What are you hoping for this Christmas?

A white Christmas? World peace?

Sounds more like wishful thinking…

What then is HOPE?

Imagine a child catching a glimpse of their father sneaking something into the house…, something that’s difficult to carry and has two big wheels.

If later you asked the child, “what are you hoping for this Christmas?“, they would likely reply with a big grin, “I’m hoping for a new bicycle!“

“Do you think you’ll get it?” “Oh yes, I’m sure!”

That is hope in the biblical sense. It is being sure that you will receive something you don’t yet have.

This is the great purpose of the 40 day Advent celebration that begins the Sunday after Thanksgiving, and ends the Sunday before Christmas.

Some may see Advent as that time of the year when that funny looking candle wreath comes out, and different people read Scriptures each week about peace, hope, joy and love, and then light the appropriate candle… HOPING the church won’t burn down in the Process.

Actually, the word Advent comes from the Latin word Adventus which means “coming”.

During this second week of Advent we celebrate the coming HOPE!

HOPE came to earth long ago with the Incarnation of Christ (Christmas past), when Jesus, the Son of God put on a robe of flesh and came to earth.

But the Believers HOPE is yet to “come”, and it is certain because we have caught a glimpse of it in the Scriptures. (Christmas future).

Acts 1:11

To discover what HOPE is all about, it would be best to hear from God himself… Please open your Bibles to 1 John 3

God inspired John, the Disciple whom Jesus loved, to record our HOPE…

He didn’t write this letter to any particular church, but instead it was meant to have been read to several congregations where John had ministered… and ultimately to THE global church.

1 John 3:1-2

“See what great love the Father has LAVISHED upon us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears we shall be like Him, for we will see Him as He is.”

There we have it!

* HOPE of God’s love
* HOPE of being God’s Children
* HOPE of going to Heaven
* HOPE that we will see Jesus! Let’s close in prayer…

Do you need more HOPE than that? I know I do…

God has much more HOPE for His Children in the present. Let’s continue

1 John 3:3

“And all (children of God) who have this HOPE (eager expectation) in Him purify (sanctify) themselves, Just as He is pure.

Does it make sense that God’s children would set themselves apart from the rest of the world and strive to grow in purity/holiness?

Without this, what HOPE could we have in the present?

For some reason, this message of holiness did not resinate with Dee & I until we came to the COTN.

It was like finding the missing link in our relationship with God and our walk with Christ…

It explained why I had been struggling with sin… I hadn’t done what God said… and intentionally sought the Holy Spirit for a deeper heart cleansing, to make Jesus the Lord of my life and entirely set myself apart for Him so I would no longer DESIRE sin.

1 John 3:4 NLT

Everyone who sins is guilty of breaking God‘s Law, for all sin is contrary to the Law of God.

1 John 3:5

And you know that Christ came to (get ready for the purpose) take away our sins, and there is no sin in Him.

This is the “Good News” of the Gospel!

Matthew, another disciple of Christ and Gospel (Good News) writer, who had formerly been a hated tax collector, liar and thief…,

was blessed by God to have recorded the message given by the angels to the shepherd’s in Matthew 1:21. “You shall give Him the name Jesus, (Savior) because He will save His people from their sin.”

John 1:29 records the words of John the baptizer (cousin of Jesus) as proclaiming, “behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world“.

So if one is still struggling with sin, not growing in purity/holiness, it may be that;

1. They are ignorant… like I had been.
2. They don’t believe they have to. (Having bought into one of the many false beliefs that are available. OR)
3. They flat out refuse to.

The last two are inconsistent with the character of a child of God, and as much as they might say they have HOPE, it is not the HOPE that God has made available through the “soul cleansing

blood of the Lamb”.

So despite what false religions believe & teach, that Jesus was simply a “good teacher” sent to point out the mess that mankind was in…, as if that was needed…

God knew what mankind really needed, “HOPE”… HOPE of a way out of the mess they were in!

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:6 and 8, “When we were utterly helpless (at our lowest point/the bottom of the barrel), Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Paul included himself in that group with us because every human being is a part of the sinners club…

V8 - “But God demonstrated His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

And since we have been made right in God’s site by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from God’s condemnation.

It would be inconceivable that He wouldn’t after sacrificing His Son!

In the same way, it is just as inconceivable for a “born again”, “washed in the blood”child of God to;

* Continue living in open sin.
* Continue living for themselves.
* Disregarding God’s Word and doing what they think is best.
* Disregarding the Holy Spirit to build their own temporary kingdom, above the eternal Kingdom of God.
* Not desire to entirely sanctifying themselves and grow in purity/holiness as Christ is pure/holy.

