

The Greatest Story Ever Told - The Promise of Hope

Part One

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Sermon Series - Theme and Description

The Word became flesh. Hope was just a word until it was made manifest in reality through the birth of Christ. The Christmas season is about God's message of hope for the entire world. Starting in the book of Genesis, God did not delay in announcing His plan of salvation. From there He spoke through His prophets from generation to generation. When the fullness of time had come, He spoke through His only Son, Jesus Christ. This hope that was birthed two thousand years ago abides within the follower of Christ. Now, hope is not just a wish that we view from the past, but a relational faith-walk that we practice on a daily basis. This is the message that as followers of Christ we proclaim—that God has reconciled the world to Himself through Christ. And this is the greatest story ever told!

The Message Description

God wasted no time in communicating His plan of hope and salvation for humanity. In the very Garden of Eden while the stench of sin was still fresh, God declared His promise of hope. All was not lost—God's intervention was immediate, swift, and intentional.

- The Prophet Isaiah writes about the Messiah:
 - For this reason the sovereign master [God] himself will give you a confirming sign. Look, this young woman [virgin] is about to conceive and will give birth to a son. You, young woman, will name him Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14).

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." ²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." ²⁴ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵ and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

Introduction - God Wants to Fulfill Our Hopes

In every person's heart there is a hope for something:

- That things will work out in their present trauma
- That there will come healing and health
- For restoration and reconciliation
- For the overcoming of the tough situations that seem to require a miracle.

Hope Scriptures

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Romans 8:24-25

²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

The Political Climate of Society in The Time of Jesus

The arrival of Christ was less than ideal. In fact, the environment, the political and social circumstances were stressful and difficult to say the least.

- Only about 10% of the people lived a lavish lifestyle - the rest of society was oppressed
 - This group of people controlled everything and everyone under them
 - While the rich grew richer, the poor grew poorer and, therefore, tension and hatred for Herod and the Romans was prevalent
- The majority of the people (approximately 90%) were impoverished and were coerced
- Israel was under Roman rule, and they partnered with certain Jewish leaders in order to dominate the people
- The people were **heavily taxed** - Some estimate up to 60% of what people made and/or grew
 - In Bethlehem, for example, (most of the people were farmers) farmers growing one bag of food for themselves would also have to grow a bag of food for Herod and/or Caesar
 - Taxes were not meant to help the unfortunate but rather to make the rich even richer
- Joseph most likely became a carpenter because he had lost his land and he would have been considered a lowly peasant
- It was a gender separated society; men and women would never meet in public places unless it was to meet in bed.

Main Points

1. In the Beginning – The Promise of Hope

- a. The Christmas story did not begin in the New Testament but in the book of Genesis.
 - i. God wastes no time in proclaiming His plan of salvation for humanity. Beginning in the book of Genesis God makes His presence, power, and intentions known.
 - ii. He reveals that Messiah will come from heaven and bruise the head of the serpent.
 - iii. God immediately expresses hope for His creation and His plan to be with mankind forever.
 - iv. We link up the promise in Genesis 3 about the “offspring of the woman” with the prophecy of Isaiah about a child born of a virgin and compare and observe at once the facts of the birth of Jesus Christ fit in like the pieces of a puzzle.
 1. The promised Savior was born of a virgin and He did come to save His people from their sins.
 2. The Old Testament begins with a prediction of a Saviour who would come to conquer the power of Satan and deal with the problem of sin in human life; the New Testament begins with the record of the actual birth of this Savior.
 3. The final fulfilment in the New Testament make the meaning perfectly clear.
 4. THE FIRST GREAT PROMISE
 - *“What does this strange promise mean? It declares that there would be permanent enmity between Satan and the human race; that the power of Satan would eventually be overcome by a human being, and that in the process of destroying the power of Satan, the Savior would suffer. In crushing Satan’s “head,” the Savior’s “heel” would be attacked. Moreover, the Savior would be “the offspring of the woman”.*

2. God Tells His Own Story – The Message of Hope

- a. God is a talker and an incredible communicator. The Bible tells us that God does nothing in the earth without first telling His prophets.
 - i. When there is darkness - God speaks! After 400 years of silence, without any spiritual leadership or voice from heaven, God thunders through the darkness with His own voice Message.
 - ii. God loves to talk about hope and His plans for a greater future. Yes! God's future is always better, it is more excellent, it is filled with life and prosperity.
 - iii. We will never choose a life that is greater than the one that God would choose for us.
 - iv. In particular, God loves to express hope and, therefore, He begins to tell His own story through the prophets and the judges and eventually this culminates through His Son Jesus Christ.
- b. Angels, Shepherds, the Wisemen, and even the stars all tell the story of Christ and bring the message of hope.

3. The Prophecy Foretold - God Keeps Hope Alive

- a. Through the birth of Christ, hope is realized and the potential of all that God had said had come to pass. Every prophecy and every message of hope that had been expressed since the Garden had now come to pass in Christ.
- b. The Apostle Paul expresses this to the believers and followers of Christ that Jesus came in the fullness of time – that He was born of a virgin to fulfill every prophetic word of the Old Testament. Galatians 4:4 - But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

- i. Galatians 4:5-7 – ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.
- ii. The wait was over! Throughout the scriptures, God keeps hope alive and focuses the vision of His people on the future.
- c. **The Lord has made known to us** - This was the message of the shepherds. They revealed to the people what God had shown them and communicated to them.
- d. God always requires a witness to the things He does on the earth
 - i. 500 people were witness to the resurrection of Christ
 - ii. Let all things be established through the mouth of 2 or 3 witnesses.
- e. The secret of the Lord....
Shepherds made known what had been revealed to them widely; they did not hold the event to themselves, but they provided witness to Christ and His birth. They broadcast the "God news" of heaven to everyone they came in contact with.

OLD TESTAMENT PREDICTION	NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT
Christ would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)	Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-10)
Christ would be preceded by a messenger chosen by God (Malachi 3:1 ; Isaiah 40:3-5)	Jesus was introduced to Israel by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3 ; Mark 1:2 ; John 1:29)
Christ would be the Foundation on which the New Covenant would be based (Isaiah 28:16)	Jesus is called the Foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11 ; 1 Peter 2:4-8)
Christ would preach Good News to the world—to all nations (Isaiah 61:1-2 ; 52:7 ; 42:6-7 ; 49:6)	Jesus is the Savior of men (Luke 4:16-21 ; 24:47 ; Matthew 28:19-20)

Group Questions & Discussion

- 1) How is hope different from faith?
- 2) What is your interpretation of Genesis 3:15? Give real-life examples.
- 3) Why do you believe that God speaks through prophets?
- 4) How can a believer in Christ express hope today to others?
- 5) Read the prophecies from the table provided above. Compare them to the New Testament. Discuss how the Old Testament and the New Testament agree with each other.
- 6) Why was the birth of Christ kept secret from the political and religious systems? Why was it revealed to humble and lowly peasants instead?
- 7) Do we require to keep hope alive in our faith?