

Christmas Hope

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[0 : 0 0] We're talking today about hope. Hope. Now, I hope you know the answers to these questions. You can shout them out. What does the word Bethlehem mean?

House of bread. House of bread. Very good. I hoped somebody would say, get the right answer. And he did. Very good. That's interesting, isn't it, that Jesus, the bread of life, came from the house of bread.

And bread, of course, because it's the staple of life, just as man cannot live without bread, the Bible says man cannot live without bread alone.

But from every word... Sorry, go on. Yeah, that's right, he did. But in the wilderness, well done. But from every word that comes from the mouth of God, we need God as much as we need our daily bread.

And actually, Christmas is a wonderful time to remind us of that. You know, I'm 60 now. I'm nearly 61. I don't know where the year went. And the older I get, the more valuable and more important Christmas becomes.

[1 : 0 8] It's kind of a very emotional time that, in a way, connects you with all of your previous Christmases and connects you with all of the people of your past, some of whom are sadly no longer with us.

It's very special to remember something as important as Christmas Day, just from a cultural point of view. But when we take in the message of salvation, the message of Jesus, the Christmas message, then we can have hope.

Okay, what about... Why did the wise men give Jesus gold, frankincense, and myrrh? Gold for a king?

Very good. Frankincense? For a priest? That's right. Frankincense was used by priests as part of the offering. When people prayed, frankincense was burned.

And it was a sweet-smelling aroma in the temple that alerted God to the prayers of His people. Not that He really needed it, but we needed to be reminded that just as our prayers go up into the skies like incense that burns.

[2 : 1 6] So God on high hears our prayers, and they are not wasted. Our prayers bring us hope. Imagine being in a world without hope. A little boy wrote to Santa Claus saying, Dear Santa, you did not bring me anything good last year.

You did not bring me anything good the year before that. This is your last chance. Signed, Alfred. That's a disappointed little boy. And sometimes we can be disappointed that our prayers are not answered, but we sometimes just have to keep praying.

Because sometimes our prayers will be answered in ways that we do not expect, and God is always good. And if He says no or wait, then we need to accept His will.

What about myrrh? What about myrrh? For burial. Well done. For burial. Yeah?

For the dead. To embalm the bodies. Because Jesus was born to die. And it's strange that such a message brings hope. He was born to die.

[3 : 2 9] To die for the sins of the world. To die to put right that which was put wrong in the Garden of Eden. As Adam and Eve went their own way and rebelled against Almighty God.

And it provided for us God's solution to the problem of our sin and our brokenness and fallenness. That's what Adam did.

Christ, he undid. There is such a way, a word. At the cross. Because of Christmas, we have hope. Christmas, hope. So, next slide, Josh. God gives us hope. This Bible text came to mind when I was thinking about the theme of hope.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 28] If I could give you a Christmas present, I would give you this Christmas present. I would give you hope from the God of hope. I can't give it because I'm not God.

But the God of hope can give us hope in a way that the world cannot give us hope. See, my 60 years of life have brought so many joys but so many sorrows.

Just less than a year ago, I buried my mom. It's hard to have hope when that happens. When loved ones die. It's then that you realize that you can't buy the hope you need.

That hope that gives you comfort in sorrow. That gives you hope beyond the grave. You can't buy that off Amazon. They don't sell it. And if they did, it would be sold out so quickly.

But the God of hope can give us hope. And He wants to give us hope that fills us with so much joy and peace as we trust in Him.

[5 : 34] And that word trust is really important, isn't it? Because trust is like saying, all right, I may not have it now, but I trust you'll give me it. Like little Alfred, who didn't get his two Christmas presents that he wanted, so he hoped for the third year, and he trusted that he would get it.

God says, in Jesus I have provided you hope. You need to trust me. God is going to save the world, and then He sends a baby in a manger.

I bet John McEnroe would have said, you can't be serious. How is a baby going to overthrow the Roman world? How is the baby going to offer hope in the midst of so much violence and suffering and pain?

But here we are 2,000 years on, and He conquered. The Roman world is no more. Evil still exists, you say. Yes, it still exists.

But in the midst of that darkness, in the midst of that evil, there is hope shining brightly still. 2,000 years on, in the person of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 43] You have to trust, Mrs. God, that Jesus is the answer to the world's greatest need. Hope beyond the grave. God gives hope.

Next slide, Josh. God gives hope. Dante, in his famous Inferno, said that written above the door of hell was the words, all hope abandoned, ye who enter here.

All hope abandoned, ye who entered, enter here. But there is hope. Written above that door, there is an alternative way.

I am the way, says Jesus, the truth and the life. You can come to the Father by me. You can escape that inferno by trust and faith in me.

And Augustine once memorably said, hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage. Anger at the way things are and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.

[7 : 52] because there are things in this world that make us rightfully angry when unjust, evil things happen, when bad things happen to those we love, when bad things happen to us, when things are out of control, when evil seems to triumph.

Yes, we should be angry at those things, but we should not lose hope. Our faith gives us courage to know that these things will not have the last word.

There is hope in Jesus. God is the source of our hope. There's a story told about a sailing ship that was caught up in a storm crossing the Atlantic, and one of the sailors was commanded to go aloft up to the mast and trim the sails.

