

## God Gives Us Hope

From the series, “Things God Gives Us at Christmas -And All Year Round”

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### Introduction

English is a funny language. I have a lot of sympathy for people who come to America and have to learn how we speak. English is a good language, of course, but it has its quirks.



For example, take the following name: Pacific Ocean. There are three occurrences of the letter “c” in that name. You know what? *They’re all pronounced differently.* With English, pronunciation can be rough.

Add to that, we have words that change meaning over time. This is even hard for the people who grow up with the language. Years ago, I knew a man who was a Bible teacher. He was the head of the seminary where I was trained. His name was Allan MacRae. We knew him as *Doctor MacRae*. He was born just after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in 1902. One time, I heard him tell the following story: When Dr. MacRae was just starting out as a Bible teacher, he got a phone call from someone who wanted him to speak. Dr. MacRae checked his calendar and saw that he was available, so he suggested a few topics that he could speak on. The person on the other end of the phone said, “That would be terrific”. At this point, Dr. MacRae got worried. You see, when he was young, the word, “terrific” meant that someone was feeling terror. In the early 1900s you might hear someone say, “We had a storm last night. There was thunder like I’ve never heard before, and the wind was so strong that trees were coming down all over the place. We thought we might get killed. It was a *‘terrific’* storm.”

As it turned out, Dr. MacRae had received his first lesson in how English words can change over time. The word, “terrific”, a word that meant “full of terror” one day, meant “wonderful” a few years later. We still use the word that way today.

We're starting a new series today for the month of December. December is a time when many followers of Jesus celebrate his birth, also known as his 'advent'. We look forward to this all month long, culminating in Christmas. Our series will be entitled, "Things God Gives Us at Christmas – And All Year Round". In this session, we're going to talk about the fact that God give us hope.

Before we talk about hope, we need to discuss something: We have to talk about the meaning of the word, "Hope".

## **I. What does the word "hope" mean?**

### ***A. The way we use the word on a daily basis.***

Here's the online dictionary definition of the word. This is taken from "Lexico", the Oxford Online Dictionary:

hope  
/hōp/  
noun  
*A feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.*

So, the way the word "hope" is often used is to say that there are a number of things that might happen, and if one of those things took place, it would make us happy.

A classic example is a sporting event. If you watch a game, you want your team to win. But, your team might lose. Either event can take place, winning or losing, but one of them would make you happy. So, you say, "I hope my team wins". Sadly, as the songs says, "It's one, two, three strikes you're out at the old ball game." So, with sports, you're never sure.

This kind of hope is very popular. Let's look at some quotes from famous people about "hope". First we'll consider poet Emily Dickinson on the subject:

"Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul  
And sings the tune without the words  
And never stops at all."

Let's look next at British poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson:

"Hope Smiles from the threshold of the year to come,  
Whispering 'it will be happier'..."

Finally, British Rock star John Lennon of the Beatles:

"You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.

I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one."  
— From the song, "Imagine"

So, in the world, "hope" means lots of things might happen, but one of them will make us happy. It can be that somehow, things will be just a little bit better than now. Or, it may be as grand as the whole world living in peace and harmony. There's something about just the possibility of good things coming that's encouraging and uplifting.

But, there is a dark side to the way the world uses the word "hope".



The new year may come, and ***things may not get better***. In fact, things could get worse. That would certainly make us unhappy.

Now, let's talk about the way that the Bible uses the word.

### **B. The way that the Bible uses the word "hope".**

We can summarize the way the Bible uses the word hope with one word: Assurance. There may be lots of possibilities, but one of them is definite. So, as far as the Bible is concerned, there's only one possible outcome.

Here's an example:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

How is this hope different from the way the world used the word? The word "hope" in this statement is attached to another very important word: "Plan". When God uses the word "hope" in the Bible, it's attached to his plans. If I say, "I hope my team will win", *my hope is based on a group of human beings*. When hope is used in the Bible, *it's based on God and his actions; his plans*.

If a human says something is going to happen, it may or may not happen. My team may or may not win. So, hope based on human beings produces random results. When God says something is going to happen, it's going to happen. Because of this, hope in God results in assurance.

