

Advent: Hope

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[0 : 00] For us this morning, we've talked about hope, and we can read hope in scriptures, but there's so many people around us who have no hope.

! Their life circumstances and their life experiences are so heavy and so burdensome that they can't see through it and see out of it. So this morning, let's talk a little bit about hope.

A good definition that I found is hope is a confident expectation. Confident expectation. So something's going to happen, and you're sure it's going to happen, and you place your trust in that. G.K. Chesterton says, hope means hoping when there is no hope. Otherwise, it is no virtue at all. In the Old Testament, hope was displayed in God's deliverance, God's provision, God being God, and providing for His people, and doing what He said He was going to do.

[1 : 11] That was hope displayed. In Psalm 130, verse 7 and 8, we can wait with hopefulness. Israel can wait with hopefulness for redemption and for rescue because God has done it over and over and over for them.

In the New Testament, hope is wrapped up in one person and one name, and that's the name of Jesus. 1 Timothy 1.1 says, Jesus, Christ Jesus, our hope.

We can trust in Jesus. We can be confident in Jesus. That is where hope is found. So this morning, I want to look at hope. I want to look at a story that may not seem very hopeful.

I want to share with you some of the things I've learned about hope in the almost three years that we've been in Memphis. Some may seem obvious to you, and I apologize, but I'm a slow learner. And then let's see what the Spirit does this morning together. So Acts 3. Nathan's daughter read it, but I'm going to read it one more time.

[2 : 23] Verses 1-10. Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the beautiful gate, to ask alms or money of those entering the temple.

Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, look at us.

And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, I have no silver and gold. But what I do have, I give to you.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand and raised him up. And immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.

And leaping up, he stood and began to walk. And he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God.

[3 : 33] And recognized him as the one who sat at the beautiful gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

I don't need to retell the story. You guys are familiar with the story. Nathan just told the story to the kids and answered some questions.

But quickly, a couple of things I want to point out before we dig into what I've learned. This man was carried every day, daily to this spot, to ask for alms, to ask for money.

And he was carried by friends or family. Who knows who they were? But they carried him and brought him there so that he can make a living, so to speak. That was his situation.

That was his circumstances. Because his body did not work. His legs did not work. And he couldn't take himself there. It's important to note that that was as far as he could go.

[4 : 36] He couldn't go any further. And we'll touch on that here in just a few minutes. But daily, these people brought him there and he asked for money because he thought, I assume he thought that that's where his satisfaction was going to be, was in that money.

So here's the first thing I learned. The first thing I've learned about hope is hope is not about me. Hope is not about me. Verse 1 says, Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

Placing myself in this story, I could say, well, I'm kind of Peter, I guess. I'm not an apostle, but sure, I'd be going up and walking to the temple. Verse 2, Peter and John could have just walked and continued their path.

They were going to the temple, the hour of prayer. That was their destination. And they see this man. Verse 4 tells us, They see him and they turn their gaze on him as he's asking for money. They could have ignored him. This man would have been used to being ignored. We see the story that Jesus tells about the priest and the Pharisees who see a man in need and they walk on the other side of the street.

[6 : 00] This man has probably looked people in the eyes and watched them immediately turn their eyes away. We have beggars all the time.

I have homeless people walking up and down our streets. We see beggars everywhere. We can't run away from them, whether it's on the street corner or the front of Kroger or the front of the mall. They're everywhere.

You can't ignore them. And Peter and John choose not to ignore them because they understand that the hope that they have, that they've received, isn't about them.

So let's back up a little bit. In Acts chapter 1, the apostles are all together. Jesus says in verse 8, speaking to the apostles right before he ascends into heaven, he says, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

It echoes the Great Commission in Matthew 28. It says, go and make disciples to all nations, baptizing them in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[7 : 25] This power, this is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. This is the same power that later in chapter 2, Pentecost, the Spirit comes down to Pentecost and it appears that fire is on their head.

This is the same Spirit that moves at Pentecost where thousands of people's lives are changed by Jesus. This is the same Spirit that later empowers them to do bold things for the Gospel.

This is the same power that lives inside of you and inside of me. This is the same power from the Holy Spirit, again, that raised Jesus from the dead.

That He was dead and He is alive. And this power is in Peter and John and leading Peter and John as they're walking to the temple and they see this man and they turn their gaze on this man.

