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## **Christmas Notes**

### **Part 3 – The Weary World Rejoices**

Adam Donyes

I've been to a lot of churches and a lot of ministries and I don't know very many ministries or churches that steward their resources and finances as well as this church does. And I'm not just saying that. I get to see behind the scenes a little bit with the elders. It's unbelievable. As a matter of fact, I want to show you. Just last week, I got to be a part of something that we do in this community. It's called Affordable Christmas. I was able to partner up with Jesus was Homeless. Woodland Hills alone supplied 200 stockings full of goodies for a lot of homeless families in Stone and Taney Counties that otherwise have never received stockings in their life. To see Mom and Dad's face light up, knowing that they were going to be able to bring Christmas to the children that they would otherwise not be able to do.

I can't describe how much you guys are blessing other families through your benevolence. So, thank you for your heart and your generosity and what it means to this community, and I know most importantly what it means to the Lord as his word tells us he loves a cheerful giver.

So, we're in the Christmas season. I know that because my four-year-old wakes up every morning and says, "Alexa, how many days till Christmas?" "There are approximately nine days until Christmas." That's what she told me this morning, so we're counting down the days. If you have a toddler, you know this is the longest month of the year by far. I was at my six-year-old's school, School of the Ozarks, on Thursday because he was giving a presentation. I heard the teachers explaining to the second graders, the first graders, and the kindergarteners that this month has been like any other month that they've experienced and it's time to reign in the emotions. Christmas does that a little bit.

There are also some misconceptions about Christmas, so I'll be careful not to touch the elf here because I know some people have some... This elf's name was Fisbee. My wife and I, in years past, decided that we were not going to partake in purchasing an elf and adopting it and bringing it home. However, our parents had other thoughts over Thanksgiving break. Without communication, they brought the elf to our home and we adopted an elf and it became Fisbee.

The very first day of this elf hanging out at our house, I'm putting my six-year-old, Aiden, to bed and he starts crying. Aiden is a very honest young man and he wears his convictions on his sleeve. I couldn't understand why he was crying, so I asked him while we were doing our tuck in and everything. He says, "I'm not going to get any gifts." I asked him why and he said, "Because I peeked at the present in Mommy's closet and I know that Fisbee saw me."

As a parent, I have a great opportunity now to present the gospel to my six-year-old. I reminded him that night, "Aiden, your hope is not in your ability; your hope is in Christ. And even when you can't do things and even when you can't resist peeking into a package to see what you may have gotten for Christmas, even when you can't withhold from those things, your hope is in Christ, not in your ability to do good or not good because we can never be good enough as Isaiah 64: 6 and Romans 3: 23 points us to." So, I got to encourage him with that.

Some of you navigate this guy differently in your house too [Santa Clause]. I'm not going to let any cats out of the bag. I'm going to let families celebrate Santa and St. Nicholas how they want to celebrate them.

In the Donyes household, we've just been telling our children, "There is a secret about Santa and when you think you know what it is, ask me and I will always tell you the truth."

Last year, my six-year-old, who was five at the time, said, "Daddy, I know what the secret is!"

"What do you think it is?"

"He doesn't go down all the chimneys because we don't even have a chimney."

"No, that's not the secret, but when you think you know what it is, ask me and I'll always tell you the truth."

This year he says, "Daddy, I think I know what the secret is."

"What do you think the secret it?"

"He can't eat all those cookies because when I eat three, I get a tummy ache."

"No, that's not the secret, but when you think you know what it is, ask me and I'll always tell you the truth."

There is no problem with doing traditions and fun and cookies and Santa and all those things. I think the only problem becomes when we allow Santa to remove the ultimate focus of what this is. I don't know if you've ever looked at the word *Santa*, but if you just move the "n" a little bit, there is something interesting that happens there. I'm just kidding. There are kids that can't figure it out, so I'm okay.

