

Topic	He is Near
Reference	Matthew 3:1-12
Date	8 December 2019
Speaker	Pastor Leon Lim

I came very disoriented, very tired and then I think the whole worship service just led me into the presence of God, to know that he is here to speak to you today and I believe that because I have been preparing this message for a while now and I have been going over and over again because partially I am not sure, I felt a great sense that God is trying to say something to church but I am not sure what it is and now I am so clear in my heart and I hope I would be able to make it clear to you, what God really wants to speak. And it was very clear to me also that many may not get it but there are some of you that He wants to speak to very specifically today. This message may not be for everyone, but it is important for some of us today. So we are going to talk about Christmas today.

The first thing that struck me today when I came in was, I saw two candles lit up today. For you I don't know whether it is meaningful to you or not, but to me it is very meaningful. Because there are four weeks of advent and each candle is being lighted and there is the fifth candle that is lighted on Christmas and it always remind me that hope is coming.

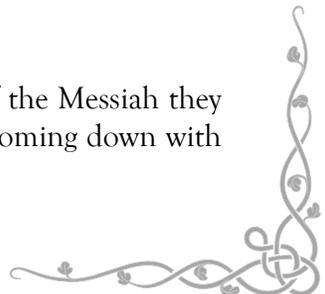
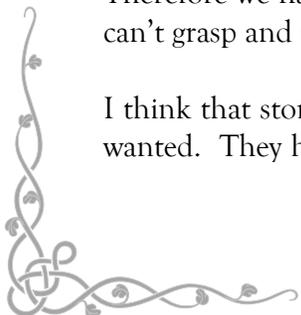
My favorite thing during Christmas to do is to watch a Christmas movie. My favorite Christmas movie of all time is Home Alone. I always laugh at the same things, I don't know why, it never grows old, why does this movie mean so much to me. It means so much to me because this is about a naughty boy who was left at home during Christmas and the parents went away and there were these two robbers trying to rob the home and this naughty boy thought of all ways to trick them and finally of course the end of the story is that the family came home and there was a great reunion. This story always gave me hope because I felt like that naughty boy and then you know that Christmas will turn out alright anyway.

That's what I thought hope was. I had lots of hope in good things. I hope for really a new hand phone. The question is do we really hope for Jesus, do we really hope for peace. Christian hope is something that I think is grossly misunderstood in today's context and I want to talk to you about Christian hope for the first part of my sermon.

HE IS NEAR AND HIS PRESENCE BRINGS HOPE

The first thing is that most of us put hopes in a lot of different things. Recently three K-Pop stars have given up their lives and psychology says that when a person is depressed, it means that they don't see hope and the so the world has a definition of hope of something you hope for or that you see a future that you see you there is a tomorrow for example. One of the famous phrase is, the sun will always rise tomorrow. Therefore we have hope, but hope in human terms is always something or someone or something that we can't grasp and the moment those idols fall that is when we lose hope.

I think that story is somewhat like Israel's hope for the Messiah. They had a version of the Messiah they wanted. They had this idea that he is going to be this white light in shining armour, coming down with



his sword, slaying all the Greeks and the Romans and then making them like kings and queens and princess and then bring Israel into this glorious reign and all of them are going to be kings and queens and then all the gentiles will be their servants, the Samaritans will be their dogs.

At the moment Jesus into the picture he did not fit, it was like me opening the presents and I got chocolate, picture, book, which I don't want. The problem is we hope for certain things and Christmas movies actually do that. They form this kind of false hope for us actually. All these times and all these years that I have Christmas movies, they always try to form that Christmas is about something good. Now if we read the passage just now in Matthew and Isaiah, Christmas is about righteousness, it is about repentance. Yes it is about joy and peace at the same time, but not the joy and peace that we think it is.

Let me tell you a story. Me and my brother when my parents say they are going to go out, we were very happy because that means freedom. So we always ask the famous question, what time are you coming home because we want to know exactly how much freedom we have. So that is our hope and when they are gone we do all the things that we are not supposed to do. We do all kinds of funny things and then by the time that our parents are going to come home, all evidence is gone and sometimes we take the Christmas hope and Christmas coming like that.

