

God's Gentleness Is Our Hope

Isaiah 2:1-5

December 1, 2019

It is hard to believe we are in the month of December. December is not another month. It is another mood. It is another state of mind. With Black Friday shopping, we are in the spirit of celebration. We decorate our homes, send greeting cards, buy gifts for the loved ones. The houses are adorned with greenery with a hope that this symbol of life will become real. We put up lights around our homes with a hope that the light will dispel our darkness. We wish this cold winter month of December to be filled with hope.

Bil Keane, an American Cartoonist, the author of *The Family Circus* once said, "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is mystery, and today is a gift of God, which is why we call it the present."¹ The question is, "How do we live today, the present, with hope?" Can we live each and every day with hope no matter what happens in our lives? Can we claim hope when we are lonely and suffering?

I dare to proclaim that we can have hope when we affirm that God is involved in our lives and he intervenes in the midst of our struggles no matter how difficult it may seem to overcome them.

Hope is the conviction that we are not permanently stuck in our own problems. No matter what we face, if we have a conviction that "This too will pass," then we can have hope that our struggle will end. If we have confidence that the Lord is with us, watches over us, and intervenes when we struggle, that gives us hope, a lasting hope. Hope surges in us when we have confidence in God.

Isaiah 40:30-31 say,

"Even youths shall faint and be weary,
And young men shall fall exhausted;
But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles;
They shall run and not be weary;
They shall walk and not faint."²

Hope and strength rise from our reliance in the Lord.

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/hope>

² English Standard Version.

Isaiah invites us to encounter the Lord and learn of his way. For that is where we find hope for our lives. Isaiah 2:3 says, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."

We will be busy in this season of Advent and Christmas – family visits, places to go, and people to meet. The question is, are we going to be any better as a result of this month? Are we going to have hope, joy, peace and love as a result of all the celebrations we have in this month? Our problem is that we try to fabricate hope, joy, peace and love.

We decorate our homes, we hang the ornaments and lights, we buy lots of things for ourselves and for others. We go to parties and family gatherings, but do we find hope in them? We do not find hope in them. Hope is not found in the things we do.

We can even saturate ourselves in religious activities, listen to a Christmas Cantata, or Handel's Messiah, or help the needy, or attend Christmas services. Yet, we still end up feeling hopeless and sad because we have failed to encounter God, to learn his ways, and walk in his paths.

A British pastor Edward Mote wrote a hymn, "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less." It goes like this:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.³

Why is Jesus' blood and righteousness our hope? Because Jesus leads us to our salvation with gentleness. He understands our frailty and weakness, and he gently guides and leads us. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."⁴

Jesus' gentle guidance leads us to his way. And his way is our hope for salvation.

³ The United Methodist Hymnal, 1989, #368.

⁴ Matthew 11:28-29.

We have been talking about the Fruit of the Spirit. And Saint Paul says that gentleness is one of the characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit. Gentleness is the character we acquire as a result of being obedient to the Lord.

The gentleness of our God, the gentleness of our Lord Jesus, is our hope. Our gentleness should lead others to the Lord, who is their hope.

Henry Moorhouse (1840-1880) was a British evangelist who made a great impact in Dwight L. Moody's (1837-1899) life and ministry. Dwight Moody and Henry Moorhouse were contemporaries. Dwight Moody served in the U.S. and Henry Moorhouse in England. Before Dwight L. Moody heard Henry Moorhouse's sermon, he always preached the message of God's impending wrath and judgment. He invited people to repentance by preaching the message of God's judgment. But Henry Moorhouse's message was very much focused on God's love for sinners, and how his love is demonstrated in the sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ. After hearing Henry Moorhouse's message, Moody realized that the real gospel is the message of God's love. After realizing that, Moody's message was changed to focus on God's love and he reached more people with the greater impact.

Henry Moorhouse pretty much preached all his messages based on one Bible verse throughout his entire ministry. That passage was John 3:16. His message was always focused on God's love for sinners.

One day Moorhouse was preaching in a Welsh mining town. The miners in that town were some of the toughest, roughest, and meanest men in all of Wales. However, as Henry delivered the message, many people were convicted of their sins and accepted God's invitation for their salvation.

Among the miners, there was a man named Ike Miller. He was a drunkard, a blasphemer, a womanizer, and a wife beater. Everyone in the town feared Ike Miller. Ike Miller did not like decent people for some reason. However, he hated preachers and Christians more than anything.

When Ike Miller heard about how Henry Moorhouse's preaching converted many people every night, Ike Miller sent a message to Henry Moorhouse. He said to cancel the revival meeting right away. If he didn't and Henry preached that night, he would come and personally beat him up until no one would be able to recognize him.

Some of the Christians went to Henry Moorhouse and said to him that he should cancel the revival meeting. Henry Moorhouse refused. That night Henry preached and Ike Miller was there sitting in the front section trying to intimidate Henry, but Henry was calm. He read John 3:16 and started to preach the message of God's love, the life of Jesus, and the joy of eternal life.

When Henry finished, Ike Miller got up. Without any violence he left the church and went home. When he got home, he called his children and his wife and made them kneel before him. Then he also knelt before them and asked them to join him in prayer. It was the first time that he had ever prayed with them.

He said, "Oh God..." and then there was dead silence. He did not know what to say. He did not know how to pray. Prayer was so unfamiliar to him. He knew how to curse and how to yell and scream; but not pray. He tried again, "Oh Lord..." Again, he did not know what to say after that. Then he remembered a prayer his mother taught him when he was a young boy. He prayed that prayer:

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild
Look upon a little child;
Forgive my simplicity
And suffer me to come to thee.

With that prayer, Ike Miller became a changed man. Not just him; but his whole family.⁵ He was drawn to the gentleness of Henry Moorhouse. Henry Moorhouse was gentle but his gentleness was his power. He was not intimidated by Ike Miller's threat at all. Actually, his gentleness toward his adversary changed the heart of the meanest, roughest, and toughest person. It changed Ike Miller.

You know God's gentleness is our hope; and our gentleness should lead others to the Lord, who is the hope of their salvation.

In this season of Advent, may we all encounter the Lord, and learn of his ways, and walk in his paths.

⁵ From James Moore's sermon, "Gentle on My Mind", www.esermons.com.