In our various discussions, I've been using 5 statements to help us face challenges in life.

- God is First.
- God is in control.
- God knows what he's doing.
- God is good.
- God cherishes me.

Today we're going to concentrate on the second statement: ***God is in control***. That statement, "God is in control", is a practical way of summarizing a number of God's qualities. He is powerful beyond belief. He is all knowing. So, as a practical matter, that means he's in control.

Here's an important point: He's not just in control right now. He has always been in control of his universe. He was in total control of everything in the past. He's in total control right now. He will always be in control moving forward. *That means he's in total control of the future.*

There's a theological word for this: Sovereignty. In history, the word "sovereign" is usually used for a great king. When this word is used, it means the king is as powerful as a human can be. The king can give any command, and it happens. God is a great king who is sovereign over his universe. He can make anything happen whenever he wants.

So, when humans, who are limited, look to the future, they use the word "hope". This means there are many possible outcomes, and one would make them happy. But, they have no assurance of the outcome. Because God is sovereign, he gives people assurance.

How does God demonstrate his sovereignty? In many ways. We're in Advent season. So, we'll concentrate on the ways that God has demonstrated his total control of the universe, his sovereignty, through what Christian believers call the first Advent of Jesus Christ: His Birth. God demonstrated the fact that he's in control through something called "Prophecy".

We could assign a whole lecture to the word "prophecy". For today, we'll say that it's similar to "hope". Here's why it's similar: To the world, the word "prophecy" means that someone thinks they know what's going to happen. Once again, it's limited to humans, so sometimes prophecies come true, sometimes they don't.

When we talk about prophecy in the Bible, it means that the Sovereign God, who is in control of the universe, who controls the past, the present, and the future, *tells someone what he's planning on doing*. That means it's going to happen.

God predicted the coming of Jesus Christ centuries before he was born. Let's take a look at some of the prophecies in the Bible concerning Jesus Christ.

## II. God Gives us Hope Through Prophecy

We'll start thousands of years ago with a very special man. His name was Abraham. God spoke to Abraham one day. Here's what he said:

"I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.  
I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3)

In these statements, God makes at least two promises to Abraham. First, God said he would make Abraham into a great nation. God did just that. Abraham started out as one man and his family. He became the forefather of the Jewish people. Many of our Jewish friends consider themselves to be descended from Abraham. Currently, there are 14.6 million people in the world who claim a direct lineage to Abraham. Note: Abraham probably lived around 1800 BC. So, this prophecy was given almost 4,000 years ago. Here's the point: ***God said he was going to do something, and it happened. God shows that he's in control over a period of 4,000 years.***

Second, God said that, through Abraham, all the world would be blessed. Because of Abraham, something will happen that will benefit the whole world.

I work hard at my job. On my best days, I hope I do things that will benefit others. But, the whole world? No, I'm afraid not. To say that something will happen because of you that will bless the whole world is an awesome statement. As it turns out, the descendants of Abraham have done remarkable things. We could spend weeks talking about everything, so let's focus for now at some prophecies having to do with the descendants of Abraham.

Abraham had a son name Isaac. Isaac had a son name Jacob. Jacob's name was changed to Israel. That's why we talk today about the nation of Israel, or the children of Israel. Jacob had a son name Judah. Let's look at a prophecy associated with him.

The scepter will not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
until he to whom it belongs shall come  
and the obedience of the nations shall be his. (Genesis 49:10)

So, Judah is told that his family will be rulers. He will hold the "ruler's staff". Today the Jewish people called this the "rod" of the King. This scepter, this rod, will never depart from Judah's family. It will stay there until a great ruler comes. The rod of Judah belongs to this great ruler. We're told the nations will all be obedient to him.

When this prophecy was given, the children of Israel were a “clan”, a small group of related people making their way through life. Later, Israel grew. After reaching a population measured in hundreds of thousands, it was organized into a monarchy.

Israel’s first king was a man named Saul. He started out with a lot of promise, but to make a long story short, he turned out to be a terrible disappointment. So, Saul was replaced with a man named David. Here’s an important fact about David: *He was a descendant of Judah.*

David was a great King. He wasn’t perfect, but most of the time he was the model of a Godly man. Because of this, God promised that all future kings would be descendants of David.

