

Hope

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[0:00] Thanks, James. So I was debating, James was asking me just before we started, do you want to sit, do you want to stand, what's most comfortable for you?

And I thought, well, maybe I'll actually sit on the floor to make James feel a little bit better about himself. But today you have the unique privilege of being able to see me from the back row as well. So I'll stand for you today. Contrary to popular belief, I will not actually really be speaking about Young Life University today. James has asked me to preach and share about Advent as we get started on this journey towards Christmas and the expectancy of what is to come.

But I will give a brief Young Life University plug. If you want to work with university students, we're talking about hope today. I think university students suffer from a lot of hopelessness like we talked about last week.

And so if you have a desire to offer hope, fun, relationship and belonging, come and talk to me afterwards because we would love to get you plugged in to what we're doing and planning on doing in the university campuses.

[1:09] So today is the first week of Advent. We've lit the candle. We've started to reflect on it. And we're talking about hope. Now, as I've talked with different people this week about what hope means to them as I talk with my kids and we talk about Christmas and preparing for Christmas, I think some of the things that come up when we talk about hope would be an expecting, an expectancy, a longing, an excitement for what is to come.

Because usually with this hope we have an excitement that life is going to get better. Something is going to get better based on what we're expecting. So we live close to a mall that has Toys R Us in it.

And so with having two kids, an eight and a six-year-old kid, almost every time we go to the mall, they ask to go to Toys R Us. They want to just look around and see what there is to look at and then ask for toys.

And so this past week we went to Toys R Us and we were waiting outside. Half the time we actually don't even go in anymore. We just let the kids go run around and see what they want and then come out. And so we were waiting outside and I saw a book sitting on the shelf outside.

And so it was this book. Maybe if you have kids you've seen it. Essentially, it's a book of toys. So not only do they get to look at toys now when they go to Toys R Us, now they can bring this home and look at it.

[2:33] And beg us for the things that they see in this book. But it's funny because as I saw this book, it actually brought massive flashbacks for me as a kid.

So we're from Canada. We grew up in Canada. And if you're from Canada, you may know a department store called Sears. It's sort of like a Mark's and a Spencer's.

And so it has almost everything you could imagine. Now, from Sears, every Christmas when they were still sending out regular mail, you know, when you would actually receive paper at your door. Every year to, I'm pretty sure everyone in Canada, Sears would send out this book they call the Wish Book. They would send it out usually right around the beginning of November.

And this book was this on steroids. It was probably this times 40. Filled with stuff. From toys to clothes to appliances.

[3:29] Anything anyone could ever hope or want for. And so as a kid, it was incredible. We waited for that day because it sort of marked the beginning of Christmas for us.

It comes to your door. You pick it up from the door. It's all wrapped in plastic so it doesn't get wrecked from the snow. You pull it all out. And then you go to your room with your pencils, your highlighters.

Depending on who you are, maybe your sticky notes. And you start to categorize the things you want from the book. In hopes that your parents will also take the same amount of time to flip through the book.

Hours upon hours upon hours. Seriously, hours spent pouring through this book. Hoping that your parents would see what you want. Get you what you want. And then life would just be perfect.

And as I reflected on this book and the wish book, we laugh about it because it seems a little bit funny. But I think actually in our own lives as adults, we've started to create our own wish books.

[4:30] Maybe it's not a paper book. Maybe it's an Amazon cart or a Taobao cart or a LinkedIn profile or whatever it is. But we've started to create our own wish books of things we're hoping we'll get.

Things we're working towards. Not that it's bad to work towards things. But things we're hoping for that will satisfy that thing in us that just isn't making us happy. That we're just not content.

And so we categorize. We circle. We hope. We hope. We hope. Our hope is often based on stuff. But as we actually look at a biblical definition of hope, we realize none of this stuff matters for us to have hope.

If we look at the biblical word, it's a Hebrew word, which I'm probably pronouncing wrong. But it's *tikvah*. And so there's two sort of definitions that come along with it.

