

Victory of the Lamb – My Christmas List – Hope – Romans 8:23-25
December 4, 2022 – Pastor Bill Limmer

As children our eyes glistened as we walk by our family Christmas tree with the sparkling lights, and decorations. As you neared Christmas, did you ever wait impatiently for your parents to leave so you could make a premeditated sweep of the house looking under their bed, in their closet, in the basement, in the garage hoping to find your gift? When your parents were gone, did you ever pick up a gift with your name on it from under the tree to shake it, to see how much it weighted, and maybe pull the wrapping tight and walk your gift beneath a bright light trying to see any writing on the box that would give you an insight into what your gift was? Did you ever do that? Me either – lol.

What was on your Christmas list when you were in elementary school? High school? And now what does your Christmas list look like this year? My guess is that as your list between grade school and high school were different, so your list this year is considerably different than it was in high school.

But even though the lists are different, there is a connection – hope!

What are you hoping for? A bike. Apple Watch. Computer. Airline Gift Card. Clothes. Smoker. Maybe, you are hoping that he or she will say “yes.” Maybe you are hoping the delay on your order will be lifted and the gift will arrive on time. Maybe you are really hoping that you bought on Amazon came with the batteries. Maybe you are hoping that everyone will get along. Maybe you are hoping that the wayward son or daughter will return. Maybe you are hoping that your spouse pays attention to you. Maybe you are already exhausted and you are just hoping for a silent night and an opportunity to sleep in. What are you hoping for this year?

Today we begin our Christmas series **Christmas List. (series slide)** In this series we will set out to not only seek but to find and open the gifts, hope, belonging, joy, peace, and love. In other words the very desires of every human heart. Today we are going to answer this question **Why do we have hope?**

Sermon Text: Romans 8:23–25 ²³ **Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.** ²⁴ **For in this hope we were saved. But**

hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ **But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.**

Did you catch the key words groan inwardly, wait eagerly, hope that is seen is no hope at all? The eagerly wait part we can understand, but the groan inwardly and the hope that is not seen. Well, that doesn't sound like Christmas, or does it?

Before the first Christmas the OT faithful waited eagerly and hoped for what they had not seen the first Christmas often with inward groans. Life was tough. There were families not able to have children. Families that lost children before they were born or at an early in age. Family strife, brothers and sisters fighting each other. Abuse. Hunger. Poverty. Slavery. Sickness and disease without modern medical care and cure. Being misunderstood and without a voice. The synagogue becoming an insiders' group, pushing women, children, and foreigners to the outside. The faithful looking around and watching their culture not only rebel against God but persecuting them as well. Desperately waiting, eagerly waiting for years old promises about the coming Messiah to come true. It was hard. — **Isaiah 9:2 The people . . . walked in darkness**

Maybe you know someone who is in the darkness of hard times and inwardly groaning. Maybe it is because of dreams dashed, cancer or some other illness, grief, loneliness, regret, separation, suffering or troubles. Maybe you are that someone.

Are you getting worn down or overwhelmed by your situation, weakened by circumstances, and stressed by struggles? Is your heart spilling over with disappointment? Do you feel like you are in a wilderness and not sure how to get out?

Christmas is a reminder that life is full of dark times. **Why do we have hope? We have hope because Jesus comes into our darkness.**

Christmas - **Some years, it's wonder and lights in the sky and some years it is ok to cry in your silent night. (Francesca Battistelli)**

Remember back in Romans 8:23 the words **groan inwardly.** Do you know what causes the kind of groaning? It is caused by something that is missing. It is the lack of completeness, the heaviness that is caused when things aren't deeply right. The groaning is caused by the lack of holiness, by not always adding up nor

making sense. What causes that kind of groaning is the break in relationship between God and people. Because what is missing is unity with God. This groaning inwardly is the result of our sin.

And we so strive to become complete by trying to fill our hearts and lives with things and people. But it is a God sized hole, only God can fill it not a thing or a person. God sent his Son to fill that whole. Christmas is a reminder of why Jesus came – because there is the darkness of sin and its painful consequences. Jesus came to make us complete and whole and restore our unity to and with God and redeem our souls from an empty way of life.

