

A SAVIOR IS BORN

Part 5: It's Time to Capture the Moment!
Luke 10:38-42

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Words of Encouragement Days 134-139



Hope is a powerful force in the human heart. In fact, **Hope** is *THE* essential ingredient for an abundant life, the kind of life that Jesus promised us. It's essential. We need **HOPE** and the good news is **THERE IS HOPE!**

The first Christmas gift brought the greatest **HOPE** of all — a Savior - to people who needed it most. Everyone could use more **HOPE** - You, me, family, neighbors, friends, those you know slightly and those you haven't even met yet. Need some **HOPE** this Christmas? Do you want to know how to share a word of **HOPE** with those around you? Join us online each Sunday to discover how to open God's gift of **HOPE** this Christmas.

This Week's Memory Verse:

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.
Colossians 3:2

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 134

“And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.” Hebrews 10:21-23

MISMATCHED CANDLES

I grew up attending a traditional church with a tall steeple that elegantly pierced the sky. We rose to sing hymns and were told to “please be seated” when we were done singing. In the weeks leading up to Christmas, a “member of the congregation” would be called upon to light the Advent candle. I don’t know if the pastor explained the significance of the season of Advent and the lighting of the candles. I was young - and distracted by the fact that the pink Advent candle looked so out of place. Surely, the church could have taken some money out of the offering plate to make sure that the candles matched! Three purple candles and one somewhat abruptly pink one threw my aesthetic sense off kilter. Imagine my surprise when I later discovered that churches across the globe seemed to have severely limited candle budgets and a defunct aesthetic sense. (Ahem). Yeah, the pink candle was intentional.

The pink candle. After some research, I discovered that it represented the joy of the season. But what comes before it are purple candles symbolizing love, hope, and preparation. Yes, Advent is a time of rejoicing, but it is also about preparing our hearts through repentance. Without repentance, our joy is muffled, a washed-out version of what it could be. As we continue the season of

Advent, let us come before Him with repentant hearts, preparing the groundwork for the joy that will flood our souls as we celebrate not only His birth, but look forward to His coming again!

TODAY’S PRAYER

Lord, so often I tend to ignore my sin and sweep it under the carpet. Today, in this season of preparation, help me to offer my heart up to You in repentance. Help me, Lord, to be completely honest with you. Clean my heart out of all sin and anything that separates me from You. Thank You for the joy of the season and for the incredible privilege of sharing in that joy because You restore all joy! In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 135

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." Psalm 46:10-11

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

"I don't want a Christmas you can buy.
I don't want a Christmas you can make.
What I want is a Christmas you can hold.
A Christmas that holds me,
remakes me, revives me.
I want a Christmas that whispers, Jesus."
--Ann Voskamp

I want a Christmas that holds me. Not the activity of Christmas, but the *person* of Christmas. In the midst of the frenzy, I pray for moments of stillness where I can hear Jesus whisper.

We all know that often we most need a vacation when we've just had one! We seem hard-wired to pack it in, do as much as possible, expend, expend, expend. Scripture, however, tells us of a different way. It is a way we aren't often taught, especially in Western society where achieve, achieve, achieve is the motto. It may go contrary to our natural bend after years of education and hard work have instilled the opposite in us. But it is a principle that when, if followed, is meant to propel us to be all God made us to be. That call is to BE STILL and know that He alone is God. (Psalm 46:10)

In Isaiah 30:15, we are reminded that in repentance and rest is our salvation, in quietness and trust our strength. Do you want to be known as a person who exhibits a godly strength? Do you want to live a life of peace in the midst of the storms of life? Want to know how best to reflect Jesus to a hurting world? Then be still and know that He is God.