Christmas is not just remembering his first coming but his second advent. Isaiah prophesized that our hope will rest in Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ these are the things that will give us hope. Let me summarize it in a chart:

Biblical Hope	Reality	Devil puts False Hope
1. Wisdom and Understanding	1. Foolishness and Stupidity	1. Intelligence and Reason
2. Counsel and Might	2. Dictatorship and Power	2. Democracy and Merit
3. Knowledge and Fear of the Lord	3. Falsehood and Anarchy	3. Intellect and Law
4. Righteousness and Faithfulness	4. Wickedness and treacherousness	4. Morality and Allegiance
5. Peace beyond our understanding	5. Indescribable cruelty and wars	5. World Peace
6. Glorious Signs	6. Pathetic Symbols	6. Human Symbols

False hope leads to a lot of suicides. In Singapore one of the highest suicide rates is amongst students, it is like they don't have any hope. When we put our hope in anything else except Jesus Christ it will fail us.

Let me tell you a story. I wanted to be a father at 21, I was very certain, so I had a relationship and I was ready to get married, was earning enough to get married and I was ready but somehow the relation never went on. So after 21, I kept chasing relationships because my hope was that I have 12 children. So I got married and my wife couldn't conceive, we went through all the things that are available and we put our hope in medical science. We moved back to Malaysia because they say you are too stressed in Singapore

and I would tell you the moment happened and I realised that I might not be able to have kids, it shattered me. I lost hope to live.

One of the reasons is this, I have a niece and she was born on Christmas. I met her once on Christmas and after that I never met her again until this year. She is now 9 years old and I didn't know who she was. The long story short it was very nasty marriage, my brother had and so my parents actually kind of lost hope. They love children. Their first grandchild they never got to meet, so I have kind of felt like that hope was placed on me as the older son and this older son take so long to get married. Finally got married, cannot have children, tried for so many years still didn't have children and I thought I failed my parents. I put my hopes in all these kind of things and it devastated me. I didn't realise that all this time the longing in my heart, I didn't put my hope on Jesus. He put this longing in me to have children, this innate desire and it was so bad that I was at the verge of a divorce. Because I just couldn't grasp life anymore. Cut the story short, we came back we just continued faithfully to endure and do what God has called us to do.

We came back to Malaysia from Singapore and everybody told us it was the most foolish thing, I am paid five times lesser than what I use to earn in Singapore and then I came back, I took a huge loan to do my doctors study and my master studies and people say you are crazy, you are not going to have a job, you are going to do this, I did that anyway because I know God asked me to study, I focused on what God asked me to do and then my wife so graciously because I was studying decided to take a job in a church to be a church administrator and in that church they wanted to start a ministry for children.

We signed up with a lot of adoption agencies but it was kind of hard also because she is Singaporean and I am Malaysian, not all the local want to give us and then on the same time there is a rule in Malaysia that only after five years of not having children you can start to apply. So we just met the five-year deadline and we were applying everywhere and we were trying very hard to adopt and at the same time still trying as parents to have our own children, but after a while I was also giving up hope in adopting, it was like just so difficult. So one day I was going to the drudgery of the norms of everyday life and I pick up a phone call that says, "Are you Pastor Leon?" and I said, "yes it is me". "We have been trying to call for your wife for months but we are not being to get to her. We actually have a child that we think we would like to adopt. Would you still want to adopt because tomorrow is the interview and we have not been getting to your wife". Of course, I straight away jumped and said "yes". So certainly my eyes sparkled again, hope filled me again.

But the moment I put the phone call down, God whispered to me in a very strange way. He said, "I am giving you a son". So I was very confident, we were doing all those things and anyway we decided we are not going to ask about the sex of the baby or about the mom. We went for the interview and they approved us to adopt a baby. I called my mother-in-law and told her that we are expecting a baby in one month and it was kind of exciting. My mother-in-law asked, is it a boy or a girl because I only want to buy presents that are correct. She said, I want to know. The agency called me and told me that it is going to be a boy. And I was wondering God, why a boy, what are you trying to say, why did you so clearly tell me it is a son. My boy is the first one who is going to inherit the entire Lim clan and he was adopted. See God had a story to tell me that when we are adopted to Christ, we inherit everything as a child of God and this boy was going to inherit everything. God choose an outsider to come in.