Gal 4:4,5 **4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.** To redeem those under law means to buy back those who have fallen short of God's standard of perfection. **2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin^[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** The hope of Christmas doesn't stop at the cradle, not even the cross, but the empty tomb as well which means it is gift for every single day!

Sometimes we forget that earth isn't our forever home, and so we expect things will be perfect or at least good, or at least our loved one will get better. We forget that Jesus came to rescue us from darkness of this world, the darkness of sin, death, and Satan.

Hope in Jesus is not wishful thinking or optimism. Hope in Jesus is about trust and confidence in what he already accomplished for us by his perfect life, innocent death-, and death-defying resurrection.

Christmas is a reminder of why Jesus came – because there is the darkness of sin and its painful consequences. **Why do we have hope? We have hope because Jesus defeated the darkness of sin, death, and Satan.**

What is on your Christmas list this year? Here is what I know, you may not have it written down, but what you want is what we all want, the gift of hope. (Grab present with the word Hope on it. Open the gift to reveal a coat.) There are going to be storms in life. Hope in Jesus is like a coat – Picture a day when it is cold, windy, and snowing. And then you put your coat on. The coat doesn't change the weather of the day. It doesn't change anything about the weather, does it? What

does it change? It changes you in the weather. The circumstances didn't change but the coat changed you. The circumstances didn't change but hope changed you. The circumstances didn't change but Jesus changed you. Hope doesn't make the present circumstance better it gives strength through the guarantee of a better future. Hope in Jesus is how you clothe yourself in a discouraging world. Hope is the way you change your focus, and you push aside the things that are worrying and discouraging you and you see Jesus.

Some of us are hurting because life isn't turning out the way you thought it would. And you are at a loss. Did your dream become your idol? Are you open to a revision of your dream? What if God let your dream die because it wasn't big enough? Let God produce the dream when the picture isn't matching your preference. What if your dream was simply a first draft of the dream that God has for you? Don't be so loyal to your first version. God has a better dream for you than you ever imagined. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, **Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.**

In your disappointment you still have a deliverer. In your wreck you still have a redeemer. When it doesn't make sense, you still have a Savior. When you are hurting you still have hope because God is close by. Psalm 34:18 **The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.** God already knows that tomorrow holds. He is holding you.

**From heaven's height to manger low
There is no distance the Prince of Peace won't go
From manger low to Calvary's hill
When your pain runs deep
His love runs deeper still
He has always loved you, child
And He always will**

**Somewhere in your silent night
Heaven hears the song your broken heart has cried
Hope is here, just lift your head
For love has come to find you
Somewhere in your silent night (Casting Crowns)**

How do we use our hope? **Because of hope in Jesus: 1. In the happy moments you can praise God, 2. In the sad moments you can seek God, 3. In the painful moments you can trust God, 4. In every moment you can thank God.** When prayer is the only option you have, you've still got the most powerful option available.

Hope and Christmas go hand in hand. Because of Jesus there is always hope. For those who have walked away from Jesus in either misplaced priorities or open unbelief, or to worship someone or something else, or walked away in disappointment or dashed dreams that led you to anger, Jesus has already provided a way back for you. There is nothing too far from the reach of God's forgiving grace and mercy. For those who are down and out, feeling unloved, experiencing the weight of grief or regret, and hopelessness is crushing your spirit, Jesus comes with an understanding heart and ear, loving companionship into every single disappointment, grief, and tough circumstance. For those who have never really heard about Jesus before today and think it is too good to be true, and you have nothing to offer but a skeptical or timid you, Jesus is here, and he offers you hope. For those of you who made it here with crossed arms not expecting and you ended up finding that with God there is always hope! For those of you who are disgusted and disappointed in yourself and the life you have made by your bad choices, Jesus is not disgusted and disappointed in you, but he has offered you deliverance from sin. **Why do we have hope? Because hope has a name. His name is Jesus.**

So, a question I have for you today. Will you open the gift of hope today?