

Hope for the Holidays Part 3

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[0 : 00] Well, hello everyone. Lovely to see you here and have you with us. It's been quite a year, hasn't it? And so that's why we've got this series on hope for the holidays.

We've got to have something to hold on to, to see us through the hard times in life. And so today we're going to see that we've got hope in Jesus who has gotten for us victory.

And so Jesus is victorious and triumphant, and that gives us hope, not just for the holidays, but we need to hold on to it now at this time. Well, I wonder if you wanted to make a phantom rugby team that was the world's best rugby team, and you had to choose from among the springboks who you would choose to be in this team.

Or maybe you could choose one person that summed up all the best springboks you've ever had, that there's ever been. I wonder who he would be. Maybe you'd want to take someone like, with the speed of Brian Habana, or the strength of the beast, but combine them now.

Imagine putting them into one rugby player. Or the kicking ability of Francois Steyn, or the brains of Nars Berta. Imagine all that wrapped into one person and then having a team of 15 of those.

[1 : 12] It would be so much more fun watching the springboks play. We'd just never lose. Well, today we're going to learn a little bit of something like that, in that Jesus, the stories we've got today in Matthew, shows us Jesus kind of wrapping up or pulling together some of the strongest and best leaders of the people of Israel.

So imagine you played the Phantom Jewish Warrior League, and you think back to the Old Testament. Who would you want to put into one person that would easily defeat all your enemies? You'd want maybe the leadership of Moses, and we'll see that there's something in the story today of Moses. You'd want the strength of Samson, and there's an echo of Samson in the story of Matthew chapter 2.

You'd want the military prowess of King David, and there's a lot in the story about David. And you'd want the wisdom of Solomon. And imagine all that wrapped into one person again.

You're just going to be winning left, right, and center, and your enemies have no chance. And so let's dive straight into our story and see how the story of baby Jesus can give us hope in the God who triumphs over evil and over all his enemies.

[2 : 28] And the first thing that... So if you've got your Bibles, just leave it open in Matthew chapter 2. I think the first thing we see is that Jesus is the Lord of all people, all nations.

Jesus has come not just for the Jewish nation, but he's come to be a gift for all the nations. And that gives us hope because Jesus is our Lord as well. Now, Jesus is no ordinary child.

He gets a visit from magicians. These are magi. We get the word magicians from it from the East. And these are pagans. They're Gentiles. They're probably from Babylon.

You know, Israel's sworn enemy. And it's interesting that it's Israel's previous enemy that come and recognize who Jesus is. You've got the contradistinction, I suppose, between these magi that are pagans, that are Israel's enemy, and King Herod, who's meant to be the king of the Jews, he is the king of the Jews, who doesn't recognize Jesus.

Anyway, they come and they're looking for a king, which is why they go to King Herod. They probably thought it was one of his children. Well, at this stage, King Herod is a bit old to have children.

[3 : 38] He's about 70 years old at this point. So this is no ordinary baby that they're coming to visit. He has a star that has risen that they've seen. The magi were experts in understanding astronomy and astrology, and they've come to pay homage to him.

They say they've come to worship him. And that word, worship, is the Greek word proskuneo. It means to bow down, to literally go down on your knee, which is what people do in those days when

they went to see a king, to pay honor and to give homage and to bring tribute, which is exactly what they did.

Another word, to bow down and to worship, is used in Psalm 2, of the kings of the earth paying homage to God's Messiah. It's not just any person that gets a star telling others where they are to be born.

You know, we talk about what star sign we're born under, and it really means nothing. But Jesus had an actual star pointing out where he was. In the ancient world, this kind of thing marked a person out as blessed by the gods.

But for the Jews, the talk of a star means that ancient prophecies are about to be fulfilled. See, the last time a star was spoken of in regard to a Jewish leader was with another Gentile who was paid to curse them by their pagan neighbors.

[5 : 02] Do you remember the story of Balaam and Balak? Remember Balaam's donkey that spoke to him and tried to stop him? Well, this question of the star is an echo of that story, which we find in Numbers chapter 24.

You've got a story of Balaam, of how instead of cursing the people of Israel, he could only bless them and left Balak, the king of the Moabites, who wanted them to curse the Jews, he made him so mad.

This is what Balaam prophesied, Numbers 24. It says, Well, I see him, but not now.

I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob. A scepter will rise out of Israel. A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city.

This talk of a scepter, you know what a scepter is, it's a rod of rule, comes from Genesis chapter 49, where Jacob prophesies over his 12 sons and Judah will receive the scepter of rule, of kingly power.

