

# THE GIFTS OF CHRISTMAS

## The Gift of Hope

Romans 15:13; Luke 2:1-7

INTRODUCTION: December is here; and with it, the celebration of Christmas has arrived!

And who can think of Christmas without thinking of gifts?

Gifts were a part of the celebration of the coming of Christ from the beginning.

- In fact, Christmas began with God giving His Son.
- The Magi, or Wise Men as we call them, honored and worship the Christ child, giving the toddler gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

In just the four short weeks of December, I want us to explore biblically the Gifts of Christmas,

- Those we have received because Christ came.
- And those we could offer Him because He came.

The number of gifts that we have received because the Lord Jesus came to this earth is a number beyond our ability to count. Certainly I cannot begin to name them all, much less describe them all in a short, four week series of sermons.

So I admit that the four I will have us focus our attention upon is somewhat subjective on my part.

- I have selected four things that we have because Christ came that we would not have if He stayed home, and never came to give His life for ours.
- Each of these gifts is discussed prominently in the Scriptures, so much so, that I will not even be able to cite but a small percentage of the passages that discuss each of them.
- Finally, the four I have selected, I believe came at the leadership of the Holy Spirit as I asked Him to control my thinking in the preparation of these messages.

So, for today, we look at the gift of hope.

**HOPE IS A FEELING.** We sense hope, or the lack of it, in our soul.

- **The feeling that things are going to be good or better than they are.**

- **As a feeling, it is affected by many things, some we can control, some we cannot.**

Contrary to the opinion of some, God does care about our feelings.

He is the One who designed us as body, soul, and spirit. Our emotions, our feelings, are a part of our soul, and God cares about them. That is not to say that we are to be controlled by our feelings, we should not be. Yet still, our feelings are important, and they are important to God.

This is certainly true about hope.

The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul called God “the God of hope,” indicating that God is the reliable source of true hope.

**Romans 15:13 NKJV** Now may **the God of hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we look to people or things as a source of hope, and they disappoint us. But God never disappoints!

And, God desires for us to abound in hope!

**Romans 15:13 NKJV** Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, **that you may abound in hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, how does that happen? We can't just snap our fingers and say, “I am going to feel more hopeful.” Sometimes we wish we could!

But there is something we can do that will cause us to abound in hope, and the instruction is in this text.

**Romans 15:13 NKJV** Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace **in believing**, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The word translated “in” can also be translated “by,” and that makes the text much more clear.

**Romans 15:13** Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace **by believing**, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This instruction becomes even more clear when we understand that the word for “believing” is the root word for faith. In other words, faith increases hope.

I like to think of it this way: **Faith in God unwraps the gift of hope.**

Folks, the more we trust in the Lord, the more hopeful we will be! I want to suggest two things about increasing our faith that immediately and specifically produce hope in our souls.

### **GROWING OUR FAITH IN THE POWER OF GOD INCREASES OUR HOPE!**

**Take time to recall the biblical testimonies of God's great power.**

- Israel, fleeing from Pharaoh, comes to the edge of the Red Sea.
- Joshua standing before the walls of mighty Jericho.
- David facing the giant Goliath with only five stones in his pouch.
- Mary and Joseph headed to Bethlehem with no prospect of lodging and Mary due to deliver any hour. But when there is no place to be found to stay dry or warm, God provides shelter in a stable, a welcome to Messiah from excited shepherds, a visit from kingmakers who traveled across a vast desert to bring the child expensive gifts, and protection from the most wicked and powerful king the region had known for centuries.
- **REMEMBER THE POWER OF OUR GOD!**
- **HE CAN DO ANYTHING!**

**Romans 8:28 NKJV** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

### **GROWING OUR FAITH IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD INCREASES OUR HOPE!**

#### **Providence – divine guidance and care**

We see God's clear guidance and care in the lives of Mary and Joseph.

Nazareth was a tiny town, maybe as few as 500 people in the days mentioned in Luke, chapter 2. What are the odds that two descendants of the Great King David, themselves being only very distantly related, would both live in this little village?

What are the odds? Well, by just random chance, probably less than 1%.

But with the working of the providence of God? 100%

- Joseph, as a descendent from King David, carried the legal right to Israel's throne, but he also carried the curse God placed upon the descendants of Jeconiah, that none of his descendants should ever sit upon the throne again.
- Mary, also a descendent of King David but through a different branch of the family, carried the physical lineage of David and without the curse of Jeconiah.

- Through the miracle of the virgin birth with Mary as the mother of Jesus and Joseph as His adoptive father, God made Jesus the unique legal heir to the throne of Israel and bestowed on Him the credentials to be the Messiah Savior.
- We do not know all the details of how God orchestrated the events in the lives of Mary and Joseph's families across the years to bring them both to the little village of Nazareth. We do not know what heartstrings God pulled to cause Joseph's eye to fall upon Mary or for her heart to be stirred by young Joseph.
- But we do know some of the final part of the workings of God in that when Mary was made pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and Joseph's natural and understandable inclination was to break their engagement, God sent an angel to speak to Joseph in a dream to reveal to him the purpose and plan of God.
- All because Joseph and Mary were under the guidance and care of the Lord Himself.
- And so, my friend, are you.
  - **God knows you by name.**
  - **God knows all about you.**
  - **God loves you still.**
  - **God has a plan for you.**
  - **God has a purpose for you.**
  - **His purpose for you has eternal value.**

### **KNOWING THIS GIVES US HOPE.**

Later today and next week, when something makes you think of Christmas, would you let your mind go to Mary and Joseph for a moment? Would you think about God's guidance and care, God's providence in their lives? And would you let that remind you of God's providential care in your own life and of His plan for you?

