

Christmas Series: The HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS

SUNDAY DECEMBER 15, 2019

HOPING FOR LOVE

I'm Afraid of Rejection and Loneliness

Matthew 1

SPEAKER: KEN DAVIS

1. Has anyone here ever noticed how love and its counterpart, loneliness, are at the center of a *lot* of the Christmas songs? **[recording]**

***All I want for Christmas is you, Baaaa-by!**

***Please Come Home For Christmas**

***Blue Christmas**

***Winter Wonderland**

***Last Christmas I Gave You My Heart**

-And the love and loneliness theme runs—not just through the Hallmark Channel—but **through just about every well-known Christmas movie, Miracle on 34th Street, The Santa Claus, White Christmas, and even The Grinch Who Stole Christmas!**

-Here's what I know; even **God** has weighed in on this. At the very beginning—when He surveyed all of creation, He said:

“It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper who is just right for him.”
(Genesis 2:18 NLT)

-Please understand, this includes romance, attraction and falling in love, engagement and marriage—but it's **way** deeper and **way** more profound than that. After all, Jesus—the epitome of love was single his entire life—but He **loved deeply** and was **deeply loved**. The point is that we were made in the image of a **relational** God—as **relational** beings. You could put it like this: **No one travels alone!**

- a. And God's command to **all** creation was, **“Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth.”** That single statement or command produced what I believe is **the** most powerful drive in every living thing. It's beautiful—but it honestly takes living creatures to places where they are more vulnerable than any other time.

-In the animal kingdom, these urges cause animals—usually males, to fight to the death. And when a **Mama** 'something' is protecting their young—**don't get in their way!** If **mama ain't happy—ain't nobody happy!**

- b. When humans feel the **be fruitful and multiply** urge, the intensity is exponential. With us, this is not just about mating—and making more puppies and giraffe-lings. No, it's **way** bigger than that! We are launched into this **intense** longing to find **SOMEONE!** You know, that person who is **just right** for us.

-And **that** brings up all kinds of other stuff; love, attraction, self-worth, flirting, jealousy, deception and, of course, lust. And it's something that most humans at least **think** about. And some think about it a **lot!** This desire brings out both the **best...**and the **worst** in us. The joy is **intense**—but so is the **pain**.

-We **long** to be attractive to, accepted by—**cherished** by someone else. This affects how much we eat and exercise—and whether or not we shower and brush our teeth. It's actually the **fear** of loneliness and rejection that causes us to make bad decisions that **lead** to feelings of loneliness and rejection

- c. At the center of Christmas is a love story. Last week we talked about Mary's encounter with an angel. It was a breathtaking encounter that had the potential of wrecking **all** her dreams for love and marriage—dreams that were wrapped up on a great guy named Joseph. She would become the most famous woman in history. The **price** tag was the impact on her engagement to Joseph.

-And the **question** comes up in this; **does God care about our love life**—or is it just an inconvenience to His plans for us?

2. Now, let me read the opening accounts of this story—for both Mary and Joseph:

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. (Luke 1:26-27 NLT)

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18 NLT)

-Now, I know for a fact that some of you have a **way different** experience of engagement and marriage than what we see on The Hallmark Channel and in **Today's Bride** magazine. And the traditions in **that** culture were very different as well.

- a. First, the **age** for marriage was way different. Is there anyone here who was engaged at 12 or 13 and married at 14? Maybe not? Well, two things affected the age of marriage then that are **way** different now. First, the life expectancy was 48 years. That doesn't give much time to raise a family—unless you start early! Most guys married at 18-19, and most girls were married by 14.

-In our culture, both guys and girls typically pursue professions, date multiple people, fall in love—keep dating—sometimes for years—and then get engaged. Engagement is a time when you can call off the wedding if you sense something is off. Some of you have done that—and some of you **should** have. Just sayin'!

-And then comes the big day, the big boss (aka Mother of the Bride) the big dress—the big party—and the big bill. And if you're the groom? Well, you're pretty much just along for the ride.

- b. In the first century world of the Jews, it actually the **families** of a young man and woman who would arrange for and negotiate a marriage. Joseph consulted **his** parents—who then connected with **Mary's** Dad, Eli—or Heli—and decided what the

dowry would be. Now Joseph and Mary likely knew each other—but it wasn't like they went to high school together. That just didn't happen.

