

“THE HOPE THAT CHRIST BRINGS”
Isaiah 49:1-7, Matthew 12:15-21, Ephesians 1:3-14
November 30 & December 1, 2019

“There’s a very beautiful story about a beautiful young woman. Her name is Cinderella. But Cinderella was made to feel ugly. She lived with a wicked stepmother and two equally wicked step-sisters. We all are influenced by a wicked stepmother, the Devil, who’s got two wicked daughters: the world and the flesh. Cinderella was made to live as a slave. Now, she was beautiful, but she didn’t feel beautiful. She didn’t think about herself as beautiful, because she was being influenced by a wicked environment that put her down, messed over her, and reduced her to nothing. The problem with Cinderella was that she was stuck there. She was locked in the situation, and for a long time, she could not get out of it.

“But low and behold, one night there was a ball. And through a series of miraculous interventions, she was transported to the ball in a chariot. There she met a prince. The prince saw Cinderella, and loved her. But the problem in the story, as you know, is that the clock struck midnight. When the clock hit midnight, she reverted back to her old ways. She became a slave again to an evil stepmother, and evil stepsisters.

“But the good news of the story is the prince never forgot Cinderella. Oh, there were a whole lot of folk at the ball, but there was something about Cinderella that made her different from the crowd. Everybody wanted the prince, but the prince wanted Cinderella. He spared no effort to find Cinderella. All he had to work with was a walking problem. There was a shoe left behind. He needed to find the foot that fit this shoe. When he found the foot that fit this shoe, he would have found Cinderella.

“The prince went from house to house, trying the shoe on different women, because he wanted to get to the person on whom the shoe fit. He finally came to Cinderella’s house, put the shoe on her foot, and he had found her. He gave her a kiss, and you know how the story ends. It says, ‘...and they lived happily ever after.’

“Believe it or not, WE’RE ALL LIVING IN A CINDERELLA LIFE. We’re living as slaves,

under the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Satan is holding us hostage. Maybe a few years ago you met the Prince of Peace, and He saved you, but you have gone back to living at the midnight hour, with that devil and his two daughters. They have you trapped in slavery. But, Jesus knows where you are, and He knows how long you've been there. When He comes knocking on your door, with those slippers, He'll let you know He wants to get you up out of there.

“He doesn't just want to bring His money to you, His castle to you, or His chariot to you; He wants to take you up out of there, and let you go live with Him. He wants to remove you from those premises, and give you a brand new place to live. He wants to show you your new position, your new glory, and your new hope. He wants to get you out of that slavery. He just doesn't want to buy you a new dress, buy you a new coat, or buy you a new car; He wants to give you a new life.

“Suppose Cinderella had said, ‘Look, Prince, I like you. I want your money. I want your chariot. I want your castle. I want your title. But I don't want to commit myself to you.’ I am sure the prince would have found somebody else, because he wanted to find somebody whom he could love, not just somebody whom he could be used by.

“A lot of us haven't had our blessing to come through because we want to use God; we want all that God has to offer, but we don't want God. God wants us to want Him, so that He can make us whole, so that when we connect, He can say, happily ever after, because He has made us whole.”¹

And this is the message from our Old Testament lesson of Isaiah 49:1-7. WE ARE ALL CHOSEN FOR THE LORD. As His people whom He loves, He desires each of us to be with Him. He has extended His hand to us inviting us to be with Him. And because God loves us so very much He saw us in the middle of our own desperate situation, bullied and abused by the world and by the flesh. So in order to call us out of this desperate situation we are in, God has appointed us to be His servants, calling us by name, searching us out and inviting us to be His beloved ones.

You see, we have a powerful and victorious God Whose “*words are as sharp as a sword*. With

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago: Moody Publications, 2009] [g/ 157-158])

His own hand He protects us” (49:2). God is greater than anything or anyone, here or anywhere in the universe. He looks at us, even when we were in our mother’s womb, and He says, “I want that one. She is beautiful and precious to me; I want her with me. He is strong and brave; I want Him with me. *“He says to [us], ‘People, you are my servant; because of you, people will praise me’*” (49:3). God is nuts about us and desires a close relationship with us. If He had a refrigerator, our pictures would be on it. If He had a photo album, our whole life would be shown off in it. God desires us to be His children!

But unfortunately, We have chosen to work under our own strength without God’s help. We say *“I have worked, but how hopeless it is! I have used up my strength, but have accomplished nothing...”* (49:4a). We’re right there in the midnight hour and instead of allowing God to see us as we really are (like He doesn’t already), we hide from Him, turn away from His love and His power to strive to live our lives by our own standards, with our own strength, and in our own wisdom. We listen to the lies and deception of the world telling us that we can have life our own way. And we listen to the cravings of our own bodies telling us that life is all about pleasure and fulfillment. And we come to the point when we cry out “What difference does my life make? I am worthless, hopeless, and useless!”

