

Christmas – a time of comfort

Have we ever desired something and it seemed that we would never get it. Then someone comes along and tells us of the possibility of us getting what we had been longing for so long. However it still does not materialise we keep hoping with our desire still a mere hope and we still have to persevere until we receive it. Then, one day we receive what we have been longing for for so long. It is a time of comfort.

Luke 1: 67 – 80

1) A time of hope

- For many years the Israelites had been living under the oppression of foreign rulers
 - It was in view of Israel's pending exile and oppression by the Assyrians and the Babylonians that many of the prophets also prophesied concerning the coming Messiah
 - However they were sent into exile and afterwards returned to Israel without seeing the Messiah
 - They were later ruled over by the Greeks and the Romans but still they waited for the Messiah
- They lived in hope of a Messiah who would come and conquer all their enemies, setting them free from all oppression so that they can live in peace under a rightful ruler of Israel. This was the basic understanding of the Messiah who they were waiting for.
- As long as they had hope they would not give up
- The time of hope is thus also a time of perseverance
- Hope has a thick skin and will endure many a blow; it will put on patience as a vestment, it will wade through a sea of blood, it will endure all things if it be of the right kind, for the joy that is set before it. Hence patience is called "patience of hope," because it is hope that makes the soul exercise patience and long-suffering under the cross, until the time comes to enjoy the crown.
JOHN BUNYAN (1628–1688)
- As the Jews had persevered through many trials because they held firmly onto the hope that they had may we persevere through whatever life has thrown at us because we hold firmly onto the hope of Christ – the One who was promised and came as a baby in a manger 2000 years ago.
 - It is unfortunate that many did not recognise their Messiah when He came because they had preconceived ideas of what to expect and missed Him when He came.
 - We need to be sure that God hasn't already given us what we really long for in another way but we have missed it because we had preconceived ideas that weren't God's ideas of the way He was going to meet our desires.
- You might have something that you are hoping for but still haven't received it this Christmas – don't give up your hope and keep persevering
- Hebrews 11: 1 – 2 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for
- The word hope I take for faith; and indeed hope is nothing else but the constancy of faith.
John Calvin

2) A time of receiving what we have hoped for

- Zechariah understood that the birth of John the Baptist was the sign of the imminent return of the Messiah
 - Luke 1: 76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him
- Even though Jesus had not yet been born Zechariah was full of joy and praise because he knew what God was doing and that the Messiah was about to come
- He rejoiced as if he had already received the promise of God
 - Mark 11: 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.
- The outcome of receiving what we have hoped for is great joy:
 - Zechariah sang his song of praise
 - Mary sang a song of praise of the annunciation of the birth of Jesus
 - The angels appeared to the shepherds with a song of praise
 - Simeon took Jesus in His arms in the temple and praised God (Luke 2: 28)
 - The prophetess, Anna, gave thanks to God for Jesus (Luke 2: 38)
- All these understood the greatness of the gift of Jesus as they spent time in the presence of God and knew His heart.
 - If we don't spend time with God and know His heart we will miss the heart of Christmas
 - Christmas isn't primarily about receiving our earthly desires but receiving God's greatest gift to mankind – Himself

3) A time of comfort

- Jesus coming to earth is Immanuel – God with us
- When we have hoped for something for so long persevering through many trials until we have received it and then one day we receive our hearts desire a huge burden is lifted off our shoulders
 - We feel comforted, relieved of that stress.
- He is the God of all comfort
- Zechariah saw this in the coming of Jesus:
 - The tender mercy of God – God feels for us from the gut
 - He lights up our darkness
 - He protects us when we live in the shadow of death
 - He guides our feet into the path of peace

This Christmas whether we are still living in hope of receiving our hearts desires and persevering through the trials, not sure of when we will receive them

Or if we have received our heart's desires

May the coming of Christ to you personally be a comfort as you experience His tender mercies, His light in your darkness, His protection in the shadows of your lives and may your feet be led on the path of peace

Luke 2: 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favour rests.