-So, when Mary was about 13, Joseph likely formalized the marriage with Mary's Dad—and sealed the deal with a **dowry**—paid in money, livestock or service. Once that happened, Joseph and Mary were **betrothed** or **engaged**. That is, they were considered to be married, but didn't sleep together. Joseph would have a year to **prepare** a place—likely build an addition onto his parent's house. . In that year, Joseph for all practical purposes.

-When it was done, He would give the signal that he was ready for the **huppah**—or wedding. He would dress in his best and, with his friends, go to the home of his bride. She would be carried through the streets on a **kit**—accompanied by her bridesmaids. And then the party would start—and last 3 to 5 days. Usually the entire village was invited. This was a **big deal! It looked kinda like this.**

- c. Now, in this betrothal time, Mary and Joseph didn't meet after work, stare into each other's eyes and enjoy long kisses and walks on the shores of Galilee.

At 13, Mary was **very** much a woman—even though her toys had barely cooled off. She was cooking, carrying water, helping with her siblings—and **Joseph WAS** her plan for finding love and companionship and building a great life.

-But sometimes God comes along and **totally** messes up our plans! And when Gabriel showed up, Mary's hopes and plans were over—and loneliness, loss, and rejection became **very** real. I'm guessing that when Mary said **YES!** to God's call, she had a knot in her stomach—and had to choke the words out.

3. And **that's** where Mary's faith kicks in. It was clear to hear that she'd been chosen for one of **the** most important roles in history. She understood that. Her first words to Elizabeth, pour out of her in this flush of Spirit-filled excitement. Mary declared:

He took notice of his lowly servant girl and from now on all generations will call me blessed! (Luke 1:48 NLT)

-Honestly? It would be well over 40-50 years before **that** would happen! What about the interim—where all that her parents, her fiancé, and her friends saw was a pregnant teenage girl—whose chance at love would be **zip!**

Nazareth now has a population of 77,000. Then? 400! In **No place to hide!** For her Dad, Eli, having a daughter get pregnant out of wedlock in that culture would shame him and his entire family. He would have to return the dowry—and then Mary would be dependent on **him** for the rest of her life. I mean, just imagine how **profoundly alone** Mary must've felt?

-And **that's** where Joseph intersects the story. Notice that no conversation between he and Mary is recorded. This is what the record says:

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was

engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. (Matthew 1:18-19 NLT)

- a. This passage tells us that Joseph was no different than us. He was a **good man**--but he **clearly** didn't believe what she had told him about her pregnancy. It sounded crazy! Your fiancée comes back from a trip 3 months pregnant—and tells you that **God did it!** In that culture, breaking off a betrothal took a divorce. And I'm sure, to Joseph, Mary being pregnant felt like betrayal of the worst kind—with his bride-to-be getting pregnant with someone else's baby.

-When you're shamed publicly by someone in front of your family and friends, what's your first instinct? To **get revenge**. To destroy that person in some way—in the eyes of your family and friends—and theirs. BTW, has anyone ever seen that happen? A **lot!** Joseph had to potential—not just to destroy Mary's rep—he could get her executed. And yet as hurt and betrayed as he felt, Joseph refused to go that route.

- b. And it's **after that decision** that Joseph gets a visit:

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"
(Matthew 1:20-23 NLT)

- c. I want you to think about this from Joseph's perspective. After the shock of thinking that Mary was **far less** than he'd hoped she was—he now finds out that she was **better** than he thought.

And that now, because of her courage, both of you are part of a way, **way** bigger plan than you ever dreamed—that **Mary was telling the truth all along!**

-I'm guessing that Joseph was giddy with relief—that He wanted to shout, cry and dance! Love is the **only** thing that can do that to you!

- d. Joseph's next move, like Mary's, is one of **instant** obedience:

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus. (Matthew 1:24-25 NLT)

-And they lived happily ever after. The End. Well, not quite. But the **main** source of tension and struggle between **them** was over. We aren't told whether an angel visited Joseph's family or Mary's family—you know, to clue the grandparents in on the identity of this baby—and what their children had been called to do. I know this, there's **no evidence** of that.

-Given Mary and Joseph's resistance to moving back home after escaping to Egypt, I'm pretty sure that an angel never showed up there for a town meeting. You know, to tell the people, "I know what you're thinking about Mary and Joseph and this baby—but this is actually the **Messiah!** You need to just stop judging them!" That's an interesting thought, isn't it—that God sometimes allows others to misunderstand us!