[6 : 14] This imagery is again picked up in Psalm 2 that talks about the king of Israel who will dash his enemies to pieces like pottery with the scepter. So all this imagery of a ruler, of a king, of one who will fight and defeat his enemies, is tucked away behind this little star imagery that the Magi are following.

And that's why Herod is so afraid. You see, he was only a puppet king installed by the Romans and kept propped up in power by his armies. He wasn't even Jewish himself.

He had kept power by the most vicious means possible. He had just got rid of his wife and had killed her.

And then he got rid of his sons just to keep in power as well. So just a little bit about Herod. Herod was made king in about 40 BC.

He was born about 70 BC. And he was about 70 years old by the time the story of Jesus and his birth. And he was turned into not just a grumpy old man, a seriously dangerous grumpy old man.

[7 : 22] He had his wife killed as well as a number of his sons just to keep power. Which tells you something about how easy it was for him to try and take care of the problem of this little king, this upstart king that he didn't want by just killing a whole bunch of innocent children.

How does this tell us about that Jesus is the Lord of all nations? Well, the Magi here represent the Gentile nations coming to God's Messiah and bringing him tribute.

You see, you only do that if you recognize him as your actual king, as your ruler. Greater kings don't give tribute to lesser kings. It's always the other way around.

And at this point, the Babylonian kingdom was way stronger than the Jewish kingdom. So what are these Gentile pagans coming to give tribute to this Jewish king that they don't even know?

Maybe he's been born, maybe he hasn't been born, he's just a small child. This is reminiscent of the tribute that the queen of Sheba brought to Solomon to honor him and to learn from his wisdom, which is partly captured in that Psalm 72 for us.

[8 : 27] Psalm 72 says, May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores bring tribute to him. The psalm is originally about Solomon, but of course it's looking forward to the greater king that was to come.

May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him. May his name endure forever. May it continue as long as the sun.

Then all nations will be blessed through him and they will call him blessed. Echoes there of Genesis 12, if you remember the series we did in Genesis. So may all kings and all nations serve him.

So what you have in the Old Testament are these constant refrains coming through that the king of the Jews will be recognized as the king of the whole world. The king of all nations.

And he is the one who will decide the fate of the world. He has the power to hand out blessing and judgment depending on how people have behaved towards him. But look in Psalm 72, I'll put it up on the screen.

[9 : 30] Just look at how this king of the world of the nations acts towards those that cry out to him for help. From verse 12, he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help.

He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence for precious is their blood in his sight.

And Jesus is of course the one who completely fulfills those words from Psalm 72. Yet he's also the one, the Psalm goes on to say, that says he will rule from sea to sea and from river, from the river to the ends of the earth.

May the desert tribes bow before him and his enemies lick the dust. So, just take a step back and we've got to ask, where do you stand in your relationship with Jesus?

What do you think of him? Are you like the Magi that recognize in this little baby someone who will one day literally rule the world as the Lord of the nations whom you owe your obedience and honor and worship?

[10 : 40] Or, are you a bit more like Herod? Is Jesus a threat to your rule and independence over your own life? Which one of these two do you think will give you a better hope for the future?

I don't know about you, but I'd rather not lick the dust like a dying worm. I'd rather admit my need and cry out to Jesus for help. And the wonderful thing about Jesus is that he looks forward to helping those who call out to him.

The gospel stories are full of Jesus doing exactly that. Time and again when you read the gospels when someone needs help, they've either got a disease or they're pressed by demons. Son of David, have mercy on us.

And Jesus stops what he's doing, turns, and heals them. This king of the nations of the world has a soft heart for his people who are precious to him. But, if you want to continue in rebellion against him, or maybe you just think, you don't even think anything, you just think, ah, Jesus, yeah, oh, whatever, you know, nice, whatever, not for me.

You need to realize that you're going to be the one that comes off second best if you want to contest with him who's going to rule over your life. This brings us to the next point about Jesus who triumphs over all his enemies.

[11 : 55] Jesus who triumphs over all his enemies. This brings us to the dark side of Jesus' birth, the account of where Herod hears about what's happening and he takes steps to stop it.

Herod and his attempts to have Jesus' life snuffed out. What we need to know, and what Matthew shows us, is that these attempts on the life of Jesus, it's not just an ordinary baby, his God's anointed special son, are doomed to failure before they even start.

Just look at how active God is in the background of these stories. All the supernatural means that we can't see and simply can't explain and simply don't have any power fighting against.

Did you notice when we read, there was, the story is replete with dreams and angels and prophecies. Now how on earth do you fight against that kind of power?

Verse 12, the Magi were warned not to go back to Herod and they make their escape. They don't trust Herod. He says, yeah, let me know where the baby is, let me go, I also want to worship him.