This Christmas season, make time and carve out those 'be still' moments. You often have to be intentional about doing so because they just don't leap up and shout, "Here I am, one of your 'be still' moments!" No, you have to *make time* for them and *make room* for them. Without them, you and I will be running on fumes. This week, perhaps even today, give yourself permission to rest with Him. Allow Him to lead you beside quiet waters. Let Him restore your soul.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, We live in a world of non-stop doing. When I consider the verse found in Isaiah 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God," I realize many times, perhaps most days, I've forgotten how to be still. Help me not to think of busyness as a measure of my worth, but to realize how vital rest is to my ability to be who You created me to be. Thank you for your gift of rest. This Christmas, help me to hear Jesus in the quiet moments. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 136

“God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.” Ephesians 2:8-10

GIVING OUT OF GRATITUDE

"**BAH** Humbug." The phrase rang out from the tape recorder. I was about 10 years old, listening to an audio book I'd received as my Christmas present. The book on tape was about a mean old guy named Ebenezer Scrooge who didn't like Christmas one bit. You may recall it was written by the somewhat well-known author, Charles Dickens. I followed along in my book, images of the hook-nosed Scrooge in his nightshirt indelibly etched in my mind. In my 10-year-old opinion, Scrooge seemed beyond hope. How could anyone hate Christmas? But then came the heartwarming turnaround. The guy who bah-humbuged Christmas woke up a redeemed man, full of love and goodwill and secretly sent a turkey to the poor-but-joyful Cratchit family. Christmas became about compassion.

Maybe you and I are not grouchy old Scrooges, but if we stop long enough, we can see areas in our lives where we could use some transformation. We need the kind of transformation that comes from God who is always working to change us from the inside out. The need for transformation is often evident in the way we give to others. So often, our Christmas good works are on the outside - we write a check, we fill a shoe box to ship to

underprivileged kids, sponsor a meal at an orphanage, and so on. All of those are wonderful things, but without a transformation from its-all-about-me to I-want-to-give-God-glory, those good works become meaningless.

This season, let us pause and use some time to reflect on the intention behind our giving. What is the reason we give to others? Is giving to others just another activity, something we do because it is Christmas and we are supposed to give to others? Or is it done as a response to how much God has done for us? Does our gratitude to God spill over into our giving so that we can't help but bless others? When we ponder the One who gave it ALL, we will give from a place of gratitude.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, If I pause long enough to truly examine myself, I realize that I may, at times, forget the reason I give to others. In my fast-paced, high-demand world, the reason or way I give to others may become routine, and I can easily give in a way that lacks feeling or a heart of gratitude for all You have done for me. When those times come, remind me in Your gentle way to stop and examine my heart and if my giving falls into a category that is less than praise-worthy, I pray for a heart transformation so that my giving is again filled with an attitude of gratitude for ALL that I have received from You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 137

“And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.” Luke 2:4-7

A LONG HARD JOURNEY

YEARS ago, I had the opportunity to hike Sleeping Bear Dunes near Ludington, Michigan. Alongside the mountain was a sign that reminded people with certain physical conditions not to attempt to hike up the hill due to how steep it is but to wait at the base for their companions to return. I hiked up the massive, steep, often challenging hill with my family, and then, after two hours of climbing uphill, we hobbled back down. The journey down was exhausting for my untrained, most-comfy-in-PJs-watching-Netflix body.

The account in Luke 2 tells a story of a different kind of journey – the one that Mary and Joseph made from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Considering historical accounts of the time period and the not-so-smooth terrain, we know that the journey was grueling. It spanned 90 miles and crossed over the rugged hills surrounding Jerusalem. Did they carry enough food and water for the journey which probably took days to complete? Did they wear heavy clothes to protect themselves from the inclement weather in the harsh Judean winter? Where did they sleep along the way? And what about Mary? Most women have difficulty sleeping during the last month of pregnancy even when resting on a comfy, plush mattress so imagine travelling and sleeping in unknown quarters. We don’t

know too many details of their journey, but when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, probably overwhelmed and bone tired, there was no warm welcome awaiting them.

Perhaps this past year has been full of good surprises along the way. Thoughts of those surprises are a great way to end this year. Maybe, however, you may feel like your journey this last year has been grueling. You weren’t ready for the onslaught of disappointment or broken relationships or shattered dreams. Yet you plodded on ahead as you had little choice. Maybe you were alone and overwhelmed and people shut you out.