Yet God desires us to see His power, understand His nature, and find His love for us. And He wants us to get to the point when we can state boldly, *“...Yet I can trust the Lord to defend my cause; He will reward me for what I do”* (49:4b). However that means we must recognize our situation of being trapped in a wicked environment, and call out to Him for help. We must stop listening to the lies, and corruption, and confusion, and deception all around us and seek the truth, and the way to life.

God has given us a **TASK** to perform as His servants. He not only desires to restore us to that intimate relationship when we were introduced to the Prince of Peace, basked in His love, and felt His warm, loving embrace. God desires to *“...make [us] a light to the nations – so that all the world may be saved”* (49:6). God has tasked us with living so differently than the rest of the world that everyone can see the difference He makes in our lives. He wants us to live as His servants, beautiful, strong, righteous, holy people who model the glories of the Lord in our lives for the rest of the world to see. He

wants to use us as His children to invite ALL nations to Him.

In this way, As we live for the Lord, many will see it and come to the point where they want what we have, and we can freely share with them the fact that the Prince has chosen THEM, too. We can help them to come back into a relationship with Him by introducing them to Jesus and helping them come to know Him deeply. Isaiah tells it plainly, “*Kings will see you released and will rise to show their respect; princes also will see it, and they will bow low to honor you*” (49:7). When you live as the princes and princesses that God has called us to live as, people notice it and they come to respect you for it, even if they don’t yet understand what makes you so different.

It all comes down to this: JESUS IS GOD’S SOLUTION TO OUR PROBLEM of living in a wicked world, ruled by a wicked stepmother who has given power to her two stepdaughters to use and abuse and defeat us into thinking that we are worthless, useless, powerless, and ugly people. We see in Matthew 12(15-17) that Jesus “*healed all the sick and gave them orders not to tell others about Him...*” counteracting the death grip that Satan had on folks at that time.

Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promised Savior as found in Isaiah’s prophecy (49:1-7). He came to the earth so that we could see Him and know Him as our Prince who has come to set us free from the slavery to this wicked world. He came to release the captives, and give recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed (Luke 4:18). He came to break our love affair with the world and the flesh so that we might experience real life in our lives.

And Jesus has MODELED for us our call to be servants of God! He came to “*announce God’s judgment to the nations...persisting until He causes justice to triumph, and on Him all peoples will put their hope*” (Matthew 12:18-21). Since our task is to bring the light of God to the world, Jesus demonstrated how we can do that in order to bring all people back to a relationship with God. His extraordinary life is the example for us to follow so that we might fulfill God’s call for all people to find freedom through Him. Life here is not all about fun and games, but about diligence in living for the One we have been called to serve.

God's desire is to bring the world back into order as it was in the Garden of Eden before sin happened. There Adam and Eve walked with God, saw Him face to face, and enjoyed His provision, His protection and His company. There all the animals ate from the grasses and trees and vines that the Lord God had called into being as food for them. Sin was what changed everything and destroyed the relationship between people and God, causing death to come upon the earth as animals turned against animals, and creation turned against itself.

The midnight hour has been upon the earth for so long and all of creation longs for the peace and justice that only Jesus brings to us, as we claim Him as our Savior and receive His invitation for release from the wickedness of this world. He is the only one whom we can put our hope in to bring new life to the earth.

So through Jesus, GOD HAS **RENEWED** HIS CALL FOR US TO BE HIS SERVANTS.

Listen to Paul's words to the Ephesians in chapter 1, verses 3-14. (READ Ephesians 1:3-14)

The Apostle Paul encourages us to Remember that we are God's choice, that we have been empowered through Jesus to live differently than the world so that we might bring the light of Jesus back into the world. God has chosen us to be His. He has extended His invitation for us to give up our chains and slavery to the wickedness of this world and has empowered us with His strength to serve Him. *"For in our union with Christ [God] has blessed us by giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world"* (1:3). We have everything at our disposal to reach out to those around us to help them find the love of God, that they might experience His majesty and power. We have been given the Holy Spirit who helps us to live *"holy and blameless lives before Him"* (1:4).

It is Through Jesus we are **ADOPTED** into God's family. God saw us in our situation and He pointed right at us and said, "That one, over there, that one is Mine. And that one over there, and that one there, and there, and there. I chose you! Come live with me so that I may love you and care for you and give you a new name so that you are no longer 'captive' but are now called 'set free.' You are no longer called 'lonely,' 'abused,' 'frightened' or 'worthless.' You are now called 'son,' 'daughter,'

‘child of the King,’ ‘redeemed’ and ‘restored.’ No longer will you be enslaved to the thoughts and intentions of Devil, but you will find a new heart and a new mind that is filled with peace and love and joy and hope. Come to Me and be My Family!”