See, hope's not about me. I wasn't created to sit and bask in the glorious news of having hope and just let it flood me and just sit under it and be like, this is so great.

[8 : 37] That's not what I was created to do and you weren't created to do that either. We were created to make disciples and to proclaim the good news of Jesus and to glorify His name. All of that wrapped up into one.

Hope is not about me and it's not about you. We read Scriptures and we get comforted. I'm going to read some this morning and you'll probably go, that's one of my favorites.

But let's be honest, it's not what you were created to do. It's just to read it. What about those people who are far from God?

What about those people who are living without hope? What about the teenage girl who was pregnant who's raising a child? Where's the hope in that? The circumstances are too tough.

She can't go to school with a baby. How does she make it happen? What about her? What about this man? Broken. Wednesday, a week ago Wednesday, we had our missional community, which is like your community outreach groups, we had a Thanksgiving dinner.

[9 : 50] And we had, I went out Tuesday and bought a honey-baked ham for 30 people. Now if you know honey-baked ham, that's not cheap. In fact, I had to talk myself into buying it at the register.

The lady said, it's going to be \$80. And I was like, what? I cannot do this. But I talked myself into it because I thought, I'm going to love my missional community.

I'm going to love the people in our MC and they're going to eat well. We're going to celebrate well because Jesus is good and He provides for us and that's what we're going to do. So the night, Wednesday night, it's about 5.45, maybe close to 6.

I look outside and there are kids just coming to our house. Neighborhood kids. I don't know most of them. I don't know. I certainly don't know their names.

I know maybe 20% of the names. And I'm looking and I'm just getting bigger and bigger eyes. This is not good. I'm getting angry because I bought this ham for our missional community, for our family to celebrate together and to eat well.

[11:02] No, this isn't what your plan is, God, because I had a plan and this isn't it. So I'm looking at Jamie. I'm looking at my wife and she's looking at me with the same big eyes and we're like having this pep talk in the middle of the living room.

I'm like, it's okay because God is good and He's called us to do this and these kids need Jesus and we're talking to each other and we had enough food for everyone.

We had over 30 kids in our house, over 20 adults. Our house is maybe 1,500 square feet. It's not a big house. Three little bedrooms. Everybody was spread everywhere.

Nothing got broken, I don't think. Haven't found it yet if it did. But everybody ate well. There's hope in my life and maybe, just maybe we gave them a fragrance of hope on that evening because hope isn't about me.

Peter and John saw this man, turned their gaze on him and they spoke to him and as we'll see in just a minute, they help him. Second thing I've learned is hope is not circumstantial.

[12:17] Hope is not dependent on your circumstances or how much money you have in a bank account. Hope is a confident expectation and you can't put confident expectation on anything that is temporal.

Anything that is temporary. dust and wind. The lame beggar was asking for all he knew and what he thought he needed.

What he thought maybe would help his situation if I just had some money. He was brought there every day at the same place.

So much so that at the end of this text, the people said, that's the guy who's been sitting there, the last whatever many years. That's the guy we've seen over and over. We know him.

That's the guy who sits outside that temple. Over and over, this guy is there. He didn't think money would heal him. How could he?

[13:19] But he thought that money would help his situation, would help his life. Maybe just make it a little better. Maybe I could eat a honey-baked ham instead of a Kroger ham.

It's almost as if his identity was rooted in receiving those alms, right? Because that's what he was. He was a beggar. Every day he was there.

I can't emphasize enough. He was there every day begging. So this is his identity. This is what he's known as. So he's living out his identity as a beggar asking for money.

If I can get this amount, if I can beg enough and maybe get \$10, then my life will have meaning or whatever the amount is.

His identity also was not to be able to enter the temple. I don't know if you guys knew this, but in Leviticus 21, it says that a lame person was not allowed to enter the temple because they saw him as unclean or saw her as unclean.

[14:33] So he wasn't even able. That's as far as he could go is to that gate. He wasn't allowed. So his identity was not just begging, but his identity was as a lame person who couldn't even go where everybody else could.

hope is not in our circumstances though. When we find our identity in our circumstances, when we're an athlete or a preacher or a teacher or whatever it is, and we find our identity in that, there is no hope in that.

There is no hope. All around us, people are looking to things or circumstances for their identity. They're looking for the next pair of Jordans or the next deposit in their bank account or their tax return.

