



## The Spirit of Christmas Future

Pastor Phil Christiansen: December 16th, 2018

**Text:** Matthew 28:18-20, Ephesians 1:18-19

*The Spirit of Christmas came to give us hope and to secure our future.*

I've enjoyed sharing this Spirit of Christmas series with you so much, and many of you have said the same, because it's just good to know that when we're in Christ we're not locked-in to being the people we once were. That's a good reminder because sometimes we forget who we are in Christ, particularly when the pressures of life squeeze on us and we respond in ways we wish we hadn't. It's good for us to know that we are still in process and that it's not about perfection but direction. Aren't you glad that God's not done with you yet? It's encouraging to know that as you cooperate with His mighty work in you that He will continue to mold you and make you into the person He knows you are.

Gratefully, at Christmastime, we have the opportunity—if we'll take it—to remember that, because of Jesus, the One who came at Christmas, we can be free: Yes! Free from our past. Free in our present. Amen! AND free in the future. Your future is secure because of the One who came at Christmas. And that's what I want to talk about with you today.

### **Contemplating the Future**

I think it's fair to say that most people look at their future in one of two ways: either with hope or with fear. Maybe it's dread or anxiety. But I think, at our core, we look at our future either with hope or fear. We're either excited or anxious.

How about you? When you close your eyes and imagine ten, twenty or 50 years from now, does that energize you? Some of you are thinking, "I'll be dead!" We'll talk about that more in a few minutes. Are you excited when you think about your future? Or does thinking about the suck the joy out of you and fill you with dread?

If you are a Christ-follower, I want you to know that you have every reason to look at your future with hope. And I'll be specific as to why in a little bit. But, for the next few minutes I want to talk to those of you who look at

your future with fear, dread, insecurity, or whatever you want to call it. If you're a Christian, you probably feel a little guilty or embarrassed because you know you *should* be hopeful, you *ought* to be excited about your future but, if you're honest, you're not. You aren't encouraged about the direction of your life. You aren't excited about the trajectory of your marriage, family, education, or career. And, to top it off, you feel bad because you think you should know better. Don't raise your hand, but does that sound at all like you?

If you're not yet a Christ follower, then contemplating your future puts all the stress on you because everything's riding on your ability to perform at peak efficiency, to finish school, have the family, save enough money, have enough stuff, and whatever else you think makes you successful. But if you've ever had a setback, didn't hit the goal, hit a bump or missed the mark, the stress of having all that pressure on you can be overwhelming. Those 'squeezed-by-the-pressure' people are the ones who often talk about the rat race, the 'get up, go to work, come home, go to bed and do it all over again' folks. Those people aren't looking to the future with hope because they don't see their future changing. All they see is the treadmill: they're running really hard but not getting anywhere. Aren't you glad you came to church today?

Here's where I'm going with this: When you close your eyes to think about your future and fear or anxiety creep(s) in, it's because you're imagining a future without Jesus. For some reason, the presence, power, grace and mercy of God are missing from that picture. That's why you have fear, anxiety or insecurity about what's still to come. But here's the truth...

### ***For the Christian***

When you're in Christ, you're under the umbrella of God's peace, purpose, provision & protection. God repeatedly promises you in the Bible that He will never leave you. He will never forsake you. He will never let you down. He will never fail. He will always love you. The only way you can look at your future and be afraid is if you picture one that He's not in!

But, as God's kid, it's impossible for you to have a future where He is *not* with you.

Open your bibles to Matthew 28:18-20. I know this passage is familiar to many of you and may not seem very Christmas-y. But, it highlights exactly what I'm trying to say. Follow along while I read, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" -Matthew 28:18-20

For many of you this isn't new. But remember, we forget easily so I want to dig into this a little. First, Jesus says that *all authority* is His. All the power of Heaven and earth belongs to Him. Does Jesus lack strength or ability in *any way*? No! **Next**, since Jesus is in charge, He gives His followers a specific mission: To make disciples everywhere they go. Get people connected to Jesus and help them grow to love and serve Him. So, Jesus has all the strength and ability and He's given His followers a specific job: make disciples. **As amazing** as all that is, I think the best part is the last sentence: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." I have a question: If you are in Christ, at what point in eternity will you be without Jesus? Never! There will never be a time, Christian, when you are on your own. He [Jesus] promises to be with you always. Maybe this verse has more to say about Christmas than I thought. That's what it's all about, right? God with us: Immanuel.

