

Merry Christmas Pickens- 2021- Hope

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Preacher: Dr. Ralph Carter

[0 : 00] Can you recall how you felt in the spring of 2020? America was dealing and the world was dealing with the COVID epidemic, pandemic, and all over the country there was just a widespread sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

There was no vaccine. There was no treatment. We had friends died a year ago this month. I buried one of my dearest friends as a result of his contracting COVID and dying from that.

There was a man in our community, a good friend of mine. In fact, we were partners in a bee operation and they were both beekeepers and he lives on Devonshire Road in Greer and he decided he wanted to somehow try to lift the spirits of people in our community and he did a very smart thing.

He lives on about seven or eight acres. He has this old dilapidated red barn. He's building new and no longer uses it as a barn. But he wrote the word hope on that barn.

In fact, we're going to put a picture of it. There it is on the screen now for you. And he hoisted a star up above it, lit it up with lights. And folks, as they would ride by his barn, would see that.

[1 : 12] And a lot of them pulled off on the side of the road. A lot of them got out of their cars and made pictures of it, came and even knocked on his door and just thanked him for it and asked if they could have their picture made in front of the barn.

And it's been a talk piece for this last year. Last Friday, a week ago, this last Friday, you may have heard about it on the news. There was a man who left that community, Devonshire community, and he walked out of his house with a pistol.

His family didn't know what in the world was going on. And so they called the authorities, were worried about him. And immediately, police were dispatched to the area. Helicopter flew over and searched for the man.

And one off-duty police officer found him on the other end of Devonshire Road. When he got out of his car, he didn't want to frighten the man. So he just came up calmly to him and said, sure, are you OK? And the man said, yeah, I am now.

He said, can you tell me what happened? He said, well, I left my home a while ago and I intended to end my life tonight. He said, I was walking down Devonshire Road, and you know that old red barn?

[2 : 14] He said, I looked up and saw that barn, and I saw the word hope on it. And he said, I thought to myself, what in the world am I thinking? What am I doing? And I turned around, and I started back home. Well, I'm so thankful Jimmy put that word up there.

It was a great idea to give our community a message to remind us that we had hope. And I want to tell you something. Over 2,000 years ago, God looked down on the earth, and he saw how broken it was.

And he didn't just send a message. He actually brought us hope. That's why he left heaven and took on human flesh. Can you imagine that? The guy of the ages, the holy, righteous God who created everything we've ever seen, that he would literally lower himself to become a man.

Not only became a man, was born in a barn much like the one you see on the screen. He went on to live a perfect life for 33 years. And then he died on the cross, not in payment for his sins, but for ours.

And he gave us the opportunity to have hope, real hope. The hope of living eternally with God. Every one of us, in spite of what we do, we're going to die. But we don't have to die a second time.

[3 : 23] We can have eternal life. And that's what the whole message of Christmas is about. And we want to give you an opportunity, if you have never received Christ as your personal Savior, if you've never received this gift of eternal life from God, you can do that right where you sit today.

And I want to tell you how. You just reach out to him and talk to him the way I'm talking with you. And you just say something like this. Lord Jesus, thank you for dying for me. Thank you for coming into our world.

I need you desperately in my life. If I'm a sinner and I'm broken and I need you to come in and to fix what I can't fix on my own. He'd give you eternal life if you do that.

So I'm going to invite you right now just to bow your head. And if you have never prayed that prayer, just reach out to God. Use your own words. Just tell him from the depths of your heart how badly you need him.

Ask him to come into your life. The Bible says, He will save you right here and right now, this very morning. Let us all kneel down To the child that's born tonight Can we humbly bow in awe The angels sang And declared his glory To the Savior of the world Come and behold the King He has come to make us free To the ends of the earth Forevermore Come and behold the King

[5 : 19] He is the Prince of Peace The everlasting Lord Come behold the King He is the Prince of Peace The Prince of Peace The Prince of Peace The Prince of Peace