If your year was disappointing, don't let those feelings envelope you. Do you remember what happened the morning after Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem. According to Luke's account of the birth of Christ, with the cry of a newborn baby Mary and Joseph’s lives were forever changed. Yes, the journey was incredibly hard – until the Prince of Peace quietly invaded their world. He can do the same for you. Give Him the broken pieces, your shattered dreams, your wounded heart. Psalm 30:5b reminds us that, "weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, You know the journey I’ve been on. You are the God of the universe, but You also know my thoughts from afar. I pray that this Christmas season will be a time of healing for me. I ask that You will invade my thoughts and my heart with a peace that is not based on my circumstances, and grant me a bubbling-over joy to fill my heart this Christmas. Thank you for loving me so much! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

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Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 138

“That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.” When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.” Luke 2:8-16

OH HOLY NIGHT

O Holy Night. That is a song guaranteed to bring you goosebumps. I don’t know much about music, but the range of notes sung in that song lends itself to an emotional outpouring. However, more than the notes, more than the singer, or even the lyrics, our hearts are bound to skip a beat when we take time, take a moment to ponder that Holy Night. Consider for a moment all that changed for mankind on that one Holy Night. For years, the Jews had waited for the promised Messiah. Suddenly, after 400 years of silence, God broke through the quiet with pronouncements to Zachariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, he sent the best rehearsed host of angels found in all of heaven to some shepherds, he caused magi to pack up some very expensive gifts and start off for an unknown destination, and he placed one of the brightest stars in the sky. God’s birth announcement was as

creative as it was simple. A manger, an innkeeper and his family, a hillside, a donkey, all were used by God to prepare for the gift of his son.

When God chose to become man, he chose to do that knowing what lay ahead. It would not be pleasant – there would be rejection, betrayal and, finally, a cruel death. Yet because the world lay pining, because it yearned for a Savior, he chose to pour out his life so that, at the perfect time, the Savior was born.

There’s only one reaction we can have to all of this. **“Fall on your knees,” the song majestically calls to us. And that’s all we can do,** fall before Him in complete humility and bow before Him in absolute awe and complete surrender. There’s simply nothing we can do but respond in worship.

TODAY’S PRAYER

Lord, When I think about the night of the Savior’s birth, I stand amazed. No detail was missed by You as you prepared to give the greatest gift ever given to mankind. What a glorious night, a holy night, a divine night. Long lay the world in sin and error pining – until Your Son appeared. I marvel at that grace, at that unconditional love, and respond in simple worship. You are worthy of all praise and glory. Hallelujah! In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

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Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 139

"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity, The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!" Isaiah 9:6-7

THE BREAKTHROUGH

COUNTDOWNS are used for many things. We count down the days until a special event - the last day of school, the days we have to wear braces, the start of something new, or a date we anticipate. Imagine waiting 400 years as the Israelites did for the coming of their Savior. Anticipating his arrival, as foretold by the prophets, can't you hear them counting down the time until the day when they would say, "**TODAY** is the day. The countdown has led to this moment. The Breakthrough has **FINALLY** arrived!" Imagine waiting 40 years, let alone 400 years, for something. To help put it in perspective, just before December 1st this past year, many of us probably made lists, we took inventory of baking supplies and decorations needed, and a plan was developed. Then it was off to the races as we counted down, from 25 to 1, the days leading up to Christmas. As December 25th grew closer, some of us may have been in a slight panic, wondering how we would get everything on our lists done in time as each day seemed shorter than the one before!

Fortunately, as we walk this journey of the Christmas season, stopping to marvel at the mystery of God becoming man, we are reminded that we do not have to get it all done. Because He did.

He came. He lived. He died. He rose again. "**It is finished,**" he declared. **He got it all done. Because He knew we couldn't.**

Despite our best efforts, we come up short, far from the perfection required by God. We cannot *make* ourselves perfect and holy, one-hundred percent of the time, no matter how hard we try. Only His grace makes it possible. *Only* His grace. So, He broke through. He broke through the darkness. He broke through the hopelessness. He broke through the bondage.

He brought light. He brought hope. He gave us the best gift of all – Himself.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You for sending Jesus to be my Rescuer and Redeemer. He, alone, paid the necessary price to reconcile us to You. Although it is so hard to comprehend, He did this because You longed to have a relationship with us, and so, He became my ransom. Father, I can't begin to fathom the depth of Your Love. Thank You for Christmas. Thank You for Jesus! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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