They're waiting for their tax return so that they can then live for the next six months. They're looking for the next thing to fulfill them and find their identity in when they can't.

It's impossible to find hope in those things. Circumstances do not make you who you are. That's the teenage pregnant girl who was pregnant.

[15:46] She's now a mom. Sure, her identity title has changed, but it doesn't change who she is in the eyes of God. And your circumstances. You could have had an abusive past or you could have had whatever it is, but your circumstances don't change.

Or your circumstances may change, but that doesn't change your identity. It doesn't change how God views you. And we can have hope in that because hope is not circumstantial. Your circumstances right now may appear hopeless.

It may appear like you have nowhere to go, nothing that can get you out of what you're in, but that doesn't change how God sees you and it certainly doesn't change the hope that you have in Christ. But what about the people around us? What about the people around you? Now, if you're a college student and you live on campus, you guys are all kind of on the even playing field, so to speak. You have the same place to live and kind of have the same stuff. You all have those milk crates and crazy plastic furniture and all that stuff, right? Is that what you guys have? And maybe a laptop? [16:52] I don't know. You all have the same kind of stuff. But if you live outside of the campus, you live in a neighborhood, everybody may appear the same, but they're certainly not the same.

What about those people? I look around the people around us and I feel hopeless. I get defeated, negative, negative.

And here's why. Because I think, I think that they have no hope because of their circumstances. I look at their circumstances and I say they're hopeless. Single mom, seven kids, I feel bad for her and I don't know how to help her.

I feel helpless. I feel hopeless when I look at people and I think that I can fix them because they're my project and I can try to give them what they need and then that will make the big difference.

[18:08] Hey, they need Jesus. They don't need me. I'm not Jesus. They don't need me to fix them. I feel hopeless when I'm frozen by fear because we don't look the same or we don't have the same mannerisms.

We don't wear the same clothes. There was a, in our neighborhood, there was this picnic, a get-together.

This lady, old lady who's been there 40 years, she's been in the same house. She had this get-together to sign petitions to get a crosswalk and maybe, hopefully, some speed bumps on our streets which is a great thing.

We were there and we pull up and we were the only white people there. And I don't know.

We were extremely nervous. We actually parked and we looked at each other. We talked soft enough so our kids didn't hear this conversation and we said, should we go?

[19:16] I don't know. I mean, it's a good thing but that looks, I don't, we weren't scared for our life. It was just going to be, it was going to be, we were going to feel awkward and, but we went.

We went because it was the right thing to do. We can't let the circumstances around us or the circumstances in other people's lives or the way that they look freeze us, free us, or freeze us from doing and being a fragrance of hope to those around us.

This man's circumstances were bad. But he still had, as we'll see, he still had the opportunity to have hope.

not only is hope not circumstantial, and here's the, you guys are going to go, yeah, of course, unless you've already done that and that's cool too.

Hope is only found in Jesus. 1 Timothy 1.1 says that Jesus, our hope, hope is only found in Jesus.

[20:31] Jesus. Look at verse 4-8. Jesus isn't mentioned here. Except by the name of Jesus, but he is all in these scriptures and in this story. And Peter directed his gaze at him as did John and said, look at us.

And he fixed his attention on them, expecting Peter, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, I have no silver and gold. In other words, I don't have what you're asking for.

I'm sorry, my pockets are empty. I don't have the item that you are looking for. However, but what I do have I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

And he took him by the right hand, raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk and entered the temple with him, walking and leaping and praising God.

Jesus heals him. The Holy Spirit of God heals this man. There's only hope in Jesus alone. Now for us, healings in the Bible are mostly pictures of the spiritual healing that takes place when Jesus changes our lives, when he saves us.

[21:53] So this picture of healing is a picture of those who are dead and broken that God makes whole in Jesus Christ.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. There's no other name. Acts 4 verse 12 says, no other name, no other name above the name of Jesus.

There's no other name that could have saved, that could have healed him. There's no other name that could have saved him. There's no other name that could have helped or can help the people around you who have no hope.

Only Jesus. 2 Corinthians 1 says, in Him we set our hope. So here's the rubber meets the road for us.

Now we can sit and we can read this. I can tell you all the things I've learned about hope. And I can do nothing about it.

[23 : 00] And I can say, that's great and take great notes and have this nice outline laid out and do nothing about it. And care nothing about the people around us. It's possible for me to do that.

