

Hope for the Holidays Part 4

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[0 : 00] But I hope you're well this morning. Who's had any presents this morning already? Put up your hand. Oh, already. So quite a few. Any disappointing presents? Anybody open a present and you went, oh, I don't want that.

I'm glad none of you got disappointing presents. But you know what I'm talking about. Sometimes you do get a present and you open it up and it's really not what you expected. It might be that ugly jersey that your grandmother knitted for you.

Or that CD of a band that you really, really don't like. And you feel quite an anticlimax, don't you? When you open it up and you think you're going to get something amazing.

And the present looks great and it's a big present. You unwrap it and then suddenly it's not what you expect. And you've got to kind of smile and go, oh, thank you very much. Well, I think for many, the whole idea of Christmas and the story of Christmas, for many people in our world today, is also a little bit of an anticlimax.

I mean, think of how the carols we sing set it up. Just listen to some of these words. A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

[1 : 13] But where is this new and glorious morn that the carols talk about? The other one, joy to the world, the other verse says, no more will thorns infest the ground.

I just stepped on a thorn last week. You know, where's this new and glorious world? Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother, and in his name all oppression shall cease.

Really? All oppression shall cease? Is that what we see in the world? Joy to the world, fields and floods and hills and plains. Repeat the sounding joy.

But do they? Is this world joyful to you in 2020? You see, 2,000 years later, after the events of Christmas, the arrival of Jesus to this earth does seem to many people to be quite an anticlimax. And what we discover when we turn to the Bible, is that the people of his day felt just the same. Because there were massive expectations around the birth of Jesus.

[2 : 14] We see that as we read Luke and we read Mary's words and we look at these birth narratives. Mary, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and some other people knew who Jesus was going to be.

They knew who was coming. The Messiah of Israel. Now, to us who don't have a Jewish background, that might not mean a whole lot. But for them, there was a huge thing.

It was the expectation of the entire Old Testament of the Bible. Now, the Old Testament in your Bibles is most of the Bible. It's the majority of your Bible. The First Testament, the Old Testament. And most of that is pointing towards the great event when the Messiah will come to earth. The Messiah will be revealed. And now it's happening. And what did that mean for an Old Testament believer, for someone who knew the Scriptures?

I'll tell you, if you read through the Old Testament, what you discover is that God made a promise to Abraham, that from his children, which became the nation of Israel, and he made the same promise to David a hundred of years later, that in their line, a man would be born, who would be appointed by God to do nothing less than to drive evil out of this world.

[3 : 33] Now, that's a big expectation, right? The Messiah, if you read and understand the Old Testament, that's what the promise of this Messiah was going to be. He was going to get rid of evil, get rid of everything bad from this world.

And that is quite an expectation. And that, of course, is why the Bible focused on the nation of Israel and not Madagascar or Bolivia or Japan.

Israel, because it was in this country, through this people, that God was going to bring someone who was going to rid the whole world of evil. That is the promise and the expectation of the Old

Testament.

That place, that little bit of real estate, which is still quite a significant place even today, it's still being fought over, it's still the center of religion for many religions.

From there, the hope of the world would come. That's what the ancient scriptures say. And it was understood when Jesus came, that he came to fulfill those expectations.

[4 : 38] Even though he was quite an unlikely Messiah, if you think about it. Born to a teenage peasant girl in a stable. But there were a few who knew who he was when he was born.

And they waited patiently. We read Mary, she stored these things up in her heart. When she saw these magi coming with their gifts, and she realized, and she remembered what the angel told her about who her son would be.

She stored these things up in her heart. And she and others waited patiently for years and years. And Jesus grew up and he was relatively unknown outside of his local family.

He was just the carpenter's son. He did nothing special as he grew up. He was just another regular kid. Probably a bit nicer than most kids. But there was nothing particularly messianic about him as he was growing up.

And 30 years passed until something happened. Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 3. Because the interesting thing that Matthew does is that he continues the story of Jesus coming into the world.

[5 : 53] We normally finish reading at the end of chapter 2 when we read the Christmas story. We think that's the end of the story of Jesus coming into the world. But it's not. There's a gap between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3 of 30 years.

But Matthew continues as if it's the very next day. Because this is still part of the story. But it's one we don't often read, especially at Christmas time. That's why I want to read it this morning. Matthew 3 from verse 1.

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near. For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said, A voice of one crying out in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord and make his path straight.

Now John had a camel hair garment with a leather belt around his waist. And his food was locusts and wild honey. Now to us, John seems like a weirdo.

If you saw a guy in Limply Road Park with camel hair garments eating locusts, You would probably call law enforcement, right? But to them he was a very significant figure.

[7 : 10] I'll tell you why. Because he reminded them of the prophet Elijah who dressed the same way and who had similar diet. And what they realized when John came preaching in the wilderness was that this was a new prophet.

