

An Invitation to Hope

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[0 : 00] While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the Lord came to him a second time. This is what the Lord says. He who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it, the Lord is his name.

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says about the houses in the city and the royal palaces of Judah that have been torn down to be used against the siege, ramps and the sword in the fight with the Babylonians.

They will be filled with the dead bodies of the people I will slay in my anger and wrath. I will hide my face from the city because of all its wickedness. Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it. I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before.

I will cleanse them from all the sins they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me. Then the city will bring me renowned joy, praise and honor for all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it.

[1 : 14] And they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it. So now going to Jeremiah 14, 16, which will be preached today.

The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at the time, I will make a righteous branch sprout from David's line.

He will do what is right and just in the land. In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called, the Lord, our righteous Savior.

For this is what the Lord says, David will never, oh sorry, so the Lord, our righteous Savior. And then we will go on to Luke. So if you guys can flip to Luke quickly, which is in the New Testament. I hope you guys know. And then we'll focus on chapter 1, verse 26, and we'll read to 38. So Luke 26.

[2 : 15] This is the answer to what we've just read. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end. How will this be, Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin?

The angel answered, Pastor Matt.

[3 : 42] Thank you so much. What an absolute privilege to be here. Thank you for having me, and thank you to the worship team as well. You guys are stunning.

It's beautiful. So really, really grateful to be part of your fellowship and your worship tonight. So, yes, as we've got to hear a little bit about me, Matt, I want to get to hear a little bit about you.

I love a bit of the turn to your person. I'm an extrovert, so I love turning to the people around me and talking. By now, I know there's a lot of, probably, potentially some introverts who don't like it, but we're going to do it anyway. Anyway, so, essentially, as we are very aware, we're coming into

Christmas, first day of Advent.

So what I want you to do is to turn to, you know, the two or three people around you, and what are you hoping for this Christmas? All right, so I'll give you a little bit of time.

So turn around, find someone or someones, and what are you hoping for this Christmas? One thing, one thing that you're hoping for. is the kind of holiday where the I Fr times our igrers, not everything, we have the othernn■■ party, and then, be Consortium, be Espa-Cathlet, and what do you think of us?

[5 : 11] Here's how thestag do you think of as we met another part of our civil ■■■ called 354th President as the Holocaust Day in December. July 2, 2, 3...

All right.

Ten-second warning. Okay. Okay.

If I can bring you back in. And now I'm going to get you to participate by also then kind of, we'll have a few people shout out what you're hoping for this Christmas. Have we got any brave people?

What are you hoping for this Christmas? Rest. That's a good one. Yes. What else have we got? Presents. Yeah, yeah.

[6 : 16] Good, good. All right. That's what I'm hoping for too. Is this being live streamed? I can show it to my family. Any other? Oh, man. That's good.

I'm going to add that to my list. That's great. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think that's the thing, right? Because Christmas, it is a time of hope where we are hoping for presents, where we're hoping for that new iPhone, you know, because our old one, it's just not up to scratch.

We need that new one. Or we're hoping because, you know, like uni or school or work is kind of coming to an end, and we're hitting that point where now the summer is in reach.

Actually, today, first day of summer. And we know that we're going to all of a sudden, we're going to have holidays, work will be finished, and we can rest. I mean, for me, one of the big things that I'm hoping for is that my child will learn how to clean, my children will learn how to clean their room. My five-year-old has a bit more time. My seven-year-old could learn. Now, that'd be fantastic. Or maybe you're kind of hoping that you'll have a job this summer. You're hoping that, or perhaps you've been working, but you're hoping for that promotion.

[7 : 25] Surely that promotion is around the corner. Or maybe you're hoping that you'll find that special someone. You're going away for the summer. You never know. You'll spot, you know, across from the pool or at the beach, and you'll see them, and you'll be like, love at first sight.

We're getting married tomorrow. Or maybe you're hoping that you'll overcome your anxiety. Or maybe you're hoping that you'll overcome the depression that you've been feeling.

Maybe you are hoping that the loved one that you've been praying for would be healed. You hope that the problems of 2024 will miraculously be resolved, and that next year, 2025, will be the year that your hopes are fulfilled.

Now, as I mentioned, this is my whanau. So this is five years ago. I've gained a kilo for every year since then. And then my two boys and my wife, Mel.

This is when we were welcomed in our poverty at Teterangi Baptist Church. And so this was December 9th. Oh, sorry. I think it was like December 11th of 2019.

[8 : 40] And so, yeah, as we've mentioned with Will before, Pastor William, I became the Associate Pastor of Teterangi Baptist Church. And now we arrived just before Christmas, December 9th.

