

First Baptist Church Powell 12 20 15 AM

Sermon 13: Born That We Might Have Hope

Series: Connecting Bethlehem and Calvary

1 Timothy 1:1

The burden that birthed this multi-part series we have been studying since 2011 is that we often miss the importance of Christ's birth by making His birth an end in itself. The birth of Christ did not save anyone. *His birth was a means to a more important end.* His birth was a means to the end of Christ glorifying the Father by becoming our substitute and dying on an old rugged cross. To put it another way, what happened at Bethlehem is important because of what happened at Calvary to the one born in Bethlehem. It was at the cross that our salvation, our sanctification, and our glorification were procured. We need to do more than just acknowledge His birth; we need to praise God for His miraculous conception in a virgin's womb, praise God for the timing and the protection from those who wanted to kill the Savior, and praise Him for the prophecies fulfilled in the Savior's birth. However, our highest praise is for what was accomplished at Calvary's cross about thirty-three years after His birth. I've entitled this lengthy, multi-year series that is presented for several weeks leading up to Christmas, *Connecting Bethlehem* (His birth) and *Calvary* (His substitutionary atonement).

We are going to focus in on *hope*. Jesus Christ was born that we might have hope. As we read in 1 Timothy 1:1, He is our hope. Hope is one of the most misunderstood and underappreciated words in the Bible. In the Bible hope is not a *wish* for a desired outcome in the future. Biblical hope is no wish! Faith and hope are linked together in the Scriptures. Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV): "Now faith is the substance [assurance in other translations] of things hoped for, the evidence [literally title deed] of things not seen." The Greek word translated "substance" or "assurance" means "something which has been put under [something else]; therefore, used as a basis or foundation." [Zodhiates *The Complete Word Study New Testament*, page 964]

Watch how this works. First, we have a promise from God that has not yet been fulfilled. Faith is simply believing that God is telling the truth. Hope then brings that future promise into the present, stands on the foundation of confidence that God does what He says (faith) and then bases thoughts, expectations, plans, and behavior on the assurance that God will keep His Word. Hope is always looking into the future at what God has promised, then stands on that promise in the present, and acts like it is true, because it is true since it is a promise of God. In the midst of confusion, uncertainties, and pain, hope stands firm with absolute confidence that God is sovereign and He *will* bring His promises to pass. In the midst of what looks like failure, hope brings expectation – expectation that God is in control and He can turn what looks like failure into what looks like success from Heaven's viewpoint (and that is the only viewpoint that counts). Putting all of that together, we can define hope as – "the joyful confidence and expectation that what God has promised, He will accomplish in His perfect timing."

When we begin to understand the biblical meaning of Hope, we can understand why the saddest word in human language is "hopeless." We become hopeless when we look into the future and we are blinded to God's promises and see present pain and failure as only getting worse in the future. Hope, on the other hand looks to the future and sees God's promises such as Romans 8:28 (NASB): "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose." Hope sees current pain in light of the promise of God's grace – 2 Corinthians 12:9a (NKJV): "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'"

I want to give you two illustrations of the difference hope makes in life here on a fallen, sinful, painful planet. Major Harold Kushner was an Army medical officer during the Vietnam War. Major Kushner was taken captive by the Vietcong for five and one-half years. He told about meeting a twenty-four-year-old Marine who had already been a prisoner for two years. The Marine seemed to be in fairly good health. Major Kushner asked the Marine how he was doing so well. The young man said that the camp commander had promised him an early release if he cooperated in every respect. The Marine agreed and became a model prisoner. As time passed, however, it became clear to the young Marine that he had been lied to. Major Kushner said that the young man became zombie like and refused all work and rejected all offers of food. He simply lay on his cot sucking his thumb until a few days later when he died. When his hope vanished, he had nothing left to live for [David Jeremiah, *Things That Matter*, page 68-69]

