

LIVING HOPE FILLED or BEING HOPEFUL

December 3, 2017

Today is the first Sunday of the season we know as “Advent,” representing the four Sunday’s prior Christmas, which of course is the celebration of the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ

The word Advent means; “coming” or “arrival” - There is an implied anticipation and expectation of this coming celebration during the Advent season, which is accompanied by a preparation, a getting ready

Today we anticipate and celebrate an historical event, a pivotal event in the Greatest Story Ever Told - This is the centerpiece of our earthly celebration and is clearly a centerpiece event in the New Testament; God putting on flesh, coming to earth to seek and save the lost

We can also anticipate with great expectation and preparation another event, a future event; the culmination and realization of True Hope, the second coming of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ

Now, those of you who know me will not be surprised that I’m going to tell you that Advent is not in the Bible - As a matter of fact Christmas is not in the Bible

We don’t read in the Book of Acts about the early Church opening Advent calendars, or hanging wreaths, or decorating their homes. Peter, James, John, Paul and the others weren’t sitting around the fire in ugly sweaters, sipping cider and singing songs

What we know today as Advent and Christmas is mostly a religious and cultural phenomenon if you will - Even within “The Church” we can get caught up and distracted by the “glitter and gold” - harried and pressured to conform and comply

Now before you storm the stage and drag me out of town, hear what I’m not saying; I’m not saying we shouldn’t celebrate and participate in our long standing church and family traditions

Traditions are a part of who we are - They're a part of every culture. The Jewish people had and still have many traditions and celebrations, we read about many of them throughout Scripture - But in Scripture they always have a place and a purpose

OUR traditions should have the same place and purpose in our lives; to point to God's amazing Grace, Mercy and Love that came down from Heaven into a manger in the form of a baby so long ago! - AMEN?

Every year at this time we have an opportunity to take our traditions and celebrations and use them with a purpose, to put them in their proper place. Let's take our traditions and celebrations as an opportunity to make sure we remember the **Reason** for the season. As Believers in Jesus Christ let's understand the purpose and place for our traditions and celebrations - AMEN?

We all know how it can go every year at this time - I personally struggle with remembering and celebrating properly and purposefully. There are a lot of distractions and it can be hard to remember and focus on the meaning of Christmas, but as Believers we must, we are called to be that light and point to the light, the light of the world Jesus Christ

We all know that something is lost in our culture's traditions and celebrations. Or, I should say **Someone** is lost in all of the hoopla!!

Oh Ya, Christmas; - A star - Angels - Shepherds - A Manger - A Baby - Something about a Messiah - Wise Men with gifts - oh, gifts; now we're talking, let's talk gifts - I hope I get that iPad I asked for - I've been hoping for a new jacket - I'm hopeful that this will be a joyous Christmas with lots of good cheer and peace on earth - Yes a little peace on earth would be a welcome change

Let me proclaim right here, right now, Peace came to earth 2,000 years ago in the form of a babe in a manger - The baby Jesus!!!

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulders. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:6&7)

So why is there no peace?

Why is there so much hopelessness and despair?

And even for those who are hopeful, who say they have hope, why are their hopes never realized or only passing or temporary?

With the message title; ***“Living Hope filled or Being Hopeful,”*** my intention is to point to the difference between what the Bible calls Hope and what the world calls hope

Certainty vs. Could be or Maybe

Promise vs. Possibility

Eternity vs. Temporary

Another goal of my message is to begin to help we Christians start to change our perception and use of the word hope, from an expression of a desire with an uncertain, unknowable outcome to a word with a definitive Biblical certainty

If you've been around here for a while or have been listening to Pastor Silas for any length of time you have probably heard him say; *Hope is the absolute certainty of coming good*

That's quite a statement to make in a world full of uncertainty, a world that doesn't believe in absolutes - A world that has no idea what's going to

happen tomorrow or down the road in the future - A world that will tell you that the only two things certain in life are death and taxes

Now I would have to agree that death and taxes are certain in a finite faithless world; a world with no future or hope beyond the fulfillment of its own pleasures, and satisfaction of its own desires

I think this really speaks to the way the world sees life and lives life, with no expectation of an eternal future - No anticipation of coming good - A world without True Hope or Absolute certainty

There is no better example of this mind set, this reality, than in the Book of Ecclesiastes - In Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes about the vanity, futility and emptiness of a life with everything under the sun but a life that has forgotten God - A life not submitted to God

Remember, Solomon “had it all” - Great wisdom - Tremendous intellect - Great power and prestige - Immeasurable wealth

Many came from far and wide to learn from him and be taught by him

Unfortunately Solomon started to believe his own “press clippings” - He began to revel in and focus on all his abundance, and chase after earthly pleasures - His life took a downward spiral as his pursuit of pleasure replaced his relationship with God

Here in Ecclesiastes Solomon is near the end of his life and he is looking back and lamenting about his life apart from God - It turned out to be a life of emptiness and futility - A life unsatisfied and restless - A life without hope!