That story reminded me that adoption was always God's plan. I put my hope in my own intelligence, instead of the wisdom and understanding of God, instead of the counsel and might of God, instead of the knowledge and fear of the Lord, instead of who Jesus is I thought that children is something I want and I think a lot of us are like that. We put our hope in so many other things than Jesus Christ and I tell you this story because I want to tell you no matter how hopeless your situation is there is always hope in Jesus Christ. Some of you may not believe in Jesus Christ, let me tell you today, if you are going through any situation in your life and if you think there is no hope, there is. If you look at your marriages and you say, no hope to stay together, guess what there is hope.

I remember the day my son came, my father was going through some sort of depression, his ministry was failing, his health was failing, he was going to give up on living and when my son came he changed. We can see that drastic change in him because of hope and hope is a powerful thing. Hope is something we need, without this wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear, righteousness and faithfulness we cannot live. Without peace we cannot live and guess what the promise is that all this can be found in our saviour, Jesus Christ. That is the hope we have. Our hope is not in something, it is not in just someone but it is really someone who is greater than any other, the king of kings is Lord of Lords and he is Jesus Christ. So I have a question. Can Christians get depressed? Yes when we put our hope in something other than Christ. But if you put your hope in Christ you will never get depressed. I learned that lesson the hard way.

So then the same thing happened, I want 12 kids. Three years already, we have been applying again then I started to lose hope again and then my girl came just six weeks ago. To God be the glory. So I am going to tell the testimony in this church until maybe in 12 years' time I have 12. I don't know what God has but my hope is in him not in my 12 children now. The more he gives me, the more I know that he is a good God. If he takes away he is still a good God and I hope that Christian hope will anchor this church and this Christmas when you see Jesus Christ you will know that my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest fame but wholly trust in Jesus.

HE IS NEAR – HIS PRESENCE CALLS FOR REPENTANCE:

This is something that most people don't talk about. Without repentance there is no hope. Most people only understand repentance as confession. Yes sin destroys our relationship with God but it also destroys our relationship with each other and that's why we are asked to confess to God and each other because confession is good to heal the horizontal and vertical relationships. It is very vital. But repentance is not just about confession. The problem today is that our Christian repentance in most places is not real repentance and let me tell you why because statistic shows the divorce rates in church and outside of the church is same. How can that be if there is true repentance, I don't understand? Statistics show that pornography in and outside the church is the same.

Repentance is when you are walking on the destruction way and you turn around and you walk to Christ and then I don't turn back. Most of us describe the Christian walk as taking one step forward two steps back, you know we keep going like that, but I don't believe in that. I believe Christian hopes keeps us moving forward and the important thing is, as we are going through this season of remembrance, this

whole season globally in the churches they are going through the same passages, we are highlighting the story of John the Baptist.

John was supposed to prepare the way for Jesus. Before coming of Jesus, John preached on repentance. Most of the time we think about Christmas, we think about this lovely-lovely feeling, everybody love each other, is great to give, is more blessed to give than to receive, I heard all these clichés but I have never heard a sermon preached during Christmas about the call of repentance. Christmas is about repenting and getting ready for our saviour to come. Christmas is acknowledging that we put our hope in things that are not supposed to be our hope and coming back to Christ saying, you are our only hope. Are you doing that this season, are you focusing on him or are you still looking back and then say, wow quite nice behind there.