And it's possible for you to do that. But Jesus is the only hope that people have. So as we sit here and sing about Jesus, as we sit here and sing in Christ alone, as we sit here and sing about the glorious name of Jesus, what are we going to do about it?

Peter and John were not intending to meet this guy. But the Spirit put this guy in front of them in their path and they were obedient to do what they knew what to do.

I praise God for Christ's family church. I praise God for the words that are preached and the gospel that is proclaimed. But if Christ's family church is not reaching the people around them, then what is the point?

You want me to repeat that, Evie? What's the point? If I'm studying Scripture and I'm preparing for a sermon to preach here this morning and I don't live this out, what is the point?

[24 : 20] There is no point. Because Jesus is where hope is found. People need to know that.

That doesn't mean that the teenager who is pregnant who's having this child and you say, Jesus will fix your problems. No! Jesus isn't going to change her circumstances.

Jesus isn't going to fix that she's trying to figure out how to be in school and figure out who's going to watch her child. That's not what that means. But Jesus is going to make her whole.

That broken heart is going to be made whole. She's going to have hope in Jesus. Jesus is going to have to be made whole. We can celebrate the Advent and we can talk about the long-awaited Savior who's going to come back.

But what about the people around you? Nitschke, I don't know, in the 1800s and 1900s, he was a philosopher and who knows what else he did.

[25 : 29] He claimed that Christianity made people cowards. Cowards. Because it taught that whatever happened was God's will.

And if God wills it, then it will happen. Thus, discouraging efforts to change the world. Hope changes the world.

Jesus changes the world. Not, doesn't leave us a room to sit and do nothing. We just went to that picnic.

The only white people there. People looked at us funny. We didn't talk about Jesus, but we made our presence known and hopefully someday down the road that will build relationships where we can then talk about Jesus with people.

It doesn't change our neighborhood. It doesn't fix anything. It doesn't fix the homeless problem or the poverty problem. Hope is found in Jesus, but also hope requires action and I've already talked about it.

[26 : 43] Hope requires action. Look at Peter and John. What do they do? So they talk to him and they say, I don't have what you're asking for, but what I do have I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Rise and walk. And Peter reaches down with his right hand and grabs him and he stands that he's never stood before. Like he's been lame from birth. He's never stood before. He's doing something new and his legs work immediately.

Just like you and just like me. and just like you and me, your heart that was not working correctly works correctly now because of Jesus.

You now can honor Jesus and you can glorify Jesus and you can glory in his goodness and you can do all these things that you originally couldn't do because of sin.

And this man is able to walk and his body works because Peter and John were obedient to the spirit's leading and they did something. There are people around you who need you to reach down

and grab them.

[27 : 56] There are people around you that need you to reach down with your right hand or your left and grab them and help them. Hope is like the Christmas presents on Christmas morning under the Christmas tree.

Now most of y'all in here are young enough that you can remember the anticipation, you can remember the feelings that you had, you can remember getting up at three or four in the morning because you couldn't sleep anymore.

And if you lived upstairs, you'd run downstairs to the Christmas tree and you'd look at it and go, oh my gosh, it's so great. And you'd run upstairs and you'd wake up your siblings and then you'd run back downstairs and then you'd figure out how to wake everybody up on accident and then you'd get everybody up and hope though is like the Christmas presents.

You know they're going to be there. You may not know exactly what they are, but you know they're going to be there and you want to tell everybody in that house about those presents.

They're here. You and I, hope is like those presents. We may not know exactly how it plays out. We know that Jesus is going to come back and we know we have the details, but we don't know exactly when and there's some things we're missing about it, but we have this anticipation or we should have this anticipation that Jesus is coming back.

[29 : 23] That Jesus is coming back and it's going to be so good and we need to wake up everyone and get them to be part of it.

we should be waking up our future family members. That's not our job to save. That's the Spirit's job. That's God's job.

But we certainly should wake them up and let them know that there are presents under the tree for them. Finally, hope changes everything.

Hope changes everything. Our circumstances can be so dim, there can appear to be no hope out of our situations and yet there is hope because of Jesus.

Our circumstances can tear us down. Things can be ripped from us, but Jesus is still there. He'll never be ripped from you. And we know through the Bible that sin no longer has a hold on us.

[30 : 37] Sin no longer has victory over you and me in Christ Jesus. Death no longer has a hold on you or me. We die, we're with Jesus.

