

December 20, 2009

## *The Good News of Christmas*

### Isaiah 66:1 – 3

When Jesus began His public ministry, He chose to do so in a synagogue in Nazareth where He grew up. He was the reader that day and He opened to this passage in Isaiah and read: *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.* And then He said, *'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'* Luke 4:21 Good News for the poor! Good news for the brokenhearted! Good news for the captives! Good news for those in prison!

This is the message of Christmas. This is why we sing and celebrate and proclaim Christ to the nations. But did you notice that Jesus stopped reading after the first line of verse 2? He stopped with the proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor. What He was proclaiming was the good news of God's grace to sinful people. In other words, His first coming inaugurated a season of grace – the favorable year of the Lord – which has lasted now for 2,000 years. The grace of God toward rebellious sinful men was poured out in Christ. That is good news because without grace all of us were destined for hell.

But what He didn't read – because it was not fulfilled by His first coming, was the next part of that prophecy: *to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.* Isaiah 61:2-3

In other words, **there is now a season of grace for sinful men to repent and turn to the Lord and be saved – and there is coming a day of reckoning when Christ will return to judge the living and the dead.** And all who have believed by grace through faith in Jesus Christ will enter into His kingdom, clothed with beauty for ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, a garment of praise instead of a spirit of fainting – like oaks of righteousness for His glory and His praise. And all those who stubbornly refuse the free gift of grace will go into eternal torment. Isaiah says it again in chapter 35: *Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you."* Isaiah 35:4

We need to hear the good news of Christmas – Christ the Lord, our Savior came to earth 2,000 years ago and inaugurated this season of grace to save us – and that this season won't last forever because one day soon He returns for a day of reckoning. What we need to hear is that today is the day of salvation and now is the time – all we have is now, the past is past and we may not have a future past this moment. The celebration of Christmas poses a question to the world every year – What is the good news of Christmas? Why should we celebrate the fact that Jesus came into the world? I have found that there are at least twenty-one reasons Jesus Himself gives for why He came into the world but I only want to look at seven of those reasons this morning.

### **He came as a ransom for many**

*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.* Mark 10:45

The word 'ransom' indicates that something had to be paid to free someone from captivity. The truth is each and every one of us was or still is, sold into the slavery of sin and are thus alienated from a holy God. Jesus was born into this world to give His life and become a ransom for many. It was not a mistake that He was crucified – God was not making the best of a bad situation – Jesus came on purpose to die for us so that we might be ransomed from our slave masters: sin and the devil – and be adopted into the family of God. Galatians 4:4-5 puts it like this: *'But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.'* His coming makes the difference between freedom and slavery.

Do you have the sense that you are enslaved this morning? Do you find that other things rule in your heart besides the Savior? Peter tells us: *'...for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.'* 2 Peter 2:19 Do you even realize that without Christ you are enslaved by sin? Christmas is not good news unless you understand your helpless condition, wrapped in the slave-chains of sin. Jesus Christ came to proclaim freedom to the captives and set the prisoners free. We have a Redeemer! **This is Christmas – the death of one and the ransom of many.**

### **He came to call sinners to repentance**

*And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."* Luke 5:31-32

There first had to be a ransom paid so that the call to the ransomed would be effective. If He would have called sinners to repent without providing a ransom – the calling would have been ineffective. And He is calling this morning. If you are a sinner, you're qualified this morning – He did not come to call those who think they are okay – He didn't come to call those who have it all together – He didn't come to call those who have no need – He came to call sinners to repentance – to turn from the path that leads to hell to follow Him to heaven. But if you think you are okay without Jesus – Christmas is meaningless for you.

C. S. Lewis once put it like this: **"Christianity has no message for those who do not realize they are sinners."** That's us. We are sinners and God is righteous. If we are going to be prepared for His coming, we better do something about our sin. That is a side to Christmas that the world will not even be aware of. They will extract those appealing parts of Christmas--the sweetness, the good cheer, the giving of gifts, etc.--but they have no concept of the deeper meaning of the Christmas event, that the holy God has invaded our world. Part of the reason for His coming was to create a new community committed to a world unbroken by sin. That's a word our world needs to hear.

If He came to give His life a ransom for many – it stands to reason that until He comes He is still calling and the number, whatever it is of the many, has not yet been reached. Perhaps you can hear Him calling you right now. Don't delay – don't put it off. His coming makes a difference between heaven and hell.

**This is Christmas – calling sinners to repent.**

### **He came to give sight to the blind**

*And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."* John 9:39

If you never see that you are a sinner – there is no impetus to change anything. There is a judgment coming – of that you can be sure – and we need our eyes opened to this fact. We need to own our desperate sin-sickness – otherwise we will never have the sense that we need a Redeemer.

***His coming to open blind eyes also has the effect of blinding open eyes.*** I think what this indicates is that those who know they are blind – also know they need help. But those who think that they see very clearly – will never know the power of Christ to save. Consider – during Jesus' ministry it was only those who professed a need that got their need met. But the religious souls who thought they were doing okay never got any help – they got judged. We ought to be like blind Bartemaeus who shouted loud and long – in spite of the people around him trying to hush him up – "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" His coming makes a difference between walking in darkness or walking in the light. **This is Christmas – blind men getting their sight.**

### **He came to bring a sword**

*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.* Matthew 10:34

This is a difficult thought – didn't Jesus come to bring peace? 'Peace on earth – good will to men' and all? And how is Christmas a sword? What in the world is that? To understand this you need to understand that without sight to see our sinfulness and need of repentance and redemption – any peace we might think we experience is not real or lasting. **Jesus came to bring a sharp division between what is holy and what is not – between what is temporal and what is eternal.** It is no accident that everything before that first Christmas is B.C. and everything after is A.D. His birth made a sharp division in the very fabric of time; and when you embrace His call to you, it will make a clear and vital division in your own life. Once you were dead in your trespasses and sins – now you are alive, really alive in Christ Jesus. Once you were on your way to hell – now you are on your way to heaven.

