

It is officially Advent. The Christmas season, ready or not, is here. If you're like my wife and Costco, you've been ready for a month. She starts the Christmas songs very early. A lot of us have different reactions to the Christmas season. Some of us immerse ourselves in Hallmark Christmas movies. You really are watching the same movie. But some of some of you do that. Others of you type A personalities; maybe you've been shopping all year long. You're one of those really responsible people. If you're one of those people, I'm just envious of you. Some of us will wait until Christmas Eve to do our Christmas shopping.

Many of you will spend a lot of your time and a lot of your money being generous this time of year. I think that's a really beautiful thing and that's something that's a strength and a gift of our church. Because I kind of have a new hat on now with the Missions department, I am so excited about our Christmas outreach offering. We have some things that are coming down the pipe.

### **Christmas Outreach Fund**

If you remember, we had the Cambodia team up on stage, and we commissioned them to go and see what was going on. Paul Knuth, our mission partner over there, is doing incredible work placing wells in areas that have schools near them. It totally changes and revolutionizes the communities. You can imagine, or maybe you can't even imagine, what it would be like if we didn't have clean water. Paul Knuth starts by bringing the hope of clean water, which draws people, schools, communities, and families, and it becomes a central hub. From there, he can share the hope of the gospel, and he's doing incredible work in church planting over there.

I'm also really excited about our community partner. I've been meeting with Christian Hong from Mobilize Love. Mobilize Love is Christian, putting the gospel on wheels going all around San Francisco. He brings different things. He has a stage truck, and he goes to schools and does after-school programs with kids who don't have anywhere to go after school.

He brings food trucks. He brings wellness trucks and laundry trucks. He has all these different trucks. I don't know who gave him that idea. Maybe he just always loved trucks as a kid when he was growing up. I don't know. But he wants to come down to the Peninsula. He's mostly in the City. We want to bring him down to the Peninsula. We want to start partnering with him because, as we're looking at what we're going to do in the future as CPC, we want to engage more effectively in our local community. We want to be a beacon of light in our local community, and Mobilize Love is going to give us an opportunity to on ramp all of us to serve our community in a more effective way. We've already been talking with Lead Elementary. It is so exciting.

So you're going to get an opportunity next week to see the truck that we're going to build with our Christmas Outreach Fund. He's going to park it, hopefully, in our parking lot. If you see a big truck, that's what's going on next week. I just wanted to give just a little plug for that. I am very excited about our partnerships coming up with the Christmas Outreach Fund.

### **Advent**

Again, we are entering the Advent season. Advent is defined as the beginning of an event, the invention of something, or the arrival of a person. Kind of sounds appropriate, doesn't it? I love framing advent around those three words: the beginning, invention, and arrival. The beginning of a new kind of hope, the invention of a new kind of kingdom, with the arrival of a new kind of king. We acknowledge that humanity has wandered from what God has intended and find hope in the fact that we serve a God who decided to come close, the Emmanuel, the God with us, in order to make things new again.

So we're calling this Advent series The Undoing. It got me thinking, probably my favorite invention that humans have come up with is the undo button. Does anybody else use the undo button on your computer? I use the undo button all the time. When I'm recording, if I make a mistake, I can say, no problem, undo. When I'm writing a document, and I have almost the whole thing written, and I accidentally

delete it all, there's the undo button; it's my favorite thing. I started thinking, wouldn't it be incredible if we could have an undo button for life?

What if we just had it on our key chain or something like that, and we could just undo? Imagine all the relationships that would be saved. Our phones are on this, by the way, our phones have an unsend button. Did you know that you can unsend your text messages? Some of you are like, this is life-changing. You can unsend your messages. They still see that you unsent it, so you're going to have to explain yourself, but they will never know what you're really thinking.

I started thinking if we expanded this into real life, imagine how incredible it would be. I've never done this, but imagine that you're at that stoplight at the Millbrae Avenue exit off of 101, and you gently roll through that stop sign ever so slightly. They send you a video, and you see yourself. You just get out your trusty undo button, and all your stupidity rolling through that stop sign will go away. You would save yourself \$600.00. That light makes a killing. I've never done this either, but imagine, gentlemen, your wife comes up to you and asks you how you like her new outfit, and you give her the wrong answer—undo. You don't have to deal with the problem of that anymore. Or you could even undo years of your life if you want to. Imagine what this could mean for Raider fans. You finally see the light, and you start supporting the Niners, and you can undo years of turmoil and sadness wiped away in a single button, haha. Wouldn't that be incredible?

