

## Victory of the Lamb – December 16 – What if . . . there really is hope?

### Isaiah 41:1, 2, 10, 11 – Pastor Bill Limmer

When I was a little boy growing up in Texas, the Texas Longhorn were my favorite football team. One year they were ranked number 1 and they were playing Notre Dame in the Cotton Bowl. If they win, and they had not lost all year, they are the national champs. In the waning moments of the game, I was scrambling in my mind for all the different ways that Texas could come back and win the game. Score a touchdown, kick an onside kick and recover it and score off of the recovery. It became desperate, but I would not give up hope. And then the final second ticked off the clock. I went to bed depressed. I got over it, about 30 years later. But I got over it.

Fast forward to last Sunday night, in a home not too far from here, where the dad came home after confirmation class, to hear his daughter chime that the Packers still have playoff hopes. This father, who will remain nameless, so that he doesn't have to get his daughter an extra Christmas gift for using her as a sermon illustration, listened as she defiantly proclaimed the hope: If the Packers win their remaining games, if Carolina and Washington and Philadelphia each lose one more game, and if Minnesota loses two of the next three games then the Packers are in the playoffs. If the Packers lose one game, then Carolina, Washington and Philadelphia must lose two games, and the Vikings must lose out.

What are hoping for this Christmas? Each gift brings hope. Is it a big gift hope, a medium size gift hope or maybe a small size with big hope?

We have hopeful wishes, I hope we don't get sick, I hope I have a great career, I hope I win the lottery and when it all comes crashing down it is easy to feel hopeless. For some this time of year is a time when hope seems in short supply, it is as if hope is snuffed out as the bills pile up, as the doctor's report is reviewed over and over, the job offer doesn't come through, your feet are muddy from standing by a fresh grave. As the tree glistens so many eyes glisten with moist tears, and you wonder if you will ever get married or ever be able to have a child. We hunger for hope grasping for straws. Hopelessness is delusional, it is the result of an inaccurate belief system. Hopelessness says at its core that sin has won me over, death as not been defeated, and God is powerless to help me.

We feel like Jonah. Jonah 2:5-6 **The engulfing waters threatened me,<sup>[b]</sup> the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. <sup>6</sup>To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.** We feel trapped by something difficult and painful in life. We get discouraged because we put our hope in things that we should have never put our hope. Just because you can't see a way out doesn't mean there is a way out. Isaiah 40:31 Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

Biblical hope is not optimism. Optimism -psychological – positive thinking Optimism says, it's not that bad. It could be worse, can be a denial of reality. Optimism beats pessimism but it is not hope. Hope is theological based on facts of God – passionate thinking – it's bad, never denies reality, but it still trust in God. Hope doesn't try to cliché the pain away. Hope is waiting in the tension trusting in a Savior who is greater than this situation is. Hope remains firm in the waiting. My soul waits for the Lord.

The sacred writing says Isaiah 40:1,2 **Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.** God comes on to the scene and

calls for comfort and comfort to the core. The reason why we need hope and feel hopeless is because of sin. Sin infects our day to day, makes things humanly impossible, causes us to blow up great things, jump to conclusions, be impatient, self-righteous, and to give up any kind of hope at all. And into the despair of the Biblical heroes from Jeremiah from time to time was distrusting of God, to Elijah who was just through of life – all alone- no way out, to Nehemiah with enemies all around wanting to take his life, and into the real life scenarios of you and me, walks Jesus. Isaiah 40:10-11 **See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.** <sup>11</sup> **He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.** The picture here is of the Almighty way bigger than a body builder God, who rules with truth and justice, stooping down to pick up a little lamb that can't walk yet and picking it up and carrying it close to his heart, while he gently leads the nursing ewe that can't run. God can do anything in his power, and he takes the care and the comfort to pick up those who can't walk in the difficult times.

Sin has made us so we can't walk, we are helpless, we are hopeless until God comes into the narrative our hearts and lives rescues us and not only rescues us from the fire but gives us the hope of heaven. Jeremiah 29:11 **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.** God's actions and thoughts towards us are of rescue and love not judgment and condemnation. Hope is built into the DNA of the gospel.

In one of the great hope stories of the Bible a guilt-ridden son and a broken hearted father find themselves on a collision course with one another. As the broken young man comes over the crest of the hill to the home he was raised, with the hope that his Father would hire him out and let him do his best to pay off his debts, he sees his father sprinting for him. Not to give him what he deserves, a kick in the pants for all eternity. Not to destroy him in wrath and anger for being so foolish but in delight. The father wraps his arms around his son. The waiting is over. And he brings the hope of debt forgiveness.

You can get out of the pit. Regardless of whether you were thrown in, you slipped in, or you jumped in, you can get out. You can get out even if you have a history of failed attempts. Even if you think you don't deserve it. Even if you have never lived anywhere else. But here's the catch – you can't get yourself out. Your stuck. Somebody else has to come and rescue you. God does want us to help one another. The trouble comes when we insist upon someone equally human becoming our deliverer. Only God can be there through very second and every need. And carry us home.

For centuries people waited, hoping to see the Messiah. Just because he didn't come in their life time, didn't mean that he wasn't going to come. In fact, he came at just the right time. Galatians 4:4-6. And now we wait for Jesus to come again. 1 Corinthians 15:19 **If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.** Some promises we will see fulfilled in our life and some we will have to wait till the next life to see them fulfilled. But hope in God is sure hope because God always come through. Remember the reading from Jonah. There is hope because Jesus was engulfed, swallowed, and wrapped in the seaweed of our sin in our place and died the death we deserved.

The Caring Bridge post started: Here we go. We will be going into the hospital tonight to start the process. The plan is that tomorrow to begin the induction and then we get to meet our daughter (LORD willing). Your prayers are greatly appreciated. God's grace continues to keep us upright. His deep love for our little daughter is a comfort beyond measure. He has already loved her so much that he was willing to be parted from his own Son. If being parted from my from daughter hurts me this much, I can't

imagine how much it hurt the Father. And yet, he willingly chose to go through such a separation. All for my little girl, for my wife, for my family and for me. Pray with us that God's will be done. Pray that however brief or long any of our times are on earth, that those times might be used by used to the glory of God. Pray that God's name be exalted and that in our joy and our sorrow, we might find refuge in him.

If there is any tension at all for you, or if the holidays seem extra dark to you, let the bleakness remind you that Jesus, the Light has come. We can allow the God of hope to sit with us and fill our empty spaces. I pray for all of during this holiday season that we would know how wide, how deep, how high God's love is for us. And I pray that we will all be filled with a hope that because of Jesus one day our sorrow will turn to rejoicing because even in the pain, even in the waiting qll of God's promises are "Yes" in Jesus.