It literally says in scriptures that he, the enemy, masquerades as an angel of light. So, I don't think there is anything wrong with celebrating this tradition, but I also know when you think of any religious holiday or focus, the enemy has done a great job of trying to divert attention from what the real purpose of that is about. Look at the Easter Bunny. Look at Halloween, when that's actually Reformation Day. Look at Christmas. None of those traditions and celebrations and family rituals... There's nothing wrong with those things. Those things become a hazard when they become our ultimate hope when only Christ should be our ultimate hope.

Here's another misnomer you may not know about, that you've probably even helped spread. "Don't say Merry Xmas, that so taking Christ out of Christmas." As a matter of fact, that's not true. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, they started saying Merry Xmas because "X" is the Greek letter Chi and it's the first letter in Christ, so it actually was Merry *Christmas*. People who don't believe in Jesus might do it now, thinking that, but that's not how Merry Xmas was started. Merry Xmas was just shortened Merry Christmas; it wasn't taking Christ out of Christmas at all.

Some of you have Nativity Scenes in your home and if you have the wise men on the set, your Nativity Scene is wrong, historically. The wise men would have been way over here. They didn't get over there until two or three years later because there was no Uber, so they weren't getting there fast enough. There are a lot of things and traditions that we can believe that historically aren't accurate or could take us away from why we celebrate one of the greatest birthdays in the history of humanity. As a fact, this Nativity is probably more accurate because Mary and Joseph have a darker tint to their skin. They weren't white and pale like all of us Bransonites right here in the middle of winter; they were Middle Eastern and had a darker complexion to their skin as they deliver this child to earth as we celebrate this birthday.

So, we just have to be weary... I'm not saying don't do traditions and don't go sing carols and don't do those things, but don't allow those things to rob you from knowing the ultimate reason we celebrate this amazing birth day.

That's why I'm dressed up today. We get to celebrate a birthday like any other. I asked my six-year-old the other day, "On May 19<sup>th</sup> is when you turn seven this year. If on May 19<sup>th</sup>, Mommy and Daddy got themselves presents and celebrated themselves and made it all about themselves, would you be upset?"

"Yeah, that's ridiculous. May 19<sup>th</sup> is not your birthday; May 19<sup>th</sup> is my birthday."

I said, "I know, and you know what? December 25<sup>th</sup> (even though it's not really December 25; I don't want to go into it and pop all your bubbles) is when we celebrate the birth of God's son and it's all about him and it's always been about him and it's never going to stop being about him."

That's where I want to go today as we talk about this series, *The Weary World Rejoices, (Because We Have Hope)* Now keep in mind that you have the Old Testament and God is speaking to his people. He speaks to them on Mt. Sinai and gives them the law, directs them out of slavery into the wilderness and then into the Promised Land. He speaks to them through kings and then he speaks to them through prophets, one of those prophets being Isaiah where he tells us this. He gives this beautiful picture in scripture that here comes Christmas morning **14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin (Mary) will conceive (immaculately) and give birth to a son...** That son being Jesus that God would come in human form to take away the sins of the world.

The greatest gift that you will ever open up on Christmas morning is that reality that you have receive a gift, God's son, so that you never have to taste death. That's something worth celebrating, that's a present worth opening.

**...and will call him Immanuel.** Immanuel literally means God with us. He loved us so much that he gave us the greatest gift he ever could have possibly given us: his son. This is where we find ultimate hope.

Then you have a couple more prophetic books after Isaiah, going all the way up to Malachi. Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament, the last of 39 books in the Old Testament, the last prophet to speak. Then after Malachi, you have four hundred years of silence, nothing, God not speaking. God not speaking through his prophets, God not speaking through his kings, God not speaking through Abraham. Nothing, zero, silence.

I'm driving to the zoo with my four-year-old. My wife and I decided to divide and conquer yesterday to get some gifts and stuff done, so I'm driving to the zoo. He's like, "Daddy, how long is ten days." That's because Alexa told us yesterday was ten days. "Can I open a present today?"

I said, "No, you can't open a present today. You need to wait. It's called patience."

"I don't like patience."

"I know you don't like patience; you're four." I've been completely aware of that this whole month. As we're driving, I said, "Anders, you have to wait ten days. Do you know how long God's people had to wait?"

