



The hope of Christmas

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday evening, 24th December 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Readings: Luke 2:8-20, John 19:25-30, Ephesians 2:14-18, and Revelation 21:1-8

Introduction

There's a song that we often sing, with some wonderful words that say:

*In Christ alone, my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand*

So what is all this about? Well, it's what made the angels rejoice and declare "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!". It's what Mary pondered in her heart as she heard all that the Shepherds relayed. And it's what an old man (called Simeon) said at the temple in Jerusalem, 41 days after Jesus was born, which the Bible records in chapter 2 of Luke's gospel:

Luke 2:25-32

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your **salvation** Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."

That is, none of these folks were rejoicing that merely a great moral teacher had been born. They weren't rejoicing that they'd have a reason for getting the family together once a year, or that their employers would give them a couple of days off work. But rather, they were rejoicing that a *Saviour* had been born! There were were rejoicing that there could indeed be peace with God.

Why was that so important? It was because we had a massive problem, that the second verse of that song speaks about. The words say:

*In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live, I live*

That is, our problem was our sin. You see, God had given us free choice. But choice wasn't free of consequences — it never is. And in the case of sin, it brought forth death, disease and suffering into this world. But furthermore, it left us with a monumental problem ahead of us — because God is good. That might not sound like a problem, but it really is. You see, because God is holy and just, He can't just excuse sin, but rather, just like in any human court, justice *must* be done — otherwise God wouldn't be just. And the frightening thing is that the Bible tells us that we *deserve* God's wrath.

But there's good news. For God sent Jesus to earth as a baby. And this baby, Jesus, grew into a man who lived a perfect sinless life, meaning He had no sin of His own to pay for. And as such He was able to pay for our sin. How? By dying in our place.

One of the most vivid illustrations of this is seen in the events shortly before Jesus' crucifixion, some 33 years after His birth. For each year, the Roman authorities would release a Jewish prisoner of the people's choice to them. And at that time, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, offered them Jesus — whom he himself had found *nothing* wrong with *at all* — or Barabbas, a convicted murderer. And the crowd chose Barabbas. In that moment, the unthinkable happened — an innocent man was sentenced to death in the place of one who deserved it.

Yet that's what happened for you and I too. You see, Jesus had done no wrong, committed no crime, deserved no punishment. Whereas we had offended the God who made us by disobeying Him, and, in the process, hurting others. Yet rather than us have to pay for our own sin, we simply walk free — just like Barabbas did — because Jesus took our place.

So now, because of Jesus death in our place, finally, there could be peace with God again. No longer would we be seen as guilty in His sight. Rather, we would be completely forgiven. And furthermore, Jesus then rose from the dead on the third day that we might also be given new life, with a new body and eternity with Him in Heaven to look forward to.

That's what the third verse of that song speaks about:

*There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ*

Now, forgiven and free, we not only have peace with God, but peace in the *midst* of this crazy world around us. Sure, there are hurts, and struggles, and fears — but it all makes sense. What we see is the result of mankind's sin, that plunged the world into chaos. But what we have ahead of us is an eternity with our Creator, with our relationship with Him restored — and in that, we have hope.

Not a distant, speculative hope. But a confident hope in what Jesus has promised, which is certain because of what He has already accomplished. And as John read in our final Bible reading this evening, *"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*

And knowing that it is God, and not ourselves, that has accomplished this, we can be certain of our future with Him. And that's why we can sing the final verse of the song:

*No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand*

What hope we have! Not only that we have been forgiven, but that we will spend eternity in Heaven, in God's presence, which is what we were created for. And all this was possible because of what God accomplished for us, which He decided He would do even before He created the world. Hope such as this, changes everything. It's the happiest of endings, yet will continue for all eternity.

It's the best possible news. And it's available to all. In our fourth reading earlier, we read: *"I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."* The question is, do you thirst for this?

You see, this good news is the reason the events of that first Christmas took place. It's the reason we're gathered here tonight. And the reason we gather often to praise and worship God in song, to learn how He would have us live, to remember what He has done for us, to pray to Him together, and to love and encourage each other in the things of God.

But before we finish, I can't ignore or skip over what else we read in Revelation 21. For those who refuse to accept the free gift of God's salvation, that refuse the living water that Jesus speaks of, will spend eternity separated from Him in hell, which will be the worst place imaginable to spend even a minute. Indeed we read *"But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."*

That, is the worst possible reality for anyone to ever face. So why would you refuse? Well, there may be a few reasons — you might not believe it's true (though that won't change the facts of the matter), or you might be hoping it's not true (which is a colossal and foolish gamble). Or you *might* even be thinking that you'll have it out with God when you see Him, and somehow prove to Him that He was wrong in many ways (though that's pretty arrogant stance, that you could somehow chastise the Creator of the entire universe).

But just perhaps, you are willing to consider that this might be true, and that you might need to do something, but you think you have plenty of time. If that's you — let me ask you; are you *sure* you have plenty of time? Sure, the world won't end today. But for 150'000 people, it will. Or at least their lives will end. Sobering right? And what guarantee have any of us of getting through today alive? None whatsoever. At best you're gambling with probabilities. But 10 out of 10 die, it's a question of when, not if. And so when that happens, how will you stand before God? Guilty of your sin, or forgiven because you put your faith and trust in Jesus as your Saviour.

The best gift that ever came at Christmas, was that first Christmas. And it's the best gift you can receive this Christmas, is to come to know Jesus as your Saviour. It's not complicated, it's Simply believing in Him, repenting (that is, turning from your sin), and putting your faith and trust in Him to save you. Not a 12 step program, and no good deeds required to earn your salvation. Trust and obey, there is no other way.

So if you don't know Jesus as your Saviour — perhaps you've even been going to church, even this church, for years — but have no personal relationship with Him, then come to Him today.

If you do know Him, then you have the wonderful gift of a Saviour — draw close to Him, and He will draw close to you. And as you walk with Him, simply share the good news of what He has done for you with everyone you can. For the hope we have is greater than anything this world has to offer. The hope of Christmas, is Jesus, our Saviour.

For the audio recording of this Bible study, and for additional studies, please see the DCF web site:



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