It's a confident trust that God will keep his promises. Or a confidence in the presence of a divine strength. And so when we hear this definition, we actually realize none of this stuff matters.

[5:42] We don't need stuff. We don't need aspirations to have hope. Because our hope is actually found in the promise that God will fulfill all of his promises.

And so today, there's a few verses I want to reflect on. On hope. Maybe different areas in our life, different times in our life that we could find hope in what we're walking through.

And so the first area that I want to look at is hope in the midst of our waiting. Who likes to wait?

Waiting is actually pretty tiring.

Waiting. I often, we're just sitting there doing nothing. But by the time if we've waited an hour or two hours, maybe you're at the airport waiting for a plane or in the grocery store waiting to pay for stuff.

By the time you're done waiting, you're exhausted after doing absolutely nothing. But the same goes in our own lives. How many times have we waited on God for something?

[6:41] We've prayed and we've prayed and we've prayed and we've said, God, I need direction. God, open this door. God, I need you to heal me. And we pray and we pray and we pray and nothing and nothing and nothing and we wait.

We lose hope because we think, well, maybe it's just never going to happen. And so we just, we give up hoping for it. But if we go back to the biblical meaning of hope that it's a confidence in God fulfilling his promises, we can look through the Bible in five numerous verses that will help us get through it.

The verse I want to look at today is in Isaiah or Isaiah, depending on where you're from. Isaiah 40, verse 28 to 31.

It says, Do you not know, have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary. Though, you know, I'm not sure. We have two young kids. I don't know if they ever grow tired and weary.

[7:55] And young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will not walk and not faint.

And so in the midst of our waiting, in the midst of the unknown, in the midst of our praying and saying, God, please, God, please, God, please. And we're just getting so tired and frustrated that nothing is happening.

We find encouragement that it's in the midst of that waiting that as we trust in God and as we look to God, He gives us the strength to continue going.

We have an Advent calendar at home. I don't know how many of you did Advent calendars growing up. We have an Advent calendar that has every day from the beginning of December to Christmas Eve where our kids do something. We put little candies in it as well as there's like a task or a Bible verse.

Maybe they read a Bible verse or they do something good for someone, something like that every single day. Because in the midst of waiting for Christmas, it can seem so far away for kids.

[8:55] It can seem like, is it ever going to get here because of that anticipation? But with an Advent calendar, there's that little bit of hope each day that we're getting closer.

It's the candy. It's the Bible verse. Whatever it is, it's the hope that we're getting closer. And sometimes I think in the midst of our waiting, we actually forget to do the small things because we're waiting so much on God to do the big thing for us that we miss out on the small things that are happening each and every day.

And so I think in the midst of our waiting, in the midst of feeling tired and weary, sometimes all we have to do is take two minutes and read the Bible.

Two minutes and pray every day. It's in the small things where God strengthens, where God renews, where God gives hope. Because we actually end up finding out that in the midst of our waiting, that's often when God is actually working the most in our lives.

Because he'll eventually answer our prayer in some way. And as we look back, we see, wow, God, you did incredible things in me in that time. But it's in the small things each and every day that we're doing that bring us closer to him, that give us the strength, that carry us through.

[10:14] And so I don't know what you're waiting for. I don't know what you're praying for. I don't know how long you've been waiting for it. But I want to encourage you with that. Know that we serve a God who gives us strength in the midst of being weary.

Just go to him every day. Two minutes, three minutes. It'll make a difference. The second thing I want to reflect on is just that there's hope in the midst of our troubles.

So I think we've gotten pretty good at putting on masks in our lives, whether it's through social media or whether it's through Zoom. I don't know about you, but during the pandemic, how many Zoom meetings did you have?

We've gotten really good at making things look good, right? And so we're on Zoom. You're on Zoom with a colleague. For all you know, they're in a shirt and tie. They're fully dressed up. But little do you know, they're actually only in their underwear.

And their background is actually blurred out. So you have no idea what's going on behind them. But their entire house is a mess. They look like they have it all together.