Just like the prophets of old. Just like the Old Testament prophets. And they were really excited about this because there had been no prophet for 400 years before John the Baptist came. God had been silent.

He had sent no word for four centuries. And then John the Baptist arrives. And so you can understand why they react like they do. Verse 5. Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him.

They were leaving the cities. They were going and they were packing their bags. And they were going into the wilderness to hear John. What has God got to say to us? God has a new message for us. He sent a new prophet. This is very exciting.

What's the message? Well, the message, turns out, was a very scary one. It was a warning. Listen to some of it from verse 10. So skip over to verse 10.

[8 : 13] You read some of John's teaching. He said, The axe is ready at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

I baptize you with water for repentance. But one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing shovel is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out.

It's pretty scary teaching, right? But this was the message he brought. And what he was saying is that, yes, the Messiah is coming.

The Messiah that we've been waiting for for thousands of years, who is going to drive evil from this world, is coming. But the way he's going to drive evil from this world is with a cleansing fire.

[9 : 12] A time of judgment where he's going to come and destroy everything that is bad. Everything that is wicked. Everything that's not meant to be in this world. And it's going to happen.

Because, of course, when God made this world, he had an intent for it. He had a plan for it. And he didn't want it to be full of sin and full of viruses and full of deadly things.

And so, the Messiah will come and take those things away with the power of God. He will drive those things out. He will eliminate them with a cleansing fire of judgment.

That's what John the Baptist's message is. It's kind of like if you've ever seen you drive past those fields that they're burning. And what they do is before they get it ready for sowing seed in it, they're burning away everything that, all the weeds and everything that's not meant to be in the fields.

And so, sometimes you think, oh, that field's on fire. But it's a controlled fire. And that's what they're doing. They're using the fire to clear away all the bad stuff. That's what the Messiah is going to do to this whole world. He's going to clear away all the bad stuff with a cleansing fire of judgment.

[10 : 23] And so, John's message to the people who came out into the wilderness to listen to him was, get ready for that. Make sure that you write with God before that cleansing fire of judgment comes. And that's why we read the next verse, verse 6.

They're rushing to get baptized. Baptized. They're probably crowding the river and lining up so they can all get baptized. Verse 6. And they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

Baptism then was a sign of repentance and a sign of turning from your sin and wanting to be washed clean of your sin, to be right with God. And they were all eager to get baptized, given this message that John had.

It's what I imagine it'll be like when the coronavirus vaccine becomes available in our country. I think people will line up and be very eager to get it. Am I right?

People will probably rush to get it. There'll probably be queues that go on for kilometers for people to get the vaccine because they want to get that injection before they get the coronavirus.

[11 : 24] Well, in the same way, in this day when John the Baptist came, everybody wanted to get baptized and get ready before the Messiah came to bring judgment.

And then, the next thing that happens in the story is that he comes. But there's no fire and there's no judgment.

In fact, he does something completely unexpected. He goes to John the Baptist, whose eyes are probably wide. And he says, can you baptize me?

And John is completely confused. Look at verse 14. John tried to stop him, saying, I need to be baptized by you and yet you come to me.

But Jesus insists and then something amazing happens. Look at verse 16. When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens opened for him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him.

[12 : 28] And a voice from heaven said, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. What's going on here? Why is Jesus getting baptized at all?

This is actually a very significant event. It's one of the few events that's mentioned in all four of the Gospel accounts. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. All mention this very important event of Jesus' baptism.

Why is it so important? Well, to start to understand that, we need to, of course, understand the Old Testament and understand these prophecies about the Messiah. And one of the qualifications of the Messiah, which literally means anointed one, is that, you guessed it, he needs to be anointed by a prophet of God, by a legitimate prophet.

It was a sign of a divine commissioning. It was a sign of God giving a human being a commission to act on behalf of God and do something in the world on behalf of God.

But here there's something special that happens because not only is he anointed by a prophet, which is what David was and what Solomon was and what Saul was, all the great kings of Israel before.

[13 : 46] Not only is he anointed by a prophet, he's anointed by God himself as well with the Holy Spirit. And that is the ultimate seal of approval and proof to us who read in faith that this is, with no doubt, this is truly the one that God has promised who's going to come rid the world of evil.

We don't have to doubt it. We don't have to wonder whether this is the Messiah. He is. And he will rid the world of evil. That's what God is. God's giving him a stamp of approval for all the world to see.

But if that's true, then where's the cleansing fire that's going to fix this world? Where's the fire of judgment of the wicked that's going to make everything right?

Well, you see, the reason that the arrival of Jesus seems so much like an anticlimax, even a disappointment for some, we start to understand why.

That reason becomes clearer. When we understand what he said to John, when John said to him, I don't want to baptize you. And he asked John for baptism. What did he say to John?

