

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 • John 1:1-14 • Matt Holtzman • January 5, 2020

You might be asking yourself, "Why is the piano player/ worship leader guy coming out from behind his post and giving the sermon today?" Well, in truth, I'm asking myself that same question! I'm honored to be here and bring this very important word to you this morning. We're talking about beginnings today. It should be no shock to you that my opening illustration is going to come from the musical side of things, so here it is: In music, beginning well matters. For the conductor who holds his hands up in front of an orchestra, the opening movement sets the course for how the song will go. If his hands begin well, chances are better that the notes that follow will begin well too. Let me tell you a story about playing "Great is Thy Faithfulness" at my first memorial service. I sang the words to the verse, but played the music to the chorus! What a mess! I began all wrong, and it gravely impacted the congregation's ability to engage. Beginning well really matters.

Happy New Year, by the way—and congratulations! You have begun 2020 well. Your church attendance for 2020 is 100 percent! This time of year is all about beginning well! New Year's resolutions have begun ... some have ended already. School has begun again, or is about to, while parents are just beginning to think about how they are going to effectively detoxify their children from all the sugar intake that has been enjoyed over the break. New beginnings are happening. Today marks the beginning of a new year, but the end of our sermon series on hope: My Hope is Built. If you've been with us during Advent and Christmas, you know that we've been taking a look at hope, claiming that our hope has a name, and it is Jesus. He is the solid rock upon which we stand. If you were here last week, you heard Pastor John Goodale talk about how true hope sustains us throughout our earthly lives, even when lives get hard. And today, as our series comes to a close, we come to recognize and remember that our hope is eternal. We have a hope for all eternity. And as we come today, what I want us to think about is this: The kind of God you believe in determines the kind of hope you have. There are different kinds of hope. On one hand we could say that one flavor of hope shows itself to be like the phrases that scrolled by in the bumper video: "I hope there are enough lights on the tree, etc." That kind of hope is really more like wishful thinking. But the hope that sustains, the hope that your life and my life depend upon is linked to a belief in who God says He actually is. Which is why I'm so grateful to be looking at the first chapter of John today.

Before we launch into this very important text together, I want to look at its author, the Apostle John. Who was John? On one hand, we might acknowledge that he is not only the author of the 4th Gospel we're peering into

today, but he also wrote the Epistles of 1st, 2nd and 3rd John as well; not to mention Revelation found in the back of our Bible. Taking these things into account, we might say that we owe a lot to John who, through the help of the Holy Spirit, has provided much of our New Testament. On the other hand, though, we must recognize that John wasn't just anybody. This man was a close friend of Jesus. In fact, we find throughout Scripture that John was very close. The words that we have the privilege of reading today come from a man who at the Last Supper was "reclining next to Jesus ... even leaning back against Him, and even whispering" a question that Peter had. Can you imagine? John was in the same personal space as the Great I AM himself! And here he is (after witnessing Christ's life, the miracles, the crucifixion, the death, and even after being one of the first to peer in and see the empty tomb), wanting to now begin well, and attempt to communicate who is Jesus.

And this is how he begins, starting in chapter 1, verse 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He was with God in the beginning. Does this sound familiar to you? It's from Genesis 1:1, the opening lines of the first book of the Hebrew Bible. Now, if John was here, one might want to say, "Gosh, John don't you think Genesis 1:1—you know, creation—stands sufficiently on its own to relay just how long Jesus has been around?" But here John takes words that would have been familiar to his Jewish audience at the time—"In the beginning"—and he makes the audacious attempt to go back even further. Why does he do this? This is why. He wants to say, "Jesus is not a demigod. He's not even a created being, but He is none other than the pre-existent God himself!" Jesus, the Word was with God. But even more significant, Jesus the Word was God! And that is where John wants us to begin as we think about this man. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. Pretty straightforward. This pre-existent Word, as we've stated, is not a creation Himself, but The Creator! He Himself was not brought into existence, but instead He brought everything into existence. Time, the universe, earth, sun, moon, stars, air, matter, you, me ... all of it has been made by Jesus. When God said, "Let there be," Jesus went to work! And nothing that exists, exists unless Jesus existed it!

And by the way, this list doesn't merely include things we can see. The apostle Paul writes, "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16–17). So John now is only three

verses in, and already he's painting a pretty monumental picture as to who this Jesus is, isn't he? The main point of verse 3 is that Jesus is the Creator of everything everywhere. Without Jesus, we are without! Without Jesus, we aint got nothing! He is the author of life itself.

Verse 4 says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind." Light and life. These two words are key in John's opening and would continue to be throughout his writings later down the road. And John wants to make sure we don't miss them! And why is that? Firstly, the "life" that John is talking about isn't merely "existence." If John wanted to say, "In him was existence" only, he would have used the Greek word "bios." But he didn't; instead he used the word "zoe." Everybody say "Zoe!" (You too can speak Greek!) That word refers to supernatural, eternal life that belongs only to God, but that we are able to receive through faith in Him! In another one of John's writings, he would say this: "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (John 5:11-12). Well that sounds pretty clear, doesn't it? Gosh, John, thank you very much. But you know, that sounds pretty narrow minded. I mean, aren't there multiple ways for us to get to God. I don't like how particular and exclusive your words are making Jesus out to be! I wish I could ask Jesus' perspective; I wonder what he'd say about himself! Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Friends, here's the thing about Jesus: When it comes to WHO HE LOVES, Jesus is wide open. "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..." He's wide open. But at the end of the day, HOW salvation works, and WHO it is that brings it ... Jesus is very narrow and he is very exclusive. "...That whosover would believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life." Why is Jesus so exclusive? He's God! He can't help himself! In Christ, and Christ alone, is our eternal hope found!