### **BELIEVING IN GOD'S GREAT POWER AND PROVIDENTIAL CARE**

- **FOR EACH OF US INDIVIDUALLY**

Allow me to insert a personal testimony here. Immediately after finishing the writing of this sermon, I received some very disappointing and disturbing news. What had been a very happy feeling that had been with me all day suddenly vanished.

I said to myself, the hope I was feeling just disappeared. And my mind said, "Mike, maybe God is telling you to put your money where your mouth is!"

And so, I began to what I just taught you to do. I rehearsed the very powerful works of God I just described to you, and then I purposefully remembered some of the times God most strongly demonstrated His providential care. My faith was strengthened. I had a firm conviction, "God can and will handle this!"

But, ..., but, I did NOT feel any different. The hopeful feeling did not immediately return, and in light of the sermon I had just written, that troubled me.

Life goes on, and I had other things that demanded my attention, and I got on them. A few hours later, when the hurry of the busyness subsided, I noticed that I FELT different. I had not done anything else, but the hope was back. The situation that troubled me was not resolved, had not even improved, but the hope was definitely back.

And then I remembered a truth I have taught many times, and one I need to remind you of.

- **FAITH IS ACTION, LIKE THE ENGINE OF A TRAIN.**
- **HOPE IS A FEELING, LIKE THE CABOOSE OF A TRAIN.**
- **THE CABOOSE ALWAYS ARRIVES AT THE SAME PLACE AS THE ENGINE,**
  - **BUT, IT ARRIVES LATER!**
- The caboose of hope always follows the engine of faith, but there is usually some lag time.

### **BELIEVING IN GOD'S GREAT POWER AND PROVIDENTIAL CARE**

- **FOR EACH OF US INDIVIDUALLY**
- **AND FOR ALL OF US COLLECTIVELY AS A CHURCH**

### **HAS GIVEN US HOPE FOLLOWING HURRICANE MICHAEL.**

Many of you remember, don't you?

A storm beyond our imaginations.

Destruction we found no words to describe.

Including our church.

- **But, God has shown us His power.**

Almost every building on our campus has not only been repaired but is in better condition now than before Hurricane Michael.

That has been aided of course by insurance.

But let me tell you of the power of God far beyond insurance.

The building housing A Sheltering Tree – no insurance due to age and type of building.

- Roofing company – whole new roof, free!
- Ministry Team from former staff member Jeremy Colloms – gutted and rebuilt walls
- Other teams and individuals – painted
- Donations from our church people and many others totally refurbished and resupplied
- NOW, Our Sheltering Tree Missions Facility is BETTER THAN IT EVER WAS – BY THE POWER OF GOD!

AND GOD EMPOWERED US TO MINISTER TO OUR COMMUNITY WHILE OUR OWN FACILITIES WERE BEING RESTORED!

Let me show you a picture I captured off of a video. I never noticed it before. This video was shot Friday afternoon after the hurricane on Wednesday.

Do you know what that truck is? That is the first of hundreds of trucks that would bring us supplies to start giving to the people of our community. None of us called and asked for it. I didn't even know it was coming. But God sent it, less than 48 hours after the winds of Hurricane Michael ceased to blow in Panama City, God started sending what we needed to do His work. And God timed it so that I would just "happen" to be there to tell them where to drop the load.

- **God has continually shown us His providence.**

The FL Baptist Convention gave us \$100,000 gift.

A church in GA gave us a gift over \$200,000.

Many other churches and individuals gave us gifts, many quite significant amounts.

And our people gave. Many of you gave!

All because of the guidance and care of our great God!

**THE GOD OF HOPE**

**GAVE US HOPE**

**AS WE BELIEVED IN THE POWER AND PROVIDENCE OF GOD!**

Remember when we went down to the Worship Center and prayed and wrote Scriptures on the bare concrete?

**AND NOW GOD HAS BROUGHT US TO THE RESTORATION OF OUR FINAL BUILDING, THE WORSHIP CENTER.**

The design plans are complete.

The building project is being bid right now.

Through the course of this series of messages about the gifts of Christmas, I am going to be sharing more with you about this Christmas gift the Lord is giving to us out of His great power and His loving providence.

I do this so that the hope of all of us will grow.

I do this so that we can properly express our gratitude and praise for what the Lord has done and is doing among us.

And I do this so that we can begin to make preparation to join God in this portion of His work among us.

- So far, all the restoration work done on our facilities has been paid for by designated contributions or by insurance.
- We have not spent a single ministry dollar to repair the damage done by Hurricane Michael. Isn't God good!
- But remember that we had already planned some changes to the Worship Center before the hurricane hit.
- The Worship Center was 30 years old and in need of some refurbishing and updating.
- There were changes to be made to help us in our goal of reaching out to Millennials and Generation Z.
- We already had a Building Team, and the church had given them a list of things to do to the Worship Center, all things that had nothing to do with Hurricane Michael.
- So we will need to have a part. We will need to give toward the rebuilding of the Worship Center for the whole project of repair and reconstruction to be complete.
- We will have a time in January to make our commitments to this project.
- But we need to start preparing our hearts now.

- We need to be praying now.

God gave Israel hope as the waters of the Red Sea parted before them. They still had to walk through on the sea bed.

Joshua saw the walls of Jericho come crashing down as the rams' horns blew and the people shouted. They still had to go in and take the city.

David saw Goliath literally bite the dust after his single shot hit the giant in the forehead. He still had to cut off his head and Israel had to route the Philistines.

Mary and Joseph saw the multiple miracles of Christmas unfold around them, they still had to raise the boy Jesus to manhood before He began His ministry.

We have seen the Lord do so very, very much. He will do much, much more. But He has a part for us to do as well.

Let's get ready!