[14:54] Those are some very important words. Let's look at them again from verse 14. John tried to stop him saying, I need to be baptized by you and yet you come to me. Jesus answered him, allow it for now.

Because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness. That's a very weird statement. And people didn't really understand what it meant.

But as we read on, and as we continue reading the story of Jesus, and we get to know Jesus in the words of the Gospels, it starts to make sense what he meant.

Because when we read the stories of the Gospels, we discover that to fulfill his mission to get rid of evil in the world, Jesus first needed to become one of us in every way and to take our burden on himself.

Because, look at me, we're the evil in the world. Jesus came to rid the world of evil. But before he brought that fire of judgment, he became like one of us in every way.

[16:02] Because we're the evil. And he came to take our burden of sin on himself. And we all know that. Sounds horrible to say.

We're the evil in the world. We want the evil to be something out there. When we read the news reports and we see all the bad stuff in the world, immediately we think, oh, it's something out there. It's people out there. It's other things. It's other people. That's the problem with the world. It's all out there. The Bible says, no, it's in here. It's our sin. We're the evil in the world. And we know that deep down inside.

We know we don't live the way God wants us to. We know we do wrong things. Even by our own standards, let alone God's standards. And no amount of religion or good works on the outside can make us good on the inside.

Look a few verses before. When all the religious people came to John the Baptist, and they thought they were ready for the Messiah. They were still coming to listen to this prophet, but they thought they were well ready for the Messiah.

[17:08] And he said to them in verse 7, these Pharisees and these Sadducees, he said, brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, produce fruit consistent with repentance.

And don't presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. What he's saying to them is that their outward religion is not going to change the state of their hearts on the inside. And it's the same for us.

No amount of outside good works or coming to church or being religious can make us good on the inside, can cleanse us on the inside. We can't overcome the sin that is inside us, but Jesus can.

You see, as the Son of God from heaven, He comes with power to overcome sin. Power that we don't have. That's why He never sinned, because He had power to overcome it.

In fact, we read in the very next event that happens after the baptism is He goes out into the wilderness to confront Satan, who tries to get Him to sin, and He doesn't, because He has power to overcome sin that we don't have.

[18:12] So that by becoming one of us, by becoming like a sinner Himself, that's why He got baptized as a sinner like the rest of us, He could come and fight sin on our behalf, like a warrior king going out in front of His troops to face their enemy that overpowers them.

That's what Jesus came to this earth to do. That's the real message of Christmas. He came to fight a battle that we could not fight against sin and against death. And that battle took Him all the way to the cross where He decisively broke the power of evil.

And then He rose again and He ascended into heaven to pour out God's Spirit on His people. Just like John the Baptist said, He would baptize with the Holy Spirit. And He did that to give His people

the inner cleansing that we all need before He comes to baptize with fire, to get rid of all the evil. And He first comes and comes humbly and gives us the Holy Spirit and fights our battle on our behalf. And He came that first time to give us that, to give us that inner cleansing so that we don't get swept away with the judgment when He comes again.

But be sure He is coming back and He will fulfill all of those Christmas expectations. A new and glorious morn will break for this world.

[19 : 39] One day, the day after Jesus has come to judge and cleanse this world of evil, the sun will rise over a new world that has no poverty, that has no crime, that has no sickness, no death, and no sin.

All oppression will cease, like the carols say. And the fields and the floods and the hills and the plains will repeat the sounding joy. But before that happens, Jesus came the first time, humbly as one of us, to take on our burden of sin, to make us right with God, so that even sinners like us can be in that new, glorious, restored creation one day that God has always intended for this world.

And so I hope you see this morning that Jesus coming into this world was no anti-climax. He brought the best gift we could ever want.

Better than whatever you got this morning under the tree. Better than anything you could get under the tree. Because He came to bring you and I the gift of righteousness.

Being right with God is nothing, nothing more valuable than that. A true cleansing from our sin. Do you realize just what an amazing gift that is?

[21 : 09] And will you accept it and become one of His people under His rule if you have not done that yet? Because we're all in need of hope this year. And Jesus came to us to give us the best hope we could ever have.

And I pray that that hope will light your way in the coming weeks and months. Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for the gift of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who came to earth and how He held back His rightful judgment of the wickedness of this world but came humbly to become one of us, to take on our burden and to fight sin on our behalf.

Thank You that He went to the cross and He died for us so that we can have righteousness. We, His people, can be cleansed of our sin. And that we can have the hope of a glorious restored creation as we look around into this weary and broken world.

We thank You, Lord, that You've given us a true and lasting and real hope and knowledge in the world to come and that in Christ, even though we are sinners, in Christ, by His righteousness, we will be part of that.

As we look around and we worry in this world, Lord, help us to lift our eyes above the darkness and look to the light of the glorious salvation that Jesus has made possible for us.

[22 : 30] And help us to follow Him day after day and help us to tell others about Him this Christmas. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.