

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS...HOPE
MATTHEW 1:18-25
12.11.2022

INTRODUCTION

A. In 1944, Donald Gardner was teaching music at a public school in Smithtown, New York. One day he asked the class what they wanted for Christmas and noticed that almost all of them answered with a lisp because they had at least one front tooth missing. So, Gardner sat down and in 30 minutes wrote the song, "All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth." It was recorded by Spike Jones and the City Slickers in 1948 and then went to the top of the charts in 1949. In a 1995 interview, Gardner said, "I was amazed at the way that silly little song was picked up by the whole country."

What do you want for Christmas?

B. Almost 30 years ago, in 1994, Mariah Carey recorded and released maybe the most popular Christmas song of all time: "All I want for Christmas is You." She sings that she doesn't care about Christmas presents or the lights; all she wants is to be with the one she loves.

C. What about you? What do you want for Christmas?

1. Most of us probably want something tangible for Christmas. The most popular gifts this year are things like a rechargeable hand warmer, and the reversible Octopus Plushie, and a mini pocket projector. We want something we can get our hands on.

2. But a lot of us, if we were asked, would probably want something intangible, something we can't wrap our arms around – like love, or peace...or hope.

3. Christmas is supposed to be a special time, but there is just so much going on, or so much going wrong, that we just don't know if Christmas is going to be memorable for the right reasons or maybe for all the wrong reasons.

- a. Maybe, for some of us, with inflation and all the financial pressure, money is already tight. Christmas just makes it worse.
- b. Maybe, for some of us, family issues are a concern and we aren't sure how everything is going to work out.
- c. Maybe, for some of us, we are keep waiting and waiting for that right break. I mean, we have been patient, but that door hasn't opened yet, or that phone call hasn't come yet.
- d. Maybe, for some of us, this is a season when we are reminded of the passing of a loved one and this time of the year is always difficult.

D. Today, let's look at how, what a lot of people want for Christmas is hope.

E. Have you ever said, "I hope I get a raise"? Or, "I hope I get a good grade on that test"? Or, "I hope everything turns out all right"? Is that the kind of hope we're going to be talking about? No. We're not talking about a feeling that what we want will happen.

The kind of hope we're going to be talking about can be defined as a trustful expectation that God will do what God promises He will do.

F. Ever thought, "I hope I get a raise." Well, that's one kind of hope. But here's another kind.

Let's say it's November and your boss, who you trust, says to you, "Come the first of the year, I promise you are going to get a raise."

What you are going to have is a different kind of hope. It's based on the expectation of what your boss promises he will do. It's the anticipation that, because your boss is going to take care of it, that you will get that raise.

That's the kind of hope we are talking about.

G. Our focus verses today are taken from Matthew 1:18-25. Or, you can turn to page ___ in the Bible in the bench in front of you.

1. These verses begin with the words, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about..."

2. When most people think of the Christmas story they think of the second chapter of the book of Luke. But Matthew's account tells us about his parents, about Jesus' purpose, and about His identity.

H. And here's a life-changing truth we will see today - if you are looking for hope, the time to look is 2,000 years ago, the place to look is in a manger, and the person to look to is Jesus.

I. In Matthew 1, the first thing we see is that through Jesus, God offers...

BODY

I. HOPE FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE IN TROUBLED TIMES.

A. You and I are just ordinary people in troubled times. We look at the world around us and we see turmoil. We look at the economy and wonder if it's going to get better or worse. We wonder about our jobs. We are concerned about our kids, or our families, or our health, or someone else's health. In so many ways and on so many levels, we are ordinary people living in troubled times.

B. Our focus verses say, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."
Matthew 1:18-20

C. Joseph and Mary were just ordinary people.

1. They were two young kids preparing for marriage.
2. They came from a simple place – Nazareth. One author compared Nazareth to Tupelo, MS. It wasn't a place where you would expect to find royalty.

3. Joseph was just a simple carpenter. He loved working the wood with his hands. Calloused hands. Blue-collar clothes.
4. And Mary was a common Jewish girl. She loved the Lord, but she wasn't perfect. She wasn't sinless. She was a young girl; she wasn't a goddess. But she was highly favored in God's eyes. There was something inside of her that God saw as special, even though no one else probably saw anything in her out of the ordinary.
5. And yet, God had a plan for them.