That's hopeful thinking. This lame beggar, his life was changed. He now can enter the temple and worship God.

Because his body is fixed. Because Jesus has healed him. There's a story in the Old Testament in 2 Samuel by the name of Mephibosheth.

I don't know if you know Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth is a descendant of Jonathan who is the son of Saul. Saul and Jonathan are long gone.

David wants to bless the lineage of Saul as David does. He's a man after God's own heart. And David asks a servant, he says, is there anybody left in the line of Saul that I can bless?

[31 : 52] And the man says, yes, there is one. Go get him please. So he goes and gets him and brings him and of course Mephibosheth is a little scared because David was the one by God's hand who wiped down his father and his grandfather and was part of that.

Now David is king. Mephibosheth was crippled at the age of five. He had nothing to do with it. His maidservant or whoever it was actually dropped him and he became crippled and his legs didn't work anymore.

And David seeks him out and he comes in and he sees that he's crippled and David says, fear not for I want to bless you.

Long story short, he tells the servant who worked for Saul's family, whatever Saul had, he has it all back. His riches are his.

And I want you and all his servants to work for Mephibosheth because I want him to have food to eat and have a living. And David says, but Mephibosheth is going to sit with me at my table.

[33 : 09] That's what Jesus does. Jesus says, you are mine and you are mine and you are mine and you are mine and you are glorifying my name on earth and you are working your tails off for me and you will sit at my table with me.

He has opened his table up to you and to me. You are going to celebrate and participate in the Lord's Supper in a few minutes and Nathan is going to lead that and that is Jesus inviting you to his table.

You have been invited to join him and the people around you have been invited to sit with the king. But they need to know, they need to hear, they need to see the hope that you and you and all of us have in this room who are in Christ Jesus.

Hope changes everything. Mephibosheth's life has been changed. Circumstances are still the same. He's still crippled. He still wobbles.

He's dependent on other people. But David said, you will sit with me until you die. You will sit with the king. And hope changes everything.

[34 : 27] Today, Jamie joked around with me about this and I'm going to mention it. Today marks 23 years ago on this day that we had our first date. Took her to a pizza place.

Got her the, yeah, big time. Play ya. Took her, picked out the wrong thing to drink for her, winter. She is the light in my sky. She is by rock a lot of times here on earth. And I've asked her to come and share a story that she'll do a way better job than me about some of the things that's going on that we're a part of in Memphis.

Let me just say it would take hours to tell you all the things that God has done or is doing. The way that he's provided for us, the people he's given us favor with, the way the Spirit has moved and led us to do certain things that didn't make any sense.

But she's going to share, and then I'm going to pray, and then I think Nathan's coming up after that. Good morning. He makes me teary before I even get up here.

[35 : 43] Those of you who know me well know I'm a crier, so forgive me. When Chris asked me to share one story, I thought that wasn't very fair. How do you choose one story when all that is happening around us is woven into this beautiful tapestry that's organic and it's alive and it can't be compartmentalized?

So when we come back to visit you and you say, how is it going? I know you're earnest in asking, and we say it's good. It's good. We say it with such vagueness because how do you?

How do you, apart from hours and hours of sitting together and recounting all the stories and all the details and all the things, it'd be like if I asked you what's new. You say one or two tidbits, but apart from having that deep conversation, it's hard to just recount one story.

So it's a bit unfair. So forgive me for, and Chris, also, for only being able to serve you just a small sliver of the Memphis pie. But I'll try.

The family I'll tell you about today, they literally walked into our lives this past summer. Two of the boys from the Coleman family came strolling into our yard. We were outside hanging out with other neighborhood kids.

[37 : 01] A lot of you heard this summer when I came about the favor we gained in our neighborhood that we were having 20-plus children at our house every day. They wanted to know if we would donate to their basketball team.

The scheme later got them busted by the police. I didn't give them money. I wasn't foolish enough to do that. I told them that I had to be loyal to some of the other boys who hang out with us and are on a team.

But we talked for a while and I asked lots of questions, of course, and got to know them a little bit better. Where are you coming from? Where are you going? over the next several weeks, they continued to come back, bringing slowly more and more of their family to meet us.

Eventually, they brought their mom and she sat on our couch. She explained her mental illness. She expressed her wonder at the fact that the Department of Family and Children's Services has never caught up with them.

