

**Sermon Series: “The HOPE of Christmas”**  
**“Hope”**  
**Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.**  
**Sunday, November 28, 2021**

One of the most important things we need in life is hope. The time we realize we really need it is when we don't have it. E.g., I recall Elena and me talking with one of my children about when they could graduate from college, and could they do it by a certain month— was their hope that this could be done? There was hope, as slim as it was from our perspective, but with hard work the date could be met, and by God's grace the date was met! E.g., we feel that way about football games, especially Saints games, don't we? The Saints had the chance to win two game this season, but they had to tie the score with a two point conversion, and both times they fell short. Now people are asking, do the Saints have hope to make the playoffs? The hope is certainly there. This past Thursday night the Saints played the Buffalo Bills, and the good news was Drew Brees was on the field in the Superdome; the bad news was he was only there for halftime—we needed him there for during the game, for the Saints lost badly! We all need hope in many areas of our lives— romance, politics, finances, etc. Unfortunately, many people enter the Christmas season not with hope but regret and sadness. The Good News is that Christmas addresses that, and restores our hope. We will begin our series focused on that word hope and how it is integral to Christmas.

READ Isaiah 8:17 (p. 637); Romans 5:1-6 (p. 155)

**CONTEXT:** In the 700s BC, the nation of Israel, north and south, are being threatened by the dominant power of the time, Assyria.

READ Isaiah 8:17. “After God hid His face (cf. Deut. 31:16-18; Ezekiel 39:23-24,29) and gave His verdict of judgment for Israel and Judah for their rebellion against Him, Isaiah stated he will wait for Yahweh with hope or eager expectation in the midst of this time of darkness. Isaiah anticipated here the child ‘born for us’ (9:6).” This historically was a desperate time for Israel, as their nation was crumbling. The Assyrian Empire was ascendent, and threatening the borders of Israel, and would eventually take the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom and send them into exile, never to be found again. Assyria also came down and surrounded Jerusalem and threatened it, but eventually could not take it. The fall of the northern kingdom Israel and the threat of Judah was God’s judgment on a rebellious people, and God’s judgment involved His turning His face from His people, a common theme in the Old Testament which meant because they abandoned God, He in turn abandoned them. Have you ever know what it is like to be abandoned, where all that you had built collapsed like a house of cards because of something you did wrong? E.g., I recall the governor of New York state who went from the darling of the media and his state to being charged with inappropriate conduct with the opposite sex and falsifying reports about problems in his administration, and was eventually forced to leave office in disgrace. In many ways this is what happened to the nation of Israel-- their kingdom, both north and south, started to crumble like a house of cards in the 700s BC. In the midst of this threat, Isaiah the prophet has the audacity to proclaim that he will wait on the Lord, who has turned His face on His people, and he will have hope in Him. That hope is continued in the next chapter, where the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light (9:3). That light is the coming of the child born

for us (9:6), Jesus is that child, as we celebrate at Christmas. Paul builds on this idea of God as the God of hope.

READ Romans 5:1-2. “In Romans, Paul pointed out that the consequence of the fact that God offers salvation/justification not based on adherence to the Law but through faith in Jesus’ death for our sins and resurrection, believers can boast in the hope of two things. First, they will take part in God’s glory!” With Jesus’ arrival in human history— His death and resurrection— we can look forward to taking part in the wonderful glory of God. We know what that can be like to desire to take part in glory. E.g, I recall reading that Deuce McAlister, the star running back for the New Orleans Saints from earlier in the 2000s, got a Super Bowl ring from when the Saints won the Super Bowl after the 2009 season. The only problem is that Deuce did not play for the Saints in that year! I had a friend of mine who was on the medical staff of the Saints from when they won the Super Bowl, and he showed me his Super Bowl ring. They are happy because they are participating in the achievement of the Saints, participating in their glory! This is but a small slice of the upcoming glory of God. He is the Victor over death and he is the Supreme One, and He is the Glorious One.

READ Romans 5:3-6. “Second, believers, Paul emphasized, also boast in the hope that suffering has a purpose— it produces endurance, then proven character, and then a hope that is unassailable because it is rooted in God’s love poured into them through the Holy Spirit.” Suffering is not fun. E.g., I recall walking into a locker room that had a sign, “No pain, no gain”. I never liked that saying! That is not exactly what Paul is saying here. He is not focusing on our intentionally entering into suffering, but life’s suffering in general as well as suffering for the gospel. As in Romans 8:28, God can work all things for good for those in Christ Jesus. Part of that good is that suffering can produce endurance. E.g., I can tell this through running; I once read that we need to have an aerobic

workout where we can talk to another person but not sing, and for each person that is a relative amount of aerobic activity; I was jogging the other day with Emily and we were talking and praying together— not singing!— and I was thinking that there were times when I was not in shape enough to do such talking; in other words, I had built up some endurance. Same with suffering in life— God is producing in us the ability to take the suffering with grace and trust in Him. And this endurance produces proven character. Our translation says, “character”, but the word δοκιμή emphasizes a character that is proven by testing; it is a noun that comes from the verb δοκιμάζω, “to test, to examine”. Have you ever seen proven character? E.g., a test I have thought of is what someone is like when he or she is not given what he or she really wants— is the person going to be thankful and appreciative of what he or she has, or bitter and angry and feeling entitled. E.g., I recall an interaction I had with Roger Cull. He loved to have the men of the church over at his boat and have a fellowship supper; on one such occasion he lit up a cigar during our time together, and I felt uncomfortable with that— perhaps some men who are trying to get away from smoking may find his smoking a temptation, and also there was the fact that smoking is bad for his health. So afterward I told Roger I would appreciate his not doing that and explained why, and I felt rather awkward, but Roger did not. He said he understood and that was fine, and he never did it again. This incident showed his great character before the Lord. How are we when our character is tested? When given the opportunity to gossip behind someone’s back whom we don’t like, do we gossip? When given a chance to tell a half-truth or lie and we think we won’t be caught, do we do it? When we suffer do we shake our fists at God and threaten to stop following Him, or do we humbly trust Him to care for us? Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces proven character. And proven character produces hope. And this hope will never disappoint, because it is founded in the love of God that He

has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. When we want to get insurance, we want an insurance company that will be there no matter what happens to the economy, right? E.g., I recall when shopping for life insurance a few years ago, I was checking out the rating on the insurance company, because I wanted to be sure it will be around to pay out in case I am not around. That is why on the Prudential commercial it says, “Get a piece of the rock”, and they have a big rock as their symbol. E.g., I recall reading in the *Voice of the Martyrs* magazine a story about a Christian woman who had her house burned down and her husband killed because they were Christians and were sharing their faith in a Muslim area, and yet the woman’s trust in God and hope was strong, despite these tragic events; the Voice of the Martyrs organization was able to build her another house.

“In what is our hope rooted?” We may face the temptation of having a blue Christmas this year because of hurts of the past and loss of loved ones. God understands that; He understands your and my losses and hurts. But He wants us to lift up our hearts and eyes and rejoice that this time of year. Not because our hope is rooted in romance or having all the people around us that we want to have, but because it is based on the One who is the hope promised to Israel for the whole world, the One who loved us and died for us and rose again for us, and promises that one day He will take His followers home, where every knee is bowed and tear wiped clean. It is a hope rooted in His love, that He wants to pour into our hearts through His Holy Spirit!