[13 : 01] But maybe they didn't realize what was going on. But God does. So you've got a king who thinks he knows what's happening in front of him, he's going to take steps to fix it, but God intervenes in ways that he just simply can't control.

In verse 13, an angel, when they had gone, the Magi had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt.

Stay there until I tell you for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. Now imagine, the angels hadn't gone to Joseph. Does Joseph know anything? He's just living his life. Maybe he knows that this is the king of the Jews that's going to be born.

They know something from last week's sermon about who he's going to be. But they don't know that Herod wants to kill him. They can't take steps to stop that. And so God comes to him and there's supernatural events that happen behind the scenes that helps God's people escape harm.

Another angel and another dream. Imagine if you were Herod and you knew about this, how exasperated you would have been. I mean, how do you fight this kind of power? You want to be the king, you want to stay in power, but you've got someone who's telling your enemies in dreams and angels, how do you possibly stop that?

[14:15] You've just got to give up and say, well, I can't win this battle. There's simply no force on planet earth that can compete with this kind of supernatural ability.

And yes, Jesus triumphs over his enemies, although here in the story Jesus is obviously just a little baby, so it's actually God who's looking after Jesus who's doing all the work behind the scenes. And that's for, we go on to verse 14, then Joseph runs off to Egypt, so he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt where he stayed until the death of Herod and so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet, out of Egypt I will call my son.

And so we've got another fulfillment, another prophecy. Now we've just got to think about the unimaginable power of God to make these things come true. Just think of the wisdom and the planning that goes into this little, just this little prophecy.

Out of Egypt I'll call my son. That's from the prophet Hosea. Hosea is about between 600 and 700 BC. Hosea is of course referring to when the Israelites came out of Egypt, Exodus, a thousand years before that.

[15:30] And 500 years before that God had caused them to go into Egypt. We've done the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So all along, throughout history God has got this amazing ability to think just completely long term and make these little things happen all the way and then they're all fulfilled in Jesus.

How on earth can you compete with a God like this? Well you can't. He's just going to win every time. But, his enemies can still bite.

Verse 16, when Herod realized that he'd been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem in his vicinity who were two years old and under in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

And then there's this horrible cry that goes out. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled. A voice is heard in Ramah weeping and great mourning.

Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they're no more. God's enemies can still bite. Herod becomes infuriated and takes his revenge.

[16:43] It's entirely keeping with his character. It's a terrible justice and cruelty but again a fulfillment of prophecy. And this points to God's victory involving death and a kind of a defeat of sorts.

There's pain in God's victory. But remember how it was promised to Adam and Eve all those years ago? The snake will be defeated but will strike the heel that tries to crush it.

So there's a life and death struggle going on in the sort of cosmic area between God and Satan and the forces of evil and sin and death. And we are not immune to those upheavals.

But when we think that they're winning God steps in and gives us the victory. Verse 19 After Herod died an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream again.

to Joseph. So no matter how difficult and painful life can get God will have the victory. Herod thought he had had it but he didn't.

[17:42] And neither will any force that comes up against the God of the Bible or against his Christ or against his people. The story of course this little story of Herod killing off the children reflects the same battle between Pharaoh and the people of God just before the Exodus.

You remember this similar story of a king wanting to stay in power and killing off a bunch of Jewish babies. How did God thwart him at that point?

God came out the winner and so did his people. How did that happen? Well it was through a bunch of women and weaving baskets. which is a very strange way to have a victory.

If you're the king of the strongest kingdom on earth the last thing you're going to expect is that a bunch of midwives weaving baskets together is going to out do your plans to rule.

Herod had forgotten an important lesson from Jewish history. The Count of Exodus tells us of a God who is a warrior God who will stop at nothing in protecting his people and from forces that want to hurt them.

[18:52] Just listen to how the victory is described in Exodus chapter 15. This is the song of Moses after they've come out of Egypt and gone through the sea. Just some excerpts from his song in

Exodus 15.

The Lord is my strength and defense. He has become my salvation. The Lord is a warrior. The Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army he's hurled into the sea.

Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger and it consumed them like stubble.

And this tells us something about how God goes about triumphing over his enemies. When God acts to overthrow his enemies, it often looks like his people and his plans have been totally defeated or at least thwarted.

That they've been knocked out and out for the count. Knocked down and out for the count. There the Jews are standing on the shores of the Red Sea. They've got the Egyptian army approaching them. How is it possible for them to be saved?

[19:58] Oh Lord, please help us. Okay, I will just make a path through the sea. The last thing that you expect and the last thing that the Pharaoh expects in his armies drowning as the waters cover them.

God delights in overthrowing the proud and the strong by using seemingly weak and unexpected means.

