

## **BIBLE STUDY LIVE**

### **Advent Bible Study Series**

#### **LESSON 1: A Reason For My Hope**

##### **1 Peter 3:15**

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: KJV

#### **The Celebration of Advent**

Advent is traditionally regarded as the four Sundays prior to Christmas day. Basically speaking, the period both highlights and celebrates the coming Christ from various perspectives. It is retroactive in its focus as it acknowledges the physical arrival of the Christ child to earth – Emmanuel; God with us. Secondly it eschatological in nature as it directs us to look forward to the returning or “parousia” or second coming of Jesus Christ. Finally, it is introspective as it directs us to examine areas in our life where Christ is yet to come and reign without challenge. Generally four divine attributes of the faith is observed: hope, love, joy and peace. During this brief bible study series, we will focus primarily on the four components of Advent and attempt to apply these concepts in a very relevant and thought provoking manner.

#### **It’s A Beautiful Hope**

For the world hope is just a desire or expectation for something better. For the Christian, hope is the very building blocks of our expected blessings. It is the DNA of which the Christian’s reality is constructed. It is the bridge that spans the waters of doubt and lands us safely on the shores of our faith.

In the above scripture, the Apostle Peter directs the saints to “sanctify the Lord God in our hearts. This concept is supported in Isaiah 8:13. **QUESTION:** What is the underlying message in this Old Testament scripture? What the prophet Isaiah is saying is that we should fear God and not what men may threaten to do.

This text speaks against our tendency to “humanize” God. **QUESTION:** It has been said the God made man in his image, but now men are attempting to make God in their image. Can you provide an example of such practices?

What the apostles is directing us to do is to separate who God is from who men are – meaning, do not attribute the fickle, unstable, bias nature of men to the thoughts and actions of our God. Allow God to occupy a sovereign uncontested and unshared domain in our hearts. God doesn’t merely desire to be number one on our list, he desires to be the only one on our list! As Clark’s commentary tells us: “We are called to separate him from all that is imperfect, human, evil, capricious, changeable, and unkind. Ever remember that he has wisdom without error, power, without limits, truth without falsity, love without hatred, holiness without evil, and justice without inequality.” **READ Num 23:19 QUESTION:** How might us not attempting to apply negative human tendencies to the character of God help establish a stronger “hope” in our hearts? It would appear that by not attributing such things to God, we are less vulnerable to attributing evil, hateful or unloving actions to God. Because of these divine qualities, we as his disciples have a great hope and we are to always be prepared to give an “answer” or to explain and/or defend why we have such hope in Christ.

#### **Is That Your Final Answer?**

In religion, the field of Apologetics is a field that is rarely touched upon in any meaningful way in much Christian churches. Apologetics deals specifically with the defense or attempting to prove the truth of various religious doctrines in a logical and systematic way. **QUESTION:** How prepared are you to explain or defend what you believe. Peter tells us that such a belief should be expressed in “meekness and respect” – not in some arrogant or audacious manner. Let’s look at one specific question that often arises during this time of year? Should Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup>?

We are living at a time when people have unprecedented access to information. With the touch of a smart phone’s screen or merely clicking on a Google search engine and an unfathomable amount of information is at our finger tips. Oddly, having access to incredible amounts of information hasn’t necessarily made us any smarter. The Apostle Paul describes such students of information as “ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” **2 Tim. 3:7** It is true that December 25 was once the day that pagans used to celebrate their idol gods; in response to this pagan observance, the church intentionally and deliberately choose to celebrate the birth of Jesus on this same date with intentions to overshadowed the pagan’s false gods with the light and power of the one true and living God. **QUESTION:** Did the church’s plan to over-shadow the pagan celebrations work? Well, the entire world has long forgotten about the Greco-Roman celebrations, but we still remember each year and celebrate when God became man and walked among us! Again, we as Christians should be able to answer anyone who asks us about our hope and why we believe what we believe?

### **Hope In Action**

Read John 5: 1 – 9

The miraculous account in this 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of John so beautifully illustrates hope in action and helps to clarify where we should place our hope. In this text this poor man was afflicted with some type of paralyzed condition that so greatly restricted his mobility that he had been in this predicament for some 38 years! Somehow, despite his dire circumstance, this man managed to continue to wait; hoping that the healing angel would return and stir up the water in a nearby pool and that despite his paralytic condition he would be the very first one to step in the healing waters. When Jesus spoke with him, the man told Jesus of this plan he had of getting in the water when the angel stirred it. This man plan for his restoration had at least one glitch that the man admitted to; he did have anyone to put him in the pool! Though we may be able to commend the man’s tenacity and grit his plans are flawed. First he has placed his hope in one narrow remedy; the angel would come and the water would be stirred and he would step in the water and be healed. But what if God desired to heal him in a different way? **QUESTION:** How have we restricted how God may respond to our needs and prayers? Secondly, this man had placed unrealistic expectations on others. This evident in his statement to Jesus that he “have no one to help in get into the pool.” First of all this somewhat suggests that others had assistance that he lacked and that others near him were both able and willing to assist him into the healing waters? **QUESTION:** Why might both of these assertions be invalid? We set ourselves up for all sorts of emotional and spiritual discomforts when we allow ourselves to place unrealistic expectations on the behaviors and actions of others. For all have sinned and have fell or and are still falling short of God’s glory. What this man needed with something or in someone to put his hope on and that person was Jesus and he was speaking to the man at the moment. “Rise, take up your bed and walk!”- was the command given and the man did so- his bed now became his witness to the world of healing and of his eternal hope is Christ. **QUESTION:** What are you carrying that the world can see as a the Christ in you – the hope of glory?