And as the young sailor started to climb, he made a mistake and he looked down. So the roll of the ship combined with the tossing of the waves made for a terribly frightening experience.

And the young man began to lose his balance. At that moment, an older, experienced sailor shouted to him, Look up, son. Look up.

[9 : 12] And the young sailor looked up and he regained his balance. It was Desmond Tutu who said, Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.

But it's only as we look up to God that we get our balance right. Look up, son. Look up. Don't look down and all around you at all of those things that cause you anxiety and fear and terror.

Look up to God, the source of your hope. God gives hope. Next slide, please. Jesus is our hope. God gives hope from heaven in an unspeakably wonderful way, the gift of his son.

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift, said Paul. We heard the reading from Isaiah chapter 9. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[10:29] Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. Jesus will bring a continuous government of peace in the hearts of men. Nothing like a government in this world.

I could have asked you a very difficult quiz question. Who is the current prime minister? You would have said Boris Truss Johnson Sunak or something like that. Human governments change so often. Human governments disappoint so often. The government of Jesus in the hearts of people never changes. And when Jesus truly enters into the hearts of people as opposed to the pretense that sometimes religion has made of Jesus, he changes society and people for the better.

I'm not defending Christendom, by the way. It's done some unspeakably evil things. But that has very little to do with Christ. When you look at Christ, even as Gandhi, a Hindu, said, I don't have problems with your Christ.

[11:45] I just have problems with some of your Christians. But those who truly live out the name of Christ and the lifestyle of Christ make a difference to the world, make the world a better place.

For Jesus is our hope. He offers us not just words of encouragement, he offers us a lifestyle to follow, and we want to be like Jesus, be with Jesus, be like Jesus, and become and do what Jesus did.

God came down to us at Christmas to bring hope, to say to us, you want to know what it is to live life with God? Emmanuel is here, God with us.

So we lit our candles. Do you know what they stand for each week? Emerging light. Do you know what each candle represents? Love, joy, peace, hope.

And the Christmas day candle? Jesus, the light of the world. Hope, says the writer of the Hebrews, is an anchor for the soul.

[12:57] Now, you might not appreciate the value of anchors unless you've been out to sea in a ship that doesn't have one, and then you will understand what that means. An anchor for the soul.

Yes, will your anchor hold in the storms of life? Yeah, absolutely. We have an anchor that keeps the soul.

Steadfast and sure as the billows roll, fastened to the rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love. I didn't plan that, so thank you for that.

It's the only thing I know that holds me when sorrow overwhelms me. It's the only thing I know that holds me when uncertainty faces me.

It will be the only thing that will keep me when I breathe my last. Jesus is the source of my hope.

[14:02] And is he yours? Next slide, please. I love C.S. Lewis. C.S. Lewis wrote the Narnia stories, didn't he? The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe and all that.

The best story is The Magician's Nephew because it kind of tells you the whole thing, how there happened to be a wardrobe. It's also the best story because I intended to read Eve every one of those stories.

We very rarely ever got past The Magician's Nephew because it's quite a dense book to read and I used to read it just before bed as I'd come in from a long day's work and I always fell asleep in the middle of the reading so we always had to start again.

Eve hopes one day that she will read The Last Battle but we'll see. You think about that story.

Remember that in Narnia it always snowed but it was never Christmas and the White Witch Jadis had set a curse on Narnia and nobody was happy there.

But then the children found their way to it, didn't they? Through the wardrobe and they battled against Jadis and in return for their freedom from her curse Aslan had to die Aslan who stands for Jesus.

[15:31] In The Voyage of the Dawn Treader you find out a little bit more about the Provencian children. Edmund and Lucy are used to kind of go and bring about a rescue for the Narnians and then it's time for them to go.

And they're told by Aslan that they will not return to the country again and so they're very upset. And when it's inquired why are they so upset they replied it isn't Narnia sobbed Lucy it's you.

We shan't meet you there and how can we live never meeting you there they're going to another place. They have come to love him and serve him and they can't think of life without him.

You shall meet me dear one said Aslan. Are you there too sir said Edmund. I am said Aslan but there I have another name you must learn to know me by that name.

This was the very reason that you were brought to Narnia that by knowing me here for a little you may know me there better. Now years later a little girl called Hilde wrote to C.S. Lewis and she asked him what Aslan's other name was.

[16:59] Ever the teacher Lewis responded well I want you to guess has there never been anyone in this world who number one arrived at the same time as Father Christmas number two said he was the son of a great emperor number three gave himself for someone else's fault to be jeered at and killed by wicked people number four came to life again number five is sometimes spoken of as a lamb he appears as a lamb at the end of the dawn trader don't you really know his name in this world asked Lewis think it over and let me know your answer can you imagine a world without Christmas no Christmas trees no gifts no family gatherings no Christmas carols no Grinch or it's a wonderful life into this world of cynical hopelessness true hope was born hope for the forgiveness of sins hope for a bright future forever in the arms of Jesus our Emmanuel

God with us what a wonderful hope it is as Paul says and let me remind you of it just again may the God of your hope so fill you with all joy and peace in believing through the experience of your faith that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound and be overflowing bubbling over with hope this Christmas day I pray that you will have the gift of hope from the source of hope from the God of all hope our Lord Jesus Christ Amen Amen Amen