

## Hope for Revival

Good morning church family as we are in a great season. Looking forward to celebrating the birth of the Savior - who is the hope of the world, Jesus Christ. Do you have a Christmas tree up. I'm just curious how many of you put up a fake tree? And how many of you like random pine needles lining the carpet and baseboards of your house? However you celebrate glad you can celebrate with us. And we are in this series called the Thrill of Hope. We believe God can restore hope this time of year. Convince us that those who hope in him do not hope in vain. Because our hope came down at Christmas.

And to get things going I wanted to consider with you the difference between a victim and a victor. As we consider life as a victim we realize we live in a world of unfairness. In this world we will have experiences we didn't sign up for, didn't see coming, and perhaps don't know how to deal with. There are children in households where Mom or Dad left, or Mom or Dad were negative influences. There are teenagers who got wrapped up in wrong decisions and now don't know what to do with life's new trajectory. There are adults who deal with the real hurts of the past and how they interfere with the challenges and opportunities of the present. I've said it before and I'll say it again. I believe everyone has a story that if you heard it - it would break your heart. And a victim responding to adversity could say the very famous statement, Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, I guess I'll go eat worms.

Such was the case for George Frederic Handel. He grew up a child prodigy. Toured around with his father to princes and dukes to play his music. In his early twenties he was the talk of England and the highest paid composer. To this day that is still remarkable to be the highest paid in your industry by your 20s. Post-recession America even more still! But life brings peaks and valleys, and he had a series of set backs. Audiences dwindled for his productions, and glory faded. He produced failure after failure and grew depressed. Because of stress he had a case of palsy that crippled some of his fingers, very important for a composer. At which point he could have played the victim card and said, "Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, I guess I'll go eat worms." He didn't say that but did say his best days were over and his inspiration was expired.

But hope came back to him through simple but powerful words. Handel came across the verses from our first lesson which said, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (40:1-2) Think of how powerful those words are for one in the midst of feeling like a victim. Comfort!? What it's possible? All I feel is pain and loss and confusion. But God you say there is comfort? God you say the hard service is done and brighter days are ahead. Speak how? Tenderly? I thought you would yell for how much I'm reeling, but you have a tender word to say. A still small voice? Sins paid for double? You went beyond what was owed for my sins? I am released now and forever because you paid for it? God says to this yes. I bring comfort and bring

tenderness and bring peace all because of Jesus. Powerful, sweet words for any victim. And the reality? *Hope is revived as you see yourself a victor in Jesus.* No matter your story or struggle you have the right to such a hope because of the comfort and peace Jesus won on the cross.

And it revived Handel. These words inspired him to write at the age of 56 what we know as Handel's Messiah. Anyone ever hear a production of that very popular piece. I would put it in the bucket list item if you haven't heard it. And it illustrates what hope can do. Hope revived can lead to incredible things. The major part me as pastor wants you to chose hope and wants me to chose hope because we have the right to it in Jesus Christ. I want you to experience and me to experience an other worldly kind of comfort that is based in the unfailing love of God. But there is this other part of me - the part that wonders what masterpiece is God waiting to work through your life when hope in general or in a particular area gets revived.

We turn now to the powerful word of God. It is the Word that is where we find our hope and strength. And today we learn of a man God used to prepare a nation for the birth of Jesus. He is John the Baptist. And he'll lead us on how to prepare for our own heart and hope revival as we celebrate Christmas. Please stand in honor of God's Word. Could you say to the person next to you. "I double dog dare you, to eat a locust."

Christmas is a time of many things, but it is of course a time to prepare many things. How many of you are preparing to give a gift to someone this Christmas? Is anyone done with those preparations? We prepare to travel to see family. We prepare especially the calendar fitting all the events in there, which is kind of like going for Thanksgiving leftovers we don't really know how it's all going to fit, but it will. One of my favorite preparations is decorating the house and putting lights out for Christmas. And this has been increasingly ramped up to the degree we have the Great Christmas Light fight. I was listening to a contestant this past week, and I heard they started preparing for the light display in August. If I do my math correctly that is at least 3 months of preparation. But it in putting out lights have you ever come across this. (Ball of Christmas lights) You don't know how it got this way, was a squirrel playing in the box where it was stored.

