

Where do you hang your hope? If all we have is what we find in this world, we are sunk. There is plenty to hope for, but not a lot of good news to build hope on for the future. Jesus is a place to build your hope. Jesus is a solid rock. Jesus, born on Christmas Day, is our hope and our salvation.

MY HOPE IS BUILT • Matthew 3:1-12 • Tim McConnell • December 8, 2019

Hope draws near. Something is coming. You know that moment when you can smell the rain coming? Hope draws near. We have launched into a series for the Christmas season, My Hope Is Built. Jennifer did a great job kicking it off last week, the team has worked overtime to get our environment all together, and we are looking at this manger, this solid, stone manger where it all began, where Jesus was laid when He was born into the world, and asking ourselves: Where have I placed my hope? Any soft foundations under there? Any shaky hooks I've hung my hopes on? There are so many directions our hopes run. There's the superficial Christmassy, Santa Claus stuff. Will I get what I want? Will it be fun? Will we sing my favorite songs? How many times will I watch Elf? We're already one in at my place! Will Buddy save Christmas? But we all know it gets deeper than that real guick. I hope the family is okay. I hope we can afford the experience we want. I hope I can keep it together this season, after the year we've had. I hope things change at work. I hope... Who will save Christmas? Can I? Do I have the strength to save Christmas? Well, where is your hope built? What is up underneath your hope? Jesus is coming. Hope draws near.

Hope is an optimistic confidence in the future. Hope is the belief that good stuff is on the way. And we need hope. We've gotta have it. Nobody likes to be around the hopeless, cynical pessimist. Eeyore is not all that fun. Leaders need hope. You know, the best leaders have unflinching optimism in the face of great challenges. They just keep promoting this super awesome vision of the future, even when there's no possible way! Sure, we'll take that aircraft carrier down. I mean we have two sticks and a coconut. We can do it! These are the great leaders. You've got to have hope. Your family needs you to have hope. Your friends need you to have hope. But where do you get it?

We are placing our hope on Jesus. We are building our hope, our optimistic confidence in the future, on Jesus. "My hope is built on nothing less," than Jesus—"Jesus' blood and righteousness." We'll get into that as we go along. But the hope is in, the hope has to be in, Jesus. Look at this

manger. Solid stone. That's what Jesus was probably laid in. That's a feeding trough in first-century Palestine. A rock. Solid. Sure. This is what the manger of Jesus looked like. But our hope isn't in a manger. Our hope isn't in holiday magic. Our hope is in Jesus—this baby is God, intervening and making a new future. If Jesus holds the future, if His plans and promises fill my future, then there's little room for projected anxieties and worries. Hope draws near. Can you smell the rain?

I don't know if this passage read like a very hopeful passage of Scripture for you. "Hey pastor, read me a hopeful passage." Al-righty. "You brood of vipers..." Actually, it is hopeful. John the Baptist appears in the desert proclaiming that there is a new way of life opening up, a turning is possible, a change is possible. God is up to something. Hope is drawing near. Jesus is coming, and that's our hope. "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (Matthew 3:1–2). Hey, change your life. God's kingdom is here. God's way of life is here. Shift your priorities. Change is possible. And He embodied and enacted and visibly represented that change with baptism. Washing with water in the river Jordan.

Who was John the Baptist? Besides a relative of Jesus on Mary's side, John the Baptist was a unique guy. We get the description in verse 4: "John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4). Camel's hair jacket. Pretty nice. But he went all the way, the whole suit. "Leather belt." Sure. Who doesn't go for that? "Locusts." That's cutting edge. Food sourcing. Where do you get your protein from? Mammals? Have you heard of the insect-based protein powder? Don't know if you've gotten into that yet or not. "Raw honey," obviously. That's a superfood! So, this guy was a trendsetter, an influencer, and people just wanted to be around him! No. Not really. This was all to demonstrate that John the Baptist was a prophet. He was a guy who stepped out of the mainstream to look back in from another perspective—as a prophet, from

God's perspective—and say a few things people needed to hear. Hard things. But true things. That's why the people came. They wanted to hear something true, even if it hurt a little bit. More than that, John was offering hope. Change is possible. There is a power on the way. The Kingdom of God is really close, and there is a person coming who will change everything. At some point, hope for change, hope for a new direction, a new pattern, a new life ... that will move you. People came out in droves to hear a strange man in the wild country yell at them: "Repent!" They came in droves.

I have gone on a journey with that word "repent." Doesn't it make your heart clinch up? This either is or is not a hopeful passage based on how you read that word "repent." I was in the second year of my first lead pastor position when I got an odd phone call. It wasn't a name I recognized, it wasn't a member of the church, and it was the kind of call I could easily dismiss, but I had a little margin and I guess the Spirit prompted me and I picked up the phone. He asked me, "What is the Gospel? When you preach the Gospel, what do you say?" I told him. God made us. God loves us. We sinned and broke relationship with God, but God sent His Son Jesus to die for us, and if we believe in Him, we are forgiven and have eternal life. "Is that it?" he asked. "Well, yeah." Then he got to the point: "What about repent? I'm calling local pastors to see how many of them preach repentance. Do you preach repentance?" I was caught off guard but held my ground. We preach grace. God's mercy leads to repentance sometime later, I said, and we went on like that for a while. I hung up and stood up and stared out the window in my office, and it was like a bell had gone off. Repent. John said repent. Jesus said repent. I have to preach repent. How?

