

# THE WRITING TABLET

## Luke 1:57-66

- A. Welcome everyone! So glad to be here. I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving. I know we thoroughly enjoyed being able to see our family, it is always a joy to get together when we can. We have much to be thankful about, even in the midst of the worst year on record... I love this time of year for us as a church, the beautiful decorations, the coolness of the day, the great music...
1. Advent is one of our favorite times of year. It has a long history within the church and has become part of our very culture now, whether we recognize it or not, our culture has adapted the Advent season of preparation and anticipation into its own rhythms.
  2. Advent became similar to the season of Lent leading up to Easter. A time when we devote special attention to an aspect of Christ's life, and allow that to minister to us in the here and now. While Easter focuses on the death and resurrection of Christ, Advent focuses on the birth of Christ and what this meant and continues to mean for us as people in the world.
    - a) There are historically four themes which are touched on when it comes to the birth of Christ:
      - (1) Hope
      - (2) Humility
      - (3) Joy
      - (4) Peace
  3. This is the first week of Advent so we are focusing on the topic of hope as it is connected to the anticipation of the Messiah. **Hope is always forward looking, but has present impacts on how we live our lives.** Obviously, we are at the other side of Christ's first appearing and have in the full the hope that He brings and is, so for us it is more reflecting on His hope in our lives, but it is also us living out the hope of His second coming. Time between the times. We hold to this hope now, but also anticipate the hope for the future return when all things will be subjected under His feet for al time!
  4. So, yes, we reflect on His first coming and how this is meant to influence and impact how we live our lives here and now, but also it is a forward looking posture mean to spur us on toward love and good deeds even when it seems very dark. We need this in 2020 and beyond. The world seems to be getting darker and darker, yet the light of hope in Christ Jesus never wavers, nor

fades. This is what we hold to the world as our standard and the light which guides our steps.

5. Have different families light a candle each week...

- a) We are lighting the Prophecy Candle of Hope this week. Each week we add another candle as the birth of Christ draws closer. This is a visual reminder that though we are in darkness of the world now, the morning light of Christ is drawing near to shine the fulness of His shining rays of peace and love upon our hearts. Our world is full of the darkness of fear, uncertainty, anxiety, restlessness, and division. This coming light of Christ is the hope which we hold to, and the anticipation which fuels our fervor and joy. In order for us to look forward to the second coming of Christ, we must remember His first coming which was promised by the prophets and delivered by God at the right time. May we let the hope of Christ sink deep into our hearts and motivate our love.
- b) Merciful God,
- c) Thank You for sending Your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. Give us grace to listen to their warnings and forsake our sins, so that we may greet with great joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reign with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever. Amen.
- d) Have family come up to light the candle, read, and pray

**B. Read Luke 1:57-66.**

**II. I. Root of Hope**

- A. I am calling this first point the “root of hope” because of the tenacity of roots to be unseen, yet hold firm in the ground, even when there doesn’t seem to be much fruit above ground for a while.
  - 1. Example of the grass in my yard. Seemed to disappear for months, but what we didn’t know was that the roots were still underground, clinging tenaciously to the soil until the right conditions for it to grow and appear again. At first is what only a small patch, but that patch grew and grew and grew until it covered our yard again and blessed us with it’s greenery and softness. Tough too, because it has weathered the almost continual abuse from my kids! Great visual for what hope is like in our lives
- B. This is the case for God’s people at the time when John the Baptist is born. Israel was in a period of darkness due to the silence of God for 400 years. The last time that God spoke to His people as through the prophet Malachi, and in that time God prophesied that the next time He speaks it will be through Himself coming to

His people. Thus, the people were waiting with great anticipation for the arrival of the Messiah Himself, awaiting the arrival of the Prophet who would prepare the way before the coming of the LORD.

