

TITLE: Filled with Hope

TEXT: Matthew 1:18-25

BIBLICAL HOPE: an eager and expectant **confidence** in God to usher in the best, most God-glorifying future. It is a state of healthy **anticipation** about a better future.

Three reasons to be filled with HOPE:

1. Our hope is in a **person**, not optimism.
2. Our hope is in a **promise**, not possibilities.
3. Our hope is **soul-sustaining**, not soul-destroying.

Four-Part Progression:

1. Look up at Jesus' **perfection** of hope
2. Look down at our **sin** of despair
3. **Experience** the Gospel applied to the sin of despair
4. **Extend** God's hope to others

INTRODUCTION

We recently finished up a sermon series on CALLING and transitioned to a series on CHARACTER. Our big idea is that there is a connection between these two that determines our impact. To put it in a simple equation, we say CHARACTER x CALLING = IMPACT. Of course we know the Holy Spirit plays the most crucial role in blessing our work to produce an impact, yet He chooses to use our good character and our discerned calling to play pivotal parts. If one of the two is lacking, we can be certain our impact will be lacking.

Today we focus on the character quality of HOPE. Hope is an essential component of any healthy human being. Hope is what helps us endure those periodic days of disappointment and even the larger difficult trials of life. Every sports fan knows how important hope is to their fandom. Even after a horrible season, the start of a new season brings new hope and new possibilities! If you're a Cleveland sports fan, such as myself, you know that all you have is hope – you certainly don't have any trophies! I grew up a

huge Cleveland Indians fan (Guardians, sorry!). I got to see some great seasons, but no championship. In fact, they haven't won a championship since 1948 – the longest title drought in all of sports. So why do I get all excited for each new season? One word: HOPE: This may just be the year it happens!

According to Psychology Today, hope is the envisioning of a better future that directly impacts the betterment of today. From a purely scientific perspective, they say that what makes today livable for so many is the hope that tomorrow will be better. According to Dr. Valerie Maholmes, children that grew up in poverty but had success later in life had one thing in common: HOPE – they envisioned a better future for themselves.

Think about so many of the people you know today. Why do they strive so hard at work? For most people it's the hope of a luxurious and easy life later. Why do many students work so hard to ace their classes? Because they hope to land that perfect job. Or why do most guys go out of their way to treat their women right during the dating stage? Because they hope it leads to a special wedding day in which he gets the girl of his dreams....and then he can take his foot off the gas and coast his way through the marriage. No! Don't do that, men!

But you heard how I said "he got the girl of his *dreams*." **Hope is all about dreaming up or envisioning something better tomorrow.** Dr. Neel Burton always asks his patients what they hope for because if they say "nothing" then that's a sign of depression or worse. Brothers and sisters, we live in a world overcome with depression. Yes, there are some biological issues at play here, but the main cause of all this depression is a lack of hope. I'm sure you've observed that we live in an increasingly hopeless world.

This is why what we celebrate at Christmas and in this text today is so significant: **The coming of Jesus to our sin-struck, broken planet is the HOPE of the whole world!** We all place our hope in something: money, sex, alcohol, jobs, family, vacation, health, fitness, public accolades, good

grades, sports – things we strive towards to get the outcome we envisioned. Yet the drive of our text is saying let all that go and come to the One who was hoped for for centuries and has finally come to save his people from their sins. ***He stops our striving and greets us with rest.***

So what is biblical hope? Often in our language the word “hope” conveys doubt: “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow!” or if you ask someone if they’re going to heaven when they die, they may say, “I hope so!” But biblical hope doesn’t convey doubt. ***Biblical hope is an eager and expectant confidence in God to usher in the best, most God-glorifying future. It is a state of healthy anticipation about a better future.***

There were two words used for HOPE throughout the OT. Yahal and Qavah. Interestingly, both of these words are most translated into English as “to wait.” ***At the heart of biblical hope is the act of waiting.*** When the flood waters slowly receded for the Ark, Noah needed to YAHAL, to wait, for weeks. In Psalm 130:5 it says, ***“I QAVAH for the Lord (I wait for the Lord), and in His word I YAHAL (I hope).*** One last example: Isaiah 40:31 - ***“But they who QAVAH for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”*** The ESV translates this word “wait,” but the NIV translates it as “hope.” ***Hoping is synonymous with waiting.***

The root Hebrew word for QAVAH is QAV, which refers to the tension when pulling on a rope. ***Thus to wait on the Lord refers to that difficult tension created by the gap between what you see right now and what God has promised to you later.*** In the story of Rahab, the root word QAV is used for the scarlet rope she hangs out her window. That cord represented the tension of what she saw – her city of Jericho about to be destroyed by the God of Israelites – and the promise of deliverance from the God of the Israelites.

