**B.C. (Before Christmas) – Week 3 – Jeremiah: A Vision of Hope**

**Message Big Idea**: In Jesus, we find hope for the future that changes our present.

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 33:14-16, Luke 2:4-7, 2 Corinthians 5:21

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**Introduction: Christmas Hopes**

*(Series Graphic)* Is there anything like that anticipation as a kid that leads up to Christmas morning? The hope of getting that thing you’ve been dreaming of for so long? Dropping those subtle, or maybe not so subtle, hints to your parents like, “I hope I get *(blank)* for Christmas! My dreams would come true!”

There were so many things I hoped for as a child in the 80s/90s. You know, back when toys were toys! Anybody with me on that?

For example, I remember the Christmas when all I wanted was a real, actual Tonka Truck:

*(Picture of Tonka Truck)*

I still remember the excitement when I opened it up and felt the 45 pounds of an actual metal truck to play with! Now it wasn’t rusty when I first opened it, but my parents thought ahead and also included a tetanus booster shot with the gift, so I was covered.



Or how about the year I spent the fall dreaming of getting a Talkboy:

*(Picture of Talkboy)*

Anyone remember these things? These were made popular by one of the best movies of all time, Home Alone 2. After I received that for Christmas, I remember recording voice memos on this thing about how to protect our house if robbers ever came.

There is that one gift that got away though. To this day, I still hope for a Gameboy:

*(Picture of Gameboy)*

Just look at those graphics on that 2 ½ inch screen! Even though I already had a Nintendo, I wanted the ability to play Super Mario Brothers on the go. To my dismay, I never found one under the tree. I’ll still drop subtle hints to my parents about wanting this, so maybe this is the year!

When it comes to Christmas gifts, sometimes we get what we hope for and sometimes we don’t. “Hope” can be a vulnerable word, can’t it? And maybe when it comes to Christmas gifts, it’s not that big of a deal. You survived not getting that toy. But hope feels a lot more vulnerable when it comes to the bigger things in life.

That’s why we say things like, “Don’t get your hopes up” when it comes to applying for that job, wanting that house, or seeing a relationship form. Some of us try to suppress our hopes to avoid being let down. But it’s tough to live, or even make it through one day, without hope.

And yet, most of us have experienced a time in our lives when we felt so discouraged or defeated about some area of our lives that it was a struggle to have hope. That’s how \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ felt.

**Video: Couple Part 1**

Discouragement is something every one of us is familiar with in some area of our lives. There have been times in my life… sentence or two. Maybe you are in that place right now? Today my hope is that you will come to see that there is hope…a powerful hope for the future that changes our present.

**Introduction to Jeremiah**

*(Series Graphic)* Over the past few weeks we’ve been learning about the story of God and the people of Israel in our series, “B.C., Before Christmas.” During this time, God sent prophets to speak words of wisdom, instruction, and warning. These prophets had names like Micah, Isaiah, and Malachi. And today we’re going to hear from the prophet Jeremiah.

Around the year 627 BC, when Jeremiah would have been about 16, God came to him and said,

**“I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb.  
    Before you were born I set you apart  
    and appointed you as my prophet to the nations.” -** **Jeremiah 1:5**

What an incredible encouragement to hear from God, right? I’m sure Jeremiah was amped up from this, and we should be too!

Jeremiah would grow up and fulfill the call God placed on his life. But check this out, he’s sometimes referred to as “the weeping prophet.” What a horrible nickname! He received this nickname because of the difficulties he would encounter during the time of Israel’s impending destruction. Jeremiah had more reasons than most people to be discouraged. Here’s the background to his story.

**Video: Historical Background of Jeremiah**

**Word: Jeremiah 33:14-16**

Jeremiah had every reason to be discouraged, but there on the floor of a dark, damp prison cell, he proclaims some of the most powerful words of hope found in all of the Old Testament. Here are some of his words from Jeremiah 33:

**“’The day will come,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will do for Israel and Judah all the good things I have promised them.**

**In those days and at that time**

**I will raise up a righteous descendant from King David’s line.**

**He will do what is just and right throughout the land.**

**In that day Judah will be saved,**

**and Jerusalem will live in safety.**

**And this will be its name:**

**“The Lord Is Our Righteousness.”’” -Jeremiah 33:14-16 NLT**

Through Jeremiah, God tells his people, “Better days are coming!” The destruction and devastation all around them won’t have the last word. God promises that he will raise someone up from King David’s line who will rescue his people.

This is repetitive

Even in the dire circumstances Jeremiah finds himself in, God gives him a vision for a better future. There is hope! And that hope would be realized through a specific person… a descendant of the greatest king Israel ever had… King David.