4. Now, why have I gone into **all** that detail? Well, first, I wanted you to know that Mary and Joseph had a relationship that was clearly blessed and used by God—and yet I **know** they experienced the same stuff we do; peace **and** drama, hope **and** fear, intimacy **and** the pain of rejection and loneliness.

-Yes, Mary conceived a baby supernaturally; yes, people did rise up and call her blessed—but it took a **long** time for that to happen. And, yes, Joseph **did** ultimately hear from an angel that she was telling the truth—and that he needed to marry Mary—and protect her and the baby she carried. Their courage and faith paid off in ways we can't even imagine. I'm hoping to meet them some day! This passage describes Joseph as a **righteous man**. Now, does that mean he was **perfect**? No, it meant that he played by the rules and kept the law. He was a straight arrow guy. But a '**23 and me**' DNA test on him would've shown that his gene pool was a **mess!**

-We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. His ancestry, see, included incest, a Canaanite prostitute, a woman from a race that Israelites were forbidden to intermarry with, and the scandal of David's affair with Bathsheba—as well as kings that sacrificed their sons to foreign gods!

- a. Now, here's the takeaway when it comes to love. If you're sad that you didn't find the perfect person—or if you're still looking for them--**it won't happen!**

A good definition of marriage is: **An unconditional commitment to an imperfect person.** There **is** no perfect person for you to meet, fall in love with, and marry.

I mean, imagine Joseph meeting Dr. Phil,

“So, Dr. Phil—I need your help: My fiancée—an amazing girl, went to visit her cousin for 3 months—and when she came back, she was pregnant. She told me that an angel visited her, told her she's really special and that God would get her pregnant with someone who will rule the world. Think I should marry her anyway?”

- b. If you want kill a relationship, throw a bunch of expectations on someone they can't **possibly** keep. That will either kill them, kill the relationship, make them hate you--or give you a stroke! Should you expect the person you're in a relationship to love you, keep their promises, and treat you and with respect? Absolutely! But there's not a person on this planet who can be the man or woman you **think** you deserve! Love is **way** too sensitive and tender for that!

-See, even though the angel told Joseph to take Mary as his wife, I think they **still** had arguments. I'm guessing that some days, they fought over the kids; “Mary, would you just **stop** expecting James, Judas and Joses to measure up to Jesus?”

-I'm guessing that Joseph didn't always like Mary's cooking; and that Mary didn't always think Joseph got clean enough after working as a stone mason all day! They had days when they were both crabby! Love is **not** about finding the perfect match; it's about choosing to **love** and build a relationship with an imperfect person by **believing the best** and not **assuming the worst**—and **growing through the process**.

5. So—here's **why** we work so hard and take so many risks to find love and acceptance: we were **made** for that. Our core calling in life is as human **beings** not human **doings**. We please God when we love Him with all we are—and love others as ourselves. It's because we were created as relational beings.

-What that means is that our fuel for **real life** isn't just food and water. What makes life satisfying and meaningful is being valued and accepted in our relational world. Love is a **basic** need. Like a **core** need in life! That's how we're **told** to love others. The way it's **supposed** to work is that parents teach children about love by loving them **unconditionally** cause conditional love, "I'll love you **if** you do well, get good grades...if, if, if" isn't really love!

-In our world, people do amazing things—they're at their **best** when they love. But people, that is **us, we** are **also** sometimes at our worst when we're looking for love. Honestly, we do some **really dumb** things looking for love! I mean, is there anyone here, besides me, who's made a really **bad** decision—something you regret—looking for love, wanting to be accepted? **Yeah! Most of us have!** Has anyone done that **more** than once? Has anyone here **lost count!**

- a. The first barrier we face in looking for love is the fear of rejection. I know things are quite different now, but back when I was in the process of finding someone it took me to the limits of vulnerability. You hold your heart out there—wondering if someone will knock it on the floor and step on it!

-Now, without getting into a message on dating, the only way—**hear me on this**—the only way to find love and kindness and companionship—is to **offer** it. And to **offer** friendship you have to make yourself at least somewhat vulnerable. **There is no rejection-proof pain-free way to give and find love!** Loving a person is not like buying a dog. Dogs will pretty much love you no matter who you are. Not cats, though, cause cats are selfish! To find love, you have to take the risk! See, everyone else is just as nervous and fearful as you!