If we're honest with ourselves, I think we would say that there's so much about life that we wish would have gone differently. We have broken hearts or relationships and bad decisions, maybe that we make with money or food or drugs. Some of our pain is self-imposed and some of the pain is imposed by others.

As we as a pastoral team considered Advent, we realized that we can't simply undo everything. But there is a sense in which the kingdom of God is working actively to undo the brokenness of this world. And so that means that when we're in the midst of despair, as we'll talk about this morning, God sends his Son, who is our hope. And in the midst of conflict and strife, God sends his Son who is our peace. And in the midst of sorrow, God sends his Son who's our joy. And in the midst of apathy or even hatred, God sends his Son, who is love.

So in Advent, we spend intentional time in this tension that exists living in our world today. We all feel

that. I want to lean into that darkness. But it's not a hopeless darkness as you'll see today. It's a darkness that we know soon will be flooded with the light of Jesus. And my hope today is that through this psalm that was just read, you'll rediscover, or maybe discover for the first time, your hope.

When your life is filled with despair or an utter loss of hope, you can reclaim that through his forgiveness, through the promises of his word, and through his undeniable pursuit of redemption. So, as we get going here, would you just pray with me?

Father, we ask that you would open our hearts to you. Lord, and as the psalmist comes with a heart of repentance, a heart that's open toward what you want to do. Lord, we want to come to you with that same posture. God, would you speak through your word today? Would you instill hope in us that maybe doesn't exist in this world, but that we can find in only you? God, we give you all the glory. In your name we pray. Amen.

We're going to go through this undoing over these next four weeks through the lens of the Psalms. And what we're about to read together is one of the most popular psalms, and it's also a song in the Bible. In fact, there's a good chance that you've heard this psalm many times.

But I believe this psalm has something unique to tell us today. In fact, I believe it has a framework for us for how we should respond when we experience brokenness and pain. More importantly, I think it answers a question that all of us are consciously or maybe subconsciously asking: Where does our hope actually come from? I want to look at the first couple of verses in Psalm 130 right now. *"Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy"* (Psalm 130:1-2).

This psalm is one of seven psalms picked out by the early church fathers of our faith. They labeled these seven psalms as penitential psalms because they focus on repentance and confession. Also, in most of your Bibles, you're going to see this little subtitle, A song of ascents. Thousands of years ago, ancient Jews, the followers of Yahweh, would travel on certain festivals and holidays. They would travel to Jerusalem and Jesus would have made this journey many times. On the road, they would sing these songs, the songs of ascent. If you look in your Bible, you're going to see Psalms 120 to 134 labeled songs of ascent. Now, most of us don't travel a big, huge multi-day journey to

church. Most of us are like ten miles or less. But there is still a lot to be learned from this practice.

These songs, much like the songs that we sing on Christmas, speak to our everyday lives. I mean, I was just paying attention to the depth of the words of the Christmas carols that sometimes can be lost on us because we sing them every year. So, if you think about it, while we wrap our minds around a medical diagnosis, we sing of his sovereignty in Psalm 135. When we feel unworthy, we press into his guidance in Psalm 131. We celebrate the gift of his forgiveness when we fail to reach righteousness, in Psalm 130.

In the midst of persecution, we solidify our courage and his strength in Psalm 125. From the lowest valley of despair, we face upward pleading for help in Psalm 123. We trust that it will come. "Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord. Lord, hear my voice. Lord, let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy."

It's clear that this psalmist is in the midst of despair. Despair is one of those things that we would like to undo. Despair is defined as an utter loss of hope, and we, being human, recognize this despair.

I'm going to throw my parenting You guys are going to judge my parenting so hard with this story, but I'm going to tell you anyway. A couple weeks ago, Charlie, my little nine-year-old was sick and she was just resting and lying in bed. I was at home with her, and I had planned on doing a lot of things, but when you have a sick child, you can't really do anything. So I'm at home, but we have this conversation. I said, "Charlie, what if I just go to the gym for a little bit? Would you be okay with that?" Our gym is about two minutes away from our house. So we have this conversation. She's like, "Yeah, I think I could do that. I think I can think I can handle that."