Secondly, "in him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind." Now, never in a million years would I have thought of myself as a scientist, and I still don't. But, along the way of preparing for this sermon, I stumbled upon some information regarding light and how it relates to you and me. Now, I don't have time to go into all the wondrous, awe-inspiring details about this, but what I want you to think about is bioluminescence. Explanation: There are trillions of cells that make up your body. In one cell, there is a ton going on. In just the last second there were over 100,000 chemical reactions that occurred ... just in that one cell. Now, there are these things called biophotons that are emitted from our cells that scientists are now believing to be responsible for the operation of our entire biological system. Why am I telling you all of

this? Here's the reason: In the scientific realm, there is a light of life (biophotons) and without light, we don't work. Our cells don't do what they are created to do. Thinking about that, consider what Jesus said about himself. In John 8:12: "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. (Not just planet Earth, but the entire cosmos! Not just light in between your cells, but the entire universe!) Jesus is the light of all life. And without Him, we cannot truly live. Just as light is needed for our cells to live their lives, Jesus is needed for our souls to live eternal lives. For "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Friends, the kind of God you believe in determines the kind of hope you have. Can you see what kind of God John is painting for us? Can you see Who he is claiming Jesus to be? He is God. He is Creator. He is life. And He is light.

Now "light" and "life." Does this sound familiar to anyone in the room? It should! Behold our church's vision statement, which is "Light and Life for the City." Now, while it is the first Sunday of the year and while this might seem like a golden opportunity to preach the vision and mission of First Pres, I'm not going to do that today—nor have I been asked to do that, thankfully. That's coming later this month. Nevertheless, in light of our vision statement, I think this is a good opportunity to simply say this: Eternal hope for our city is and always will be found in Christ alone. The church simply gets to testify and point to that truth. That's our job; nothing more and nothing less. A few years back, Tim Keller said, "If there are those who come to us looking for hope, and our answer to them is the institutional church, they will leave us burdened. However, if they come to us and our answer to them is Jesus, they will be set free." Friends, our aim here at First Pres is to testify and point people in the direction of where true hope is found. Jesus' light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. If it is merely our light, even our best energy and efforts that attempts to shine into the dark places of people's lives, we will fail our people, and true hope will not be realized. But if, as a church, we glorify Him for all that He is worth, if we give the gift of Jesus, people will be set free.

Now, what I'm about to do flirts with taking Scripture out of context, but if you bear with me, and if you can somehow channel your imagination here, I think you'll see what I'm after: "There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world." In this verse, the apostle John is writing about John the Baptist, who lived his life as nothing more than a witness to Jesus. But what if John was not talking

about John the Baptist? But, years from now, looking back and writing about First Pres? Can you imagine?

There was a church sent from God whose name was First Pres. She came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through her all might believe. She herself was not the light; she came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

Friends, can you imagine that? What if this was our story? What if 2020—this year out in front of us—was the year where people from all over our city, no matter where they came from, were set free? Can you imagine that? Who in your life needs the light and life of Christ? I pray for each of us, that we might be ready and willing to witness and give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope we have.

The kind of God you believe in determines the kind of hope you have. And you know, the kind of Jesus that the apostle John is painting for us is a pretty galactically sized God. Before the foundations of earth were established, Jesus was with God. Not only that, Jesus was God. Jesus is Creator. Jesus is life. Jesus is light. These are huge statements! And we are grateful for them, Amen? Because the truth of the matter is, in order for us to have a galactic-sized hope, we need a galactically sized God!

One of my favorite songs to sing at Christmas is "O Come, All Ye Faithful." In verse two, it paints a big picture of who Jesus is. "Oh, sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation, sing all ye citizens of Heaven above ... Glory to God! All glory in the highest!" We sing praise to the holy Word of God. But then in verse three, have you noticed, this galactic-sized God suddenly becomes this: "Word of the Father...now in flesh appearing." So, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

You see, Jesus didn't see it proper to leave you and me thinking about Him only as a galactically sized God. He took on flesh so that you and I could know Him personally and intimately. He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. But instead He took on the very nature of a servant, and He demonstrated His own love for us, that while you and I were yet sinners, He would dwell among us, show us who God is, die for us, and on the third day rise again.

So that our hope is an eternal one.

# STUDY GUIDE MY HOPE IS BUILT • "Hope for Eternal Life" John 1:1–14

### UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: John 1:1–14.

- 1) Read Genesis 1:1–3. John's opening verses are intended to remind the reader of the first verses of the Hebrew Scriptures. In what ways does John's Gospel mark a new "beginning?"
- 2) Read Colossians 1:15–17. Paul affirms the claim that Jesus is central in Creation. What might it mean that all things were created for Jesus? How does this enrich your understanding of the person of Jesus Christ?
- 3) Read Isaiah 55:10–11. Keeping in mind that Jesus is the "Word," what might we learn about Jesus from this Old Testament prophecy? What purposes do you think God expects Jesus to "accomplish?"
- 4) Reread verse 14. To what extent have you allowed Jesus to "dwell" in you? Are there areas of your life that are "off limits" to Jesus? Why?
- 5) Read John 10:7–10. What connections do you see between Jesus' statements about life in these verses and the statements about life in the John 1 passage?
- 6) How might this passage encourage you to live more fully into the reality that Jesus is your hope and salvation?

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

Reread verses 11–12. What does it mean to "receive" Christ? How might you explain this to someone who is curious about your faith?

#### **IN:** Connect with Each Other

The Winter Alpha course is starting this week. This course is intended for people who are interested in exploring the basics of the Christian faith. Pray that God would use Alpha to draw people to Himself this season.