

Central Baptist Victoria
Christmas 2022
2nd Message - HOPE

LIGHTING A CANDLE OF HOPE IN YOUR LIFE

Tom Cowan

(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 01 as Tom comes on stage) I like words – I have often been called a wordsmith. I like Greek words – I like Greek words that we also use in English. This morning – want to give you a Greek word that we use in English – and we will see how it is an important word in our faith.

Today's word is **EPIPHANY**. **(SHOW SLIDE 02)** It means a sudden appearance – a moment of intuitive knowing – something just suddenly becomes clear – the light goes on - a moment of WOW! -- and that clarity changes everything. This morning I hope you will have an epiphany – and that epiphany will give you fresh hope in some aspect of your life. My prayer is that when we come to close our service in communion – as we say - we do this until He comes – the hope that is contained in the message of the bread and wine will just flood your life.

We begin this morning is Titus 2:11 **(SHOW SLIDE 03)**
Verse 11 - For the grace of God has appeared [epiphany] that offers salvation to all people.

Appeared = the word epiphany.

The grace of God made its appearance in the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

The evidence for Jesus – who he was and what he did – is based on the 4 gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – and in these 4 books we have the most reliable historical evidence of Jesus Christ. When people say to me – I don't believe in the Bible I ask if they have ever read it.

I am like Doubting Thomas in the gospel of John - he needed what I call intellectual integrity – he needed to put his hands into the nail-prints -- I needed intellectual integrity to believe in Jesus – If I could not find that – I would have become an existentialist – I do not believe there is an alternative – but I looked into the historical evidence in the Gospels – I believe that they give us a solid reliable basis for believing in Jesus.

C.S. Lewis says – you must make your choice – **(SHOW SLIDE 04)** Either this man was and is the Son of God – or else a madman or something worse. – you can spit at him and kill him as a demon **(SHOW SLIDE 05)** or you can fall at His feet and call him Lord

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and God – but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about him just being a great human teacher.

Titus said when Jesus came – he was an epiphany – an appearance of the grace of God.

But that historical epiphany over 2,000 years ago needs to be followed by a personal epiphany. Each of us needs to come to a personal epiphany – our own moment of time when we come to accept who he truly is. Each one needs our own WOW moment! Perhaps it was in this church – perhaps it was at a Billy Graham rally as they were singing just as I am – perhaps it was at your bedside one night with a parent – or perhaps at a summer youth camp. It does not matter where – all that matters is that it took place.

Lewis right – Either a fraud has taken place at some stage or else Jesus is the divine Son of God.

For me – that personal epiphany came when I was about 16 – in a Baptist church in Glasgow Scotland – when after a service one day – I knelt with the pastor – and quietly bowed my head and invited Jesus Christ to come into my life.

A few weeks later I was baptized – (that’s the right order) the verse was said over me – Phil 1:6 – **God who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.** I have held on to that truth for over 60 years.

Scott and Phil are going to come and share their personal testimony – we can have a little fun with this!

Scott: Tom, can I take a couple of minutes and tell the congregation about how I came to know Jesus

Tom: Scott – this is my sermon – you are interrupting me

Scott: This is important – can I tell my story.

Tom: I guess so

Scott comes to pulpit to speak

As he is finishing – Phil calls out –

Phil: Can I share my story

Scott: Sure, Phil – Tom won’t mind

Phil comes up to pulpit – speaks – then sits down.

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Back to Tom: -- More than anything – that will light a candle of hope in your life. I guarantee you.

Let me tell you what amazing thing happens when you are doing that – unseen but remarkable.

(SHOW SLIDE 06) 1 John 3:9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.

The picture takes us back to the birth of Jesus – actually to his conception. The remarkable thing that God did in the life of Mary was that he planted the life of Jesus into her womb through the power of the Holy Spirit.

She was told that the Holy Spirit would come upon her -- She bore the one who was the Son of God. God impregnated Mary with the seed that was the Son of God. That truth is repeated here for our lives. When we become Christians – God is impregnating us with his seed – Greek word is sperma. John uses a word from sexual intercourse to talk about what it means to become a Christian. God impregnates our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit being implanted in us.

We are given the seed of new life – so that we will become and live as new people/ That's why around this truth – John say no one who is born of God will continue to sin because God's seed remains in him.

Now we all know that we sin – we blow it – but what John is meaning is that a lifestyle of deliberate, premeditated, intentional, planned conscious sinning is no longer how we will live. The reason is – the seed of God has been implanted in us – impregnating us – changing us.

Titus declares to us --

(SHOW SLIDE 07) For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

If you are a Christian – and you are struggling with some addictions – I understand the help that you can get from counselling – therapy. I am not trying to diminish that at all – I am very aware that my gifts and my training are not in counselling -- but we

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have to understand the power and authority that we have within us to start by saying NO to certain things that will be destructive.

