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**Briefing 43: Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2020.**

Dear friends,

This Sunday is the last Sunday in Advent, and the end of our 4-week sermon series in the book of Revelation. We've seen that the return of King Jesus will bring with it the end of history (*as all of human history has been heading towards this ultimate goal*), the end of evil (*because Satan and all who side with him against God will be judged and sentenced and all signs of evil will be washed away*), and the end of ignorance (*because as the Lord Jesus returns and begins to reign all our questions will be answered*).

This Sunday our topic is: the return of King Jesus will bring the end of hope.

That sounds rather bleak doesn't it. Hope is a good thing. Without hope life becomes intolerable. Studies have shown that prisoners with no hope of release suffer more illnesses and die far earlier than prisoners who, although sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, have the hope of eventual release. Hope is vital to human flourishing. If we had no hope of a time when the coronavirus was defeated, how dark would our mood be right now.

Hope looks for something better, times of freedom of release, of blessing and peace, of an end to bad things and the enjoyment of good things. Without hope we are lost.

But as we've seen through these last chapters of Revelation, and as Jesus clearly teaches too, there will come a time for those who reject God's offer of forgiveness through Jesus when their hope of a better day comes to an end. The writer of Hebrews wrote that '*man is destined to die once and then face judgement.*' We have hope only whilst we have life. The church where I served as a curate in Sidmouth has a large clock on its tower with this inscription: **now is the time of salvation**. Whilst we have life there is hope of forgiveness and adoption into God's family and inheriting eternal life, but when our life's clock stops ticking, that hope will be gone.

The thought of that should force us to consider the claims of Jesus now, if we haven't done so already. And it should stir us to overcome our fear of rejection, of failure, of embarrassment to share the good news of Jesus with those we love and care for. Right now they have hope, because the way to salvation is still open, but they only have that hope whilst they have life. There will come a day when, for those outside of Christ, hope will be over.

Hope being over does sound bleak, but there is also a sense in which hope being over is a gloriously good thing. And that is the case for all those who do trust in Jesus.

What is our hope as Christians? Our hope is that since we belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to God and his son Jesus Christ, that one day we will be with him for ever in his perfect new creation. Our hopes for eternity are many. We have glimpsed them already and will see more of them this coming Sunday, but they include perfect peace and rest, unending joy, everlasting love and life, absolute security, the absence of all evil and all the effects of sin, perfect harmony between peoples of different nations and backgrounds and languages, and the perfect and unending presence of God with us. That is our hope now. It is a hope that should inspire us to persevere through times of difficulty and suffering and persecution. It is a hope that should inspire us to serve God with all we have because our treasure is in heaven. It's a hope that we should want to share with others, so this can be their hope too. But one day that hope will be gone, because the things we hope for will be our daily experience.

There was a time when I hoped to be married to Judy. I don't hope for that anymore. I enjoy it daily! There was a time when I hoped Luton would win a major trophy, and on a glorious April day in 1988, they did, and my hope was fulfilled. I have hoped to break a hundred at golf, enjoy holidays with my children and grandchildren, go scuba-diving, skiing, and enjoy a tender fillet steak with a peppercorn sauce – and at various times those hopes have been fulfilled and enjoyed. And one day, one beautiful day, all our hopes for eternity, for God's glorious presence and all it brings, will be fulfilled and we will hope no more because they will be our daily experience.

May the certainty of our hope in Jesus inspire us to keep going, to keep serving, to keep witnessing, because one day our hopes will be gone and replaced with the unending pleasures of eternal life in God's glorious presence.

# IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

**COME AND PRAY TOGETHER!** Our last early morning prayer meeting of the year will take place next Tuesday morning between 7 and 8 AM. Email Dave for a link It's also not too late to come along to our virtual prayer gathering this evening between 7:45pm and 9pm. Again, email Dave for a Zoom link.