Contrast that hopeless prisoner of war with the life of America's first foreign missionary, Adoniram Judson (1788-1850). In the early 1800's, Judson and his wife Ann were called to Burma (today Myanmar). The conditions were horrible; the persecution was unimaginable; visible fruit was non-existent. While in Burma, Judson lost his wife Ann to sickness, as well as several of his children. Judson toiled in Burma for six long years before seeing his first convert. In a letter to a group in England that was supporting him, Judson said this: "Beg the churches to have patience. If a ship were here to carry me to any part of the world, I would not leave my field. Tell the brethren success is as certain as the promise of a faithful God can make it." When Adoniram Judson died, his mark was left on Burma that still exists today. A few years ago we had a young couple at our World Missions Celebration that served in Burma. They shared first hand testimony that after 200 years the influence of this man could be felt in this spiritually dark country. Judson was thirty years in Burma before his first furlough. How did he go on? What kept him from quitting when he was undergoing unspeakable persecution? It was biblical hope! He had absolute confidence that God is faithful to fulfill His promises. Judson's hope, his ability to keep on going when the times were difficult can be summarized by this quote from him: "The future is as bright as the promises of God." That is a life of hope! We discover that hope the same way Adoniram Judson discovered it – from the promises of God in the Scriptures! Romans 15:4 (ESV): "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

From the Scriptures, we learn that because Jesus was born, we have hope in three very important areas.

I. He Was Born That We Might Have Hope of Salvation

This is a short point, but an essential one. The awful predicament of all mankind apart from God is summarized in Ephesians 2:12 (ESV): "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Notice some key words in this sobering verse: *separated, alienated, strangers, and because of being separated, alienated, and strangers*, we were a people *having no hope*. But in the hopelessness of being separated from Christ, something happened! Galatians 4:4 (NKJV): "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." When we were separated from God, alienated from God's covenant people, strangers to the promises of God, completely hopeless, and without God, at God's foreordained time, He sent forth His Son, born of a virgin – God in human flesh! This one who was the Son of God accomplished what the law could never accomplish. Ephesians 2:13-14 (ESV): "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one

and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility”. We were separated, but now we have been *brought near*. We were alienated, but now, “He Himself is our peace.” We were strangers, but now, “He has made us both one.” We had no hope, but now we see in Ephesians 2:19 (ESV): “...you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” Jesus was born that we might have the glorious hope of salvation.

II. He Was Born That We Might Have Hope in Trials

Romans 5:2b-5a (NKJV): “...rejoice in *hope* of the glory of God. And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint...”

In Romans 5:2b-5a, we see a sequence that leads to hope. If scripture was just a product of man, it would say something like, “we glory in success, knowing that success produces a good self-image and a comfortable life that leads to a hope filled life.” That’s not exactly what it says! This sequence leading to a life of hope (the joyful confidence and expectation that what God has promised, He will accomplish in His perfect timing), begins not with worldly defined success, but tribulation.

I often spend time in my early morning quiet times praying through the prayer requests turned in on the connection cards. As I pray through these requests, I can sense the pain. There is the marriage hanging on by a thread and seemingly there is no hope of it working out. There are the prodigal adult children that it seems are never going to repent and entrust their lives to the Lordship of Christ. There are marriages broken, all sorts of physical illnesses, problems at work, problems finding work, struggles with the past, and on and on. The best word to summarize what so many are going through is tribulation. All of us are, or will be dealing with tribulation. Jesus made a promise that never makes it into the little “promise books.” He said in John 16:33b (NKJV): “In the world you will have tribulation...” What we see in Romans 5:2-5 is that when Paul talks about tribulation, he doesn’t just tell us to stoically endure it; he says that we must use our tribulations for God’s intended purpose which is to cultivate hope!

One of the key words in Romans 5:2-5 is the word *knowing* in verse 3. In the Greek it means to perceive with the mind and understand. As we’ll see in a moment, the reason that we can glory or rejoice (ESV) in tribulations is because there are some things we *know* that tribulation produces. No one enjoys tribulation, but we can rejoice in the midst of it because we *know* what is being accomplished through the tribulation. What we have presented to us in these verses is a four step process that leads to the maturing of hope which results in a lifestyle of hope that mystifies the world and causes them to ask us a reason for this hope that dwells in us (1 Peter 3:15).

A. Tribulations (v3a)

What is it we rejoice or glory in? We rejoice in *tribulations*. The Latin word that translated this Greek word was *tribulum*. It referred to a threshing sledge which separated grain from chaff or husk. The bottom of the tribulum was studded with sharp flints or metal. It was used to pound the wheat and then drag over it. That is what tribulation can sometimes be like. In reality, there are a number of words that accurately translate this Greek word: afflictions, pressures, stresses, or difficulties, to name a few.

