



## **Hope For the Hurting**

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—I want to invite you to open with me to Genesis 3. It's good to be together around God's Word. If you're exploring Christianity or have come with a friend or family member, we're so thankful you're here. We're really excited about the month of December at McLean, both for this giving emphasis—as we challenge each other to give generously at the end of the year—and also for Advent.

For those of you who may be new to Christianity or are exploring Christianity, Advent refers to the anticipated arrival or coming of someone significant. During the Christmas season, many followers of Jesus spend the weeks leading up to Christmas specifically thinking about His coming as explained in the Bible. That's what we're going to do, Lord willing, over the next four Sundays and then on Christmas Eve.

Today, we are giving out Advent guides that contain a verse or passage, along with a devotional thought and prayer, for each day leading up to Christmas as we contemplate the coming of Jesus. The devotional thoughts and prayers actually correspond to the "Pray the Word" podcast, so you can listen to that as well. The Advent guide includes activities for kids and families to do together and has different information about activities going on at all of our campuses leading up to Christmas Eve and the particular services times on those days.

All that to say, make sure to pick up one of these Advent guides and use it over these four weeks. Then each Sunday as we gather together, we'll dive into one of the texts that is a part of the devotional from that week—starting today with Genesis 3. This happens to be the first devotional on December 2<sup>nd</sup> in that guide.

As we head into this Advent season, let's address the question why do we hurt? Because we all hurt in a myriad of different ways. We hurt physically. We struggle with sickness and pain. Our bodies deteriorate. We hurt physically. We hurt emotionally. We struggle with anxiety, fear, depression, loneliness, worry, sadness, grief. We hurt relationally. We experience conflict, tension, division with friends, family, in marriage and divorce, in death. Hurting is a given in this world for all of us.

I know as I've been preparing this week, that many of you come in here hurting, some of you in all of those ways: physically, emotionally, relationally. But did you know that it's not always been this

way? There was a day when there was no hurt in this world—no physical hurt, no emotional hurt, no relational hurt whatsoever. In the beginning of creation, there was no hurt. There was perfect harmony between God and man and woman in the world. No such thing as anxiety or fear, sadness, worry, conflict, division—not even death.

But everything changed in Genesis 3. So I want you to read with me about the introduction of hurt into the world. Start in verse one:

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”<sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,<sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.<sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”<sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.<sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.*

*<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.<sup>9</sup> But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”<sup>10</sup> And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”<sup>11</sup> He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”<sup>12</sup> The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”*

*<sup>14</sup> The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”*

*<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”<sup>17</sup> And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”*

*<sup>20</sup> The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.<sup>21</sup> And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.<sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live*

*forever—”<sup>23</sup> therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.<sup>24</sup> He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*

There’s so much here; this is the saddest chapter in the Bible. Certainly there are other sad chapters to come, but they are all the effects of this chapter. What we learn here—the core truth in this chapter—is that hurt in this world is ultimately caused by sin in this world. We hurt in this world because of sin in this world. This means that if we’re ever going to understand hurt, if we’re ever going to have any hope of our hurt going away, then we need to understand sin. We need to figure out how to get rid of it. We need to realize that it’s not just sin outside of us or around us, because sin is inside each one of us.

### **The core of sin: we have questioned God**

So think with me about the core of sin in Genesis 3 and in every single one of our lives. We have all questioned God’s words. When it comes down to, “What is sin and how does it happen?” it started in Genesis 3 with questioning God’s word. The very first question in the Bible is found in verse one: “*Did God actually say...?*” Back in Genesis 2:16-17, God said, “*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” But then by the beginning of Genesis 3, God’s command had been reduced to a question.

One writer said, “For the first time ever, the deadliest spiritual force was covertly smuggled into the world: the assumption that what God has said is subject to human judgment.” Let’s talk about what God has said and how we feel about it. Adam and Eve should have been suspicious. Well, first and foremost, they should have been suspicious of a talking snake. But they should have been all the more suspicious when they heard the adversary saying, “God told you a lie. He didn’t tell you the truth.”