- b. What drives us to this is the **fear of loneliness**—or should I say **hatred** of loneliness. It's **true** isn't it, that sometimes people will take huge unnecessary risks because they are afraid of being alone. -I'm going to step into some **very** dangerous, mucky territory if that's okay.

-Here goes! We live in a culture where it's seen as normal to portray yourself as sexually available. And girls at a young age—usually before they even know **what** they're doing—are taught how to do this by their role models by how they dress and how they portray themselves on social media.

-Adults do that too. In fishing language, it's called **trolling** with a lure. Lures have **hooks**. See, depending on what kind of lure you're trolling with—you can get a **lot** of

attention. But do you actually **want** the kind of love that comes from trolling your money, your stuff, your success or your body through a world that will use you and throw you away? To mistake **sexual attractiveness** for **love** isn't just dumb, it's dangerous. Animals **mate**; humans **love**.

- c. The kind of love you were meant for is the kind of love that makes sacrifices. The kind of love that is patient, kind, and self-giving. The kind of love that goes **beyond** the smooth skin, white teeth, silky hair, and **really** cool car. Love was **God's** idea—so I'm thinking it works best when we pursue it **His** way and in **His** time.

-I'll tell you what I see **way** too often. It's two people who really haven't followed God or talked to Him before getting all tangled up in a relationship. And once it's all signed, sealed and delivered—and we get in trouble we ask, “Oh **God**—please help me and then heal and bless the mess I've made!”

- d. See, God is **all for love!** He longs to love **us**—and He longs for **our** love. He wants us to love and accept—and **be** loved and accepted. Paul made a comment that we can do a **lot** of impressive things—but if we don't love, it **doesn't matter!** That if we don't love—we're **nothing!** The consistent message, through, is **not**, **“Go find someone to love YOU,”** it's **go and love others!**

-But loving God always comes first. And we love Him by both **respecting** what He says about life and love and sex and marriage—and by then obeying Him, sometimes as an act of pure faith.

- e. Now, I want you to think about love and romance and marriage soberly for a minute—and not based on some Hallmark Christmas love flick. Marrying someone is **the single most important decision you'll ever make**—apart from deciding to follow Jesus. When you marry someone, you make yourself relationally, physically, financially, and emotionally vulnerable to them—along with your entire lineage—the children you will have together.

-The **second** biggest decision most of us make in life is buying a house. You have to think about location, neighbors, the quality of the house, and whether or not you can actually pay for it. **My concern** is that some people put more effort into—and do more research and consulting over buying a house—which you can sell, if you have to—than finding and marrying someone.

-In our world—just being honest here—I watch people inviting people into their bed—that they would **never** trust with their bank accounts! And the reason I'm saying all this is because I love you—and I watch **way** too many people being dragged away from God, dragged away from their children, and dragged away from happiness by making **really** bad decisions in this area.

-And I **also** know the instant reaction from people who are on a collision course; **“Not ME! Not US—we're in LUV! We even have a special song—and when we started to date, see, I saw this special formation of clouds in the sky, and a friend sent me a text...!”**

6. Now, here's what I'm trying to say. Loneliness--this craving for intimacy—to know and be known, to love and be loved, to be connected, to be attractive to someone, valuable to

someone is a powerful, **powerful** urge—and leaves us vulnerable—and sometimes desperate. If you're not careful and thoughtful—this urge can be the hook that's used again and again **and again** to drag you to a place that promises life and hope and happiness—but wounds us.

- Remember how a few months ago we talked about the difference between **happiness** and **pleasure**? How God has given us the capacity for both? That if you put **pleasure** before happiness—you'll lose both? It's true in this arena, too.

a. When we're lonely and sad and not feeling great about ourselves or life in general—and we want to sing along with Mariah Carey, "All I want for Christmas is you, Baby!" And when someone offers us what **feels** like love there is almost an overwhelming urge to set our brain to the side—and dive headlong into a relationship that makes **no** sense given who we claim to be—and belong to!

-I mean, imagine **being** in pain—and then voting for **more** pain. See, we lie to ourselves—that because it **feels** like love, it must be love—and it must be okay! Our desire for love and companionship is **good**—but when it get twisted together up with sex and our need for a boyfriend or girlfriend—it leads to **pain**. Yet, that's what our culture pushes at us **every single minute of every single day**.