I bring this up because John the Baptists mission was to prepare the world at that time for Christmas. We hear again in v.2-3, "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will **prepare** your way a voice of one calling in the wilderness, '**Prepare** the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" And you and I know how to prepare for decorating and prepare to see family and gift shop. But the real question is how do we prepare for Christ this Christmas? And I believe that it is similar to that big bundle of twisted and broken lights. Here's the way of preparation and revival *If we hope for revival we need to address the mess.*

When is the last time you were real with how broken and messy this world really is. What does it take for you? To hear of a Chicago Lieutenant fired for probably misconduct involving drinking and a possible affair. To hear of a nation divided during an impeachment process. To hear of kids under threat of shootings in WI, whether West Bend or Waukesha wondering if children can go to school and be safe. The crazy thing is that we don't even need to read those headlines, all we have to do is look at our hearts. Paul said when he looked inside and this after conversion, "I know that good does not live in me, that is, in my sinful flesh." (Ro 7:18) When is the last time you looked inside what was inside of you and just saw a complex system of brokenness and mess. A mess not even a million lights knotted together could match.

What was John's message? v.4 "Preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." *Hope for revival starts with repentance*. It's a bunch of people who finally looked deep into their situation and said - this is a mess, this is broken, this needs help.

When's the last time you were truly stuck. Side of the road, middle of a recipe, or without a clue how to go forward. I had a time recently this year. I was filling up my car and gas starts spilling on the ground, not really what it is supposed to do. But I think no problem with my good 'ol friend the internet and a bit of elbow grease we'll figure this out. So I went for it, found I needed a new gas neck and I started the install. Got the old one out. But now getting the new one in. And stuck. Tried again. Still stuck. 3 hours later stuck. I sent this picture to a buddy of mine able to help. And thankfully he bailed me out and he was able to provide the fix for my stuck situation. But if not for him I would have absolutely remained stuck.

If this Christmas all we see in the manger is icing on an already full schedule of activities. If the Savior is the fluff and not the center we're missing something. Because the story of Christmas is we were stuck in our sins - with no way of unraveling it, and no way past the consequences. More stuck than a car on a jack. But if we cry out and simply say help. If in repentance we change our mind from self-sufficiency, avoidance or self-righteousness. If we beg for help from Jesus we find he isn't just the icing, but the answer. He is the center of all we celebrate because he has an answer for the mess. And guess what his solution? It's not to unravel the mess, it's to throw it away and give us something new. Hurlled in the depths of the sea is our sin, paid once and for all is our punishment, and given is forgiveness. Our old self was crucified with him on the cross, and the new self is a new creation - like a pristine new set of lights meant to shine for him. Repentance is addressing the ugly mess, and seeing the beauty of Jesus the Savior. Christmas is the story of a Savior getting us unstuck. Comfort, Comfort says our God. Hear the tender voice of your God. Your sins were paid for double. Your help has come.

I love the songs of the season and Matt Redman has a great song out called hope of heaven. I wanted to share it with you, for many songs are better sermons than I could preach. "When the world is on our shoulders. And we need a hand to hold us, When no miracle is found still believe. There is a whisper a voice of hope inside you, There is an answer a name above to guide you. Help from heaven." Christmas speaks we can hope again, we can dream again, we can have joy and peace again because help came down in Jesus Christ. For you and for me.

Speaking of songs. Do we have any concert goers here? I still remember my first concert. Hootie and the Blowfish. But before the headliner you have those who come before, and many times you don't even know who it's going to be. Like a remember seeing Hootie, before the warm up act? The only time I remember the warm up act was when going to Weezer and there was this band called the Fray. They were good I thought. But the point is that this act is going to be less full, less polished, and pretty much less good than the Headliner. The Headliner is who you are there for.