The key here revolves around this tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Our first thought might be, “What’s so wrong with knowing the difference between good and evil?” But that’s not all this verse means when it talks about good and evil. This is not just a picture of knowing good and evil. This is about determining good and evil. In other words, the picture here refers to the ability to determine that which is good and that which is evil. So to eat from this tree would be to reject God as the One Who determines good and evil, assuming that responsibility for ourselves and saying, “I am the arbiter of what’s good and what’s not, not God.”

We see this all over our culture in a relativism that claims we each determine what is right and wrong for ourselves. If we disagree, then the one with the most power determines what is right and wrong. So we lust for, struggle for, fight for power. It’s not just in the culture around us. This is in our

hearts within us. We want to be the ones to determine what we think is right or wrong, what we feel is right or wrong—based on ourselves, not based on God’s Word.

### **The core of sin: we have doubted God’s love**

We question God’s Word and in the process, we have doubted God’s love. I want you to notice something really interesting in the serpent’s words. You’ve got to back up to Genesis 2:4. I want you to see throughout Genesis 2 that God is referred to as “the Lord God.” Look at verse four where the Bible says, *“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.”*

Two names for God, back to back. “LORD,” in all caps, is the covenant name for God. It’s basically a name that reveals God’s love for and goodness toward His people. Then the second name that’s used there—“God”—is *Elohim* in the original language of the Old Testament. This is a more common name for God—in a sense, a more generic name for God—that really illustrates His power, greatness and authority as Creator. So when you hear “LORD God,” picture both the goodness and the greatness of God together.

I want you to notice every time you see God mentioned this way in Genesis 2. The end of verse four is the first time.

- Verse five: *“When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land...”*
- Then you get down to verse seven, *“The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground.”*
- Verse eight, *“The LORD God planted a garden in Eden.”*
- Verse nine, *“Out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.”*
- Skip down to verse 18, *“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’”*
- Verse 19, *“Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field.”*
- Verse 21, *“So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man.”*
- Verse 22, *“The rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.”*
- Then you get to Genesis 3:1, *“The serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.”*

The picture we see over and over and over again is the goodness and the greatness of God. But then listen to the serpent’s temptation: *“He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden”?’”* He doesn’t use the name that refers to the goodness of God, but only that which refers to His power and greatness.

We get down to verse three and the woman replies, “*God said...*”—not the LORD God, but God. Verse four: “*But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God...’*”—not the LORD God. “*...God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God.*” Twice there in verse five..

Then it’s interesting. Once temptation and sin have occurred, then we get to verse eight: “*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God.*” Verse nine: “*The LORD God called to the man...*” and on throughout this chapter. Look at verse 13: “*The LORD God...*” Verse 14: “*The LORD God...*” Verse 21: “*The LORD God...*” Verse 22: “*The LORD God said...*” Verse 23, “*Therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden.*”

See this picture. What the Bible is teaching us here is that temptation at its core involves doubting the goodness and the love of God. The serpent was basically saying, “God is great. God is powerful, but He doesn’t love you. He doesn’t want what is best for you.” This is how every single one of us is tempted all the time. We are constantly tempted to think, “I know what is better for my life than God does. I know what is good for my life.” Satan tempts us in this way to say, “Oh no, I know what’s good. I know what’s better. I don’t need to trust God.

### **The core of sin: we have chosen our ways**

At the core of sin, it’s not just questioning God’s Word, it’s doubting God’s love. As a result of these things, we have all chosen our ways over God’s Word. This is the reason we hurt in this world. We see this in Genesis 3 and we see this in every single one of our lives. We question the Word of God; we doubt the love of God; we choose our ways over obedience to God’s Word. As a result we see the conflict from sin that affects all of our lives.

