

Victory of the Lamb – New Year Revolution – Hope –

Matthew 2:1-12 Get Your Hopes Up High – Pastor Bill Limmer

I hope you had a good Christmas? Did you? Whether had a good Christmas or not, Christmas is over so now what? What are hoping for in 2018? For some you are hoping for a manual on how to be a good parent with so much stuff going on, from bullying to sexual harassment to AAU sports, it seems more difficult than ever. While some are just hoping for a child, you have been trying and trying and you are prayerful and hopeful for a pregnancy in 2018. For some of you, 2017 was pretty tough financially, and you are hoping for not only financial stability but a financial cushion would be pretty cool too! For some 2017 was full of sickness and disease and you are hoping that this is the year you conquer cancer, and for some we are just hoping that we stay healthy. For some, you have been overlooked and overlooked, and you are losing your spirit, you are hoping for a little recognition. Maybe you are just hoping you will get what you deserve. And maybe, maybe some of you have given up hope. It seems like you are living in the dark ages. You can't catch a break. The canvass of your life is one mistake after another. The canvass is filled with scribbled and messy lines. You think you are past any blessings, that you are past God. (facts, feelings, failures) How many of us have heard and even said ourselves, "Don't get your hopes up. Well no matter what happened in your past or didn't happen, today as we look at God's Word we have God's permission to Get your hopes up high!

Hope. Even the sound of that word can lift your spirits when you're down. Hope keeps you going when life seems to be going nowhere or going in the wrong direction. Hope gives you something to cling to when you've lost your job, or your health, or someone you love. Hope is a spark inside your soul that tells you that tomorrow things will be better. Hope is like having an anchor in the future. But the problem with earthly hope is that it is always based upon uncertainty. For example, we may say "I hope it gets to 70 degrees today. That kind of hope is a wish, not a certainty. We can hope all we like for something, and all the indications may be that it will come true, but life is unpredictable, and things can change at the last moment to dash all our hopes. In the Bible, however, there is a unique kind of hope that is never a wish. It is always based upon an absolute certainty. You can hope for these things with the utter confidence that they will happen. It's the kind of hope that is based on God what God had promised. And, since God always fulfills His promises, we can look forward with absolute hope. So, get your hopes up high!

For years people had hoped for the Messiah. And at just the right time, in the fulness of time, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law. **After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."** The Wise Men were hoping for Jesus! Just because they were hoping for Jesus didn't mean it was always easy. They saw the star from their eastern home but it wasn't up in the sky the whole time. It disappeared. And so that meant they had to walk by faith not by sight. Faith is sometimes the only things that brings light because it trusts who not what. At one time, it go so bleak they even had to ask for directions.

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold,

frankincense and myrrh. They didn't set out from the far east to find something that would lose its significance in a few years if not in a few months or even weeks. They didn't set out to find the latest viral fad. They were willing to leave their family behind. They were willing to leave their wealth behind. They were willing to leave their comfort behind. They were willing to leave their gifts behind. They were willing to leave their significance behind. All to worship Jesus. And even more, they didn't go worship God for what he could do for them, even though that is great and glorious and limitless but they set to worship God for who he was.

To worship Jesus. I don't know about you but I know from time to time I have worshiped God for selfish reasons, for what he can do for me instead for who he is. I have treated him like Alexa, my virtual assistant. Alexa turn the channel to ESPN. Alexa set the alarm. God do this. God do that. Have you ever done that? Sometimes when I have do this it is because I was worshipping myself instead of God. For me that adds a whole new meaning to praying "your will be done." Because we all want to do that from time to time, right?

Here is what I want you to consider: Jesus left his home behind, Jesus left his comfort behind, Jesus left his Father behind in heaven, to come not only for the Wise Men but for us, not because of what we could do for him but because he saw intrinsic value in us, even though we were fallen, full of blunders, past mistakes and edgy personalities, and weak willed convictions. Jesus is the one who can make sense out of all of our scribbled lines and turn them into a masterpiece, his masterpiece. Jesus brings hope and promises to turn our lives into a masterpiece

With Jesus whatever looks hopeless to you, your stump is never a stump, a shoot of hope can spring from impossible places. Bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. Jesus will not disappoint. Jesus makes you spiritually rich even though you were spiritually poor. Jesus makes you spiritually healthy even if you are spiritually sick. Jesus will give full forgiveness of all your sins. You can't out sin God's grace. Jesus will accept you even if your friends don't. Jesus who has the name above all names has adopted you into his family through his baptismal promise and so you have the position, the status, the title of dearly loved child of the Sovereign Saving God, and that doesn't go away at death. Jesus has something better in mind than any earthly thing or person. Jesus already has plans for you to prosper you and not to harm you, to give you hope and a future. But one thing Jesus will not give you. Jesus will not give you what you deserve – instead he will give you mercy and grace. Because that gives God glory!

Glory is used in the Bible over 370 times. Glory means weight. Sometimes we give a lot of weight to facts, failures and feelings. (Abraham had a story full of bad facts, a horrible past, wife is my sister; feelings I'm too old.) The Wise Men had facts they were a long way away. They didn't know where they were going when they lost the star. They felt lost and needed to ask directions. Are you on the road to see Jesus? Maybe you aren't sure? And maybe you are sure you are not on the road. See saw illustration. In our lives we often look at our circumstances and situations and give them like immovable weight. What are your facts that are weighing you down? Old or young, sick, not married, rebellious teenager? What are your failures that are holding you back? Your past, sin, lies, mistakes. What are your feeling that are weighing you down? Feelings of worthlessness, insignificance, you don't have what it takes. I want you to know that God is greater than your facts. God is greater than your failures. God is greater than your feelings. When things get tough remember there is always a story behind the glory. Jesus had the to face the horrendous facts of our sin and our failures. And Jesus was abandoned by God

in our place. But the tomb is empty. And the victory is won. And he won that victory for you and me. So get your hopes up!

Here is one of my hopes for you: that you will daily receive the love of God, that would receive this objective truth and make it a subject truth every day in every situation. And that love will fill us up to overflowing so that we can provide hope for our community and world.

Fill out hope cards. Your own personal hopes and your hope for our church. You can put your name on them or not. You can place them in the offering basket when they go by in a few minutes. Pastor Ben and I will be praying these through.

As we begin our journey into 2018, we keep our eyes looking up to God by being in his word, here in church, in our personal devotions and in our small groups. Through the Bible the Holy Spirit guides us more directly than He guided the Wise Men. A new year of high hopes because God is going to be faithful to all his promises to you. So get your hopes up high! Amen.