[11:25] And it's really all falling apart. I think that's actually quite an accurate picture of a lot of our lives. We walk into church.

Hey, how are you? Oh, so good. Life has been so good this week. You go to work. Oh, how are you? Oh, everything's great. And we've gotten so good at putting that mask on because we don't want to admit we have troubles in our lives.

Because maybe it means we're a failure. We're not doing things well enough or whatever it is. But one of my favorite, simplest verses that I always come back to is Matthew 28, verse 20.

It's the end of the Great Commission. So Jesus is, he's with his disciples. He's saying, I'm going to be leaving you behind. But you go and you go share the gospel. I'll see you later. But he ends with this.

He says, surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. He doesn't say, surely I'm with you and I will make everything better for you.

[12:31] I will take away all your troubles and I will make everything great. He says, surely I am with you and I am always with you. I actually find incredible comfort in that.

When I was in college, I went home for Thanksgiving weekend and my friend said, hey, do you want to run a half marathon with me? So about 22 kilometers. And I said, sure. I hadn't been running.

I hadn't been training. I hadn't done anything for a couple years. But I said, sure, I'll run it with you. And so we go out and we start running. And the first 10 kilometers are great, no issues. But as we get to about 14, 15 kilometers, my legs are burning.

I'm getting cramps. It's hard to breathe. I'm like, this is a bad idea. And I just keep saying to my friend, you know, like, go ahead, go ahead, go ahead. It's fine.

And they say, no, I'm with you. Like, we're getting through this. We're going to make it through.

We're getting to the end. I'll get you to the end. I'm not leaving your side. We have the creator of the universe saying that to us.

[13:37] It doesn't matter what you're walking through. How desperate it seems. He's saying, I am with you. And I'm not just with you today. I am with you until the very end.

Right by your side. We will get you through this. So we find hope in that. But we also find hope in that we're part of a community that is also saying that to you as well.

And so sometimes I feel like we're so afraid of being ourselves because we don't know what people are going to think of us. But the privilege of being part of this, part of church, is that we can actually put down those masks.

We can unblur our background. Please don't stand up if you're just in your underwear. We would appreciate not seeing that. But you can unblur your background. And we're here saying, God is with you, but we are also with you.

Let's get through this together. And so I don't know what you're walking through. I don't know how difficult or horrible or great life has been for you. And as you look ahead to Christmas and what Christmas means, some people love it and some people absolutely hate it.

[14:53] Because of what's happened in the past. Know that Jesus is saying to you, I'm here with you always.

To the very end, I'm here. I am here with you. And then the last thought I want to share with you today is that as we look at hope and the anticipation of what is to come, sometimes we simply have to do that.

We need to remind ourselves of what is to come. Sometimes we just have to lift our eyes up. We can get so caught up in our lives and what's going on within us that we forget where we're going towards, what we're running towards, what the end goal is.

This weekend, yesterday, we made a decision, probably an unwise decision, to go out to Disneyland because our kids are so desperate to see the world of Frozen.

It's been open for a whole 10 days, so all the crowds must be gone by now. So I'm pretty sure all of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia was at Disneyland yesterday.

[16:10] But we showed up and obviously the first thing they say is, you know, we want to go ride the new rides in Frozen. So we go right there and we get to the sleigh ride. It's the new roller coaster or whatever.

I don't know. Has anyone been there? Okay, there's been a couple people. Perfect. So we get there. And it's an hour wait and the kids don't care. They say, we're doing this.

This is what we came for. And so I say, okay, I will wait with you. And so we'd never been on this ride before, obviously. And so we weren't aware of what the line looked like, what the queue, how it weaves and waves and stuff like that.

And so we're in line and we get inside and most of it is inside of a building. Now, some of the rides out at Disneyland, you can see the whole queue ahead of you. So you know what to expect and what you're going towards.

This one, you have no idea. It's like corner after corner after corner after corner. And so you're just holding out hope that around the next corner you're going to get there.