### **The conflict from sin: between us and God**

There’s conflict between us and God. In their desire to be like God, Adam and Eve actually found themselves separated completely from God. The effects of this are many. Think about this not just in Genesis 3, but in our lives. We feel guilt. In Genesis 3:7, they knew they were naked, exposed in their sin before each other and before God. There was a total loss of innocence here. For the first time, they felt the sting of their conscience. They knew they had done something wrong and in that one act, guilt was passed on to all of mankind.

We not only feel guilt, we also carry shame. In Genesis 2:25 there was no shame. By Genesis 3:8, they felt shame before each other and shame before God. Their shame led to blame. Eve blamed the

serpent, Adam blamed Eve—and not just Eve. In verse 12, Adam said, “The woman You gave me…” The audacity of Adam to blame God!

We carry shame, which leads to blame, then we experience fear. So the joy they felt in the presence of God in chapter two is now terror in chapter three. Up until that time they would have run to God. They would have rejoiced at hearing His voice. Now it’s the opposite. They’re running from Him and hiding. And they had a reason to be afraid, because God had said they would die. Before sin, man and woman enjoyed the presence of God with no guilt, no shame and no fear. After sin, they were hiding in guilt, covering themselves in shame and living in fear—emotions that every one of us is familiar with today. This is not just some old ancient story. This is real life for every one of us.

### **The conflict from sin: between each other**

As a result of sin, there’s conflict between man and woman and God; there’s also conflict between each other. As we read about God’s judgment upon Adam and Eve, it’s obviously not just the intimacy between God and man and woman that is lost here. The most intimate of all human relationships is also damaged. The pleasure of the union between a man and a woman in marriage would from then on be marked by pain, sorrow and the struggle for power.

I’m not going to ask for a show of hands, but has anyone ever experienced conflict in marriage? Or in other human relationships? Family, friends—no human relationships are completely perfect without conflict. Heather and I were talking about a parenting issue with one of our kids that I won’t go into detail on, but I said to her, “I don’t mean to be discouraging, but I’m a sinner, you’re a sinner, and this kid’s a sinner—which does not make for a good set-up.” It’s true. It’s no surprise we’re having a hard time.

### **The conflict from sin: between us and creation**

Sin brings conflict with each other and conflict between us and creation. Here in Genesis 3 we see the pain of childbearing and the curse on work—neither of which would be a reality if it were not for sin. Do you see this? All that was good in creation fell apart when man and woman defied the Creator.

### **The consequence of sin: immediate spiritual death**

This led to all the hurt I mentioned earlier: physical, emotional and relational, all leading to the ultimate consequences of sin. God had said, “If you eat of this tree, if you sin, you will surely die.” Here in this chapter we see a picture of immediate spiritual death. A man and woman once had a perfect,

unhindered relationship with God, but as soon as sin entered the world, that relationship was broken resulting in immediate spiritual death.

### **The consequence of sin: eventual physical death**

It was only a matter of time before that spiritual death would lead to physical death. If you look at the chapters that follow this, you see both of these themes. Genesis 4 shows the effect of sin, as one brother murders another. By chapter five we see a genealogy of names that is so foreign to the picture of Genesis 2. Almost every paragraph in Genesis 5 ends with the phrase, "...and he died. ...and he died. ...and he died." That's not the way it was designed to be. Our bodies were not originally designed to deteriorate and die. This is the effect of sin.

### **The consequence of sin: eternal spiritual death**

Immediate spiritual death, eventual physical death—then, if we physically die while spiritually separated from God, the inevitable consequence is eternal spiritual death. If we die separated from God, we will spend an eternity separated from Him. Yet we resist even that thought.

This has been and still is the ultimate lie from Satan. He's trying to sell it all across this gathering today in each of our hearts and all across this city. He's constantly working to convince men and women that there will never be any judgment for sin, that one day, when you die, you'll just go to some wonderfully happy place—or maybe you'll be reincarnated or just go out of existence. The ultimate lie that Satan persuades us with in all kinds of different versions is that there will be no eternal consequences for sin. But it's not true.