So, if you envision your future with fear or apprehension, then it's for one of two reasons: Either you've forgotten that your Savior, the Spirit of Christmas, not only came for you but promises to be with you forever, or you haven't yet trusted Jesus as your forgiver and leader. You've either forgotten or you've not yet placed your faith in Christ.

If you've forgotten, then let this be your reminder. You don't have to worry about your future ever again because the One who has all the power and

authority in the universe is with you: Immanuel. There was a time when it was all about you, and whether you were good enough, fast enough or smart enough. You were trying to do life on your own. But you were changed when you got connected with Jesus. Just like we talked about a couple weeks ago, when you're in Christ it's not about *you* anymore: it's about Christ in you. Your life is hidden in Christ, right? (Colossians 3:3)

I love the story in Matthew 8, where the disciples are in the boat heading across the lake when gnarly storm blows in. They're freaking out because they think they're going to drown. When professional fishermen are terrified that they're gonna die that says something about the storm. Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat (clearly not worried about a thing!) and they woke him up saying, "'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'" <sup>26</sup> He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. <sup>27</sup> The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!'" (Matthew 8:25-27) These guys had been with Jesus. They'd seen Him do all kinds of miracles. He healed people. But when this incredible storm fell upon them, they had no idea that He could take care of that, too. Who is this guy? Maybe they hadn't yet realized that Jesus was the One with all the power and authority. Aren't we just like that? 'Well, sure. Jesus can rescue me from hell, but what's He gonna do about my marriage? My wayward child? My health? My job? My broken friendship?' See what I mean? We forget Who promised to be with us forever.

It doesn't matter if it's smooth sailing or the biggest squall you've ever seen, Jesus promises to be with you through it all. That's *His* promise, not mine! With you. Always. Constantly. Now...now...now... now...now... moment-by-moment for eternity. Christian, you don't have to fear the future because Jesus is with you.

### ***For the Unbeliever***

If you haven't placed your faith in Christ yet, then everything is riding on you. And you need to know: you'll never make it. Sure, you may have the

American dream with power, position, and prestige along with the picket fence and fancy cars, but that won't secure your future. Your sin will continue to keep you at a distance from God because He's holy. That's why Christmas is so important. God chose to clothe Himself in humanity and come, in person, to pay the penalty for our sin so we could be forgiven and free. The only way it happens is if we place our full trust in Jesus as the One who can forgive us and lead both now and forever. There is no other way. That's exactly what Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

If you're hearing me today and you know that you've never trusted Jesus as your Forgiver and Leader, but you want to, you want to be free from the penalty and power of sin and have the hope of a secure future, then it's time to do something about it. Will you please come talk to me when we wrap up today? You can talk to me or Brian or Sam. If you're in the chapel, talk to Dillon. We would love to help you get connected with Jesus. Come talk to us. You can be free. You can leave changed. You can go home today certain of your future and secure in your relationship with God. This could be the best Christmas you've ever had!

### **The Joy of Hope**

A future without Jesus is a future without hope. That's what we see in Ebenezer Scrooge, isn't it? There's no hope when he looks at his past, present or future. His broken, bitter, selfishness condemns him to a tragic, hopeless future. When the last of the spirits visits him, Scrooge was so shaken that he begged, "*Spirit, assure me that I may change... Change my ends by an altered life.*" And the Spirit assured him there was hope for change. He wasn't locked into being the kind of man he had been. He had hope that he could change and his tomorrows could be different.

The next day, there's a sweet scene at the office between Ebenezer and Bob Cratchit, Tiny Tim's father and Scrooge's abused and underpaid clerk. When Cratchit arrives at work—about fifteen minutes late—rather than chewing him to the nub for like he used to, old Ebenezer showers

Bob with blessing and a raise. And soon after, we see Ebenezer carrying Tiny Tim [pic] on his shoulders. That's what hope does, friends. It's fun to watch what happens when lives are changed and hope overflows—even when it's fiction. It's even more fun to watch what happens in the lives of real people when Jesus gets hold of them. If you know Jesus, then you have every reason to celebrate like crazy this Christmas! Your past is done, your present is sure and your future is secure. It doesn't get better than that. Everything else bonus...it's extra.