In chapter 8:12-14 he is struggling because he sees the wicked treated as if righteous and the righteous as if they are wicked - From his philosophical, worldly point of view it seems to make no sense - He is struggling with the vanity and inconsistency of it all - Why bother with anything at all

Then in verse 15 Solomon writes; ***“So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.”***

In a different circumstance the Prophet Isaiah expresses a similar sentiment about the behavior of Israel. Israel is coming under siege from the Assyrian nation and they are preparing for war; fortifying walls, digging tunnels, gathering weapons but forgetting about the Lord

Isaiah 22:12-13 reads; ***“And in that day the Lord God of hosts called for weeping and for mourning, for baldness and for girding with sackcloth. But instead, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating meat and drinking wine; ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’”***

Again, a complete reliance on self, on the things the world has to offer – Although God blessed them and has blessed us with much, even the ability to enjoy those things were never meant to be our focus, to replace God or to be our hope

What we have accomplished - What we can accomplish - What we know or can figure out - What we own

Ultimately what do we have, but this day of enjoyment and pleasure these verses tell us - A hope found only in what we can see and feel and taste and touch and hear

Can we not look around and see this in our world today; in our families, our friends, our co-workers, our neighbors.....OURSELVES?

I don't stand up here pretending to be above this or to be immune from a Solomon mindset, a worldly mindset

What I am going to say is that I need to be constantly reminded of the futility and emptiness of worldly pursuits - To remember that hope does not come from finite things or things that satisfy the flesh temporarily

True Hope rests on the Promises of God - On the Character of God - On the Person of God - On the Name of God

True Hope rests on who God is - What He has done - What He is doing and what He will do - AMEN?

Revelation 21:1-7; ***“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully adorned for***

her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.'"

I want to constantly be reminded that True Hope has substance - True Hope rests on a promise - True Hope came to earth in the form a babe in a manger - True Hope lived a sinless life - True Hope took on my sin and died on a cross - True Hope rose from the grave - True Hope defeated death - True Hope is alive - True Hope is Eternal - True Hope is coming back - True Hope has a Name that is above ALL names - Our Hope is.....JESUS!!!

Romans 5:1-5 (READ)

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Here in Romans 5, the Apostle Paul not only tells us who our Hope is in, but he shows us that the path to realizing that Hope comes from placing our faith and trust in Jesus

He tells us that when we believe and are born again by the Spirit we have Jesus - That means we have all of Him - Everything that He is

Paul says; we have been justified by faith - As Pastor Silas said last week that means that our account has been emptied of sin and filled with the Righteousness of Christ

All of our sin is forgiven and forgotten simply because of our faith in Christ
- No effort by us - By Grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone -
AMEN?

Because of we are justified by faith, Paul tells us we have the certainty of these blessings:

1. We have Peace with God - Are you kidding me? Peace with God - WOW! - The war is over - No more enmity with God - God holds nothing against us - We can rest with assurance that the wrath of God was realized at the cross - Yes we can “rest in peace” now, we don’t have to wait until we’re dead - ***“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus”*** (1 Timothy 2:5)

2. We have access into this Grace in which we stand - Whaaaaat? We’re standing in Grace? YES! - We stand in an unimaginable position of favor with God because we are accepted in the Beloved! - WHO is the Beloved? - We are as close and as loved as His One and only Son - This describes our position before God - A position that is perfect and permanent - Hallelujah!!!

3. We rejoice in Hope of the Glory of God - Not only will we be in the presence of His Glory but we will be glorified, manifested in glory - ***“And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”*** (John 17:22-23)

And Colossians 3:4; ***“When Christ, who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”***

4. We also glory in tribulation - Hebrews 12:2 says; ***“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the***

right hand of the throne of God.” - What was the joy set before Him? It was the result of His death and resurrection, our salvation - Eternity in Heaven with us - Another WOW! - The world cannot comprehend this at all - Joy and suffering - Glory and tribulation - For we Christians joy and affliction can coexist because of Christ - Let us be joyful of our eternal future in Heaven with Him, our Hope, no matter the circumstances and even more so if we suffer for His sake - AMEN?

5. Tribulation produces perseverance - We could not possibly know how to persevere without trials and tribulation - To be able to become steadfast in the midst of this broken world - Paul writes in Philippians 3:14; ***“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*** - Paul was not focused on his past sins or his present sufferings, he had his mind set on the “upward call,” God’s call upon his life with anticipation and expectation - And so we should too - It is during these tribulations, the Greek word used is thlipsis or crushing that we realize we must totally rely on the Lord - He is our present Hope and the realization of our future Hope

6. Perseverance produces character - The character that develops through this process is one of patient endurance and faithful reliance - Of knowledge that He is working in us and through us, developing our character - A Christ-like character - ***“...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*** (Philippians 1:6) - He is working in you - Be steadfast and persevere

7. Character produces Hope - All of this should fill us with Hope - To remind us of our Hope - To help us to focus on our Hope - Knowing that the Lord of Heaven is working in us and through us for His Glory - Knowing that He is using us for His Good purpose to further His Kingdom

Paul tops it all off in verse 5 by telling us that hope doesn’t let us down, why? - ***“...because God’s Love has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”***

The Holy Spirit is the sign, the seal of approval - The confirmation of Hope

The Holy Spirit is God's assurance to us of His love for us and our Hope in Him - Christ lives in us by the Holy Spirit - He is leading us into all righteousness through the Holy Spirit

He is producing a growing hope in us, where we are ever more reliant on His Promises for us

He is producing in us lives that are to be Hope filled

In all circumstances let us live lives full of Hope until that glorious day when fully realize our Hope and stand face to face with the Hope of Glory - AMEN?