So, Judah had a descendant named David. God promised David that future kings would be limited to his descendants. When Jesus was born, he was a descendant of David. So, as a member of David’s family, Jesus was eligible to be king.

After some time, another prophecy came:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2)

From this, we get the famous Christmas Carol, “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” From what archeologists can find in ancient records, Bethlehem was never a big place. In this passage, which was likely written around 700 B.C. Bethlehem is referred to as “small among the clans of Judah”. Never the less, something amazing will happen there. Someone will be born. A human. But, this human has “origins...from of old, from ancient times”. How many people do you know that are “from ancient times”? A child will be born in Bethlehem, but this will be something much more than a normal human child.

So, according to Bible prophecy, a great king will appear someday.

- He will be a descendant of Abraham.
- He will be a descendant of Judah, and then King David.
- He will be born in Bethlehem.
- And, he will be something much more than a normal, mortal human being.

You don’t have to listen to too many Christmas carols during Advent season to know that this was Jesus Christ. This is all amazing. Or, dare I say “terrific”.

But even more important than prophecies of a great king, are the prophecies of what that king came to do. Let's read a prophecy from Isaiah:

Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

We're just been told that we as humans can be compared to sheep that have gone astray. If a lamb wants to be safe and happy, it needs to listen to its shepherd. Running away is dangerous. We've all done this. "Each of us has turned to our own way."

God calls us to be obedient to him. But we have all refused in some way. This is called sin. The apostle Paul said something about sin in the book of Romans:

For the wages of sin is death... (Romans 6:23)

We have all sinned against God. Because of this we will all someday die.

According to Bible prophecy, a great king would come. But, he would not be content to be served as king. He came, we are told, to carry away our sins. Let's look at those words from Isaiah again:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
**and the Lord has laid on him**  
**the iniquity of us all.** (vs. 6, emphasis mine)

One day, a man named Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem. He walked among humans. But, he was clearly more than a mere mortal man. He showed powers far beyond anything that humans possess. Then one day, he allowed himself to be nailed to a cross, so that he could be a sacrifice for our sins. And after allowing himself to be sacrificed, he showed his power by being raised from the dead.

Because of this, the apostle Peter gives us the final word on hope. He wrote a letter to his friends almost 2000 years ago, and in it he shared these words:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. (1 Peter 1:3-4)

Think about that. When we used the word “hope” we want something to happen. We may desire it. We may long for it. We may wish for it. But, in the end, it may not happen.

The Bible offers us assurance. When God created the heavens and the earth, he set a plan in place. He is sovereign; he has total control over his universe. He always has and he always will. He announced that plan in his Word, the Bible through prophecy. His plan can not fail.

God offers us hope: an assurance of victory over death through the work of Jesus Christ. As we just read, there is nothing he offers to us that will ever perish, spoil, or fade. What God offers us is eternal. It's forever.

## **Conclusion**

We've talked about different kinds of hope today. Here's a vital question:

### ***Which kind of hope do you want?***

Perhaps you've never fully understood the message of Jesus Christ. If so, you've been living your life with earthly hope. You live from day to day hoping that something will happen to give your life meaning and purpose. Friends, God offers you something much greater: not earthly hope, but his hope. He offers assurance of a place in eternity.

Please let us tell you how you can have this kind of hope. Contact us at Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ. All the info is on our web site. Of course, you can come and visit! Or, you can make a decision right now. Visit Billy Graham's web site: [PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net). You can learn everything you need there.

Or, maybe you've heard this before. You've accepted the hope of God. But sometimes, that hope feels distant. The voices of the world get loud, and they can drown out the voice of our God. We forget that he's in control. He always has been, and he always will be. This is the time to re-commit; To re-open your heart to the eternal hope of God through Jesus Christ. You need to remember that nothing on earth can compare to the hope of heaven.

God gives us many things. He gives us good things at Christmas, and all year round. Today we've learned that he gives us hope. Let's pray that God will grant us the ability to enjoy the hope that he gives us, now and forever.