Listen to God's Word, not Satan's lie. Romans 6:23, "*The wages of sin is death,*" eventual, physical death—then eternal spiritual death, separated from God forever. In other words, the hurt we experience in this world with separation from God will become a hurt we experience for all of eternity in separation from God.

So is there any hope for the hurting? What is our hope? This is where I want you to see that right in the middle of the lowest point in the Bible, we find the first promise in the Bible. Genesis 3:15 is what Christians throughout history have called the *proto-euangelion*—the first gospel, the first good news. God says to the serpent in verse 15, "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*"

In the first part of this statement He's talking about offspring in general, but then He gets specific. God points to a time in the future when a son of Eve, a human being, will come and be bruised

by the serpent on the heel, but He will crush the serpent's head. This is the first promise in the Bible of the coming of the Advent of Christ.

Genesis 3:15 is what we celebrate at Christmas, that Promised One from Eve has come, born of woman, like us in every way, yet without sin. He never once questioned the Father's word. He never once doubted the Father's love and He never once chose His own way. Even in the face of death for our sin on a cross—a death He did not deserve to die—He prayed in the garden, “Not My will but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42). He willingly went to the cross where He paid the price of death. He died for sinners. His heel was bruised. But ladies and gentlemen, three days later He rose from the grave and He crushed the serpent's head. He conquered sin and Satan and death and the grave.

I know you're not supposed to read the end of the story from the very beginning. I get on to my kids all the time about this, when they read the first few pages of a book and the last few pages, then tell me, “That was a great book.” I tell them, “You didn't read the book.”

But that's what we're going to do today. I want you to turn with me to Revelation 20. I want you to see the end. I want you to see our hope. This is the promise in Genesis 3 of hope to come in Christ, as explained in Revelation 20. See these scriptures as bookends in the Bible. Especially if you're new to Christianity or exploring Christianity, here's the big picture. I want you to see hope that you can hold on to in a world of all kinds of hurt. Here's our hope: one day, Satan will be defeated. We have the promise in Genesis 3—now watch this in Revelation 20, starting in verse seven:

*<sup>7</sup> And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup> and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. <sup>9</sup> And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, <sup>10</sup> and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

There's a lot to unpack there, but the point is clear: Satan is going down. He will be defeated, finally and eternally. I want you to remember this, brothers and sisters. No matter how much hurt you ever experience from the effects of sin—sin in your life, sin in this world, or sin in others' lives that affects you—know this: one day Satan will be totally trampled and sin will be totally destroyed.

As we keep reading in Revelation 21, here's another picture:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be*

*no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*

There is coming a day when sin and all of its effects—all the emotional, relational and physical hurt in this world—will be gone. On that day, God’s creation will be restored to what it was designed to be. Continuing in verse five: *“And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’”* New heaven, new earth—now in perfect harmony with God, with each other, with the world around us. God’s creation will be restored. God’s people will be rescued.

Then in verse six: *“And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.’”* Hear these words in light of what we read in Genesis 3. Here is our hope.

### **Our hope: God seeks the guilty**

Think about what we talked about. We feel guilt and shame and fear. But what is our hope? Our hope is in this reality. Remember back in Genesis 3 when man and woman were hiding in the garden? What did God do? God came to them. This is our hope. In our sin, you and I run from God. We can’t face Him in all His holiness. What does God do? God comes running after sinners. It would be completely just for the holy God Whom we have sinned against to punish us in our sin. Instead, He pursues us with His love.

Christian, just think about your story. There was a day when you were running from God, you didn’t want to face Him and the God of the universe came running after you. He came to you to tell you He loves you. He opened your eyes to see your sin and to see the love of your Savior through Jesus.