And we knew that we would miss our kind of our wider whanau Christmas that year. But don't worry, because we thought what we were thinking, and we were hoping in 2020 we'll celebrate Christmas back in Australia with our whanau.

And I was also really hopeful about what ministry would look like. I was an ICU nurse before this. And so this was my first kind of stepping into pastoral ministry. And I had plans for how it was going to go.

So, and then as you would all be very aware, March of 2020 happened. And we went into COVID lockdown. And so it wasn't until, and then I was all of a sudden, sorry, and we were doing Zoom services, Zoom home groups and studies, and Zoom youth group, one of the hardest things to do. I don't know if that's what, if you guys did that. It's so hard. There's only so many cahoots that you can do. But yeah, it was hard. And so we didn't actually get back to Australia for our first Christmas, back with our wider whanau until Christmas of 2022, three years after moving here to New Zealand.

[9 : 56] What we had hoped for looked completely different to what we experienced. And yet, far from it being that God had abandoned us, God was at work in it.

Now, the first reading that we had from Jeremiah 33, we entered this sobering scene from the prophet Jeremiah's day.

So as we read, he's imprisoned in the court of the guard, and he's prophesying to the city of Jerusalem, which is under threat from the Babylonian army, one of the biggest, greatest, nastiest armies known in history.

And we have this city that is on the brink of destruction. I think I meant to, I should change. There you go. And families are falling apart. In fact, what we read, some of the prophecy we read, is that the families end up, some of the families turn on one another.

It gets so terrible. And their identity, these people had grown up believing that they are God's people, God's chosen people, beloved people of God.

[11 : 01] And this identity is shattered. Things were not going as planned and hoped, and their hope is fading.

And yet it is into this bleak and desolate scene that the prophet Jeremiah, surrounded by death and destruction, dared to speak the words of life that we read.

And he declares the promise of God. The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

In those days, and at that time, I will make a righteous branch sprout from David's line. He will do what is just and right in the land.

Can you imagine hearing these words in this time? Surrounded by an army and yet a righteous branch, an image of life and hope, breaking forth from the seemingly dead stump of David's line.

[12 : 05] It's as if God is saying to them in this moment, this is not the end of the story. I will bring life where there is death. I will bring restoration where there is ruin.

I will bring justice where there is injustice. But something we really have to note right here is that this promise was not fulfilled immediately.

The city was conquered. The people were taken into exile and experienced years of hardship. They longed for the day when God's promise would come to pass.

But it was actually nearly 600 years later that this unfulfilled hope that had been passed down from generation to generation finally came into being.

The words of Jeremiah would come to pass in the most unexpected ways. through the person, through a young woman named Mary, whose obedience opened the way for the branch that would sprout from David's line to be fulfilled.

[13 : 20] And not some abstract idea, not some metaphor, but a person. Jesus Christ. God in flesh. Emmanuel.

Emmanuel. It's what we read. It's your memory, your Bible verse this month. Stepped into human history to bring justice and righteousness.

And so, so surely now, surely now, that the Messiah, the promised one, the Christ, God in flesh, here on earth, would arrive in glory.

Trumpets would sound, there would be prestige, there would be castles, and an army, and he would make everything right. That's what they were thinking, right? The hope was fulfilled of 600 years of waiting, and now the hope's fulfilled, and so he will make everything right.

When you read about what, in the Gospels, what they were kind of expecting and planning for, was this, this military king, who would conquer Rome, raise them out of oppression, but that's not the story that we read, every year at Christmas time, is it?

[14 : 33] Sorry if I'm a bit behind. Yeah, here we go. And I think this is the problem. We can get so familiar with the Christmas story, with the details, that sometimes we sanitize it.

Sometimes we airbrush it with snowy backgrounds, crafting it into a serene scene, with silent night, and singing angels. Little pet peeve of mine, nowhere in Scripture does it say that angels sing, just so you know.

Not a big deal, but it's just a thing. But singing angels, and somehow, for some reason, I mean, I even have this, where you kind of imagine the barn, and the hay, and where Jesus is laid down in the manger, but you're like, that is soft hay.

That's beautiful. Has anyone ever kind of rolled in hay before? Maybe just me. Okay. I don't do it every, all the time. But it's itchy. It's spiky. It's not comfortable.

That's actually where Jesus was laying. And then, okay, but surely you've done this. When you imagine, like kind of, we imagine like the barn sort of thing, where Jesus is, and we imagine animals, and we imagine beautiful little sheep, that are perfectly white, right?

