In four days, we are going to be celebrating that famous world holiday called Christmas. Perhaps the most common way of celebration is spending time with our family, consisting of sharing a meal together, giving each other gifts, and if you are somewhat religious, attending a church service to enjoy Christmas carols and a play about the birth of Jesus. It’s all a wonderful time and I believe God is honored because we express love to one another during this season.

My desire this morning is to offer you a biblical perspective that could make this Christmas season much more meaningful— one that could build our faith, inspire us to share the good news with others, and rekindle hope in our life.

You see, the essence of Christmas- the birth of Jesus Christ, is fundamentally a remembrance of the greatest gift that God gave mankind. This gift came at a time, a season where God had been sort of missing in action. The period between the end of the Old Testament writings and the beginning of the New Testament— a period of about 400 years, was a dry period. There were no angelic visitations or great prophetic utterings. God’s people, his chosen nation- Israel, were in a state of dead religion and anxiety. They were weighed down by a lack of fulfillment of the prophecies spoken of old- that the temple of Jerusalem would be rebuilt and they would experience Gods blessings, that many nations would begin to worship the true and living God, that there would be a period of prosperity, expansion, peace and the return of God’s presence into their midst; indeed, they were awaiting their Messiah, who was going to come and restore them to their full glory! By the time Malachi was writing his message, the last message of the Old Testament, he was disillusioned because what he saw around him was poverty, prolonged drought, pestilence and spiritual destitution. It was a hopeless time.

Have you ever been at a place like that in your life? You have these great ideas of where you should be in life, but the reality is so far from your mental picture or your heart’s desire. I’ve been at such a place. In my case, it was dealing with personal failure to achieve a desired goal. One of the most difficult times in my life was going through university. You see, as a teenager, my greatest desire as I finished high school was to party as hard as I possibly could. I grew up on Channel O old school vibes, gangster rap (West vs. East Coast, Tupac & Wu Tang), when NBA was still cool (MJ and the Chicago Bulls), movies like Friday were big! I had a fantasy that growing up was going to be one big constant party! So I started Uni in 2003, and hit it big time! I remember being awake during the day was strange because me and my clique were such night people. The only day I would not be out was probably Monday and Tuesday, after
that it was a marathon until Sunday. I'd meet people who were in school for 5 years and think what the hell are you doing in school for 5 years- are you doing medicine or what? Well... 9 years after I started, I was still in campus, and feeling much like the Jews of Malachi’s time felt. I was depressed, embarrassed, confused, and hopeless. This is where I met Christ, and the journey of rekindling hope in my life began (you can buy me coffee to hear the rest of the story :)

You see, the way out of my hopeless situation was through Faith in God through Jesus Christ-which gave me hope for life. Romans 5: 8 says ‘But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us’: how do you feel when you find out that a friend or some stranger has done a favor for you behind your back? My first major point here is that hope begins with Jesus, it is a gift of God, and it is sustained by focusing on Jesus only- not on our situations or relying on man, but only on Jesus Hebrews 12:2 ‘Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...’

• Because when we get saved, God’s priority is not to bless us but to transform us into the image of Jesus & that requires Him to grow our faith;

• It is interesting to note that as believers, one of the basic ways God grows our faith and matures us is through trials. So not all trials are to be hurriedly exited or impatiently prayed away- sometimes we need to go through the furnace to purify the gold in our life so to speak. James 1: 2-7 brings this into perspective ‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously without finding fault and it will be given to him.’

**Question of the Day:** Think of a hopeless situation in your life currently; or if there is none, think of a situation that a friend of yours may be in; and let that be in your mind as we go through this sermon.

You see, Christmas is the greatest gift from God- not only to us who believe and have received that gift, but even for unbelievers. If you are here and are yet to receive Jesus Christ as your personal savior and made peace with God, then I’m glad you have come. You too have hope! That gift remains unwrapped for you to come and take. We all face times of great hopelessness; either because we desire something and have not received it or we struggle with habitual sins, or we are desperate for God to intervene in a situation.

Whatever the case is, I want to present to you 3 ‘great expectations’ that are fundamental to our faith, 3 great expectations that spring from the birth of Christ all through to his resurrection, 3 great expectations that should rekindle our hope during this Christmas season.
Brothers and sisters, the reason for studying and understanding hope - which is appropriate for the Christmas season, is not just for lack of a better topic. Sometimes we may get bored of hearing the same messages of hope through the birth of a savior, but it is actually a biblical imperative that we understand our hope as Christians. Infact, this is a major reason why I chose for us to have a deeper look at the message of Christmas this morning. Let’s check out 1 Peter 3: 15 ‘…Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect’.

- **Give Real life scenario:** sitting at the Christmas table and someone asks you about your hope.

- It is clear that understanding hope is of critical importance of effective witnessing and discipleship. Some people may challenge you, or you may be sharing the gospel with someone and they want to understand what makes Christian hope different from non-Christian hope. So I pray that this morning you will go away with a better understanding of the great hope that you carry in you as a born again follower of Jesus Christ.

**There are 2 things to note as an introduction to our study on rekindling hope:**

1. **The first thing to note** is the Foundation of our Hope: before we get into the meat of the topic is this; Christmas gives us a great hope because Jesus was born and we received a savior, but to understand the full measure of the hope we have in Jesus, we must understand the whole story; Concisely packed into this scripture: 1 Peter 1: 20-21 says ‘He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.’