1. The Root of Hope was still there for Israel, for they had the written prophecy of God to hold on to and to let guide them in their lives. Thus, the first root of hope in our lives today must be the Scriptures. We must hold fast to the Scriptures in our lives so that the tenacious root of hope may not be utterly destroyed, but wait for the right circumstances by which fruit may be born in us again. All we have and need for life and godliness comes to us in the fully completed written word of God. There is no other source we need, or should go to, for life and godliness than the Scriptures. There is no other authoritative source of hope or of prophecy than the Scriptures.

a) *“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” - 2 Peter 1:19-21*

- (1) Notice the connections that Peter is making to the role of the Scriptures and the similar language of darkness needed the light of the coming day. Peter’s point in this passage was to remind the Church that we have all we need for knowing God’s will in the Scriptures and that all of the Scriptures point to Christ, who is the morning star and the One who brings the dawn. God’s Word is to have this place in our lives, where we let it sink deep in our hearts and let it help us hold fast to God.

- b) Zechariah chosen to burn the incense at the altar of incense, there a messenger of God meets with him and tells him that he and Elizabeth were going to have a son named John would be a great prophet.

- (1) First time in 400 years that a prophet would be called to bring God’s people back to Himself. This itself was even prophesied in Isaiah 40, where Isaiah prophesied about the coming of the one who would raise the valleys and lower the mountains in order to create a level place to come to God...

(2) *“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts” - Malachi 3:1*

- (a) This is the last message of God to His people. Preparing them for His arrival. Messenger sent first, then the presence of the LORD.

- (b) *“What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.” - Matthew 11:9-10*
- (c) Jesus confirms that John is the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1, and that John is the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5
- (d) *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” - Malachi 4:5*
- (e) *“For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” - Matthew 11:13-15*
- c) *How does this relate to Zechariah’s writing tablet? Zechariah did not initially believe God’s messenger about his son, yet in writing his son’s name on the tablet, it shows the faith and trust that Zechariah had in God fulfilling His own promises.*
- d) ***Lesson to learn from Zechariah’s writing tablet is that God’s Word is the seed of hope which takes root in our hearts.***
- e) How do we do this? By reading, meditating, and memorizing Scripture. However we can get it into our lives we must do this. It is the seed of the kingdom, which becomes the root of Christ, which bears the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. We have no hope of having hope in our life if we are not regularly, desperately, ingesting the Scriptures in our lives. It gives us the vision and image of what the kingdom is and how to live this out in a world right now which is seeking to suffocate us and push us down more and more. I love the analogy that Kevin gave last week of the rabbit hole, because it feels like that right now. The more we are pushed into this pandemic mindset, the more we feel squeezed and the darker it feels, the more we are confused by where we are going and what is at the end of it. Yet, God’s Word is the light of our life which guides us in the ways we should go and which gives us the courage to say “NO” when we need to. Through His Word we are being guided toward hope.

### III. II. Fruit of Hope

- A. Really, the reason I chose this passage to focus on was because in writing his son’s name, we see the fruit of hope being born out in their lives. Both literally, with his birth, and spiritually with the action of faith being worked out.
- B. Once the roots of hope are secured, they are tenacious, and will eventually bear fruit in our lives if we persist in faith with Christ. This is what we see happening with Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Their hope, for a very long time, had been

to have a child, yet they were barren and could not have one. This brought great shame and reproach upon them. Yet, they stubbornly clung to their desire and hope for a son.

## 1. Personal Fruit

- a) This is why the arrival of Gabriel to Zechariah and the pronouncement of the answered prayer is so sweet. It reveals the intimacy of God in His servant's lives. God is not just answering the prayers and needs of the nation, but also in the more intimate and personal longings of His servants.

(1) "But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth' – Luke 1:13-14

- b) What a beautiful God we serve who not only sees the big picture and is moving to meet those needs, but also sees our own personal longings and desires and moves to meet them in His time as well!

(1) Story of longing for a child, seemed impossible, and then God in His time gave us not just one, but three! And he knew my personal desire for a son, and He has blessed us with two! God is so good!

(2) "For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." —Galatians 6:8-9

- (a) What is the good here that Zechariah was doing? Praying. Praying consistently for a very long time. Holding to the desire that God had given them for a son. Seeking God for the answer to such a longing. This Zechariah had done for years and years, it is good to seek God for our desires. This pleases Him and is good for us. God answered in a powerful way! Just because we want something doesn't always mean that we will get it, for God often uses our wrestlings with desire and prayer to transform us to His ways and will at times as well.