[15:37] And they're kind of just jumping around. Ah! And it's like beautiful, and you're like, oh, that's so cute. It would have stunk. Like, it was smelly. Some reason, we think that they were clean.

No, this was a space where there would have been animal waste. You see, this is the context in which the branch of David would be born.

This is the circumstances that the promised Messiah entered into. This true story of Christmas tells us that things were not well.

The fulfillment of hope did not come in the way that many expected. Nor did it erase the difficulties that surrounded his arrival. As we read of the story of Christmas, we read of overcrowded towns where even pregnant people were cast out into the cold.

We read of a king who was so insecure, so power hungry, that upon hearing that a baby king had been born, he then issues a decree to have every male under two years in Bethlehem, murdered.

[16:48] The promise spoken in Jeremiah of a righteous king is fulfilled in Jesus, but God's plan comes to fruition in the midst of oppression, of chaos, and personal upheaval.

You're thinking, surely this is going to get hopeful at some point. It's an invitation to hope. And so that's where we come to this next week because surely if anyone is going to experience kind of something good, some kind of blessing, it would be the person who is going to bear the Messiah, right?

The one who will give birth to this baby king. But then we turn to the story of Mary. In Luke 1, 26, 38, we see how the promise of the Messiah enters into the life of this young woman.

But instead of making everything better, it completely turns her life upside down. In fact, we see how her faithfulness was required in the midst of uncertainty.

If you continue to read the story, then there is the risk of social ostracism, oppression under a foreign occupation, and fear for her life, for her husband's life, for her newborn baby's life.

[18:11] But let's zoom in on the interaction between Mary and the angel Gabriel. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you.

But she was greatly troubled. at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting that this might be. And I like, I love Mary's immediate response, right? It's one of concern.

And the reason I like it is because it invites us to have our concerns, to have our doubts, our fears, when it comes to trusting God, placing our hope in Him.

But then the story continues. And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.

[19:16] Now, my best guess, my best guess, is that Mary was probably hoping for a normal life. She was planned to be married to Joseph, who may, we don't know, I mean, it could have been an organized thing, or they could have seen each other across the town and thought, that's the person I'm going to marry.

But we imagine that what they wanted was stability, a stable income, a local community where everyone knew everybody's names. But then here comes an angel saying, salvation is coming through you, and it disrupts everything.

But do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Can you imagine? I'd be saying, I don't want God's favor. It's good. I'm good.

It's fine. Because how does this align? This announcement completely disrupts her life. But this is God's favor. This is the Lord with her.

You see, here is the thing. We long for security. When we think about our hopes and our dreams, we're thinking about what will bring me security?

[20:30] What will give me certainty in life? What will give me ease? And I think some of us think, if I just had more of God's favor, everything would be all right.

Who now, after hearing what God's favor means, is going to be praying for more God's favor? Because I think one thing that we learn from this passage is that favor from God doesn't equal

favors from God.

Favor from God doesn't equal favors from God. God's favor from God. And so Mary kind of still wrestling with this because actually what she's just heard is now this impossible.

How can this happen, Lord? How will this be since I am a virgin? You see, what the angel is describing isn't just improbable, it's impossible.

But the angel responds with four assurances. one. This is not an act of man, but an act of the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 41] God has already done the impossible by giving Mary's far too old cousin a child. She was beyond childbearing years, had wanted a baby for years, but hadn't received one.

And then God, do you know who her cousin is bearing? John the Baptist. God is the God of the impossible.

When it seems like there is no way God finds a way, whether it be 600 years that one has to wait or in that immediate moment. Why? Because God is faithful.

It may not turn out how we thought, it may not look as we planned, but God is faithful to His promises. And Mary in it all, even though her life is about to be completely flipped upside down, this incredible woman of God responds in the most beautiful way.

I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. think about what Mary was agreeing to here.

[22 : 55] She was consenting to a divine plan that would radically alter her life. She would face misunderstanding, ridicule, and most likely accusations of immorality.

she would risk her future marriage to Joseph and her reputation in her community. She would raise a child destined to suffer.

In the chapter that follows, in Luke 2.35, Simeon prophesies, a sword will pierce your own soul too. Your child will suffer and die.

Yet in the midst of this, Mary chooses hope. She chooses to trust. She didn't demand answers. She didn't ask for any more guarantees that everything would turn out the way that she wanted.

Instead, she said yes to God's plan because she trusted that he was faithful to his promises, that God works all things out for the good of those who love him, even when it doesn't make sense.

[24 : 06] I think Mary's response teaches us a profound truth about hope. Hope requires trust in God's character.