**Jesus is Born**

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of this Savior. We can read about his coming in the second chapter of Luke:

**“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.” -Luke 2:1**

It’s now almost 600 years since the time of Jeremiah, and the Roman emperor rules the world. He calls for a census, which in that day required every person to return to their ancestral hometown. Realize, this was no easy feat! In that day you couldn’t jump on an airplane or road trip in your SUV. This meant a long journey on foot.

**“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.” -Luke 2:4-5**

Joseph is a descendant of King David so he and a very pregnant Mary have to make the 85-mile trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David’s origins.

Now, if you’ve been paying attention as we’ve gone through this series, you might point out that Joseph isn’t really Jesus’ biological father. As we talked about last week, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. However, Joseph was the man chosen to be the earthly father figure in Jesus’ life. Being born into Joseph’s family meant Jesus would be considered as being from the ancestral line of David. So Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem, and…

**“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.” -Luke 2:6-7a**

Jesus, the Savior, the one Jeremiah proclaimed has come to rescue his people!

So what does it actually mean that Jesus came to rescue us?

**“The Lord is Our Righteousness”**

Well, let’s turn back to Jeremiah. At the end of the prophecy we read earlier, Jeremiah proclaims:

**“And this will be its name:**

**‘The Lord Is Our Righteousness.’” -Jeremiah 33:16b NLT**

~~In the original Hebrew, this name is~~ *~~(add)~~***~~“Yahweh Tsidqenu”~~** ~~(pronunciation:~~ [~~https://www.howtopronounce.com/tsidqenu/~~](https://www.howtopronounce.com/tsidqenu/)~~) or “I AM your Righteousness.” Jesus came to be our righteousness. But what does that mean?~~

What does it mean that Jesus is our righteousness?

Or if you’re from California, “It’s righteous, man!” “Righteous” is not a word most of us use in our everyday conversations. If we do hear it, it’s often used to describe someone acting “holier than thou.” Maybe like a person who takes pride in being the ultimate “goodie-two-shoes.” Anyone willing to admit you tried to be a “goodie-two-shoes” when you were growing up? Yeah, but you and I both know you had your moments, right? I bet your parents could tell some stories! For most of us “righteous” is something we’d say we are not.

So what does this word “righteousness” actually mean?

In Scripture, the word “righteousness” is a relational term. In other words, a righteous person is someone who lives completely right with God. Someone who never does or says or even thinks anything that could cause a relational rift with God.

The obvious problem with this… it’s impossible! The Apostle Paul rightly describes our predicament:

**“There is no one righteous, not even one.” -Romans 3:10**

We might get things right some of the time, but no one gets everything right all of the time. None of us are “righteous.”

But Jeremiah tells us that one will come whose name will be *(Jeremiah 33:16b NLT)* “**The Lord is Our Righteousness.”** Jesus is the one person who walked this earth who got it right all of the time. He is the one person who never did or said or thought anything that would cause any kind of relational rift with God the Father. He is the only righteous human being who has ever lived.

And here is the incredible reality that lies at the heart of the Christian faith. Paul writes:

**“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” -2 Corinthians 5:21**

When Jesus died on the cross, he took upon himself our unrighteousness, and in exchange, we received his righteousness! Just try to grasp how astounding this is! When we accept what Jesus did for us on the cross, we are declared righteous in God’s eyes! When God the Father looks at you, he sees a righteous person. You are fully and completely right with God!

So many of us think… but how can that be? There are so many things about my life that aren’t right. To that I’d say, you’re right. In yourself, you aren’t righteous. In myself, I am not righteous. But in Jesus, we are declared righteous.

The anchor of our hope is that we are right with God. This is the reason we have hope.

And do you know what that means? It means…

* No matter how discouraged I might be about some areas of my life…
* No matter how defeated I might feel in areas I struggle with…
* No matter how many times I have stumbled or fallen or lost my way…

I have hope. You have hope. In Jesus, we have hope.

* Hope that declares we are accepted as God’s sons and daughters.
* Hope that promises we are never alone.
* Hope that reminds us that there are always second chances.
* Hope that says no matter how dark the night, morning will come.
* Hope that is leading us to a place where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

In Jesus, we have a Savior who has rescued us from the destruction and devastation of this world and promises us a better future. Because of Jesus, no matter what we might face or feel in this world, we have hope of better days!

**Hope: Future and Present**

And this hope we have for the future can transform our present. When we really take hold of the hope that is ours in Jesus, it can change everything about how we walk through the situations and circumstances we face in the present.