Like I said, I have gone through a journey with this word repent, and the whole journey is right here. At first, I thought repent meant be sorry. Be sorry for what you did. Feel bad. Someone is upset with you, someone is disappointed with you, and in fact that someone might be God! So, you really need to feel bad about yourself. That's what I thought repent meant. John the Baptist came

preaching, "and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (Matthew 3:2). The Kingdom is coming, the King is near, and frankly He's not all that excited about your behavior. Feel bad. Well, then someone taught me what the word really means. It doesn't mean "feel bad." Repent is the Greek word metanoia, and it means to change your mind and turn around; it means cross over to the other side and change direction. That helped. Feeling bad was only getting me so far. I mean, I was good at it. As a people-pleaser personality type, I could really feel bad. I was good at feeling bad about what others thought, or God. But it wasn't getting me anywhere, so try this.

John the Baptist, verse 7: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance'" (Matthew 3:7–8). Don't just talk change, make change. Change your life. Turn around. Okay. Right. But then that started to feel pretty hard to accomplish too. I wanted to turn around, but sometimes I could, sometimes I couldn't, sometimes I wanted to, sometimes I didn't, and it was hard. Like these folks walking against the wind. Turn around. For some reason, it was not as easy as it sounds. I needed a little more help. So, I shifted again.

I went from repent means feel bad, to repent means turn around, to another, deeper meaning still, an older one, a meaning that's been right there in the Scriptures in front of me all along. Repent, Tim, means throw yourself on the mercy seat of Christ. Turn your mind. Cross over. Your hope is not built on your ability to be adequately sorrowful, or sufficiently regretful, or manifestly resolved to shift gears and change directions. Your hope is not built on your ability to pull it together, or your fortitude or grit or resolve. Your hope, if you have hope at all, is built on your Help. Your hope is in your Help, your Savior, Jesus.

Your role when you 'repent'—and here's my third position, the one I think about the most now— is to take responsibility. Responsibility. If there is anything lacking in our character these days, it's the

ability to take responsibility. To say, "Yep, that's mine. That's my mess. That's what I did. There's no one to blame but me. Well, maybe others were around, but I take responsibility." We throw responsibility anywhere and everywhere, so long as it doesn't land on us. To repent is to own it. That's my mistake, my disobedience, my sin—and it was wrong. I throw myself on the mercy seat of Christ. The Pharisees scrambled for any excuse, and John shut them down quick. Look at verse 9. Don't say it doesn't matter, I'm a child of Abraham. They didn't want to take responsibility. It can't be me! Blame the system, or it's the schools these days, or I'm only doing what everyone else does, or the darn media or the darn kids or the darn whatever! Just stop. Own it. You have made mistakes. Only from here can the turning begin.

But watch now, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). Jesus is coming. Hope draws near. John wouldn't keep going if there was no hope. But John has a message of change, a message of hope. When He comes, when Jesus comes, He changes you from the inside out. Holy Spirit—that's going to make your insides different. Fire—fire changes everything it touches. That's what Jesus is. Jesus is change for your whole life from the inside out. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." That means my hope is not in passing worldly things. My hope is not in what I can do, what I can do to save my life, to save Christmas, or to save anything at all. My hope is in Jesus, who came from heaven and took on flesh and blood, and lived, and loved, and bore my own sins in His flesh on the cross to bury my death and raise up my life. He killed my false path, my treacherous way toward death; He put the axe to it and He gave birth to new life in my soul. My hope is that when I stop, and I name it, and I own it, and I repent, I change my mind, I am forgiven. And my hope is in my Help. My Help. My Savior. Jesus.

STUDY GUIDE MY HOPE IS BUILT • "Hope Draws Near" Matthew 3:1-12

UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Matthew 3:1–12.

- 1) Read Matthew 3:1–4. Then read 2 Kings 1:7–8. What similarities do you notice between these two men?
- 2) Read Malachi 4:1–6. The opening verses of Matthew 3 link John the Baptist to this Old Testament prophecy. What role has the Old Testament tended to play in your own engagement with Scripture?
- 3) Many of the promises and prophecies that Israel had relied upon throughout the Old Testament were finally realized in Jesus Christ. What ongoing promises of the Lord do you rely upon today?
- 4) Reread Matthew 3:1–2. John is almost like a coach giving essential course-correction instructions for Israel in preparation for the kingdom of heaven. Who in your life plays this role?
- 5) Are there any areas in your life where you may need to practice some confession and repentance in preparation for the kingdom of heaven?
- 6) How might this passage encourage you to live more fully in the reality that Jesus is your hope and salvation?

Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Last week you started thinking about who you might invite to join you in worship in this Advent Season. This week, start looking for an opportunity to extend an invitation!

IN: Connect with Each Other

Pray for the person you plan to invite to worship. Pray that their heart would be open to hearing the Good News that Jesus is their hope. Pray that they would be receptive to your invitation.