-It's not really love—it's **luv drugs** and like all drugs, they're addictive and make you feel better for a while, but ultimately kill off what you're **really** looking for--to be loved, valued, cherished; to be respected, admired and desired.

-If you're looking for **love and acceptance and value**—and you settle for sex—or for a brief fling with someone who will **luuv** you for a little--while you will get cheated—and you'll be left with way less than you started with.

b. Now, please don't miss what I'm saying. Our need is for **love**--not **marriage**. You cannot permanently fix loneliness by getting married. Truth is, some of the loneliest people in the world have someone who sleeps next to them every night.

-But that's the thing, isn't it? We're trying to **avoid** loneliness because it feels so awful—and then make bad choices or settle for some cheap substitute and end up even **more** lonely! I don't think **anyone** wants that!

7. So, we've been **all over the map** on this—from arranged marriages like Mary and Joseph—to the stuff that's going on in our world. When I look at Mary and Joseph in this story, what I see in them is an openness to God—and what **He** was asking of them, even when it was really **costly** and **difficult** for them. From what I see in them, I think that's what they would've done—even if Mary **wasn't** asked to carry and give birth to the Messiah.

-If there's a lesson we can learn from Joseph and Mary in this story—it's the importance of **restraint**. Can you imagine Mary running after Joseph, crying, "But don't **leave** me Joseph! I'll be all alone! I'll do **anything!** I just don't want to be alone!" Nope! She went to see Elizabeth—and re-affirmed her plan to do what **God** asked her to do--**even if it meant losing Joseph..** And **that** wasn't easy. I'm guessing she cried herself to sleep many nights.

-Joseph thought **very** carefully about how to handle Mary's life and reputation—even when it appeared that she'd betrayed him. He **immediately** took Mary as his wife when the angel

told him to—and then was married for 6 months without having sex with her. Guys—how many of you think that **might** be tough? It's called **self-restraint! Doing what's right for a higher purpose!**

- a. So, let me ask you a question; do you think it matters whether or not **you** are willing to do something that is difficult and costly in a world that tells you to do **whatever works for you?**

-See, if you're in this for whatever makes life easier and gives you what you want—I'd question whether you can do that and be a servant of the Most High God. See, if you just do what's best for you—that's quite a distance from being a servant.

- b. My second question may be really offensive—but, heck, I'm going to ask it anyway: **Is self-restraint a part of your world?** Interesting, isn't it, that we'll show self-restraint in what we eat and how we exercise to make ourselves attractive and sexually desirable—and yet reject self-restraint when it comes to our sexual appetites.

-See, I don't think self-restraint is some weird antiquated thing. I think it's a part of what God wants for us **now--**just as much as He wanted it back then. God is younger and more with the times than we are—and yet He hasn't changed his mind one bit about how life, love, companionship and sexuality works.

8. How does Jesus' coming deal with all of these hopes and fears; hoping for love, yet afraid of loneliness and rejection?

-First, He left Heaven—a place of infinite beauty—and showed up in a filthy manger—as an act of love—and potential rejection. See, He's the One who showed the world what real love is—and He's **still** doing that. It's His self-sacrificing love that shows every man how to love a woman—and every woman, how to love a man. He **fills** our hearts with love—and shows us how to be known, loved, accepted—even if we never marry.

-Jesus made it clear that God doesn't just **love** us—he **likes** us; finds us desirable—and longs for our company. Because of Jesus—we are accepted **just as we are!**

-Has anyone here ever found it difficult to truly love—and keep loving someone you've fully committed yourself to? Well, Jesus sends the **Holy Spirit—the Spirit of love**—to give us the power and the courage to become good at loving and accepting others.

-The world system has a **lot** of tricks to help us look young and attractive. They're not working for me—but they may for you! And social media offers us a **bunch** of ways to create our own press releases on how desirable we really are. But the **Spirit of God** actually has the power to transform us—and make the inside of our lives beautiful and happy. And if we'll cooperate with Him—He'll help us **live** well—and find love, not just in bits and pieces—but for a lifetime. Who **do** you believe? Do you **believe** that God wants that for you? Do you believe that God is committed to your long-term happiness? And that He's more likely to know the path to find it than you are?

-Why not at least give Him the opportunity to do that for you—and in you? Jesus came to love the **world**—to love **you**. He made himself **vulnerable** and **reject-able** to love the world. And He offers **His** love...to you. Do you accept?