John the Baptist is the ultimate warm up act for the headliner. Now by the way he is quite the warm up act. Look at what Jesus says, "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John." (Luke 7:28) Jesus says he is the best human being who ever lived - how's that for a compliment. Yet, John would be surpassed by Jesus. He famously would be beheaded by Herod for speaking God's truth about relationships. And I guess he could have

played the victim card and been down about it. Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, I guess I'll go eat locusts. But he was good with it. He knew that was the point. Though beheaded here on earth, he has the greatest prize. So he says, "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." (v.7) John knew Jesus was the headliner the world couldn't miss. And he was preparing them now so they could have a true revival. For *true revival cannot center on anyone but Jesus*.

We live in a world of celebrity Christians. Tim Tebow and mega church pastors who have high praise. Perhaps you've heard names like Billy Graham, Andy Stanley, Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, and Steven Furtick. Most recently is Kayne West. Have you heard of this. While Kayne isn't a role model and maybe shouldn't be listened to for past music, statements and lifestyle. He is making some beautiful confessions of Jesus Christ as Savior. And Lord be praised by the confession of Jesus through various people. It doesn't matter who preaches him as long as Jesus name is lifted high. But no one person should ever be what we built upon. He uses broken people so they can confess the power isn't them, he uses people with a past so they cannot claim perfection but have to point you to the perfect Savior. He allows great leaders to get lost and uses it so our hope will not be built on anyone but Jesus. To the degree he's allowed you to see the flaws of those confessing Christ, is a degree of grace so that your faith and hope for revival can be built on him. To put it another way Jeezus will never be Jesus.

Why does this matter. Some of you have a voice like a parent or teacher in your life. They are currently your voice when it comes to Jesus. You may be living on a borrowed faith, borrowed confession and borrowed example. But they are not Jesus, and you need to place your faith in him not them. A mature faith doesn't borrow faith, but grows it's own with it's own confession. A mature faith holds no idols, because there is only room for the King of Kings. Some of you love pastors that you watch online, but don't be surprised if they get lost. They are fallable people. Some of you even like me. There's grace there. I say with Luther I am simply a bag of maggots. Here's what Luther said, "How did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name? ... I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing." Please know the show stopper is Jesus - he'll knock your socks off every time if you'll truly see him. Seek him and place your hope in him to have true revival. I love even how this section of Scripture starts, "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." (1:1) There is only one who will never fail you, one whose love has no end, only one who truly gets you, only one who is the light strong enough to break the darkness and even twist the darkness to become light for his people. This is Jesus. All glory and all praise go to him.

But before we go can we talk about the locusts? Why did John eat those? Vegan and palo before there was such a diet. Trend setter? This more reminds me of a Fear Factor episode. And what about the apparel camel hair and leather belt? What is this? I think I got it. *Hope for revival is in being hairy and eating bugs*. Naw I don't think that's it. So what is going on.

To talk about this. I consider one of the most common questions at Christmas? What are you getting for Christmas? What are you getting? It's a question kids ask their classmates. What are you getting? Beats, games, clothes, phones, and computers. What are you getting? Time off of work, family time. What are you getting? And it's not that it is bad to ask what the kids want and discuss. But consider Christmas. Christmas is Jesus giving up so we can get.

What is John the Baptist doing. He's living radically different. He's displaying how revival takes place. It's not by chasing after everything the world does, it's not wondering what I am going to get in return. No revival starts with people saying what can I give up. Consider what Jesus said is the mark of the disciple. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must **deny** themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23) *Revival includes what we are willing to **give up** to follow Christ.*

What is that for you? Maybe it's an area of noise. You spend so much time and attention on that hobby and sport - and it is honestly getting in the way for Christ to be all in all. Maybe it's a person. And not that you get divorced, or say good bye to friendships - but you stop pursuing people as if they were God. They are not and will let you down. Maybe it's a career. Maybe it's time refocused and shifted like never before, from endless hours making money, into more time focused on eternity. Be like John the Baptist. Think of what you might give up to ensure revival happens.

For when we see Jesus. Getting rid of our mess, and comforting through this world of mess. When we consider how far above he stands over any person any figure anything the world can offer. When we receive his Word of comfort, and this tender voice changes our soul by the power of the Spirit. It's then we all can live more and more like victors, and less like victims. May God empower revival this Christmas, may it start with us here and now and spread like never before.