Christmas present means many things to many different people…

But for followers of Christ, Christmas is about bringing the true HOPE they have received, to folks who need it.

Gifts, toys, money and help are all nice… but Christ is the Soul Saving, life changing HOPE that is needed most.

Colossians 1:27 Paul reminds the Gentile believers that it is God’s plan for us to make known His secret, this rich & glorious secret which is for ALL people. The secret is that Christ lives in you, the hope of glory!

Offering another human being the life changing HOPE of Christ, is far better than any other gift you may have planned to give them. And it won’t cost you a cent. Jesus paid it all for you!

Christ offers the HOPE of a new life and a fresh start.

But the message of HOPE that Christians offer, is much of the reason Jesus has become so unpopular to our world.

It is why they are trying their hardest to remove Christ from Christmas.

They want Christ X’d from the very day we celebrate Him.

It’s like intentionally uninviting someone to their own party, X-ing out their name on the invitation and trying to make it mandatory that the whole world do the same, and if we don’t go along with it… someone may get upset! They may even try to sue you!

This year I was asked by some people in our community to lead and help the Salvation Army bell ringer‘s at bashes (setting up & taking down).

The other day I was standing outside with one of the bell ringers, and she told me that she knew she probably shouldn’t say “Merry Christmas”, but she did it anyway.

I said “it’s not wrong, this is America, many soldiers have fought and sacrificed their lives so that you can be free to say whatever you want!

And our nation was founded on Christ!

I suggested that if the “happy holiday” people complain, tell them that you didn’t want to offend the “Merry Christmas” people.

Christmas is not “Merry” for many, because it’s a reminder of the fact that Christ came to take away sin…

Which must mean what? “They” have sin that needs to be taken away.

Even the believer is confronted with the question; “have my sins been taken away, or am I still doing it“? If so, my sin hasn’t been taken away.

It’s no wonder the world wants to remove Christ, and simply make it a “happy holiday”.

Even “good people”, when confronted with God’s 10 commandments, have to admit that even they have followed the sinful example of another person to some extent.

The Bible says: “There is none righteous, no not one…”

But this is why it is so important for Christians to be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have… 1 Peter 3:15

What hope?

The HOPE of not just going to Heaven someday, but the hope of a new/transformed HOLY life now, by yielding to God’s Holy Spirit, because Christ has taken away our sin.

The HOPE of A Christ-centered, God honoring Life.

HOPE that God will in turn use us to lead others to a saving relationship with His only Son, the only Savior of the world.

The HOPE of a life that can say;

* I was a good, respectable person, but had impure thoughts.
* I had money and lived comfortably, but always had to have my own way, and held bitterness in my heart toward those who stood in my way.
* I turned around every good thing that God was doing and looked for the negative.
* I was a gossip, critical, thankless, judgmental, uncaring and unforgiving.

And here is the HOPE, Christ came to take away our sins!

Until people are able to face the reality of sin in their life, the necessity of a cure isn’t likely to be forthcoming.

People see Jesus as a miracle worker, and he certainly was that.

Bringing hope to many; lepers, blind, lame, and even the dead.

Think about that for a second, even the dead found HOPE in Christ!

But the greatest miracle Jesus ever did was to bring people who knew they had a problem…, to seek Him for their cure.

What was it that Jesus said made them well? Their faith! Faith in Christ!

Their faith in Christ made them more than well physically, they became different people.

They became FEARLESS! Telling the world about Christ, even when the authorities dragged them in for questioning!

1 John 3:6-8 and we will close…

Anyone who continues to live in Him will not sin. But anyone who keeps on sinning does not know Him or understand who He is.

Dear children, don’t let anyone deceive you about this: when people do what is right, it shows that they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous.

But when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil, who has been sinning since the beginning.

But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil.

Those who have been born into God‘s family do not make a practice of sinning, because God‘s life is in them.

So they can’t keep on sinning because they are children of God.

There are many examples of a true child of God in the Scriptures, but one of my favorites is Luke 19:1-10 and the account of Zacchaeus a chief tax collector.

* Zach was trying to see Jesus, but he had no idea that Jesus had come to seek him. He is seeking you today.
* The devils work was destroyed in Zach’s life, which gave him real HOPE! Christ want you to possess that same hope.
* Zach became a true child of God that day. Which was visible when stopped sinning and his possessions and money became far less important than living like one of God’s faithful/pure/holy children.

Can the same be said for you? Do you possess this HOPE today?

If not I invite you to come and kneel before God at one of these altars, while the rest of us pray with you and sing a couple of verses of a song.