To rejoice in tribulations doesn’t sound logical or natural or rational. It is not logical or rational or natural unless you *know* what the tribulation produces. Perhaps you have heard the old atheistic line of reasoning that uses suffering or tribulation as a means of *proving* that a good

and all powerful God cannot exist. The false reasoning goes like this: “If God is good, He would desire to make His creatures happy and if God were all powerful He could do what He desired. But God’s creatures aren’t happy because so many of them suffer. Therefore, God lacks goodness or power or both.” There is something that is fatally flawed with that argument. It assumes that human happiness is the ultimate end of life. That is a false assumption. God’s glory is the ultimate end of life and His chief means of achieving that glory is to take hopeless sinners and transform them and then conform them to the likeness of Jesus Christ. To accomplish that goal, we need to go through uncomfortable, unhappy circumstances that propel us to a life that brings glory to God.

Let’s look at the next element in the process to mature hope.

B. Perseverance (v3b)

The word translated perseverance is a compound word that is made up of the word for “under” and the word for “abide.” It means to live under something. In the context here it means to live under tribulations without wiggling out and running away. It is the opposite of *bailing out* every time the pressure comes. This patience, perseverance, endurance, and steadfastness is developed no other way than by going through trials. The mature believer develops this hope filled “stick-to-itiveness” by going through tribulations.

C. Character (v4a)

Perhaps a better translation would be “proven character” or “tested character.” The word means to be put to the test and approved. It brings up the picture of heating gold or silver ore until the impurities float to the top and are skimmed off. What is then left is *tested and approved*. We read in 1 Corinthians 9:27 (NKJV); “But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” The word translated “disqualified” is this same word translated “character” with a negative particle in front of it. You don’t gain proven character in a classroom or from reading a book. It comes as a result of going through tribulations and standing fast or persevering.

D. Hope (v4b, 5a)

Our hope takes us through the suffering that leads to endurance, that leads to proven character which leads to a stronger hope or confidence in God, and His promise which enables us to endure more tribulation, leading to even greater character which leads to an even stronger or more mature hope, etc. Knowing this, do you see why we can rejoice in tribulations? The Puritan William Gurnall spoke of this mature hope when he said, “Hope fills the afflicted soul with such inward joy and consolation, that it can laugh while tears are in the eye, sigh and sing all in a breath; it is called ‘the rejoicing of hope’ in Hebrews 3:6.” [*A Puritan Golden Treasury*, page 144]

Verse 5a tells us that this mature hope will never disappoint us. There will be trials, there will be problems, there will be tribulations, there will be difficulties, but if you have this hope you will never be disappointed, and you will never feel that you are *let down*.

Jesus Christ was born that we might have hope in salvation and hope in tribulation

III. He Was Born That We Might Have Hope in His Return

We read in Titus 2:13 (NKJV): “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” The eternal God, the Son, took on human flesh in a virgin’s womb

and was born in Bethlehem. He lived a perfect life, then on the cross, He took the sins of all who would believe on Him, and suffered the wrath of God for those sins. He was buried in a borrowed tomb, and three days later He rose from the dead, was seen by many of His disciples (over 500 at one time), and then ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father, and one day He is coming again. For those who have repented of sin and savingly believed on Jesus, His coming is not a time of dread and fear; it is a time of great anticipation of a glorious event. For believers, His coming back is called here in Titus 2:13, “the blessed hope.”

When the early church was going through trials, tribulation, and some were losing all that they had, they longed for His return. It was their “blessed hope.” One old preacher said that they weren’t waiting for the undertaker but the upper-taker; they were not anticipating a hole in the ground but a cleavage in the sky as the Savior comes in glory. Their parting phrase was not “see you later” or “good bye,” it was *maranatha*, which is interpreted, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” The most literal translation of Titus 2:13 is the NASB translation. It says, “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” When He comes again, it will not be in humility to a stable; it will be in Glory to rule and reign. This glorious coming is our *blessed hope*. Whatever tribulation you are going through, you have the solid hope that it is working perseverance and proven character into your life, but there is also the glorious hope of His return in glory.

Conclusion

Are you living in hope? Jesus was born that you might know genuine hope. Are you experiencing the hope of salvation? I don’t mean the world’s kind of hope, but the solid hope that you are His? Are you living in hope in trials? Are you looking to the skies waiting for the blessed hope?