I believe God has brought some of you to church today because God is pursuing you. There are some of you who have been running from God, some of you who have been indifferent toward God. Hear this good news today: the God of the universe is pursuing you. He has brought you here to hear this good news, that although you were guilty of sin against Him, He has sent His Son Jesus to cover over all your guilt, to forgive you of all your sin. He has come to you. This is so different from the way the religions of this world work. This is so different than the way we think, which is, “What do I have to do?”

I was having a conversation with a guy named Angel this last week. He was saying, “Yeah, I know I’ve got to do certain things in order to get into a relationship with God.” I told him, “No, Angel. I’ve got good news for you, man. It’s not about what you can do. God has come to you.”

I was thinking about when I was in eighth grade and was on the basketball team. I thought I had arrived. I was on the school team—until I realized I had kind of a unique role on the team. I had visions of glory, but I was on what I later called the “20-20-20 Club.” What that means is when our team was up

by 20 or down by 20, with 20 seconds left on the clock, that's when I was sent into the game. I was particularly needed in those moments to play a critical role at that time. Over the course of the season, I played a total of six minutes and 57 seconds. Not that anybody was counting.

That meant I had a lot of time to listen to the cheers from the crowd. There was one cheer the cheerleaders would do that went like this: "We are the Spartans and we are the best." Then they'd spell out S-P-A-R-T-A-N-S. So I came up with a cheer of my own, and along with another guy who was in the 20-20-20 club, we would cheer, "We are the Warmers and we warm the bench. W-A-R-M-E-R-S. We're bench-warmers with plenty of rest." That was our cheer.

I remember at the first game, when I didn't know this was the way the season would go, I thought, "I'm not starting, but I'll be in. Coach will want me in pretty soon." But for the first half he didn't put me in. I was thinking, "Maybe he forgot about me." So at halftime he said, "Everybody got in, right?" I told him, "I didn't get in yet, Coach." He said, "Okay." It's the second half and I'm waiting for my moment. He called me, "David, come on." I was crouching next to him as he was coaching, then he looked down at me and said, "Oh, no, no, no; not you. The other David." It was a rough season.

Throughout the whole season I was thinking, "How can I impress the coach? How can I get him to notice me?" That's how religion often works for certain people. They're thinking, "What can I do? What path do I need to take? What laws do I need to follow? What do I need to do in order to get God's attention?" We take Christianity and make it something it's not.

The whole point in Christianity is that we are running from God. There's nothing in us to impress Him, but He comes running after us. We don't have to impress this Coach—He loves us in our sin.

### **Our hope: God covers the shameful**

God seeks the guilty and God covers the shameful. Did you see this back in Genesis 3? God made clothing of animal skins to cover over man and woman in the shame of their sin. But how is that possible? In order for an animal skin to cover over man and woman's shame, what had to happen to that animal? That animal had to die. That is the first time death appears in the Bible, but it's not the death of man or woman; it's the death of a substitute whose death covers over the shame of sin.

So the stage is set for a story, where God would one day send His Son Jesus as a Substitute, Whose death would cover over the shame of our sin. Think of all the shame of your sin. It is totally covered by the sacrifice of Jesus. It's why later in Revelation 21:22 we read, "*I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*" See the mention of the Lamb here? That's a reference to Jesus. He's mentioned two more times in this last paragraph in Revelation 21 as the Lamb Who was sacrificed to cover over our sin. God covers the sins with the sacrifice of His Son, the spotless Lamb.

## **Our hope: God protects the fearful**

God seeks the guilty, He covers the shameful and God protects the fearful. Remember back in Genesis 3 when God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden? He kept them from going back in to eat from the Tree of Life. Why would that be bad? Think about it. In their sin, Adam and Eve were afraid of God. God protected them from spending eternity in that condition. It's the picture we see throughout the rest of Scripture of sinners fearing God because of the judgment they deserve from God. Even earlier in Revelation 6:16 we can see how people are crying out to God to keep them from His face, because they know the judgment they are due.