"How long, Daddy?"

"Four hundred years."

"How long is four hundred years?"

"Well, Anders, you're four, so that's a hundred times how old you are." I don't think he really understood me, but he understood me enough to grab his hair and yell as I'm looking at him through the rearview mirror to the backseat. I said, "Anders, people had to wait a long time to hear this great news, to receive this ultimate gift of hope in Christ." I don't know, maybe I was just really getting ready for this message and so I just went into preaching mode on a four-year-old, which works; it helps me better prepare for all of you.

I said, "Do you know what else, Anders? They used to have to bring all these sacrifices, these spotless lambs to the temple and sacrifice them to take care of their sins. They would constantly do that, hoping that their sacrifice would appease God and then he would deliver them from their sins. 'I hope this lamb was spotless enough. I hope that God will accept this offering. I hope, I hope, I hope.' But then Jesus came and now you don't have to hope anymore because he is well pleased in you through his son. Through his son, he sees the imputed righteousness of Christ, which is a beautiful thing."

So, there's this connection between faith and hope. This idea that you would have faith in Christ. Romans 10; 9-10 says that if you believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and confess with your mouth that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved.

There is a faith, but at that conjunction of faith also comes hope. Those of you that have trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior know in that moment this overwhelming Holy Spirit coming to live inside you gives you a hope, a vertical hope that you know can never be taken away from you.

As a matter of fact, Hebrews 10: 22-23 makes the connection with faith and hope this way. ***22 ...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience...***

C.S. Lewis talks about this in Mere Christianity. Even before you become a regenerated believer, you know in your conscience there's a difference between good and evil. You know that no matter how much Fisbee or something or someone else is watching you, you can never be good enough. Inherently, you still need the help of the Spirit of God.

So, he cleans you from this guilty conscience ***and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess...*** So, there's this connection between faith and hope. We place faith and now our hope in things and who we have our hope in completely changes. ***...for he who promised (Jesus) is faithful.***

As a matter of fact, Hebrews 13: 5 says it this way, "He will never leave you nor forsake you." Hebrews 11: 1 puts it this way with the connection between faith and hope. ***1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*** So, you see this direct correlation between faith and hope.

When we talk about hope, that's a confusing term because sometimes we hope in things that let us down. When we make the connection between the hope in things that let us down and the hope in Christ, it can get blurry. There's an Australian evangelist. His name is Nick Vujicic. He was born with no arms and no legs. This young man travels the world sharing hope. How can a young man... I know he's a believer in Jesus and I know he loves Jesus. The only probably explanation of how a young man with no arms and no legs – many of us would say those were tough cards he was dealt - could express and communicate hope to a world. It's only because he hasn't placed his hope in this world. He's placed his ultimate hope in Christ.

Check out this video clip:

...looking at me people are pointing their finger at me and laughing. I was born this way and no doctor knows why I was born this way. My parents don't know why I was born this way, Lady Gaga doesn't know why I was born this way. And in my life, you know, seeing everyone with arms legs... My brother and sister have arms or legs.

I never imagined that I'd be happy. But we got to understand that brokenness is brokenness, but hope is hope. You know, some people say, "Well all you need is just to be positive." Well it's easy for you to say, that's what I'm thinking, you know. People who have arms and legs, while it's easy for you and I just want you to know though that there is something I have come here to prepare a message for you to let you know that there is hope beyond what you see.

When in life we have things in life that that come, and we try figure out, “Well who am I and what am I doing and what's my purpose. Is there any purpose at all to my life in the end “ And I stand before you, without arms or legs, telling you right now that I am absolutely not deceiving. There is something greater, something greater than the disabilities around you or the limitations around you. There is hope.

[video ends]

So, I don't know how you walked in here today. What addiction you may be facing, what difficulties in your marriage you might be facing or your parenting or whatever. But there's hope and his name is Jesus. We celebrate December 25<sup>th</sup> because his name is Jesus and he gives us hope in a weary world. We rejoice in a weary world because we have this hope in the name of Jesus.