[17:09] And so in the midst of it, we're singing. Bella's favorite thing to do in waiting is singing songs. So usually we're like singing worship songs, but it turned out to be Christmas songs yesterday. But we couldn't see the full picture.

And so it seemed like a long time. And in the midst of it, I'll admit I was feeling pretty hopeless. I was like, let's just leave. We can't see the end. Let's just go.

Nope, nope, we're going to do it. But I think that was actually quite an accurate picture sometimes for our own lives. We get so caught up in what's going on and we get so inward focused in what's going on in me that we start to feel hopeless because we don't know what's around the corner. We don't know what we're going towards. But in the scripture, we're reminded we're actually headed towards something pretty incredible.

And we're reminded that sometimes we just have to lift our eyes up. We just have to look ahead and remember that goal. If we look at 2 Corinthians 4 verse 16 to 17, it says, Therefore, we do not lose heart.

[18:24] Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. In our last week of Revelations, James talked about in Revelations 21 how the

end goal, where we're going towards, there's no tears, there's no pain.

It's a perfect place of being in the presence of God forever. Sometimes we've got to fix our eyes on what is unseen. We've got to remind ourselves that we're part of something bigger.

Because as we look up to the end goal, to the bigger things, it not always minimizes what's going on in our lives, but it gives us perspective of what is going on in our lives.

I like to call this an eternal perspective. And so when I'm struggling with things, or I have issues with my boss, or things like that, I like to ask myself, in light of eternity, how much does this actually matter?

[19:42] Because we can make the small things such a big deal, the arguments with the co-workers, or whatever it is, we become so all consumed by it. But when we ask ourselves, in light of eternity, does this actually really affect me?

Majority of the time, the answer is, it actually affects me far less than I imagined it would. Because what I'm going towards is something so much greater. There is so much more purpose.

And so sometimes in the midst of whatever we're going through, we just need to remind ourselves of that. As we were waiting in the line, as the end opens up, we say, we can see what we're going towards.

Yeah, there's still zigzags. Yeah, we still, but at least we know where it ends. And the ride was, don't wait an hour. Honestly, it was, I'm not exaggerating.

I think it was a 20-second ride. Like, seriously, 20 seconds. 26 seconds. Yeah, it, it's not worth the hour wait.

[20:48] But as we were waiting in line, and as it opened up, we felt hopeful again. But as believers, we have the privilege of knowing where we're headed towards. And if we don't believe, you have the opportunity to know where you are headed towards, and the hope that comes along with that.

And so I don't know what you're walking through today. I know for probably all of us, life isn't perfect, and we all have things we're dealing with and walking through and maybe feeling hopeless about.

And so I just, I wanted to encourage you with that. That in the midst of your waiting, no matter how long the wait is, there's a God who wants to strengthen you and encourage you and get you through it.

that in the midst of your troubles, in the midst of not knowing how to move forward, if you can move forward or what tomorrow looks like, there is a God who says, I am with you always.

Always. No matter what you've done, no matter what you're doing or what you will, I am with you always. And then, in light of eternity, let's remember that.

[22:02] What is our eternal perspective? What are we going towards? What are we running towards? We're going to close with a song. I think we'll get James to close with a song.

But the last verse I want to read for you is Lamentations. Jeremiah, he wrote this and he's in the midst of seeing destruction all around him.

The temple, Jerusalem, is falling around him and he says, it's Lamentations 3, verse 22 to 24. He says, but this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore, I hope in him. And so let's remember that our hope isn't found in the stuff of the world, but it's in confidence that God will fulfill his promises.

[23:08] And so today, let's say, Lord, you are my portion and I put my hope in you. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your goodness and your faithfulness in our lives. we thank you that in the midst of our waiting and our anticipation of Christmas and what is to come and just the waiting in our lives and what's to come in our lives, that you are there with us and you are carrying us through. I pray that today we would be strengthened, we would be encouraged, that you would renew our hope in you, that we wouldn't look to the things of this world to satisfy, but that we would look to you to satisfy those longings within us.

Give us people around us to do this life with. Strengthen us today, Father. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.