But now, because of Jesus—the Lamb of God—listen to Revelation 22. See if any of this imagery sounds familiar. This is the first mention of the Tree of Life since Genesis 3:

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb<sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.<sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.*

Next come five of the most beautiful words in all the Bible in verse four: *“They will see his face.”* Verse five, *“...and his name will be on their foreheads, and night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”* Ladies and gentlemen, one day there will be no more curse, no more hurt. There will be only healing. We will see His face and we will have no fear.

## **Our hope: Jesus will be praised**

This is our hope! One day Satan will be defeated, sin will be destroyed, God's creation will be restored and God's people—all who trust in Him to save them—will be rescued. And Jesus—the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the Lord of all—will be praised. Jesus will be praised! This is the One Whose advent, Whose coming, we celebrate at Christmas.

But even that's not the end of the story. Three times in Revelation 22 we hear these further words of hope:

- Verse 7, *“Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”*
- Verse 12, *“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.”*
- Verse 20, *“Surely, I am coming soon.”*

He came once and He's coming back. Ladies and gentlemen, to all within the sound of my voice, if you have never put your trust in Jesus, I urge you to turn and trust in Him. If you are not following Jesus, I urge you to decide to follow Jesus today, before it is too late.

To hurting men and women all across this church, I say, "Jesus is your only hope. In every hurt you have, Jesus is your hope. He alone can remove your guilt. He alone can cover your shame. He alone can protect you from all fear. When you trust in Jesus, when you love and worship Jesus, you have a hope that ultimately conquers every single hurt in this world. I want to say that again just to make sure this lands in your mind and heart and life, especially with whatever is going on in your life right now. When you trust and love and worship Jesus, you have in Jesus a hope that ultimately conquers every single hurt in this room.

You say, "What do you mean? Is that like physical hurt?" Yeah. When your hope is in Jesus, you know that all physical pain, struggle, sickness, disease is temporary. You go to the doctor and he says, "You're going to live with this pain for the rest of your life." You can just look back at him and say, "Nope. With all due respect, you are wrong. Maybe for the next 10 or 20 or 30 or 40 years—but I'm thinking more about the ten trillion years to follow; I'll be just fine then." When your hope is in Jesus, physical hurt is temporary.

Emotional hurt? Although it's deep, it will not last forever. There's a day when your grief will be gone. Your despair will turn to delight. Your mourning will turn to laughter and joy. It's coming. There's a day coming. Your loneliness will turn to fellowship that's greater than anything you've ever fathomed.

Relational hurt? Yeah, it hurts deep in this world. But know there's coming a day when you will be fully reconciled to God the Father and all who have put their trust in Him in perfect harmony. Jesus is our hope, so put your trust in Jesus. Keep your hope in Jesus.

As I've been praying this week, asking, "What is this word leading us to do?" here's how I want to lead us to respond. In just a moment, I want to invite two particular groups of people to respond.

First, I know there are people listening right now who have never put their trust and hope in Jesus. You've never become a follower of Jesus. I want to invite and urge you to trust in Him today. By faith in Jesus, you can begin a relationship with God today. You can have your guilt and shame covered, your fear gone, before God today through faith in Jesus. That's the first group.

Then the second group are people all across this room who are hurting right now in all kinds of ways. You can say, "I just need an extra measure of grace in my life right now amidst physical pain or emotional hurt or relational hurt—or maybe all of the above."

In just a moment, if you fall into one of those categories, I'm going to ask you to stand where you are. As you stand where you are, we're not going to call on you to share all the things that are going

on in your life. But by standing, you're saying either, "I want to follow Jesus. I want to put my hope in Jesus," or "I've got some things I'm really wrestling through right now and I would love for some people to pray for me."

What's going to happen is after you stand, then others around you are going to stand and put a hand on your shoulder. Then I'm going to lead in prayer for you. You're not going to have to share anything if you don't want to with anybody around you. We're just going to have a time when we pray for you. If God has brought you here today to hear this good news and you're saying, "I want to put my trust in Jesus," then I'm inviting you to stand.