Just make a note of that because that's how God gets the triumph. We're going to see that reflected in the life of Christ. Back in our story, Joseph and his little family are on the run for their lives.

It doesn't seem like they're winning. They can't even go back to Bethlehem. That's where they thought they were going to live. They've got to go up to Nazareth because they're still too scared of Herod's other son, Archelaus, who's even worse than Herod by all accounts.

And yet, this is clearly part of God's plan to fulfill prophecy. And you'll see at the end of our story, in verse 23, Joseph is running off to the north.

[21:02] He went to live in a town called Nazareth, which is in Galilee. And so was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, he will be called the Nazarene. Now, Joseph probably didn't know that. He's just running for his life, but behind the scenes is the God of history making sure that he's winning the whole way and that his savior is safe and that his people are safe.

This is an obscure little prophecy. It probably points to Samson, who's the only known person who took the Nazarite vow, if you remember the story of Samson.

When Samson himself was a type of Christ figure, if you think about it, he won, ultimately, Samson won victory from a place of weakness and humiliation.

And when God decided to act in mercy and save his people from the enemies, there's simply nothing that can get in the way of his plans, of carrying out his wishes. Jesus travels throughout Palestine and with mere words, tells demons to go and stop bugging his people.

He tells disease and sickness to leave and he raises dead people to life. And just when it all seems like it's going somewhere, he enters into Jerusalem, triumphant greeting, you're the king, Hosanna to the son of David, welcome, welcome, it all comes crashing down and ends in defeat.

[22:35] But this is exactly how God saves. Because Jesus is God's chosen king, even his death has power.

His death breaks the power of sin and his resurrection breaks the power of death. By doing that he breaks the power of Satan and so Jesus' defeat is our victory and his victory is the defeat of our enemies.

Martin Luther, the great theologian, back in the 1500s, makes this point about Christ's victory.

Christ won a victory over the law, over sin, our flesh, the world, the devil, death, hell, and all evils.

And this victory of his he has given to us. Even though these tyrants, our enemies, accuse us and terrify us, they cannot drive us into despair or condemn us.

For Christ, whom God the Father raised from the dead, is victor over them. And he is our righteousness. Everything that once used to torment and oppress me, Christ has set aside.

[23:47] He has disarmed it and made a public example of it, triumphing over it in himself by the cross. and this is how God defeats his enemies.

His power and might are hidden behind weakness, behind smallness and seemingly insignificance. But behind that is a cleverness and a wisdom and a plan and a power.

Divine knowledge, secret ways of making things happen, control over history, overthrowing evil ambition, salvation, staying true to his promises over all that time.

And so this is what gives us hope this Christmas. This God, this plan, this Jesus. It shows us that out of pain and defeat caused by our sin, God will, by dealing with sin in the death of Christ, bring about healing and victory.

Out of disaster, God will bring blessing. Out of death, he will bring life. God is not just in control of the present, but he's in control of the past and the future as well.

[25 : 01] And this gives us hope because we can rest in whatever present circumstances we find ourselves. Because God has got it all planned out. Yes, it looks like defeat. It feels like defeat so often for us.

But it's not. You've got to grasp that with faith because when you look at it in front of you, it seems like we're losing. Sometimes. But Matthew chapter 2 says, no, no, no, God's got this.

You just need to look behind what's happening in front of you. The only place you can really find that is in God's word. That tells you how God is working things out. Our lives may at times look like defeat and disaster.

The world around us might be looking like that too. But we have nothing to fear. We know from Matthew 2 that God is working in the background through supernatural means to defeat his enemies and to bring about the glorious rule of Jesus.

A seemingly in this story unimportant person living with a refugee family of little means in far off and unimportant Nazareth. But who is in reality the Lord of all the nations of the earth and the one in whom God will bring victory for his people over all their enemies.

[26 : 17] That's why Psalm 72 ends with these words. May his name endure forever. May it continue as long as the sun. Then all nations will be blessed through him and they will call him blessed.

Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel who alone does marvelous deeds. Praise be to his glorious name forever. May the whole earth be filled with his glory.

Amen and amen. Especially at this Christmas time and taking us on into the future. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you for the story in Matthew that reminds us that you're in control and that you've sent your son Jesus Christ to rule over the nations of the earth and that no power can thwart your plans and no enemies can overthrow him.

Indeed, Lord, in his death and resurrection, you've given us the victory for everything that we need in this life. Lord, sometimes our enemies are strong and our defeat seems sure.

We are pressed on all sides by many things. Lord, in all of this, help us to see through them to you and your word and your promises and your power and your victory in Jesus and to hold on to that for that to be our victory as well in the end.

[27 : 44] Amen. Amen. you