She has this Alexa in her room. We don't have a phone for her, but in her room, she can call us with her Alexa. And what happens is she calls, and it looks like it's coming from Katie's number, which is the number I always have to answer. And so I say, "Charlie, if you need anything, I'm only two minutes away; just use your Alexa and call me."

She goes, "Okay, let's do it." We even practiced. Everything went great. So I went to the gym, and things are going moderately okay. I get this call, and I don't really think anything of it because it's not coming from Katie's number; it's coming from some random number in Atlanta. I don't answer it.

I'm at the gym for maybe an hour, and I get home. I open the door, and Charlie's just standing in the kitchen, crying. There was no hope in her cry. It wasn't like a big, boisterous cry; she was just sitting there crying. I went up to her and asked what happened. She said, "I tried to call, and you said you were going to answer, but you didn't answer. Then I called Mom, and she was at school. And then I called Auntie Jen, and I called grandma.

Right about the time that she tells me that, I get these flood of text messages from my entire family. I'm just like, "Oh man, I really messed this one up." But what struck me about it was walking into that kitchen, and what breaks my heart even now thinking about this is that her little heart lost hope. When I got there, the calls were done. She exhausted all of the calls that her little nine-year-old brain knew to make from her little Alexa. And she, at that point, had resorted to just standing there crying.

I think sometimes all of us can relate to that. Every single one of us is going to go through these dark nights of the soul, and maybe you are walking in one of those right now. As a pastor, I feel it's an incredible honor to walk people through these moments, and certainly one of the most important roles, if not the most important role, as a pastor, is to be present when someone gets to the point where they want to cry out to God.

I've also had plenty of my own dark nights of the soul, crying out to God, wondering if he's listening. And I've learned it's often in these moments when our heart is tender enough, and our pride is humbled enough that we experience the most growth.

As I was reading through this in a commentary, by Alec Mattea, he has these little side notes that I think are really good. And in this one side note, he wrote, "Coming to God with one problem may easily and blessedly expose the real problem that needs to be solved." I want to say that again. "Coming to God with one problem may easily and blessedly expose the real problem that needs to be solved." And then he just writes this little scripture reference of the paralyzed man. You may remember that the paralyzed man's friends decided that Jesus might be someone who could actually heal their friend. They go up to the roof. It's probably a ton of work to get him up there. They cut a hole, and they lower him down in the midst of this crowd.

Their whole purpose, their one problem, is this man, their friend, is paralyzed, and they bring him to Jesus.

And Jesus says what? He doesn't heal him right away. He says, "Your sins are forgiven." And I can imagine sitting there with Jesus after I had just worked really hard to get my friend down there. And then Jesus doesn't even do what I initially wanted him to do. I might say, "Yeah, thanks for the forgiveness, Jesus, but can you actually heal him?" Jesus could see through that maybe the presenting problem wasn't actually the real problem.

If you're here this morning, you're experiencing a difficult season; my hope is that you'll consider this notion that perhaps whatever is causing your pain is simply the vessel that is bringing you to God to expose the real problem. And you'll also notice in this psalm that he's crying for mercy. There's a difference between a cry for mercy and a cry for help.

Mercy is compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone who is within one's power to punish or harm. So when you ask for mercy, you're requesting that your punishment be turned into forgiveness. When I was a little kid, my mom would often get done with me and say, "Look, I've had it with you. Go up to your room and wait until your dad comes home because he's going to deal with you." Did anyone else have that happen to you? I'd go up to the room, and I'd just sit there and wait and wait and wait, and anxiety would just build. My dad maybe spanked me once, but I was just convinced this was going to be the time. By the time he would get there, I would just explode with my plea for mercy. "Dad, please, please. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to do it. Dad, dad, dad." And I would be so over the top, I'm told that he would actually start laughing. You know how hard it is to discipline a kid when you're laughing.

I tell you that story because I want to mention briefly that just because you're crying for mercy doesn't make you repentant. When he started laughing, half the time, I got away with it. That's why I did it. It just means that you don't want to face the consequences of your actions. But you do see the repentance here in this psalm. *"If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you"* (Psalm 130:3-4).

I think God's forgiveness is easy to take for granted. You might be sitting here thinking, "Oh, I'm glad God's forgiveness is there. I'm grateful. But maybe your heart's not really in it. We could get our heart into it? What if we list every questionable thing we

did up on that screen right now. Can you imagine? Are there any volunteers that want to let me do that?