1 John 3:8 – the Son of God has appeared (**epiphany**) to unloose us – to untie us – to set us free from the works of the devil. Satan’s work is to tie us up – Jesus sets us free.

Jesus came to set us free from the works of the devil – he came to release us from addictive behaviours and sinful patterns of living. There is power in us to say NO to sin – and change our lives. **Counselling is not a substitute for obedience to God’s Word.**

Jesus knew that power – when he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness – he declared – Matt 4 – it is written = this is where you find authority – Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

We know (**SHOW SLIDE 08**) LOGOS as the word that means the word of God – the Bible. But LOGOS is not the word used here – the word used is (**SHOW SLIDE 09**) RHEMA – it has the idea of a specific word – a specific promise – a specific truth that we can use and apply to a situation.

Also used in Ephesians 6:17 – passage about putting on the armor of God – it says and take the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God – once again RHEMA – a specific word that we use to challenge a specific issue in our lives.

That means you have to know God’s Word – not just generally – but in detailed ways.

I once told a young man who was trapped in sexual sin to stop. He said – nobody has ever told me to stop. And he stopped.

It can be an epiphany for us to realize what Jesus Christ has come into our lives to do – what authority he has given us – the power to stop – the power to change - the power to take hold of our freedom in Christ. It is not just willpower – it is the power of the cross at work in us – Jesus came to free us from the works of the devil – his work is to tie us up in knots – Jesus untangles us and sets us free.

Charles Wesley – great hymn - he breaks the power of cancelled sin – he sets the prisoner free....

That is an epiphany that should give us hope. Is there some truth in there that you need to take hold of this morning? Is there something you need to stare down and say NO.

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Now there is another epiphany we are waiting for -

(SHOW SLIDE 10) Titus 2:13

while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing **[the epiphany]** of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

appearing = epiphany – another WOW moment ! An event still to come.

Biblical history is not cyclical – it does not follow a path of reincarnation – biblical history is linear – it is going somewhere – it is heading towards a climax – towards a culmination of all things. Our work is to wait in expectant hope.

So the first advent is the birth of Jesus in history. Right now we are living and waiting for the second advent.

Until then we wait - but it is a waiting for the second advent that is to be filled with anticipation and expectation. It is a waiting for the second advent which is filled with purpose and intention. This is an appearance that brings intervention that changes the course we were on.

Because of the first advent – we find that we are made new people – the old is passed away – we are made new – as we live in the anticipation of the second advent – we continue to be drawn to live lives that are different and distinct from our culture. In the coming light of this next advent – our waiting is to be marked by a radical change of lifestyle.

1st John 3

(SHOW SLIDE 11) 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known **[epiphany]** But we know that when he appears, **[epiphany]** we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

(SHOW SLIDE 12) 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Our life should be different – your life must be different – first of all because Christ lives in us – changing and transforming us from the inside – - and secondly because we look ahead to who is coming to meet us – and it is more than just what we will be like

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– actually it is WHO we will be like! John says - we shall be like him...we will be like Jesus!

We are to be shaped by the coming future – by the promise and the hope of this second epiphany.

In these present difficult times – we are well aware that it has been a struggle for a lot of folk – economic struggles – pandemic issues – homelessness -- war in Ukraine – all kinds of programs on the mental strain that we face today – I am not diminishing any of that – where do we turn to for hope – what do we turn to – who do we turn to for hope?

We really only have one answer – we ultimately believe that our hope is in the Lord. We have this hope – an anchor for the soul – firm and secure.

This epiphany of Jesus will be nothing short of an intervention– changing the course of our lives and also changing the course of world history.

The world system of today will be shattered – and will be replaced by the long-awaited kingdom of righteousness.

For the Christian – epiphany contains both hope and challenge – we are to look at the ways of the world and state a decisive NO! We are to commit ourselves to doing good while we long for Jesus to return and to intervene – and restore this tangled world to its intended beauty.

So as we live between these two advents – can you see how each of them have to impact your lives – as it were pushing us from both behind us – and also in front of us pulling us forward.

The first EPIPHANY of Jesus revealed the grace and truth of God – and there is a final apocalypse still to come – in which there will be a revelation of the true reality of things. Jesus came to change our lives – and his second advent is to be the impulse – the motivation to keep us on track.

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So we come to Communion –

At communion – we look back – back to Bethlehem – back to Calvary and all that happened in the life and death of Jesus. It was nothing short of an epiphany.

We look inside – where is our heart with God. Do we know that personal epiphany?

We look ahead – we do this – until He comes. The second advent – the next epiphany.
We do this in anticipation – looking with hope to the future that lies ahead for us.

Communion: Bread – prayer

Wine – prayer

Worship team up -- People STAND - prayer to close communion.

Closing Song: Soon and very soon....