There are different types of hope. There's a horizontal hope and there's a vertical hope. What's really cool about vertical hope is when you read about hope in the Old Testament, you see the word *batah* and when you read it in the Greek in the New Testament, it's *elpizo*. Both times when you see these words in the Bible, doubt is never associated with them. The word doubt is never in the same sentence as these words of hope. To put it another way, there's no doubt about it. When you have ultimate hope in Christ, there is not doubt. We know he's going to come back. We know that he's going to rescue those who are his. We know he's going to redeem us of all our sins for those who have put their trust in him.

So, when you talk about the horizontal hope, there are three different types of horizontal hope. The first example of horizontal hope would be something like this. “I hope the Chargers win the Superbowl.” That means I don't have any certainty that the Chargers will win the Superbowl; I only desire that they do. Now, they did beat the Chiefs on Thursday, which was awesome. Too many Chiefs fans in here. But I'm going to prove to you why those that just booed me have their ultimate hopes in the Chiefs and not Christ because they were in a really bad mood Friday morning. And the spouses had to deal with it.

As a matter of fact, I was at the game Thursday night. It's an annual tradition. I was born and raised in San Diego so don't hate me for being loyal, bandwagoners. I was there, and I'll tell you the truth. I was with my buddy, Dusty, and we were watching it and I literally told him, as it was fourth and six the first time, going on that last drive. “Hey, if they don't get it, we're beating the traffic. We have to get home tonight; I gotta get to Branson; we're going.”

Then they picked it up on fourth and six. Okay, now I've got a little more hope. It gets to fourth down again and I was like, “Okay, as soon as they don't get this first down, we gotta go.” Then they picked up the first down again. Chiefs fans, are you reliving this with me? Then they picked up the first down again and then they didn't call a spear on Phillip Rivers and I was like, “Okay it's over. As soon as they stop him on these two, we gotta get out of here fast.” Then they scored the touchdown and I was like, “Please go for a two-point conversion, I don't what to stay here all night. I gotta beat this traffic and get home. I have something to do in the morning. Then all of the sudden I have a lot of hope. Oh, my goodness, we might actually get this two-point conversion and then we did and guess what? I've never, in my life, heard Arrowhead go from the loudest thing I've ever heard in my life to the quietest I've ever heard it in my life. It was awesome.

Here's the problem and I why I'm rubbing some of you Chief's fans. You can't put your hope in that. When your hope is in sports or your hope is in your sports teams, your Razorbacks, pig sookie, or your roll tide or Patriots or your Cubs or your Cardinals... When you put your hope in your sports teams, you realize how much hope you've put into them when they don't succeed. When they don't succeed, you take it out on other people because you've placed your hope in a sports team and a bunch of 22 -23-year-olds that might be wrongly treating women. Not mentioning the Chiefs again. And you put your hope there and it shatters you because you placed your hope in something that's not supposed to fulfill you.

Another example of horizontal hope would be "Our hope is that our daddy will get a raise." That means we don't know if he will or not, but that's our desire, so we put our hope in daddy's income, we put our hope in that we're going to get that pool, right, Clark? We put our hope in our boss giving us a Christmas bonus or that we're going to win the lottery, or we put our hope in things that we can't control. Then when the boss doesn't give Clark a raise, our whole world is shattered, and we start burning Christmas trees and throwing Christmas lights everywhere and we're angry and we're short tempered and we don't treat our family well. That's because we've put our hope in a job or a circumstance that we have no control over. And when you put your hope in anything other than the vertical hope of Christ, it will eventually leave you disappointed and dissatisfied.

The other example that you could talk about is "I hope there are no ice storms during the holiday season so travel is not compromised." Good weather would give us our desired travel conditions, but it is not guaranteed. You see where I'm going with this. Anything that you fill in the blank here with other than Christ – "If only I had \_\_\_\_\_ then I would be happy or then I would be satisfied." – is counterfeit hope if that blank is not Jesus. So, if only I had good weather. If only I had vacation. If only I had a raise. If only the Chiefs win the Superbowl. If that blank is anything other than Jesus, it's a counterfeit hope that will disappoint you time and time again.