Others of you may have been followers of Jesus for decades, but right now you're walking through some particular hurt in your life, in your family, and you're saying, "I would love for some people to pray for me." Don't think, "Well, I don't know if mine is as big or serious as others." If you can say, "I'd love for some people to pray, because I need an extra measure of grace right now in my life," then I hope you find this to be a safe place. This is what we're designed to do as the church for each other.

If you fall into one of those categories, I want to invite you right now to stand with me. You're saying either, "I want to trust in Jesus today" or "I am walking through some things in life or family or marriage or work or health, and I need an extra measure of grace and strength and wisdom." I trust that there will be many who fall into one of these categories, who will say, "I want to put my hope in Jesus today," or "I just need help in clinging to the hope of Jesus."

People are standing all across this room. Let me invite the rest of us now to stand and gather around somebody close to you. Put a hand on their shoulder. I'm going to pray out loud and you feel free to "amen" what I say or feel free to pray out loud as well at the same time. Echo what I'm praying in your own heart or feel free to pray out loud alongside me. Let's pray right now for these who have stood.

O God, we are just so thankful for Your love for us. Thank You for not leaving us alone in a world of hurt, in a world of pain and sorrow and grief—all these things we've talked about. God, thank You, thank You, thank You for the hope we have in You. We praise You for the hope that some are experiencing today for the first time in Jesus. All glory be to Your name for the way You seek us, find us and save us.

God, I pray for those who are standing and saying, "I want to put my hope in Jesus today," who may have been running from You or may have been indifferent toward You. Whatever their circumstances, today they're saying, "I need You." So God, may they know the truth of Your Word, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, that in Jesus we are reconciled to You, that all our sin can be forgiven. May they know that. May they know that right now their guilt is gone through faith in Jesus. The shame of their sin is totally covered through faith in Jesus. There is no fear because

they have eternal life with You through faith in Jesus. God, may they know that and may they grow in that in the days to come. May they grow in the knowledge of Jesus and the understanding of Who You are and what it means to follow and enjoy You.

Then, God, we pray for those who are hurting in many different circumstances right now. I don't presume to know all of them, but You know all of them better than anyone else. So please, O God, we pray that Your grace would be sufficient in every single one of these circumstances. Help them, we pray. Help them in physical pain. We pray for relief, for physical healing. Just like Paul, in a 2 Corinthians 12 kind of way about his thorn in the flesh, please show Your power in their weakness. Please provide for them. Please draw them closer to You in the middle of all this.

Please, O God, bless them. Give them hope and give them faith in those days when faith is hard to come by. Give them physical strength amidst physical weakness. We pray for their emotional hurts. We pray for peace where peace is needed; for comfort, wisdom, patience, grace and love. We pray for confidence of Your presence. May they know they are not alone, that You are with them, that we as a church are with them. God, we praise You for the strength and courage that are found in Your presence.

May they know Your strength and Your courage amidst relational hurts, amidst broken relationships, amidst broken marriages, broken family relationships and others. God, please, please, please, we pray by the power of the gospel, that You would bring about reconciliation, restoration and redemption. Please, O God. In the days when it's hard and doesn't seem like it's happening, please give faith to persevere and press on.

Draw those who are standing and those whom they may be in conflict with to Yourself, then as a result of being drawn to You, may they be drawn to each other. God, we pray for healing in relationships. God, we long for the day when hurt will be no more, when none of these things will even be a reality in our lives, when You will wipe away every tear from our eyes. We long for that day.

So we pray today in anticipation of that day, "Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly." Help us walk with You faithfully, clinging to You as our hope every step of the way until You come again. We await Your advent. Even as we celebrate Your first coming, we anticipate Your second coming. In Jesus' name we pray all these things and all God's people said, "Amen."

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