Repentance is not just about inward. When I look backwards I need to repent and keep my eyes on God. There needs to be an outward manifestation of it. There is a story about Albert Johnson. He confessed bank robbery from a Baptist pulpit. The story goes like that, at 19 he joined two man in robbing in bank and the case was closed after two other convicts were killed in an auto crash. So that means there was a car that crashed and there were two ex-convicts inside, so they suspected them to be the robbers. So he got free. He was sure that he is never going to be caught again. He married a Christian girl and pretended to be a Christian before her, she knew nothing of his past crime. Then someone send him a track in an email and says, God's plan for salvation. Reading it he noticed that one of the Bible verses said, whoever shall came on the name shall be saved.

This struck to him, he could be forgiven and his consciousness set free. He knelt down and prayed and accepted Jesus Christ. His life changed. He stopped the lifelong habit of lying and after much thought in prayer he decided he was going to confess his crime. Now I don't know about you but to make a public confession of a crime over pulpit takes guts and he did it. His confession became such news that all the television newscasters and newspaper put as their headlines even in Canada. On Sunday morning in a Baptist Church Albert Johnson stepped up to the pulpit and revealed to the congregation that the day before he make this public confession he went to the district attorney and confessed his role in the crime. I thought about the bank robbery many times. I was a teenager when the crime occurred. I prayed about it and asked the lord to give me an answer. It seemed that he would give me only one answer that I should give myself up. Johnson also revealed that he had borrowed money to repay the bank his share of the stolen funds.

In the end he was set free, although he chose to repay the stolen funds and all those kind of things, I think what is really remarkable is that today Albert Johnson is a manager of a service station and the father of three admiring children and he is serving as a layman in his church. See, this is a picture of true repentance. He didn't have to confess it and that confession didn't just say, Oh I am sorry for the bank robbery but guess what I wish I escape all the consequences of it. His hope was not in what he can do but who his God is and God set him free. I think we as a church needs to repent like never before in this Christmas. If we have put our hope in something else, this is the season to put our hope in Christ again.

Is my hope this Christmas in Jesus Chris?

HE IS NEAR, HIS PRESENCE BRINGS JOY AND PEACE.

Romans 15:13

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

Christian hope is like this, the Holy Spirit is the source. It starts with joy and peace that comes from the Holy Spirit then we have abundance in hope then in Romans it talks about that you can endurance then can encourage each other then you get joy and peace again and then it is like this cycle that should not end. Now the problem with Christian peace is this, we have joy and peace, we are bound in hope and then it stops there. Some of us endure, some of us don't. Now endurance is one thing, why we have testimony time in church because it is supposed to be encouragement. When I shared to you about my situation, it encourages you to know that if you cannot have children you have hope. That's how Christian hope supposed to work but it always fall short on one of these areas, because this cycle is not complete most of the time and I want to encourage you this season, let this cycle flow in your families, in your situations, in your offices, wherever you go, don't just get the joy.

Joy and peace is not something to be grasped and feel good. Paul says that in every situation we can rejoice and be glad in it, why, not because I have this positive mindset that I can think well for myself. It is because my hope is that Jesus Christ has died, has paid at all and no matter how bleak the situation looks like I have hope. So the Holy Spirit gives me joy to know that and my two children will always remind me that I should never put my hope in anything else and I hope for you to, when you see my two children as they grow up in this church, it will remind you to put your hope in Jesus Christ. Don't worry if they are going astray, don't worry if people make wrong choices, God will never let them go, put your hope in Christ, pray for them, get on your knees. We know that our God has hope.

In closing let me go back to a story. A young man was returning home to be married. He was in the army but he was sent home earlier than expected. So he was to return home and be married. He did not notified his bride to be because he wanted to surprise her. He decided to give her a surprise. He loved her devotedly and work very hard to save up, to purchase a home for her. It was about midnight when he arrived and when he came near the house that he bought for her, he saw its all lighted up and he came closer and he heard music, still nearer he saw dancing, finally window through the window he saw his bride to be dancing in embrace with another man. His heart sank within him and he went away never to return.

If Jesus came today where would his bride be, dancing with false hope or waiting in hope for him to return. Going back to the story about me and my brother, we always knew when our parents are coming back. My friends, we don't know when Christ is coming back. Are we dancing with Christ in hope this Christmas or are we putting our hope like me in a hand phone or something else.