Now, there might be temporary satisfaction in those things... The Chiefs might please you for a season, but Cubs fans are already displeased again, and they finally won the World Series after 80 plus years. So, it will only last for a season. The Chiefs might win the Superbowl this year, but you're going to want them to do it again next year. You might get a shiny new toy this Christmas morning in nine days, but you're going to want something new nine days later.

I was explaining this to my six-year-old. Aiden, who sitting right here in the front row. I said, "Do you realize that you're going to wake up Christmas morning..." He's six and he builds 14 year old Legos. The kid is crazy. In a good way. I said, "Do you realize every time you build the Legos, you just want something more. You constantly want something more. No matter how many Legos... I could buy you all the Legos in the world and you would still want to build more Legos because you always want more. What's going on is your heart is longing for something else that this world can't satisfy."

C.S. Lewis put it this way: *"If I find within myself a desire in which this world cannot satisfy, the only probably explanation is I was made for another world."* I was made for a hope that will never be destroyed, that will never be destructed. And that's the ultimate hope in Christ that can't be taken away from us.

So, as we explore this horizontal hope versus a vertical hope, the question I have for you today is, "Where are you placing your hope? If your mood or your day is dictated off of how other people treat you or circumstances in your life or your marriage or different things, when those get off kilter, so does your life. But, when your ultimate hope is in Jesus and Jesus alone, when your hope is placed heavenward, your foundation is secure, your foundation is more solid, and people can't rattle you as easily.

I love the way Romans 5: 5 puts it. Biblical hope is not a wish because you don't wish for what you already have. Jesus came. He did everything he promised he would do that was prophesied in the Old Testament. He fulfilled it, so there's no reason or inclination that we would think he's not going to fulfill the rest that's still to be fulfilled whether you look in Daniel or the Book of Revelation. He's fulfilled it. So, it's not I wish Jesus would come back. No, he's coming back. I wish Jesus would finally defeat Satan. No, he's going to defeat Satan. I wish those who trusted in him would be in heaven. No, we are going to be in heaven for those who trusted in him and placed our ultimate hope in him. It's not a wish. You don't wish for what you already have.

Ephesians 1 talks about how he sealed us in him. The promised Holy Spirit, a deposit guarantying our inheritance. We don't have to wish. It's ultimate hope.

I love what Romans 5: 5 says. "For those of us that hope in God will never be disappointed." Hope in God will never put us to shame. So, that means it doesn't matter what amount of baggage you brought in here today. It doesn't matter what addiction you have. It doesn't matter what thing your hiding. Hope in God eliminates all shame.

Let me tell you there is no room for shame in the blood of Christ. If you are living in shame today, you are not living in the beauty of the forgiveness of Christ. You need to hear the gospel message. You need to hear the Christmas story this morning. You need to hear that God sent his one and only son in the form of a man to live the life we all should have lived, died the death we all deserved to die, so that you don't ever have to live in shame. He's not shaming you. He sent his best gift, his son, for you.

That's why we celebrate Christmas. We celebrate the ultimate hope of Christ because we don't have to live in shame. There is no more shame and there will be no more pain or tears or sorrow anymore. That's the ultimate hope. That's what keeps my life filled with joy. My hope is not in my wife. She's awesome, but my hope is not in her. There have been times she has disappointed me and more times that I've disappointed her, but we're okay because we both have placed our ultimate hope in Christ and we know why we celebrate December 25. What a beautiful birthday.

Horizontal hope is eventually going to disappoint you. You may be able to ride the coattails for a little while, but eventually, horizontal hope is going to disappoint. Vertical hope, biblical hope never disappoints.

My six-year-old is really sharp. He finagled my wife yesterday. I saw the whole thing coming. He was being really sweet. He's naturally a really sweet kid, he really is, but he was up to something. He was begging me to take him Christmas shopping for his four-year-old brother.



