

Christmas Gifts – Hope – Luke 2

How many of you like to go fishing? People have told me that they don't like to fish because fishing is boring. And I'll admit that sometimes it is. But every so often you catch one or two and it makes you want to go fishing more and more. A couple of years ago I went out with Billy and Timmy on Lake Bridgeport and we fished for a while and didn't catch much but we saw some jumping out in the middle of the lake. So, we went over there and we had the best time. We got into a school of sand bass that wouldn't quit getting on our lures. We would cast and pull them in. Cast and pull them in, almost every time. Billy got hung up at one point because it was pretty chaotic and I'm screaming at him, *"Put that rod down and get another one in the water! Get something in the water, Billy!"* We had so much fun! Definitely not boring.

Now, that was a couple of years ago but I still remember right where that was. And almost every time I go out, I go cast a lure in that spot. And do you know what happens? Nothing. I've never caught anything in that spot ever again. But every time I go out, I go check that spot. Do you know why? Because I have hope. I know that they could be there. I've seen it. It could happen. And I hope that it does.

Proverbs 13:12 says, *"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life."* Have you ever looked forward to something that didn't happen? Have you ever hoped for something that you didn't get? We all have. Maybe it was a big thing or a small thing. Maybe you hoped it would rain and it didn't. Maybe you hoped the Cowboys would win the game and well...

Hope deferred makes the heart sick. That was written by Solomon thousands of years ago but did you know that just in recent years scientists have discovered that hopeless people have the same lifestyle risk factors as people who smoke a pack a day? It's true. Being without hope is bad for your health. The problem is we have all hoped for something and had those hopes dashed. How do we know what to hope in or hope for?

Well, let's turn to **Luke chapter 2** and we will read a passage about two people who had hope and had it fulfilled. We are continuing our look at the Christmas gifts that God gives. We saw last week that He gives us faith. We saw that through young Mary and how she believed what the angel Gabriel told her. This week we will look at the gift of hope that God gave to two people who are really just random strangers in the scheme of things. This is the only time we read anything about them. We know their names but not much else. But we see that when the baby Jesus is brought into the temple, both of these people had their hope fulfilled and it made their hearts healthy and glad.

Let's read **Luke 2:21-40**. On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"),²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: *"a pair of doves or two young pigeons."*²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was **waiting for the consolation of Israel**, and the Holy Spirit was on him.²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:²⁹ *"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."*³³ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them

and said to Mary, his mother: *“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were **looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.**³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Now, the good doctor Luke is talking about three different things going on here. We will concentrate on just one. The first is when the baby is eight days old. They would take the boy child in to be circumcised and to give him his official name. Then when the baby is forty days old, the parents would go to the temple for the purification rites described in **Leviticus 12**. Also, if the child was a boy and first-born, they would consecrate the child to the Lord. So, in this case, Mary and Joseph had to pay five shekels to redeem the Redeemer who would one day redeem us!

So, Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple to do what they needed to do when He turned forty days old. And there they are just walking through the building when this old man walks up to them and takes Jesus in his arms. Okay, a couple of things here. First, we don't know for sure that Simeon was an old man. We assume he was by the way he talks but scripture doesn't say it. Tradition says he was 113 years old but that's just tradition. Also, old man or young man, let me ask you mamas out there. If some guy walks up and takes your 40-day old baby, what are you going to do? If it's in church, that may be one thing. If it's in Walmart, we're gonna have trouble. Right?

But Simeon walks up and takes Jesus and holds Him in his arms and he gives thanks to God. Why? Why was Simeon grateful? Was it because Jesus was so good-looking? Was Simeon waiting on a child that was from a rich family? Was Simeon waiting on a warrior child? No, of course not. Look at **verse 25** again. It says Simeon was waiting for the “consolation of Israel.”

The consolation of Israel means he was looking for the Messiah. See, all through the Old Testament the Messiah was prophesied. “Messiah” means the anointed one. It was prophesied that this anointed one would come and save Israel and the whole world and it starts in Genesis and the prophesies continue through Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Malachi and Psalms and Zechariah. And Simeon believed it and looked forward to it. Not only that but it says the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would one day actually get to see this Messiah and here He is, in the flesh, in little baby flesh, the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One Jesus. See, Simeon had hope.

Now, let's look at Anna. Anna's name means grace and she had received grace from God and at 84 years old her hope was fulfilled. In what did Anna have her hope? Was she hoping that God would give her another husband? Was she hoping to have her bad back healed? Was she hoping for the Cowboys to win? Look at **verse 38**. She was looking forward to (she had hope for) the redemption of Israel. That's just another way to say, “the Messiah.” It doesn't say how she knew Jesus was the Messiah. Maybe she just overheard Simeon or maybe the Lord told her, but it doesn't matter. She knew and her hope was fulfilled.