Mary's faith wasn't rooted in her ability to understand the full scope of God's plan. It was rooted in her belief that God is faithful and good and his promises are true. Mary teaches us that hope isn't about the absence of struggle.

Her life didn't suddenly become easy because of her faithfulness. If anything, it became harder. The arrival of the Messiah didn't erase the challenges. It gave her strength and purpose to face them. Which ultimately is because of the final one. Hope leads to surrender. It leads to total submission to God. Mary's response, let it be to me according to your word.

It's an act of beautiful surrender. It's a prayer of yielding to God's will even when his will might cost something. You see, Jeremiah teaches us that hope is not about quick fixes or instant gratification.

[25 : 22] Hope is rooted in the faithfulness of God's promises even when they take longer to be fulfilled than we would like. Jeremiah, the people of Jeremiah's time had to cling to the promises that God had not abandoned them even when their circumstances suggested otherwise.

Mary teaches us that hope isn't found within the absence of fear or challenges, but in those fears and challenges the trustworthiness of God exists.

He is the one who keeps his promises. It's not a passive hope. I think that's one of the big things we have to realize. You can't just go to sleep and hope to wake up that it will be okay.

It's an active, courageous trust in God even when we don't understand, even when his plans don't seem to make sense to us. Through these lives of Jeremiah and Mary, we witness that the hope of the Messiah came into a world not of peace, and ease, but into one marked by chaos, struggle, and injustice.

And I think as we look around the world, as we look at our immediate lives, and we struggle with some of the things that we're facing, as we look at what's happening in Israel, Palestine, Ukraine, Africa, and all these different places, and we go, God, where are you?

[26 : 51] We read these stories, experience these lives, and realize that the God who worked in the worst and most unexpected situations thousands of years ago is the same God who works

today in our lives.

You see, this is why we can have hope in Jesus, in God. God had not abandoned Judah as they were besieged by Babylon. He was there in their midst, speaking through the faithful remnant, crying out for his people to turn to him, to place their hope and their trust in him.

And even when they didn't, even when they were not faithful, God remained faithful. He remained faithful and promised that he would fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah, a promise that he then fulfilled in the quiet town of Bethlehem when Jesus Christ was born. Born to a young woman named Mary, whose life was flipped upside down. Who was present in all of it through all the years, through the centuries?

God. You see, whatever we're facing, pain and suffering, hardship and disruption, these are not foreign things to God.

[28 : 16] He's present in it all. He has not abandoned or forsaken. He's present with you today, tomorrow, in each and every day, in the planned and the unplanned, in the predictable and the messy.

For some reason, I think we've created a theology, a way of thinking about God, where we think that it's only in the perfect, it's only in the good. That's when I'm experiencing the presence and blessing of God. But when we read the Bible, we see that not only is He there, but in the mess, in the horrible, He is there.

I think ultimately this is totally seen and ultimately seen in Jesus, the righteous branch who not only was born into a world of chaos and oppression, but then lived so that He might die an unjust death on a cross, on a Roman torture device, to bring ultimate justice and righteousness, to fulfill the promise of God and do what is just and right.

The one promised in Jeremiah and carried by Mary gave His life to secure the hope of the world and then promises in this beautiful promise at the end in Matthew, at the end with His disciples, that He will be with them until the very end of the age.

He promises to send the Holy Spirit that we've prayed and invited into this space and that is here with us now to counsel us, to comfort us, and to form us through all of life's up and downs.

[29 : 53] God, in His great love, willingly steps into our mess. You and me, He steps into our brokenness, into our unfulfilled plans and says, this is not the end.

The pain, the suffering, the death that we see around us that so often we think, oh, surely this has had the final say. These are not the end of the story.

This is why Christmas is a time of hope, in the most unexpected way, because Christmas points us to the birth of Jesus, which points us to, let me just, there we are, points us to the resurrection, where He points us to the crucifixion, which points us to the resurrection, which points us to His triumph over sin and death, and it points us forward to the day when He will return to make all things new.

On that day, Revelation 21 tells us, death, grief, crying, and pain will be no more, for the old order will have passed away, and God will make everything new.

And the question though that we are faced with in this interim, in the in-between, in the now but not yet, where we have seen God's faithfulness in the past, where we now celebrate His coming at Christmas time, time, but as we look forward to His return, just as Jeremiah and Mary had to face this question themselves, as we wait, will we hope?

[31 : 34] Will we trust in God today? And I'm not talking about like a flippant, you know, kind of wishing for the best, an assured hope, grounded in the character and faithfulness of God.