If we listed every single thing we did just from the last year. Pick anyone in this room, the best person in this room, if we listed all of your thoughts and your actions. Who of you in this room could stand? Romans said the wages for sin is death. And I think understanding forgiveness starts with the understanding and acknowledgment of our own brokenness and our own sin.

Now, I don't know about you, but I am continually blown away by my capacity to rationalize my own sin. Oftentimes, it takes a moment of despair like this psalmist is talking about, when the consequences stack up, and I have no choice but to stop and look myself in the eye to finally see it. Once we're in that place, the next part of that Romans verse is so much more beautiful. "But the gift of God is eternal life." No one could stand if God didn't offer us forgiveness. And as followers of Jesus, our good news, the gospel, starts here. God forgives us.

The story of Christmas shows he went to great lengths to show us. He came as a baby and lived a perfect life. He walked this earth to set up his kingdom and was put to death, even though there was no sin that he needed to atone for. Then, he put death in its place when he conquered it on Easter morning. Before Jesus, we were stuck in the mire of our own sin, despairing in death. But with Jesus, that despair was undone. That is something to be hopeful for. Amen.

### **Where Do We Find Our Hope?**

So, as we seek to answer that question, "Where do we really find our hope?" The first answer we see is that we hope because God offers us forgiveness. And that hope should lead us to serve the one true living God in reverence.

The word reverence in this passage stuck out to me. The base word in reverence is actually fear. It's literally translated that you may be feared. So that you may be revered or feared, that's an important distinction as we look at this passage. We could easily look at the verse and read it simply, so that we can serve you. But if you add, so that we can in reverence serve you, it changes it. There's a different respect, there's a different awe, and there's a fear. But not as you would fear someone with evil intent; it's as you would fear someone who is so big and so powerful that we can't possibly comprehend.

All of our commercialization of Christmas can easily put us at risk of being irreverent. It's a story we've heard maybe a thousand times, and we can buy cute manger scenes and talk about little baby Jesus. He may have come as a baby, but that's also the same God that created this universe. He is the same God that's the alpha and the omega; the God that's so huge we can't even fathom him.

I happened to read in Leviticus recently, and there was this little story where God told Moses, "Hey, if Aaron comes to visit me, make sure that he doesn't come unannounced because I'll be hovering in a cloud, and he won't be able to handle it. If he comes unannounced, he'll die." There's a mystery to this God. He is bigger than our minds can comprehend. And there should be a reverence. We need to be intentional with our reverence for God. While knowing at the same time that he is a God of grace and mercy.

I've sung *Amazing Grace* so many times over my life, but I've never really realized the depth of the second verse. "It was t'was grace that taught my heart to fear, but then His grace, my fears, relieved."

I think one of the most common occurrences in our human frailty is that we convince ourselves that we are in control. Sometimes, depending on how stubborn or prideful we are, we get humbled enough to realize our sense of control in this life is actually a bit of a fallacy. I think all of us eventually come to the end of ourselves because we are finite, but once you've cried out to God and asked for his mercy and forgiveness, what do we do next? Let's see what the psalmist does.

*"I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning"* (vv. 5-6). Waiting is hard, isn't it? It seems like it's getting harder the more that technology progresses. Our ability to patiently wait for something in a society where we have almost always had a means to instant gratification seems to be more difficult as the years go by.

But the psalmist manages to wait for the Lord. His whole being, it says here, in other translations, "My whole soul, my soul waits for you. More than the watchmen wait for the morning." Occasionally, I'll watch those survivor shows where they drop someone in the middle of the wilderness with nothing but a canister of water and a Bic pen for survival. And nighttime is always the worst. You're there in some secluded place, and you hear animal noises, and you

know they can smell you. They can probably see better than you can in the dark, and there are bugs biting you like crazy, and sleep seems completely impossible. I just couldn't do it. But the same thing always happens. Morning always comes unless you're in Alaska; morning always comes. It's guaranteed.

We sing so much about God's faithfulness. We talk about God's faithfulness all the time. There are people in your life, and they're not perfect, but some of them are diligent in keeping their word. As I'm talking about this right now, you probably picture a person in your mind. They may have flaws, but if you ever need anything, you know you can rely on them. They're not going to over-promise and under-deliver.