**CHRISTMAS SERVICES AND EVENTS:** all our Christmas services have been advertised through Facebook – but they are listed here for ease of access! Events in red still need help – please let Dave know if you can assist. We look forward to seeing you over the Christmas period. (*services from St Nicholas on 20<sup>th</sup> + 27<sup>th</sup> will be live streamed*)

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> December @6pm: Drive in Carol service at Stevenage FC Training Centre at Shephalbury Park: Limited spaces. To book follow this link: [Drive-in Carol Service | Facebook](#)

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December @ 6:30pm: Carols by candlelight at St Nicholas. To book click here: <https://forms.gle/sFNqSfkgWAa1Sxoe9>

Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> at 2pm: live-streamed carol service from St Nicholas for those in the Cygnet Hospital.

Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> at 4pm: Singing outside Halcyon days in Graveley: as many as possible!

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 10:30am-12:30pm: family Christmas treasure hunt in St Nicholas churchyard

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> at 3pm: Singing in the courtyard at Pine Lodge Care Home. As many as possible!

Christmas Eve 1pm-3pm: Family Christmas treasure hunt in St Nicholas churchyard

Christmas Eve 6pm: Carols by candlelight at St Mary Graveley. To book contact Janet on 813863

Christmas Eve at 11pm: Carols by candlelight at St Nicholas. To book click here: <https://forms.gle/Z8St3aRxMpA1qjVg7>

Christmas Day services: at St Nicholas at 9:30am - to book click here: <https://forms.gle/c3BWpjuaEqMQcMV89>

and at St Marys at 11:30am - to book contact Janet on 813863

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> December at 10am: A joint service for the benefice at St Nicholas with Holy Communion.

**CAROL SINGING TROUPES:** Want to go singing Christmas cheer? Contact Mike Wilton on [churchwardens@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk](mailto:churchwardens@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk)

**SUPPORTING OUR MISSIONARIES THIS CHRISTMAS-** Instead of sending Christmas cards around the church, the church wardens and I want to encourage you all to sign the virtual cards on our Facebook pages.

The St Nicholas card can also be found here: <https://www.groupgreeting.com/sign/ef4e18e7e65000b>

The St Mary's card can also be found here: <https://www.groupgreeting.com/sign/9e78fef31839f60>

Once you've signed the cards, do consider making a Christmas gift to Jimmy and Katia in Brazil (St Nicks) and Rachel and Bernie in Uganda (St Marys and St Nicks). Links to give on line are below and on the Facebook posts. Or alternatively, bring your gifts to church in an envelope marked **Christmas Gift**. If you do donate on line, it would be really helpful if you could send an email to the treasurer letting them know that your gift is for that purpose. Email addresses are: via [enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk) (for Graveley) or [treasurer@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk) (St Nicks)

**CHAIRS:** In the New Year, St Nicholas will be replacing the old wooden chairs, and a number of new options are in church right now. Please do sit on them and let Dave or one of the churchwardens know what you think.

**OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD:** Thank you to everyone who has brought along a box, manned the church or helped in the delivery of hundreds of boxes to the local depot. There's still a chance to **pack a shoebox online** without visiting a shop, click here: <https://shoeboxonline.samaritans-purse.org.uk/>

**WAYS TO GIVE:** Gifts and offerings for God's work can be made in church, via standing order (ask me for details) or virtually via these links. Thank you for your generosity.

For St Mary's, click here: <https://givealittle.co/campaigns/fcb2cb18-94af-4c38-8b07-1471769b64c8>

For St Nicholas, click here: <https://givealittle.co/campaigns/5f594bca-73e3-426b-82f0-c46e9bfa2e96>

**SUNDAY SERVICES:** This Sunday, St Nicholas will have a Service of the Word at 9:30am, whilst St Mary's will have a short service of Holy Communion at 11:30am. To book click here: <https://forms.gle/CtKFFhG9wSPHnFGK9>

The service from St Nicholas will also be streamed: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzRGAaIRTsJuKFRBvkLjAtQ>

There will be a further update on Friday. Until then, may God bless you and your families.

Yours in Christ, *Dave*