Will we hope in His promises despite our fears and uncertainties? Will we surrender our plans and trust that God is faithful to fulfill His word? This was God's invitation to hope for Jeremiah and to Mary and for you today.

And so, I just want us to kind of think, because I know there will be people in different stages, and perhaps God's invitation at the moment is asking you, what is an area, what is one area of your life where God is inviting you to surrender to Him in hope?

Hope that His way is best, to trust in His timing and in His plan. Or perhaps you're in a good place. You're seeing God's blessings around you.

You're feeling like you are at the moment in a high point of your life. That's an incredible gift. God's love. So how do we then embody the hope of Christ for someone else this Advent season?

[32 : 54] And I'm just going to push us into a little bit more, just because you kind of get to that point, you're like, yeah, but maybe I don't know how. What does it look like for you just to simply encourage someone?

Just words of encouragement. I'm a person, I love, one of my love languages is words of affirmation. And so I love it. When someone encourages me, that's not me saying, make sure you encourage me at the end.

But what does it look like for us? Because I think we live in New Zealand and I don't know what it's like here at PCBC, but we can kind of slip into, you don't want to encourage people too much because you don't want to get a big head.

But what does it look like to be a church that encourages one another? That encourages people into their gifting? That encourages people and the worship team or if you're on, if you're helping out or even if you're just here and you can see someone and they're looking sad or looking a little bit lost and you encourage them.

Words of affirmation. What does it look like to serve those in need? To be able to come and to volunteer or to donate? I'm sure there are things that are happening out here in East Auckland that you can, that ministries or different events that you can step into, that you can be a light, that you can bring hope.

[34 : 06] What does it look like to advocate for justice, to support causes that fight oppression and inequity? What does it look like for you to open your home, to open your hearts, to invite others in, creating an environment, not one of entertainment, but one of hospitality and love?

Now this is the hard one. I think this is probably one of the hardest because sometimes we think we can, we're just going to show the gospel, we're not going to share the gospel.

I'm going to show the gospel in the way that I live and that's absolutely yes, 100%. The thing is, if you're here today, if you believe in the good news of Jesus, it is likely, I'm going to say nearly 100%, that it's because someone shared it with you.

Whether it was your parents or a friend or a family member, someone shared the gospel with you and you've accepted it or you're wrestling with it.

It's not just simply because you saw someone who was kind of doing nice things, who was caring for those in need. Maybe you saw those things and that made you go and ask them why, and then they shared the hope that they have.

[35 : 24] See, these are all incredible ways to reflect our hope in Jesus, but we also have to be prepared to share our hope in Jesus with our friends, our neighbors, our colleagues, our family.

And I just want to, is there someone that comes to mind right now? In your, in the image in your mind that you can see that, oh, I've been wanting to share with them, but I'm scared. Maybe the Holy Spirit's prompting you to share.

Christmas is an incredible opportunity. Take it. And lastly, pray for others. If you're scared to talk to that person, pray for them.

If you're unsure, pray that God would reveal. Lift up others in prayer, particularly those who are facing hardship and loss. Pray for our nation, pray for the world.

It needs Jesus, needs the hope. Finally, we demonstrate our hope through our own faith, even in difficult circumstances.

[36 : 31] When we realize, when we can truly grasp within our souls, not just a head knowledge, but a deep belief that the same God who fulfilled his promise to Jeremiah and Mary invites you to hope, and you embrace that hope.

So as we celebrate this Advent season, as we celebrate Christmas, as we celebrate the community that he calls us into, the body of Christ, let us hold fast to the hope we have in Jesus as we wait for his return.

Would you join me in praying? God, we just thank you.

We thank you that you've been here with us. We thank you that you were here with us in this week that has passed, and you will be with us in the week to come, in the years to come.

God, we thank you that you are a faithful God who fulfills your promises, and that ultimately we see this in the most beautiful reflection of justice and righteousness and mercy and love in Jesus Christ.

[37 : 50] Lord, as we surrender ourselves to you in waiting, we just ask that you would help us to trust, that you would place faith in us, give us more faith, that we might be able to hope in you as we wait in whatever season we find ourselves in now.

God, that we would be able to wait with a spirit-led hope. And as we wait your second coming, when you will make all things new.

And God, as we wait, would you empower us by your spirit to live a life filled with hope, that we would be strengthened to live as a people of light in a broken world, that we'd be a people that not only live as people who reflect your love in the way we act, but Lord, that we would reflect your hope and your love in the way that we speak, and that we would declare the good news of Jesus without shame, without hindrance, Lord, that all may come to know the hope that is in Jesus Christ this Advent season.

We thank you, God. We pray this in your mighty name. Amen.