   - **[Genesis: The Beginning]** ‘He was chosen before the creation of the world…’ We see that the plan of our salvation - yours and mine, was planned a very long time ago. **This should humble us and cause us to fall in love with God** even more because His love for us dates a long time ago;

   - **[Christmas, Christ’s Ministry, Death & Resurrection]** ‘But was revealed in these last times for your sake…’ Last times began when Jesus was born (Christmas) - when we received the living hope. **Now this should cause us to be eagerly awaiting and alert because Jesus is coming soon, we are living in the last times;**

   - **[Foundation of our Hope]** ‘Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God’ So because of Jesus coming to earth, beginning with Christmas and ending with his resurrection, our faith and hope rest in God. He raised Jesus partly as proof
that we can have hope through this life (we will talk about this more later on)  

\[Psalm 43:5\] ‘Why are you in despair?’

2 The second thing to note is the Source of our Hope. Where do we get hope from? Does God miraculously conjure up warm feelings of hope while we are in depressing and desperate situations? No brothers, we have a responsibility as well. We find hope in the scriptures and we must rely on them for our hope—especially when we are downcast and depressed. Romans 15: 4 ‘For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.’

- ‘Everything’: Not just your favorite verses e.g. God so loved the world or I know the plans I have for you. We must invest in knowing the full counsel of God!
- ‘Written in the Past’: We can rely on the written word, which was inspired by God. (2 Timothy 3: 16 ‘All scripture is God-breathed’)
- ‘Teach us’: We have to be humble and learn. Hope is learnt! It is not a mere feeling!
- ‘Through Endurance’: The race is not for the swift but for those who endure until the end; Hebrews 12: 1 ‘...run with the endurance the race that is set before us’. Don’t give up! It’s not easy, so let us prepare to run the distance and not grow weary! This requires serious training constantly.
- ‘The Encouragement of the Scriptures’: Lasting encouragement comes from the Lord and not human philosophies (Horoscope; The Secret; Oprah).
- ‘Have Hope’: This therefore seems to be a product of God’s Word, teachings us, through endurance and encouragement of His Word.
- Summary: The Word is and will be central to you and I finding and receiving hope from God.

Great Expectations

The first great expectation as Christians begins with a difficult passage to deal with because it forces us to stop focusing on our present circumstance, our day to day struggles, and cast our eyes on things that have eternal ramifications. We were actually not created to be constantly struggling with our immediate needs, problems, and desires- God intended for us in this life to be expectant of the life to come. Ecclesiastes 3: 11 ‘He has also set eternity in the hearts of men...’ We see in this verse and the ones that precede it, that mankind, no matter the wealth or fame or enjoyment/pleasure that he/she experiences, will always have an inner urge to
understand or an inner urge that this life is not all there is to it- there is eternity planted in all of our hearts!

That introductory verse is 1 Corinthians 15: 19 ‘If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.’ And this verse does well as an introduction to the great expectations:

1. **The return of Jesus Christ is the central hope of our faith.**

   - **Titus 2: 11-14** ‘For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the **blessed hope**- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ…’

   i. **While we wait**- waiting in Greek carries a connotation of eagerness. Excitement, ‘can’t wait’ feeling! This should cause us to live godly lives and avoid worldly lifestyles that we once used to live in.

   ii. **The Blessed Hope**: Christ’s second coming is a blessed hope. This is a blessed hope because of how such anticipation for Christ’s return inspires us to live in this present age- godly lives, watchful, no fear of death, sharing the gospel eagerly, trusting in the forgiveness of our sins etc.

   - **1 Peter 1:3-7** ‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade- kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be reveal in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire- may be proven genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed’.

   - **1 Corinthians 15: 12-19**: ‘But if it is preached that Christ has been reaised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the daed? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Chrshit has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men’
• 2 Peter 3: 3-4 (Scoffers): ‘First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say ‘where is this coming he promised?’ Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’

2. The Redemption of our bodies/New body of perfection and no sin.

• 2 Corinthians 5: 1-5: ‘Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now ti is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come’

• Philippians 3: 20, 21: ‘But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who , by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.’

3. Hope of Righteousness & Eternal Life

• Galatians 5: 5: ‘But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope’

• 1 Thess 5: 9: For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ’

4. A New Heaven & a New Earth (Restored Creation)

• God’s presence among us Revelation 21: 27 ‘Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.’

• Revelation 22: 3-6 ‘No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. The angel said to me ‘these words are trustworthy and true…’

• 2 Peter 3: 13 ‘But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.’
• Revelation 21: 1-2 ‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.’

• No fallen thing; no sin; perfection Isaiah 65: 17 ‘Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.’

Response to this Hope (Application)

1. Be self-controlled, godly, upright and alert (Titus 2: 11-14)
2. Purify ourselves from sinful living. (1 Peter 4: 7-11)
3. Share the gospel eagerly, joyfully, and effectively (explain our hope clearly). (2 Cor. 5)
4. Trust that God will complete His work in us & declare us righteous at judgment. (1 Thess 5: 9-10)
5. Rejoice in hope (Romans 12:12).