



Hope in the storms of life.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil... Hebrews 6:19.

This past year, our congregation has been advent-uring through the Old Testament. Along that advent-ure, we've studied the journey of Noah (Genesis 5-9) and where and when God showed up in his life. Noah needed Hope on his dark journey.

Being in darkness is neither God's will for mankind nor out of His power to overcome:

- Creation was formless and void yet God sent forth the Light of the Creation (1:3-4) and spoke into existence the lights of creation (1:14-18).
- The Flood brought in a seemingly endless storm like none that the world had never experienced before (or since, thankfully!) yet God called forth for the breaking of the storm and the coming of light (8:1-5).
- During the Exodus the Israelites spent a literal lifetime wandering the desert in search of their place in the world yet God was always present in the cloud by day, pillar by night (Exodus 13:21-22).

In the New Testament we read of others who were on similar journeys: The Wise Men (Matthew 2:1-6). The Bible says that they travelled from the east. This area was formerly the seat of world power following the fall of the Egyptian empire. Then Greek then Romans eventually overran the entirety of southern Europe through to the far east (Assyria, Babylon and into India). Now the former world conquerors were a conquered people.

As they looked at the former nations that they had once conquered, there was Israel – still hopeful and awaiting their Messiah. The wise men came seeking to worship the Messiah for themselves as well as for their once powerful empire.

These wise men probably understood some universal truths.

- Darkness cannot dispel darkness. It takes a more powerful force from outside of itself to come breaking in. Ask any person struggling with depression or anxiety; they know they

can't just "better thought" themselves out of the dark places, but need outside care and intervention.

- Lies hide in the darkness. Fears and insecurities grow, damaged self-worth and an incorrect valuation of community become deeper and darker corners that we either retreat or feel shoved into.
- We only live and walk in fear when there is darkness. As long as they remained silent in their far eastern countries, they would live hopelessly under the power of a heavy empire that oppressed them.

They needed Hope on their dark journey to bravely step out of the broken places and seek out the God of Israel and He in faithful, loving response provided for the whole world the star by night. It is a light of creation that God used to point toward the Light of the world, His Son and our Savior Christ Jesus.

The narrative of the world is to "get over it, lift yourself up, you'll be fine." But the narrative of the Bible is opposed to this self-defeating lie.

"The psychologist Larry Crabb writes about 'false hopes' among believers:

'Modern Christianity, in dramatic reversal of its biblical form, promises to relieve the pain of living in a fallen world. The message, whether it's from fundamentalists requiring us to live by a favored set of rules or from charismatics urging a deeper surrender to the Spirit's power, is too often the same: the promise of bliss is for now! Complete satisfaction can be ours this side of heaven...

An inexpressible joy is available which, rather than supporting us through hard times, can actually eliminate pressure, worry and pain from our experience.'

Contrary to this view, for the apostle Paul, the Christian life was no bed of roses: he suffered troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights and hunger. He concluded that he was 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything' (2 Corinthians 6). Struggles, pains and battles mixed with contentment, joy and peace. Again and again in the New Testament, Paul gives the basis for hope and endurance as being in our relationship to Christ – knowing we are accepted and loved by Him." – Richard Winter, When Life Goes Dark, page 226.

What I believe Richard Winter is expressing in his book is that Hope gives us an *endurance through* rather than *escape from* the dark places of our journeys. And that hope has as its source our relationship with and promised future in Christ Jesus.

Maybe you are – or someone you know is, in need of Hope on the dark journey. We find this in Jesus; the Light of the world.

In Jesus teaching at the festival of Tabernacles (continuing from John 7), He stated:

- John 8:12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, **“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”**
- John 9:5 **“While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.”**

He is the “I Am” from that moment back through history and Creation and forward to the redemption of all things and eternity with the Father. He is I Am!

“On the last day of Tabernacles, the illumination of the Temple was celebrated. The Torah scrolls were removed and replaced with a candlestick in an allusion to Proverbs 6:23, Psalm 119:105 and Isaiah 60:1. This prayer would be offered on the occasion: ‘Oh Lord of the universe, Thou commanded us to light the lamps to Thee, yet Thou art the Light of the world.’”

– Michael Card, John

“During this same visit to Jerusalem for the festival of Tabernacles, while teaching near the treasury in the Temple, Jesus made the further revelation of Himself as the Light of the World... Such a revelation at this time was in keeping with the symbolism of the festival. The Israelites had been guided during their journey across the wilderness by a pillar of light in the sky; and this phenomenon was recalled to the minds of worshippers at Tabernacles by the ceremony of lighting the golden candelabra.” – R.V.G. Tasker, TNTC: John

“Our Lord’s ‘I Am’ statement was also related to the Feast of Tabernacles, during which the huge candelabra were lighted in the Temple at night to remind the people of the pillar of fire that had guided Israel in their wilderness journey. In fact, John has combined three ‘wilderness images’: the manna (John 6), the water from the rock (John 7) and the pillar of fire (John 8).”

– Warren Wiersbe, BEC: John

This Advent season, Lord, give us hope and let us know that You are here. Let us pray... Amen.