**When you take the position that Jesus is *the Savior, the only way to eternal life – the sword comes.*** That kind of stand divides you from every other philosophy or religion. When a person is ransomed, and called out of darkness and into the light, something radical happens to them. They see everything differently with new eyes, they are accountable to a new master – things they once did they don't do – and things they did not do before, now they do. And that kind of radical life change causes tensions and divisions between those who follow Jesus and those who do not. What He is saying here is that everything is different for those who are ransomed, called and given sight – they can no longer walk as the unbelieving world walks.

Is there a clear and unmistakable division and separation in your life? Do people know where you stand? If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict?

**This is Christmas – a clear division between life with Christ and life without.**

**He came to save us from condemnation**

*"For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not condemned; he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. John 3:17-18*

It is strange, is it not, that at the very heart of Christmas is the truth that without this Jesus we all of us stand condemned before the throne of a Holy God. This is what ought to thrill our souls – **that He came into the world, not to condemn us – but to save us!** The birth of Christ opened the door to heaven for all who will believe. If you do not believe in Him – you already stand condemned. It isn't as though there is any kind of a question now – am I going to go to heaven or will I go to hell? You don't have to wonder if salvation is yours - *He who believes in Him is not condemned*, or as Paul puts it in Romans 8:1: *'So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.'* Christmas is God's way of being for us – not against us. All that remains is for us to believe. Are you certain of heaven this morning?

**Christmas means having the certainty of salvation and the freedom from condemnation.**

**He came to give us eternal life**

*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16*

Christmas means that God sent His Son so that we could believe and have eternal life. I do not know how those who do not believe can have any hope at Christmas. It reminds me of the sign I saw once. **"Merry Christmas to our Christian friends. Happy Hanukkah to our Jewish friends. And to our atheist friends, good luck.** What do you have left after the presents and the parties and the festivities if you do not have Him? It is a well-known fact that statistically, the number of people suffering severe depression and the number of suicides increases dramatically at Christmas.

It is strange that at the season of the celebration of the birth of the eternal life-giver – so many would despair of life itself. But it is just in these places of hopelessness and helplessness that His almighty power is born. There were no festive lights in the stable, or presents under a tree, or friends and relatives making merry – it was no doubt cold and smelly and probably somewhat depressing. **But God chose that place to unwrap His greatest gift. This is Christmas – the gift of eternal life.**

**He came to bear witness of the truth**

*Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice. John 18:37*

These words were spoken at the end of His life – and they are about Christmas. 'For this reason I was born...' For this reason there is Christmas. **Christmas is, because Jesus came to bear witness to the truth. Christmas means that there is truth.** And to reject this truth is to reject the Author of truth. All the separate reasons why Jesus came into the world are summed up in this – **'For this reason I have come into the world to testify to the truth: to the truth that He came as a ransom for many; to the truth that He came to call sinners to repentance; to the truth that He came to give sight to the blind; to the truth that He came to bring a sword; to the truth that He came to save us from condemnation; and to the truth that He came to give us eternal life.**

Pilate was standing face to face with the truth – and he rejected Him. Don't be like Pilate. **Christmas means that there is truth – truth that you should believe.** It is an annual visible reminder that Jesus Christ is the Savior who came to ransom you from the power of hell and give you life. I want to invite you this morning to say yes to the truth – to say yes to the good news of Christmas – to respond to His invitation and let His coming make a difference in your life forever. As we close with Amazing Grace – let this message sink deep into your heart and soul and ask yourself: **Do I believe that what I believe is really real?** Do I believe in the Christ who came to earth as a babe 2000 years ago to be my Savior, and who is coming again one day to bring me home?

### **The Good News of Christmas**

*Jesus Christ came as a ransom for many  
Jesus Christ came to call sinners to repentance  
Jesus Christ came to give sight to the blind  
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Jesus Christ came to give us eternal life.*

*Our loving Father and gracious Redeemer,*

*Thank You for this season of grace. We come this morning, just as we are – with no pretense or covering up. You died for people like us and we are thankful. We couldn't do anything to make ourselves acceptable in Your sight, and so we won't even try to pretend. May Your word humble us before Your awesome Majesty and renew our hearts to give You glory as we ought. Let our hearts be stunned once again by the wonder of Your love and moved to grateful and joyous worship of Christ our Redeemer.*

*For those still in darkness, may Your word be a brilliant light – may it loose the chains that bind them – let it set captives free – let it bind up the wounded and lift the broken-hearted. Expose the utter helplessness of those without You, and the sweetness of Your undeserved mercy and draw them by Your kindness to repentance. Let this message of Christmas bring peace and hope to hearts ravaged by sin and despair and give beauty for ashes and gladness for mourning that You might be glorified in hearts that see and savor Your wonderful gift of salvation we pray, in the precious and saving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*