We all live in this tension to some degree or another. We are often disappointed by the reality of the life we see yet we live in hope of a better life with Christ forever. ***For the remainder of our time I want us to see three reasons to be filled with HOPE because of the coming of Jesus.***

BODY

First, we can be filled with hope because our hope comes from a person, not optimism. These two are very different. The first is a tangible being, the second is an elusive feeling. Optimism is choosing to see in any situation how circumstances could work out for the best. Some of us are more optimistic than others. How have you been around one recently? They can drive you mad! They can lead you to roll your eyes over and over again, saying, “Oh, please!” It could be pouring down rain outside, and what do they say, “It’s not that bad!” Or it could be the bottom of the ninth inning and your team is losing by 8 runs: You begin heading for the car, but your friend pulls you back and says, “Let’s stay to the end; you never know what may happen!”

I had a friend back in college who was the most optimistic person I’d ever met. His grand phrase everywhere he went was “Praise God!” It was strange; at the end of almost every sentence, he’d say, “Praise God!” I even remember when he got a test back in OT survey. He failed the test, but he still said, “Praise God!” I looked at him and asked, “Shawn, why are you praising God; you failed your test!” He said with a smile, “Jason, it’s only one test. Obviously I’ve got more to learn; I think I’ll do better next time!” That’s optimism!

Yet all this really is is a feeling based on a positive perspective of circumstances. Optimism hopes for a better outcome based on an inner, upbeat sense. But biblical hope is not based on a feeling; it’s based on a person. ***Optimism joyfully plays the odds of circumstances. Hope rests on the promises of a person. Hope is a strong confidence. Optimism is wishful thinking.***

We can be tempted to think that God could have simply told us the Good News by way of an angel pronouncing it from atop a cloud. Maybe He could have simply given us all the promises in the Bible as a written Word without ever stepping into our world. But this is not the way God chose to bring us His Gospel!

God chose to send His own Son as a person, just like you and I. This is the doctrine of the incarnation, and it's summed up in the profound word of v.23: *Immanuel, which means "God with us."* When it came time to fill the world with the hope of God, it didn't come as a pronouncement from heaven, but as a humble person on earth. ***This baby, sweet and innocent, as He was, was the embodiment of all the promises of God.***

And as we know, Jesus' mission wasn't simply a message to share, but a sacrifice to offer. Few of us are moved purely by the sharing of good news. We are much more moved in our hearts by the demonstration of Good News. This is where we get the saying, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Husbands and wives, are you more moved by your spouse saying they love you or by their demonstration of love in surprising you with a special date night out?"

Jesus' life lived out showed how much He cared for His created humanity. His whole life was a demonstration of God's love. Jesus was born that He might die. He died on the cross so that he might share that love with us forever. ***This is the fortitude found in the person of Jesus.*** Everything He did from His incarnation to His resurrection brings us hope.

When we source our hope in His person and not a mere feeling of optimism, our hope grows roots. And this hope grows as our relationship with Him grows. Let this Christmas be a time to experience afresh Immanuel, the God who came to be with us.

Not only is our hope in a person and not optimism, but our hope is also in a promise and not possibilities. As you know full-well by now, circumstances will often let you down. You are always playing a betting game when your life's hope is sourced in outcomes that are not guaranteed. This is why our emotions are always a roller coaster ride. Temporary peace comes after a positive outcome. Then anxiety and despair plague us after a negative outcome. God didn't want our emotions to be a tangled mess.

What we find in the Bible is a God who is not afraid to make us promises. God made promises to Noah, Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, just to name a few. And every single time, God proved Himself to be faithful to those promises. Hebrews 10:23 tells us, *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”* So it’s no surprise that when it came time for God to fulfill His biggest promise of all, the coming of a Savior, it most certainly happened.

Jesus was born, the Savior of the world. And it’s His name that clues us into His purpose. In Hebrew, Jesus means “the Lord saves.” What from? Our text tells us in v.21: *“He will save His people from their sins.”* **Sin is the number one hope killer.** It’s sin that separates us from the person of God, and it’s sin that separates us from the promise of God.

The only thing that can leave you in despair is the sin you commit. Sin has a way of darkening our understanding and deceiving our heart. It can convince us that our hope can somehow be found in the world. It tells us to work harder, push further, take more risks...all in the hope that we will finally be satisfied in the right way. Yet this never works out. It doesn't matter how much money we have, how great our family, how big our home, how great our job, or how much ease we have, it’s never the end we dreamed of. It’s certainly not the end we were made for. It was C.S. Lewis who said, *“If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.”* **Sin’s mission is to blind us from the hope found in that other world.**

This would have always been the case until Jesus, the light of the world, broke through our darkness. He came not just to make us feel better or to help our odds in the game of life; He came to free us from the hope-crushing power of sin! Jesus came to set you free from sin and to renew your hope by way of an everlasting promise. This promise isn’t based on optimism but on His own person. This promise is that one day He

will forever destroy the brokenness of this world and make all things new! Promises are far better than possibilities. They give us a rope to hold on to when everything else in this life gives way.