There was a legendary study done at John Hopkins University that I think illustrates the power of hope perfectly. But first, I have to start off with a couple disclaimers. You know its going to be a good story when we have to start off with disclaimers!

* First, let it be known, no animals were harmed in the writing of this message.
* Second, this is a study using rats, and almost all of us scream when we see them anyway and want nothing to do with them. And…
* Finally, this study occurred during the 1950s when people didn’t know any better.

Everybody good with that? Ok, good ☺

There was an experiment at Johns Hopkins which was aimed to discover the power of hope. They wanted to see how animals could be affected by it, so they did a study using rats and water. Candidly, they wanted to see how long a rat could swim. At first, just putting the rat in water, they lasted an average of 10 minutes on their own before giving up. The university found that in the situation in which the rats had no hope, they literally gave up.

But then there was a tweak in the experiment. Using similar rats, they would instead lift them out of the water for a few seconds 2 or 3 times during those first 10 minutes. Check this out, by doing this, the rats would then last for more than 60 hours! The introduction of hope during those first 10 minutes gave the rats the ability to swim more than 100x longer than without it!

Tease this out more. What is a “life out of water” moment. In the middle of this hard thing, this is what God did for me. A few examples. The point of this, keep swimming! For those of you who feel like God is nowhere to be found. For those of you who feel like your situation is hopeless. For those who are angry, sad, or worried. There is hope and I want you to find it. This is not just about a pep talk, but real hope.

It’s a hope that overwhelmed professor, author, and theologian Henri Nouwen. He writes:

**“I have found it very important in my own life to try to let go of my wishes and instead to live in hope. I am finding that when I choose to let go of my sometimes petty and superficial wishes and trust that my life is precious and meaningful in the eyes of God something really new, something beyond my own expectations begins to happen for me.” - Henri Nouwen**

This is a hope that carries a power that goes beyond a desire for a change in circumstances, as real and painful as those desires might be. To “let go of our wishes” and to instead “live in hope.”

I really wanted that Gameboy. I really thought that’s what was going to make it the best Christmas ever! But really, that Gameboy was just a wish, not a hope. What really has stuck with me all these years is that each Christmas we would gather as a family and celebrate together. My parents hoped I would grow up to love Jesus and find the very real hope that he gives.

The hope Jesus offers us is a sure thing, something we can count on. It’s not just a wish. And that hope can transform our present.

**Video: Couple Part 2**

I love that story. Let me just say that I know the holiday season can be a time when stress can weigh heavily in a marriage and maybe this is an area where you are looking for hope this morning. I want to encourage you to do what \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ did… come to the *(Graphic)* Together Conference on February 8th, 2020 at our Yellow Box location. You can register now with the information on the screen. You might just find the hope that you’re longing for.

**Conclusion: Put Your Hope in Jesus**

For all of us, listen to these words from pastor Matt Woodley:

**“Hope is a vision for better days that changes us in the present.” -Matt Woodley, “A Look at Advent through the Old Testament”**

Today, if you find yourself discouraged by the circumstances of life, I want to challenge you… Put your hope in Jesus, better days are coming!

If you feel defeated by your struggles… Put your hope in Jesus~~, better days are coming~~!

If you are worn out from disappointments… Put your hope in Jesus, ~~better days are coming!~~

If you are tired from hitting dead ends… Put your hope in Jesus, ~~better days are coming!~~

Today, if you have lost faith in your marriage… ~~Put your hope in Jesus~~, better days are coming!

Today, if you are brokenhearted over your kids… ~~Put your hope in Jesus~~, better days are coming!

Today, if you feel overwhelmed with loneliness… ~~Put your hope in Jesus~~, better days are coming!

You are not alone!

You are accepted!

You are loved!

There are always second chances!

There is always light in the darkness!

There is always hope!

For at Christmas a Savior was born! He came to rescue us from the devastation and destruction of this broken world, and to give us a hope that will never perish, spoil or fade.

So put your hope in Jesus, better days are coming!

**Communion Idea**

The truth is, before Jesus, we were in a hopeless condition. The reason everything has changed is because of the Good News. Jesus restored our relationship with God to give us an eternal hope.

Paul says that:

**“You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don’t drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News.” – Colossians 1:21-23a**

Through an act of grace unlike anything ever before, we have access to the presence of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It’s his Spirit that lives in us, that moves us, that gives us joy, and that provides hope for what is to come.

It’s this truth that we can stand firmly in. Don’t drift away from that. Lets take communion as we stand firm in the hope and assurance of Jesus.