### **Tomorrow's Hope**

When we started today I said that people tend to look at their future with either hope or fear in their heart. As a Christian, you don't have to fear the future because Jesus is with you and He is your source of hope!

As you stay close to Jesus each day, yielding to His power at work in you, like Brian talked about last week, you can look forward to your future with hope because you're right where Jesus wants you to be. Even when the storms blow—and we all know they blow—you're going to be okay because He's with you. And He's got more power and authority over that situation that you can begin to imagine. You're God's kid and that means the King of the Universe is right there with you every step of the way.

That's what Paul was trying to express to the church in Ephesus. Check out these verses from Ephesians 1. “<sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe” (Ephesians 1:18-19a).

As God's children, we have every reason to look forward to tomorrow because He will be with us. We have hope because He's promised to take care of us in ways that we can't even comprehend just because we're His (Matthew 6:25-ff, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Philippians 4:19). You don't have to worry if you'll have what it takes to make it tomorrow because it's not about the strength you bring, but the immeasurable power of God working in and for you as you stay close to Him. Just like the little child who's holding Daddy's hand is

safe and secure, so are we. We just stay connected to Him each step of the way. Have you ever seen a toddler holding his parent's hand? He's cruising along, not a fear in the world, safe and secure. And if he starts to stumble what happens? The parent gives a little *lift* and bingo! Back on his feet again. We can learn something from that, friends.

It's pretty easy to look forward with hope when things are going well. But when life gets rough it can send us reeling if we think we're in it alone. At the end of John 16, Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We may not know what's coming next, but Jesus does and He will lead us through it. When the storms come, stay close to Jesus and let Him take care of you. He won't leave you no matter how bad things get. Cry out to Him in prayer. He won't be angry. Ask Him to remind you that He's with you. Ask Him to take away your fear. Ask Him to meet you in the middle of the downpour and allow Him to cup your face and say, "Dear one. Your faith needs to grow some more. Don't worry. I'm right here." Continue to meet with Him in His word. Let Him speak to your heart again about who and Whose you are. When you're going through it, please say something to those who love you and love Jesus. Christ commands us to bear one another's burdens and to encourage and build one another up, but we can't do that if we don't know. So, please speak up and let us love, encourage and remind you of the truth when your heart grows faint. I don't know what I would have done without my friends in Christ when my dad died. You prayed for me, sent me tender, thoughtful reminders of God's grace and love. You hugged me and cried with me. Some big, burly men in this body cried with me.

When you're in Christ your short-term future is secure. That's Jesus' promise. He said that He will take care of you and give you peace, purpose, provision and protection. You can look to your future with confident hope. But wait, there's more!

## **Eternal Hope**

Not only is your short-term future secure but, even more importantly, because you are in Christ, your eternal future is secure as well. You're set. And not just for today or tomorrow...but FOREVER! Heaven is coming, friends. I don't say that like a threat or that I hope you'll die today—but if you do I'm going to be thinking, "Lucky!" I can't wait for Heaven. I'm not trying to be morbid. It's just that ever since I did the Heaven series a few years ago, I've been eagerly looking forward to it. Imagine what it will be like to be totally free from the power and influence of sin. To see Jesus, face-to-face. To hug Him. To kneel at His feet and tell Him how grateful you are for all that He did for you. To be fully alive and able to relate with Jesus and others with nothing in the way. Friends, that's what I'm talking about!

It feels weird to talk about death and Heaven in a Christmas series, but I don't know how to avoid it! Jesus came at Christmas to rescue us from the power and penalty of sin so that we can be in relationship with God and spend eternity with Him. You can't talk about why Jesus came without talking about Heaven. The problem is, when it comes to talking about death and Heaven, people get squirmy. Some of you are squirming now! I know what you're thinking, "This is supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year and Phil's talking about death!" Here's the truth: If you *really* want to celebrate this Christmas, take a good hard look at your future and what you have to look forward to because of Jesus. That'll make even those of you with a good Baptist upbringing want to dance.