She groaned about not having clothes for her seven children. They had all been thrown out during the most recent eviction. There are seven children. There are nine people total in a one-bedroom house.

[38 : 05] It sits about a quarter mile from us on the busy main road. We're just slightly off that road. So, you know, anybody who comes down that road can see our house. It sits next to a gas station that can only be described as sketch for the illegal things that happen there.

The house looks uninhabitable. As you can imagine, these kids don't hang out at their own house because how do you hang out at a house where there's nowhere to actually hang? They often roam around in sort of a pack with other kids whose situations and homes are similar.

This pack of children, as they roam around the neighborhood, they lie, they manipulate, they steal. They generally create an interesting wake of havoc wherever they go. School?

Well, we couldn't get them enrolled until the school had already been in for a couple of weeks. kids. By week three, the middle schoolers were banned from the bus for stabbing another child. By week 12, it was clear that after multiple suspensions, the two of the boys that were at our neighborhood school wouldn't be able to stay. They are now headed to an alternative school. One of the biggest problems, mom is too tired, she's too apathetic to walk her younger kids to and from school.

[39 : 26] She isn't willing to intercede for them and she isn't willing to fight for them and so they fight all the way there and all the way back home. What else do you do when you're bullied? If I can connect with them before school, I'm talking the oldest down off of whatever anger ledge he's sitting on.

He usually shows up, fists bald, tears flowing out of his face. I'm helping he and his brother tuck stained shirts and fix ill-fitting belts and pants and usually carefully piecing together their shoes so that they won't cause too much embarrassment during the day.

We fix the little sister, we wipe the crust from her eyes and nobody's eaten yet so there aren't milk stains and things. They depend on the school for their breakfast and their lunch and usually are not fed at dinner or on the weekends.

We try to get her to smile erasing the perpetual void look that usually fills her eyes. lots of talking before they go into the school because they're already mad.

You can do this. Do your best today. Don't worry about what other people say. I love you. We hug them big, long I care for you type of hugs. If we connect after school we'll walk together for a little while until our paths diverge.

[40 : 40] They might have some small like tattletale type things to report but they aren't like our children where they're talking about anything they learned or they did in school or that they're excited about the upcoming field trips. Nothing like that.

They're usually just the same questions. Number one, can we have a ride home? Number two, can we get some food to eat? Number three, can we play at your house? And number four, are we having the skill community this week?

Forgive me for not being able to fully describe the overwhelming desperation. Their jaded spirits. Their smell.

And their hardness. Here's the thing. The Coleman family is a norm on our side of the neighborhood.

They're the norm in the urban school where I teach. In fact, their story is not the worst, most seemingly hopeless story I could have shared. I, however, refuse to view them as a statistic.

[41 : 48] You know, the old pipeline to prison. elementary schools are a pipeline to prison is very true where we live. You can look at these children and already see how if there is not intervention, that's exactly where they're headed.

I know the only hope for them is Christ. So, can we clean them up enough and make them smell great and get them a better house and maybe a better car and better medicine and make them act more like us all in the hope that Christ will save them?

Was that your experience when Christ sought you out? No. We were all the Coleman's. We were dead in our sin. You weren't born more privileged to know Christ.

You weren't chosen for Christ because of the color of your skin. You weren't chosen for Christ because you smelled good. You weren't chosen for Christ because of the family you grew up in, the schools you attended, your natural intelligence.

He sought you out. And if you believe anything different, shame on you. And so, I choose to believe that Patrice, the mom, and Kayla, Chris, Martavius, Quentin, Tyler, Nalia, and Joseph are all loved by God and are gently being wooed by his spirit.

[43 : 17] I feel honored that we get to be people who are intentionally loving them, many more like them in our neighborhood. My hope is not that the Lord will save them to then make them look, smell, and be like us.

My hope is that the Lord will save them to look, smell, and be like him. I want them to be image bearers of Christ. I want them to be part of his body, adopted sons and daughters.

Will you join us in praying big prayers for the families in our neighborhood? Will you begin to look for the Coleman's around you? You won't have to look far. We've lived in Dahlongega.

We know the Coleman's that live in this area. Will you dream big dreams for those people around you who can't dream dreams for themselves? As we walk out this beautiful mess, whether in Memphis or North Georgia or wherever you may live, may our hope be unwavering, a confident expectation that the Lord is doing great things.