He was like, "Can we go shopping for Anders; I know exactly what he wants for Christmas." Okay, that makes sense, you two are buddies, two years apart. You guys are in each other's world. So, like I said, we did the divide and conquer yesterday. I went to the zoo with my four-year-old, so my six-year-old and my wife could go Christmas shopping for the four-year-old. They get there, and they pick out the gifts and then they come back.

My six-year-old wants me to wrap my four-year-old's present with him. We're back in my room while my little man is doing something else in the living room. We're wrapping the present and my six-year-old looks at me and goes, "Daddy, I know Anders is really going to like this, but I'm going to love it." You totally just worked your mom. So, as I'm wrapping, he's like, "No, but I really know he'd like it."

I said, "But yeah you wanted this gift didn't you, buddy?"

We finished wrapping it and I get to talk to him back in my room. I was like, "Do you know where selfishness comes from? Horizontal hope drives selfishness. When we place our hope in horizontal things, it fuels selfishness. When we place our ultimate hope vertically, biblical hope in Christ, it breeds selflessness."

C.S. Lewis said, "Selfishness is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less." I like how he put that.

So, as I'm trying to communicate to my six-year-old that just finagled my wife, I'm like, "Hey, we need to think of others more." We only do that by realizing what this ultimate hope for us provides.

John Piper puts it this way: *"Biblical hope not only desires something good for the future, it expects it to happen. And it not only expects it to happen, it is confident that it will happen. There is a moral certainty that the good we expect and desire will be done."*

To put it another way, biblical hope is not a feeling; it's a reality. While feelings are important, it's important to know my hope in Christ is not based on how I wake up and feel this morning or whether or not my coffee had enough creamer in it. That's not where biblical hope lies. It's not a feeling; it is a reality, a reality of who Christ was and is and is to come.

Some of you walked in here today and there's a disconnect from your brain to your heart. Your whole life, you've heard this Christmas story. "Yeah, I know, Jesus is the ultimate hope and apart from him, I'll never be satisfied." And it's just become like a mantra to you or it's just become very routine and ritualistic. I'm here to tell you it's one thing in your brain and another thing in your heart. When you place your heart in the ultimate hope, it's not just in your mind because your mom and dad have always taught it to you or you just go to church once a week and you've heard it or whatever the case may be.

There's a similar guy in the Gospel of Mark that wrestles with the same thing. He's heard the message his whole life, but he's really never placed his ultimate hope in Christ. He's never fully trusted in Christ. Remember I told you there's a connection between the two. Jesus calls out this man for his unbelief or

his lack of hope in who Christ is. The man responds this way and it's such a powerful response. "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief." Mark 9: 24

I don't know about you, but I've been there in my own life. There have been seasons where I have had no idea how God was going to get me through something. I believe, but there is a lot of doubt and worry and I'm focused on a lot of horizontal things rather than vertical things. So, maybe the most powerful prayer you'll pray this Christmas season, as we approach the greatest birthday in the history of humanity, is "Jesus, I believe, but I need you to help my unbelief. I've placed my hope in sports teams, I've placed my hope in family and my spouse and my kids and their behavior and their performance. I've placed my hope in conditions outside my control and I've become a control freak and I'm driven by being in control. I've failed to realize those are all counterfeit hopes and I need to place my ultimate hope in you and you alone."

The crew is going to come out and sing Silent Night one more time after I pray. As they do, I just encourage you to pray, "Jesus, I believe. Help my unbelief." And that this holiday season, you reflect on placing your ultimate hope in the ultimate gift from the ultimate creator who took away all the shame and sin in the world.

God, thank you so much that we get to celebrate your birthday, that we get to worship you, adore you, praise you, lift you up on high. May we be reminded this Christmas season that it's always been about you, it's always going to be about you, and it will never stop being about you.

Thank you for the biggest act of humility that humanity has ever seen by coming down to this earth and taking our sins upon your back.

We pray these families will be blessed during this holiday season and that they reflect on all they have from you. It's in the matchless and mighty name of Jesus we pray. And all God's people said... Amen.