D. Because of the unexpected discovery of Mary's pregnancy, these were troubling times for both Mary and Joseph.

1. When Mary told Joseph that she was pregnant and that the baby growing inside of her was from God and that she was still a virgin he didn't believe her. Would you have believed her? Of course not! I wouldn't have.
2. That just goes to show how ordinary Mary was. Joseph thought she was more likely to be an unfaithful fiancé than the virgin mother of the Son of God.
3. And Joseph had options.
 - a. Jewish law permitted that a woman who was engaged to be married to one man slept with another man could be put to death by stoning.
 - b. He could go through the marriage anyway; but wasn't about to do that.
 - c. But the other option, the one he chose, was to send her quietly way and divorce her. You might be thinking, "But they weren't married." In those days, the engagement was a binding agreement. You had to present a bill or divorce, a certificate saying, in effect, "This woman is not my wife; I am not her husband."

E. But at just the right time, God stepped in. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. She is telling the truth. The child growing inside of her is being conceived by the Holy Spirit.

F. At just the right time, God stepped in.

1. At just the right time in the world, God decided to send His Son.
2. At just the right time, God chose an ordinary, but faithful young girl, Mary to be the one who would give birth to His Son.
3. At just the right time, as Joseph was about ready to send her away, God sent an angel to change his mind.
4. At just the right time, God steps in.
5. God doesn't abandon ordinary people in troubled times. At just the right time, God steps in in ways that soothe our wounds, or brings comfort to our souls, or peace to our hearts, or solutions to our troubles.
6. Deuteronomy 31:8 says, "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."
7. It doesn't mean that sometimes things don't get worse or that everything will always turn out beautifully. What it means is that we aren't alone. God is always with us. He's never going to leave us. There is no need to be afraid.

G. Have you ever heard that Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year and rolled your eyes? Why? Because you might be thinking, Christmas doesn't change what we're going through. All my problems were here before Christmas and they will be here after.

And you might be right. But Christmas reminds us that Jesus came to be with us no matter what we are going through. He stepped in at the right time...and He still does.

Transition: In Jesus we see...

II. HOPE FOR THOSE WHO STRUGGLE WITH SIN.

A. I was once asked to visit someone's daughter who was in the hospital. I hadn't met her before, but I was glad to go. In addition to what she was currently dealing with, the daughter had been dealing with some more serious health issues for a while. And she had been keeping God at kind of a distance.

I walked into her hospital room and introduced myself to her and her sister. And when I told her I was her mom's pastor, she just kind of gave me a frown. Like, "Oh, mom sent you. I see."

But we talked a little bit about what she was going through and I could tell it was weighing her down emotionally - like it would anyone else.

Doctors were coming in and asking her questions. People were coming in and drawing blood. And there were all these things going on when she said in a moment of transparency, "I just want to get out of here." Except she also cursed when she said it. And she looked over at me and said, "Sorry, reverend." I said, "That's okay. And it's just Barry. No titles. Just Barry."

As I was leaving, I walked over to the side of her bed and whispered in her ear so that her sister couldn't hear, "I just wanted you to know that I've said that same word too. It's been a while. It's been a long time. But I have too."

And then we prayed together.

I wanted her to know that we are all kind of in the same boat. That just because I'm a minister doesn't mean that I haven't and don't struggle with some of the same kinds of things that she struggles with. We all do.

And, the good news, is that Jesus came to bring people like us – people like you and me – hope.

B. The angel said to Joseph, "She [Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21

C. Do you know why things like love, and hope, and peace, and joy are elusive?

1. These things are elusive because we are flawed. We've all got this selfish sinful nature which sabotages our ability to naturally have things like hope, peace, and joy. These things are elusive because of sin.

2. Paul writes in Romans 7:18: "I know that good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."

3. We are all born with this sinful nature and each of us may choose to, when it's convenient or easy, satisfy this nature.
4. But the choice to satisfy this sinful nature is the choice to sin. And the results of sin are things like pain, and distress, and fear, and confusion, and broken promises.
6. You may not want to admit it, and I don't like to admit it, but I struggle with sin. We all do. And unless something is done, that sin is going to do us in.
7. But angel said to Joseph, "She will give birth to a son...[and] he will save his people from their sins."
8. Do you know what the name of Jesus means? The reason he was given that name is clear. The name Jesus means "Yahweh is salvation" or "the Lord Saves?" For those who Christ saves, he saves from their sins.