This brings us to our last reason to be filled with hope: ***Our hope is soul-satisfying, not soul-destroying.*** We said at the beginning that a good definition of hope is a state of healthy anticipation about a better future. If we are longing for a better future, then there must be a problem with the reality we live in now. None of us would disagree with that. It's the tension we live in. It's the reason we need hope. It's the reason we need to eagerly wait with a healthy expectation of something better to come!

Darin introduced us last week to a 4-step progression of experiencing the Gospel applied to our point of need. ***It always begins with looking up at Jesus' perfection of hope.*** What we see in Jesus in the perfection of hope. Just as learned last week that Jesus is love personified, so also He is hope personified. How does that play out?

When Jesus was born into a sin-stricken world, even He was tempted to hopelessness, discouragement, and disappointment. He lived amidst sickness, depression, and significant need. Even more depressing, He lived among rebellious sinners with hard hearts! The Pharisees exhibited pride and self-reliance. Others exhibited contempt for the poor. Still others promised to change but backslid into sin. Their hatred for Jesus grew so strong that they nailed Him to the cross! Yet despite all this, Jesus remained hope-filled! How could this be?

Hebrews 12:2 encourages us ***to look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising its shame. Even Jesus kept His hope alive by envisioning a better future.***

His example stands in contrast to ours. ***The second step in our progression is to look down at the sin of our despair.*** What we find is that we often don't share the faith of Jesus that things will ultimately get better. Rather than remaining hopeful, we become the opposite: despairing.

We doubt God's person by failing to believe His goodness. We doubt His promises by failing to believe He will fully rescue us from sin and its consequences.

And when we fail to have Gospel-centered hope, we begin searching for hope in other places. Suddenly our joy is inconsistent. We become prone to anxiety and anger. Think about it: Anxiety results from a lack of hope in God's promises. Anger results when our worldly hope structures fall and we are left with only disappointment.

Jesus shows us a different way to live, but it wouldn't be right to only say: "Now go live like Jesus lived—full of hope!" It's impossible to take on the character of Jesus without also taking on the power of Jesus. That would be law-based living and not Spirit-based living. We will always fail and fall back into greater despair. ***So our third step is to experience the Gospel applied to the sin of our despair.***

The great promise of Jesus' coming as Immanuel is that we would no longer be left on our own in our fight against sin. ***Jesus came to defeat the penalty of sin on the cross and He now gives us His Spirit to defeat the power of sin in our hearts.*** Colossians 1:27 declares, ***"To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."*** This means to say that our only true victory over despair and disappointment is Jesus' hope-filled Spirit within us. There is nothing within ourselves that we can conjure up to endure heartache. It's only the Spirit living in us.

And the Scriptures say in Ephesians 1:14 that ***"we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it."*** The Holy Spirit is the down payment, if you will, of all the blessings that will come in the life that follows this age. So this Spirit of God inside us is the source of our hope, the hope of glory—the hope of our glorification! That same hope that characterized Jesus on earth is that same hope now living in us.

God calls us to confess our despair and repent of it. It could be that there is one particular area of your life in which you are failing to see through the lens of Gospel hope. It could be something weighing on you that is sucking joy out of you. God doesn't want you to live in that disappointment. He wants you to endure it well as you look forward.

Our goal is to ask the Spirit of hope within us to give us eyes to see all that Christ has in store for us. **God's design for overcoming the difficulty of today is to hope in all the goodness He plans for the future. He wants us to envision the fulfillment of all His promises!**

There was a study done with kids at age 5 in which 20 of them were individually given the option of either having a bag of candy right now or choosing to wait one hour to get 10 bags of candy. Surprisingly, only 4 in the study had the staying power to wait the full hour for the better reward! Yet what made them wait, was the promise of something greater.

Scripture tells us that God's people in times past found their ability to endure trials by looking ahead to a better future. Hebrews 11:24-27 says, *"²⁴ By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible."*

Just in the previous chapter of Hebrews it speaks of those who cared for fellow Christians who were arrested for their faith. They wanted to care for their needs, but doing so would reveal their similar faith in Christ and result in their persecution. It says in v.34, *"For you had compassion on those in prison and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one."* Notice the profound connection between joy and the plundering of their property. Such a connection does not exist apart from the hope-filled promises of Christ.

The conclusion is this: ***We can joyfully endure losses today because of all that is coming to us at Christ's return.*** Jesus wants us to live with this kind of forward-looking vision. ***It changes how we live today. And because "hope" is synonymous with "waiting," it changes how we wait today.*** We don't wait with anxiety and uncertainty. We wait with peace and confidence. This happens as we turn to the Lord in our disappointment and trust Him for all He still plans to do. This is what makes our hope soul-sustaining and not soul-destroying.

This leads us finally to our last step in the progression: ***Extend God's hope to others.*** Brothers and sisters, we live in a hopeless world. They don't have Christ's promises and they don't have Christ's person. Yet because the hope of glory, Jesus Himself, lives in you, you are called to take His hope to a dying world. Jesus came at Christmas to rebirth hope into hopeless hearts. I wonder who comes to mind for you during this special time of the year that could use the hope of Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER

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