But in every adoption, it is one thing to be invited, and quite another to accept that invitation and claim that adoption as real and forever. Though God has called us to become a brother and sister with Jesus, a child of God, the choice is ours as to whether or not we will actually take Him up on His call and receive Him as our Father, claiming His name as our own, and becoming a part of His family. Jesus has already done the paperwork and worked out all the details of the adoption for us. All it requires is our signature on the bottom line making the deal complete. But it then requires our commitment to leave the things of this world and seek the ways of God.

So God has revealed the mystery of His will, His secret plan for all those who would listen to Him so that we might be filled with the hope that He has for us. *“God did what He had purposed, and made known to us the mystery of His will He had already decided to compete by means of Christ [Jesus]. This plan...is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head”* (1:9-10). God hates this separation between us and Him, and has given us Jesus to bridge the chasm and reunite all of creation back to Himself. And we are a part of that plan as we work to live as new members of the family of God.

And Paul tells us again that We have been CHOSEN by God. Since Jesus has already come to the world to bring the world back to Him, we, then, are to carry on His work and let the nations know of this tremendous love of God for us. Even though we had chosen to rebel against God’s will and God’s way, He never gives up on us, but pursues us like a lion after its prey. God does not want to lose us to the discouragement and depression and hopelessness of the world, but to give us such hope for new life that everything in us demonstrates that new life. Let me give you an example of what I’m talking about.

“An interesting item appeared in a Nashville newspaper, datelined Memphis (UPI): A woman named Hope pulled a man from chilly harbor waters after watching him drive his car off the bank in an

apparent suicide attempt.

“Hope Phillips, thirty-eight, said Monday she was sitting in her car with her husband and son Sunday afternoon when she saw the man drive down Riverside Drive into the Wolf River Harbor. Phillips said she saw the man climb on top of the sinking car. ‘His face was like, ‘I’m so desperate, please help me.’” All I could do was run into the water,’ she said.

“Phillips said she swam toward the man, who was about twenty-five feet off the bank, and used a tree branch to pull him toward the bank. He husband helped drag him out of the water. The man said he was a student at the University of Tennessee.

“She said: ‘He kept telling us he wasn’t worth anything. I said, ‘You are worth something, you’re here, aren’t you?’”

“Then he asked my name. I said ‘Hope,’ and he said, ‘What’s your name?’ He repeated it twice. He had a smile on his face. You knew he didn’t want to die.

“The police took the man to the Regional Medical Center.”² The man had been saved by Hope.

We live in a world crying out for hope and new life that is only found in Jesus Christ. Yet We have to make our own choice as to whether or not we will receive that hope. I cannot make the choice for you. You cannot make that choice for anyone else. We each make up our own minds with regard to the call of God on our lives.

Paul reminds us this when he says, “*And you also became God’s people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought you salvation. You believed in Christ, and God put His stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit He had promised*” (Ephesians 1:13). As we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, the One who came to set us free from the world’s worthlessness and the flesh’s emptiness, we are called to take that message to those around us, especially to those who are so desperate that they are ready to end this life without Jesus. It is in Jesus that we have hope, and they need to hear that, often over again and again and again until it makes sense.

² (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publications, 2000] pg. 451)

God empowers us to live for Him through the gift of the Holy Spirit (1:14). As the Spirit works with us, He changes our thinking, He changes the way we see our surroundings, and He changes our outlook on life. And as we begin to change the way we think and see and consider life, it affects the whole rest of our lives so that we find God's complete freedom. When we find Jesus and claim our adoption into God's family through Him, we lose the tethers and binders that the world has over us and we become new people, released back into the world as workers for God to reach others who are still caught in the trap of the ways of the world.

THIS IS THE HOPE THAT CHRIST BRINGS! As we begin the season of Advent, in anticipation of the coming of Jesus a second time as the King of kings and Lord of lords, and we remember His first coming to the earth as a human like us, we see the hope of the Lord our God for us.

It is only in Jesus Christ that we find A new family in the household of God. No other person, no other religion, no other philosophy, no other teaching and no other worldview enables us to find worth and value and freedom and peace and hope. Only Jesus provides us with a new life right here on the earth as we claim Him as our Savior and Lord. No more step-family! Now we belong in the family of God through Jesus.

And it is only through Jesus that we have A new HOME, away from the wickedness of this world, away from the emptiness of the flesh and the deception of the Devil. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and only through Him do we find our new home in the Kingdom of God.

Only through Jesus do we truly find The love of God the Father, for only Jesus knows the depths of God since He is the Son of God. Only through Jesus do we hear the message of hope and life and love that God has for us, even after we have rebelled against Him. God provides His relentless love for all of us so that we might come back to Him.

So the big question for us is **WILL YOU RECEIVE IT.** Will you take hold of God's love for us and turn to Him, and allow Him to bring hope to your life? There's no greater time than right now, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Hope of the world, our Savior and Lord. AMEN.