

Look around you today. Can you believe it Christmas is right around the corner? And it will be here before you know it. And like most years it will come fast and go fast, but this year, why not take the time to reflect upon the question: What is this day truly all about?

This week leading up to Christmas, I want us all to reflect upon the awesome miracle that happened in that stable 2020 years ago, and how it still affects us today. Stripping away like a painter or carpenter all that covers its true beauty. Hopefully finding underneath all the layers of man-made ideas. The true meaning of Christmas and in discovering this meaning, we will be directed towards the hope that is found only in Jesus Christ. .

I read a story of self-made millionaire Eugene Land, who greatly changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. Mr. Lang had been asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? He wondered how he could get these predominantly black and Puerto Rican children even to look at him. Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak to them from his heart. "Stay in school," he admonished, "and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you." At that moment the lives of these students changed. For the first time they had hope. One student said, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." You know what nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school.

Brothers and sisters, Hope is an amazing thing. Hope can transform a life with no meaning into a life that is full of purpose and direction.

With this question and thought in mind turn with me in your bible to the central reason for our hope John chapter 3 verses 16-17 says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

In this one verse John 3:16 the entire gospel message is unveiled. God loved us so much that he sent Jesus to us that we might have a hope. The hope being that through Jesus we have the opportunity to spend eternity in heaven with Him.

In that manger lay a baby, Christ, our Lord, our peace, and our hope. A hope that is offered to all. A hope that is offered right now to You and to me. A hope that transcends time that reaches back to our past, touches our present, and reaches out to our future. A hope that transforms.

This gift of hope reaches back to our past.

When Jesus shed his blood for us upon that cross 2,020 years ago, he died for all your sins past, present, and future. Some of you sitting here are haunted by your past. Living with guilt, regret, anger, jealousy, you name it. The past clouds your present and blocks your future. This Christmas, Jesus wants to offer to you Hope. A Hope that things can be different, A Hope that you can let go of... you fill in the blank, hope that you can forgive, A hope that despite the past, Jesus stills loves you and he still died for you. A hope that says Jesus's love for you never changes. He loves you just as much when you in the biggest mess or

when you are doing good. His love for you never changes. The Holy Spirit can enter into your deepest hurts and bring healing.

But healing only comes when you stop denying and start accepting the hand of God into your pain.

1 Peter 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"

That is what Jesus wants to do for you. To offer to you a Living hope.

Paul prays for this for us in Ephesians 1:18 listen to what it says: "*I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"

There was a time in my life when memories of the past held me hostage for years until one day I let Jesus into those memories. From that point the healing started.

As an adult after rededicating my life to Jesus and asking Jesus to heal these memories, laying them at His feet, Jesus answered my prayer. The Holy Spirit wants to do that for you today. To heal your pain, to help you forgive either yourself or someone else, to give you fresh perspective on a life-long lived under the shadow of pain and suffering. Today choose to open your eyes and let the hope that comes through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, transform your past.

Not only does this hope transform our past but this gift hope touches our present and transforms it as well.

A man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing--we're behind." "Boy," said the spectator, "I'll bet you're discouraged." "Why should I be discouraged?" replied the little boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!"

I love that illustration. Our gracious God has given us hope for the past, he has taken away our past, given us a fresh start, taken away the 18 runs scored against us, but we have yet to bat? What will we do now in the present.

Acts 2:26 echoes this feeling - listen: "THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE;"

Have you ever wished you were someone else. Looking at your life and comparing it other peoples lives. At Christmas, through music, movies, or TV, we do just that and at the end of the day we feel lost like somewhere we are missing something. Making us feel that if we only had this or had that we would be better. But that is the world's logic not God's. Nothing in this world can fill a God sized hole in your life. Many have tried with drugs, money, things but only in vain.

The hope found in Jesus tells us that we are God's masterpiece that God made us just as we are. This hope also tells us that God has plans for us to give us a hope and a future. The choice becomes whose perspective are we going to view our lives from the worlds or God's.

Today this Christmas choose to live. In the shadow of the realization of what God has done for you. The confidence that Paul shared when he wrote We are more than conquerors through him who loved us and gave himself for us. Really all Satan can do to a believer is nip at our heels causing us to look at everything but Jesus. Living in hope means keeping your eyes on Jesus. Meeting with him each and every day.

Not only does this hope transform our past and our present but also this gift of hope reaches out to our future and transforms it as well.

There is an interesting map on display in the British Museum in London. It's an old sailor's chart, drawn in 1525, outlining the North American coastline and adjacent waters. The cartographer made some intriguing notations on areas of the map that represented regions not yet explored. He wrote: "Here be giants," "Here be fiery scorpions," and "Here be dragons." Eventually, the map came into the possession of Sir John Franklin, a British Navy officer and explorer in the early 1800s. Scratching out the fearful inscriptions, he wrote these words across the map: "Here is God."

Like no other time our future seems so uncertain. Global warming, terrorist attacks, deadly viruses, you name the worry. This Christmas God's gift of hope allows us to always say to whatever comes to us in the future, "Here is God." And with God you can accomplish anything.

Even though you might be in a tough situation now, you can have hope that your future is in God's loving hands. No matter what you are facing today, God says I have won the victory for you and will bless you with a "Future filled with hope." You see this life it is only temporary, you were made to exist forever and this body, this earth, is only the first chapter in a novel with no ending. Because of God's gift of Jesus we have been forgiven of our sins and we once again have been restored to a right relationship with God. We are no longer separated from him and because of this the Bible says,

"This truth gives them the confidence of eternal life, which God promised them before the world began and he cannot lie." Titus 1:2 NLT

You are the "them" in that verse, you are the one that will have eternal life with God! So the things of this life, the worries, the stress, the fear for our future is pointless because our hope is that this life is just the rehearsal for the real production. We don't have to get all worked up about what will happen to us because God has taken away our past, given us freedom in the present, and secured our future all because of his gift of Jesus this Christmas.

In Job 11:18 NASB it says, "Then you would trust, because there is hope; And you would look around and rest securely."

That is what our future is, it is secure and full of hope! God's gift of hope through Jesus is so amazing! I get excited just talking about it because it has given my life purpose, security, and even excitement. Something I had lost for a long time.

The Bible says in Hebrews 6:17-18 NASB, "In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us."

For some of you today you might not know about all this hope because you have never taken hold of the hope that is right in front of you. You have never said to God, I need you to come and save me from my past, give me freedom, and give me a hope of being with you one day forever. But you can because it is so easy. God has done all the work through Jesus and if you ask him he will come and give his Christmas gift of hope to you today. Will you accept his gift?

Let's pray. Father God we thank you for sending your Son here to the earth to save us and provide us with hope for the future! Lord if there is anyone here who needs that hope I pray you would fill them up. I pray that it would not end there but that we would have the courage and strength to share this hope with anyone who also needs hope this Christmas season. Lord we lift up Ocean View and The Big Island and the state of Hawaii and beyond too you. Help us to be beacons of hope to this present world. We thank you Father and pray in Jesus name. AMEN.