The problem is, rather than looking forward to Heaven with hope, many Christians have this secret fear about Heaven because they don't know what to expect. They have all these ideas in their heads that society or Grandma told them that don't match up with what God has to say. So let's wrap up our time talking about what you have to look forward to in Heaven...what your eternal future will look like.

People are afraid that Heaven will be boring. [Farside Cartoon] But God's not boring! Think about it with me: everything that brings you joy (that is not sinful) is a gift from God—the Source of all joy. A good meal. A good

laugh. Singing. Creating. Reading a good book. Hard work. A hike with friends. Watching your children or grandchildren play. “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...” (James 1:17).

We enjoy God’s gifts because God is the source of joy behind them. “Flowers are beautiful for one reason—God is beautiful. Rainbows are stunning because God is stunning. Puppies are delightful because God is delightful. Sports are fun because God is fun. Study is rewarding because God is rewarding. Work is fulfilling because God is fulfilling” (Alcorn, Randy *Heaven*. Tyndale House, Illinois, 2004. p 177). Everything we enjoy is derived from the One who is the Source of joy. God is not boring so Heaven cannot be boring!

People often pucker when they think about Heaven because they think they won’t have anything to do—except worship—like it’ll be an eternal church service. But here’s the truth: whatever He calls you to do will be your act of worship. Whether it’s walking with Him, talking to Him, enjoying the splendor of the New Earth, talking with friends old and new, working, or ruling with Him (Luke 22:30; Revelation 5:9-10); it will all be worship! Every part of us will seek to adore Jesus out of an overflow of gratitude, awe and love for our Savior as we enjoy being fully alive. There will be plenty to do in Heaven and it will all be worship.

Perhaps the greatest source of stress about Heaven is the final step that gets us there: death. People who love Jesus deeply freak out when they think about death. At least part of the reason for that is that our society avoids death in every way: don’t talk about it, don’t plan for it, don’t admit that it happens, and when someone you love *dies*, you have a week to get over it!

Death is an intruder—an enemy. It’s not what God had in mind for us when He first built humans but, because of sin, it is now our very unwelcome reality. But here’s what I want you to remember: Because we’re in Christ we have victory over death. Check out Hebrews chapter 2, “Since the

children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:14-15). Because of Jesus’ death, we are free from the bondage of fear that comes from death. The devil is no longer in control. Jesus is in charge. That’s good news, friends! We don’t have to be afraid of death because Christ has set us free from the power and penalty of sin!

And, when Jesus spoke to His closest friends about Heaven He said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and *take you to be with me* that you also may be *where I am*” (John 14:3). And later He prayed, “Father, I want those you have given me to be *with me where I am...*” (John 17:24a). See? You don’t need to be afraid of death because Jesus, the victorious One, conquered not only sin, but death. He’s in charge of how everything unfolds *and* He wants you to be with Him. He wants you with Him.

Even better, Jesus promised not just to have you be with Him, but promised that He would be *with you*. That’s what we talked about in Matthew 28 earlier. His *promise* includes being with you in your transition from life on the earth to life in Heaven and He will be with you forever. He wants you with Him and He wants to be with you! Your future is secure.

As you think about eternity, about Heaven, you have every reason to be excited about it. You’ll be totally free from sin and it’s influence. It won’t be boring because God is not boring. You’ll have plenty to do and it will all be an act of worship. And, since Jesus conquered sin *and* death, you don’t even have to worry about that part because He will be with you through it all.

## **Close**

My hope is that thinking about your future, both tomorrow and eternally, will create a hope-filled yearning in you. I want you to get to the place where you long for ‘home’—not so you’ll just sit and wait to die, but so you

will *truly live* and fulfill your mission while you're here! He's given you a job: tell as many people as you can about the hope you have. Go tell it on the mountain! You tell them how about how your past is done, your present is sure and your future is secure because of Jesus. You don't have to fear the future because the One who came at Christmas will be right there with you. Always. No fear...just hope.

### **Pray**

Hope-filled hearts as they look forward. Past is done. Present sure. Future secure. Rest in the truth that Jesus promises to be with them...always. Even to the end.

[Offering] Blessing from Ephesians 1:18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you..."

More about Heaven on our website: [foothillscp.org/sermon-cat/heaven/](http://foothillscp.org/sermon-cat/heaven/)