Let me ask you, what is hope? How would you define it? We all have examples of it but it can be hard to define. Webster says it is **a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen**. And that's a fine definition from a non-believer. But for Christians our hope is not a feeling. It's not wishy washy. It is different than an unbeliever's hope. Our hope is in the promises of God. Our hope is a confident expectation in something that just hasn't happened yet. We can still hope the Cowboys win or that it rains. Nothing wrong with having that kind of

hope but it's just a different thing altogether for a Christian to take the promises of God and stand expectantly waiting for them to happen.

Adoniram Judson was a missionary in Burma (which is now Myanmar in SE Asia) in the 1800's. It didn't go well for him and at one point the natives had chained him up and basically left him for dead next to another man who was not a missionary. The other man had heard Judson preach and as they lay there close to death, the man sarcastically asked Judson, "Well...where is your hope for the future now?" Judson replied, "My hope is as bright as all the promises of God."

Where there is a belief in a living and active God who loves and cares for you, there can be hope like the Bible talks about hope. But do you know what that means? It means you have to have faith. We talked last week about how faith brings peace and joy and all kinds of other good things in our lives but here we see God giving us the gift of hope through that gift of faith. How cool is that?

That also means that those that don't have faith have no real hope. How could they? If you believe in God, you can have hope. But if you don't believe in God then what is there to hope for? But just because we believe in God doesn't mean that we will experience everything we hope for. It doesn't mean it will rain or not rain. It doesn't mean the Cowboys will win. It's not about just having hope. It's the object of our hope that fulfills our hope. And our hope is only in what God promises. So, let's look really quickly at some of God's promises.

Isaiah 41:10 says, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." What's the promise there? God will be with you and will give you strength to do what He has called you to do. You can expect that to happen.

In **John 16:33** Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." What's the promise there? There are actually two promises. First, you will have problems in this world. But secondly, God is over it all. He controls it all. He's in charge and if you have a relationship with Him through His Son Jesus then what are you worried about? That should bring you hope.

How about **James 1:5**? I like this one. "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." The promise there is plain. If you need wisdom (and who doesn't?) then just ask for it and God will give it to you. We can hope today that God will give us wisdom.

Let me give you three more that directly speak to hope then I'll go another direction.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." – **Jeremiah 29:11**

"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." – **Romans 15:13**

"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." – **Psalms 42:5**

Do you see how faith in God results directly in hope? But all of those are hope for this life. And those are good, in fact, those are priceless and wonderful. But we have something different to hope for, don't we? Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15:19** that, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." If there is

no afterlife, then what's the point? If there is nothing but this life then I'm done. Let me off. I don't want to even do this anymore. *"But wait! There's more!"* Right?

How about one I'm pretty sure you've heard before? **John 3:16** says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Romans 6:23 - *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

John 14:2-3 is one of my absolute favorites. You ought to have your kids and grandkids memorize this one. Bribe them if you need to. It's worth it. It says, *"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*

I'll give you just one more. **John 10:28** says, *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."* You know what? Those verses make me happy. They give me joy. They give me peace. They make me want to be obedient. And they ultimately and mainly give me hope. What is hope worth? Priceless, right?

Let me close with this. Do you ever hear people say, *"I don't want to get my hopes up"* because they're afraid of being disappointed? The Apostle Paul wrote in **Romans 5**, *"We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance [brings about] proven character; and proven character [brings about] hope; and hope **does not disappoint** because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

A Christian's hope does not disappoint because our hope, our true hope, is based on the promises of God. I understand saying, *"I don't want to get my hopes up"* about rain or the Cowboys but my ultimate hope is for God to be with me in this life until I can be with Him in the next life! That's my hope and that's the gift that God has given all of us. And it is life-changing hope.

Okay, I've saved the best "hope" verse for last and it is **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** where Paul says, *"Brothers, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words."*

That is our ultimate hope and our encouragement. I **hope** that it is today! 😊 How about you? If you are a true believer in Jesus as being the only way to Heaven then that is your hope too. But if you don't have that hope, if you don't have peace and joy in this life and your faith is in yourself to be good enough to get to Heaven then you need to know that it is only through our faith in Jesus that we get to live in Heaven for eternity. Jesus paid the price for your sin that will cost you an eternity in Hell if you pay it. But all you have to do is believe and let that belief change your life as you give your life to Jesus to do what He says. And when you do that, He gives you Christmas gifts all year round. He gives peace, joy, faith, hope and so much more. Do you want that today? You can. Do it right now as the music plays.