D. When my now 19-year-old daughter was 6 or so and in elementary school, I was taking her to school one morning. We had just turned into a neighborhood and I pointed out the Christmas lights. It seemed like a good time for a teaching moment. I wasn't sure what she did and didn't remember about Christmas. Whether she remembered it's about the birth of Jesus or if it's about getting presents. I asked her, "Is Christmas about getting or giving?"

She answered and said, "Giving."

That was the response I was looking for so I decided to go a little deeper. "Do you know who gave the greatest gift of all at Christmas?"

She said, "God."

"And what did God give?"

She didn't give the answer I expected, but got it right anyway. "What did God give?"

Aubrey replied, "Love."

I John 4:9-10 says, "God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." I John 4:9-10

Transition: Jesus came so that we could have hope in spite of our sin. We also see the birth of Jesus brings...

III. HOPE FOR THOSE WANT TO SEE GOD.

A. Look at our focus verses, it's the final words of the angel and the response of Joseph. Let's read Matthew 1:22-25: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' - which means, 'God with us.' When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." Matthew 1:22-25

B. Have you ever wished you could see God? Or hear God speak to you? Someone pointed out that "Jesus was the clearest image of God man has ever seen." Colossians 1:15 says, "He is the image of the invisible God..." You want to know what God is like? See God? Look at Jesus.

C. There are three things in our focus verses that point to Jesus being God in the flesh.

1. His coming was prophesied hundreds of years before in the OT scriptures. Jesus' coming wasn't Plan B. It was God's plan all along that He would put on skin and walk around with man. And that He would die in our place to pay for our sin.

2. And our focus verses tell us that he would be born of a virgin. The angel's words in Matthew 1 are taken from Isaiah 7:14: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son..."

Jesus' birth was always God's plan.

3. And our focus verses say the angel tells us, "They will call him 'Immanuel' - which means 'God with us.'" God with us.

God did not create this world, wind up it, and then sit back and watch it spin like a top. He created the Heavens and the earth. Then He created man. Then, later, He became human. Jesus - Immanuel - God with us.

And the struggles we have – Jesus had. He was tempted in all ways like we are. And yet was without sin. But He understand what we go through.

CONCLUSION

A. A family was out vacationing at the lake one summer. Dad had been puttering out by the boat house. Two of his sons, a 12-year old and a 3-year-old were down playing along the dock. The 12-year-old was supposed to be watching his little brother, but he got distracted. 3-year-old Billy thought it would be a good time to check out the shiny aluminum fishing boat tied up at the end of the dock. So, he went to the dock and put one foot on the boat, and one foot on the dock. He lost his balance and fell into the water, which was about 5 or 6 feet deep.

His brother let out a piercing scream. Dad came running from the boat house, jumped into the water, swam down, but unable to see anything, came up for air. He went right back down into this murky water, and began to feel everywhere around the bottom. But he couldn't feel anything.

Finally, on his way up, he felt little Billy's arms locked in a death grip on one of the posts of the dock, about 4 ft under water. Prying the boy's fingers loose, they burst up together thru the surface and filled their lungs with air.

When the adrenaline had stopped surging, and nerves had calmed down a little bit, the father asked his son, "What on earth were you doing down there hanging onto the post so far under the water?"

Little Billy's said, "I was just waiting for you dad. Just waiting for you."

B. Is that a true story? Probably not. But it does remind us of an important truth.

Christmas reminds us - 2000 years ago, the God of the universe left the glory and splendor of heaven, a place where there was no pain and no sickness, no accidents, no hurt, and no death.

And he plunged into this dark, murky world on a rescue mission, a rescue mission for all of us who are drowning, a rescue mission for all of us

who are barely hanging on, a rescue mission for all of us who are lost in the darkness. A rescue mission for all of us looking for hope.

Jesus is our only hope.

C. Now, what are we going to do with Him? Are we going to keep Him at an arm's distance or are we going to invite Him and start a relationship with Him?