I want to give a shout-out right now to my father-in-law, Mike Alford because if I was stranded in the middle of a Nevada desert or I was in jail, I would call him. He doesn't know it, but when I have to list my emergency contacts, I always list him. Because I know one of his highest values in life is to keep his word. And listen, faithfulness is an attribute of the God that we serve. God describes himself this way. The authors of the Bible describe him this way. And this book is the Word of God.

His word will be the last word. And it's filled with promises of God. So when you wait, wait like a watchman who knows that the morning will come. We seldom know when God will show up or how he will show up. And when he does, it often doesn't usually look like what we thought it would look like, but he does keep his promises.

Octavius Winslow says it like this, "God's word is the only plank to which faith clings, and clinging to which will float the tempest-tossed wave buffeted soul to shore." When you're in the depths, God's word, the promises of God, will hold you, will put you on dry land, and he's worth trusting.

So that's the second place that we find our hope this morning. We have hope in God's word. And as we get close to the end of the psalm, it continues to rise like any good song of ascent should. Starting in the depths and ending in the cloud. *"Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins"* (vv. 7-8).

In the Old Testament, we see this example of redemption talked about in Leviticus and then played out in the book of Ruth, called the kinsman redeemer. The basic idea is that a male relative will help a weaker

relative who's in need or in danger. And oftentimes, they'll marry into the families of widows to help take care of them, as in the case of Boaz and Ruth. They avenge enemies. They will deliver, rescue, and, in many cases, they redeem property if it's lost. We also see God redeeming Israel time and time again from all sorts of pain, evil, slavery, and other hardships.

So then, when we get to the New Testament, in light of Jesus, the New Testament speaks of redemption, and it speaks in terms of ransom and men held under the curse of sin itself. But the Redeemer purchases their deliverance by offering himself as payment for their redemption. God is our kinsman redeemer.

**For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 1 Peter 1:18-19**

I want you to think about this Christmas story for a second again. I want you to remember the God that we described earlier, that God who should be revered. What kind of faith story is this? What reason would an all-powerful God have to come to his creation, to become one of his creation, in the form of a helpless baby, to clothe himself in human skin and human frailty, to expose perfection to a sinful and broken world that would ultimately kill him? Why? What kind of faith story is that?

The reality is that he's a God who will stop at nothing to redeem his loved ones, and church, that is you. And so the final thing that we put our hope in is that we have hope in God's redemption. He will stop at nothing to come for his children. Theologian Walter Brueggemann says it like this.

**Psalm 130 exemplifies such a journey gripped by the power of death and announces that, even from the depths of such chaos, YHWH still hears the honest cries of the struggling person of faith. YHWH is never beyond hearing distance. Brueggemann**

I wonder if anyone in this room feels that they're beyond redemption today. I wonder if any of you is overwhelmed with despair, suffering from an utter

loss of hope. And if that's you this morning, my prayer is that you can find hope today in the forgiveness of God. That you can find hope today in the faithfulness his word. It's unfailing. I pray you find hope in his unrelenting pursuit of redemption.

What is God stirring on your heart? Is there one of these that's jumping out to you that you know God wants to get your attention on? Are you embracing his forgiveness? Do you really trust in his promises? How we wait reveals where our heart is with all that. And do you really comprehend and understand the full pursuit of his redemption in your life? So I want to just take a minute and allow God to speak to your heart here, and then, as we close, I'm going to ask that we read this prayer of confession together.

God, I want to pray for anyone this morning who needs to know you're here and that you're real. God, would you, your Holy Spirit, make real this sense of forgiveness, the real forgiveness that you offer us, the real redemption? Help us to trust you Father.

Oh God, you search us out and know us and all that we are is open to you. We confess that we have sinned, in your mercy, Lord, forgive us and heal us. When we make no room for Christ and fail to welcome him into our lives, in your mercy, Lord, forgive us and heal us. When we follow shooting stars and squander our gifts in Herod's court, in your mercy, Lord, forgive us and heal us. When we seek to cut down those who might rise above us, in your mercy, Lord, forgive us and heal us. When we sanitize your birthplace and erase from memory the poor and the displaced, in your mercy, Lord, forgive us and heal us. When we sing sweet sentiments over Christ's birth but fail to rejoice over his everyday presence, in your mercy, Lord, forgive us and heal us. We turn to you, O Christ, perfect union of Spirit and flesh. We renounce evil. We claim your love. We choose to be made whole. Amen.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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