- i) Story of becoming a pastor. Wasn't something that I really wanted initially, in fact the reason we got married in the first place was because I didn't ever want to be a pastor. Yet through many years of prayer and wrestling with Him, God transformed me and Valerie so that we want to be pastor and want to serve God in this way...

**(b) Lesson to learn from Zechariah is that persevering hope can only happen through persevering prayer.**

i) “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” - Matthew 7:7-8

ii) Do you have something that has persistently been a desire and longing of your that you have yet to see bear fruit in your life? Continue to seek the LORD and He will answer in due time!

## **2. Many Blessings**

- a) True fruit of hope brings blessings to many. It is not just personal/individual, but is something which is shared with others! This is what we see with John's birth. Not only does he bring joy and gladness of heart to his parents, but he brings fear, joy, and wonder for the larger community, which gets passed on to many others
- b) We have the truest hope for the best kind of life here and now. We have the source of life as our God, Savior, Redeemer, Lover, and friend. Are we allowing ourselves to be filled with joy and gladness in the LORD? Or, is this season seem dark to you? Some of us here really need to seek joy and gladness in the LORD and seek to pass that on to others, for in it we see our joy grow as well!
- c) True sharing of hope brings gladness and peace. This is the power of hope in Christ.
- d) We are entering into a season which allows for us to more freely share the hope and the reason for our hope in Christ. I pray we take this opportunity as a church and as individuals to share this hope.

### **e) Resolved Christmas Gift: Four Ways to Share Hope**

- The Zick's in Italy
- The Maddox's
- The Henry's to the Navajo
- Our Own Church (AV & Playground)

**(2) We want to raise \$8000 to share and bless that we might be able to partner with them as they, too, share the hope of Christ to those we can't reach by ourselves.**

### 3. Prophecy

- a) How does hope connect to prophecy? Difference between future telling and forth-telling. Well, we have already talked about how prophecy gives hope for a better future for God's people, but prophecy also is bringing out the reality within us so that we can be re-aligned to the hope that we have in Christ.

(1) Zechariah was reprimanded by Gabriel because of his lack of faith. This exposed for Zechariah a place where he wasn't truly trusting God. God's Word, the true prophecy for us, is meant to expose the places in our lives where we have become complacent in our faith, or hardened to our sin, or bitter toward God and others, or contentious in our relationships. It is used to expose this, forth-telling, so that we can repent of it, and allow the hope of Christ's transformative power have it's way in us. So that we move from complacency to vigor, from hardness of heart to tenderness of conscience, from bitterness to compassion, from contention to peace.

(2) All of us have a need for God's Word to pierce our hearts and expose our areas of sin, idolatry, or immaturity. This is a good season for self-reflection and seeking God through prayer and community in ways that God's Spirit might be leading you to seek to change and bear fruit according to the Spirit.

- b) Zechariah's great action of faith and trust was to declare John's name by writing it down on the tablet. Sometimes it helps to write down our personal desires for them to become real to us. And then, like Zechariah, we take it to the LORD in persistent prayer, giving all glory to God when we see the fulfillment of that desire.

**(1) Challenge: Find a passage of Scripture that God wants to use in your life and write it down somewhere where you will see it often and be reminded of what He is seeking for you to trust Him with.**

### IV. Conclusion

- A. Where do you need to be spurred on in your life of faith? Where do you need to grow in persevering prayer? Where do you need God's Word in your life more? How is your relationship to God in His Word? Are you being entertained or numbed by other things rather than seeking the hope and shared joy in the Scriptures? Remember that Christ is the Word of God made flesh, He is the One who holds to us even when we want to let go of Him. He is the One who intercedes for us when we don't pray. He is the One who seeks us out when we don't want to be found at times. May we be humble enough to let the Spirit of God work in our hearts, turning us back toward Him, and letting His hope impact how we live our lives today. Let's pray.

## **V. Lord's Supper**

- A. Here at the table we taste the hope of God. Jesus, the Son, came and died for us so that we might have the life of God now, and in full when He returns. Here we proclaim that hope to a watching world, who is seeking to find hope like lost and dying people. We have the true life of God, may we share this with those around us today that Christ may be honored and that He may continue to build His church.