

The Righteous Life of Christ

— Advent Devotional 2023 —



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Monday November 27, 2023

— JEREMIAH 23:5-6; 33:14-18 - Jackson Randall —

Jeremiah tells us that Israel had a big problem: a leader problem. Israel's leaders had failed in their duties. You see, these leaders were meant to function like shepherds. Shepherds are supposed to care for sheep by providing food, binding wounds, warding off threats, and ensuring the flock's well-being. Israel's shepherds refused to care for their sheep, choosing to abuse them instead. The result was that the sheep were scattered. God's people found themselves lost, vulnerable, and in grave danger with no shepherd to come after them or protect them.

The good news of Jeremiah 23:5-6 and 33:14-18 is that God didn't leave His people lost and in danger with no hope. Jeremiah 23:5 says there is coming a day when God will raise up a new leader and a better shepherd. This righteous Branch of David would be a wise and compassionate king, dedicated to justice and righteousness. Unlike the destructive leaders before Him, He would work to rescue and save. Jeremiah, of course, is talking about Jesus.

In John 10, Jesus tells us what kind of leader He is. In this passage, Jesus says He is the "good shepherd". In saying this, Jesus contrasts Himself to the bad shepherds of Israel. Unlike them, Jesus knows His sheep. Unlike them, Jesus provides nourishment for His sheep. Unlike them, Jesus doesn't seek to save Himself but lays His life down for His sheep. Do you see how different Jesus is?

Do you know the really good news this Advent season? Jesus's shepherding care extends to His Church. That means that this sort of shepherding is extended to us! Jesus is not merely the shepherd of the lost sheep of Israel; He is the Good Shepherd of all the sheep He's brought into His flock. You included! This means you are safe and sound in the care of Jesus. This means His life has been extended to you. This means that if you wander, He will come after you.

This Advent, know that God has made good on His promises. Jesus, the righteous Branch of David, the high and heavenly King has arrived. He ushers in a new age of justice and righteousness in the land. He ushers in the era of salvation in His name. But this King is also a shepherd; a good shepherd. And all of His shepherding care and protection are aimed at you! This Advent, remember that if you have Jesus, then you are as safe and cared for as it is possible to be.

Tuesday November 28, 2023

— ISAIAH 11:1-9 - Jennifer McClish —

There's a kind of relentlessness to the news cycle and our constant connectivity, a growing sense of chaos like no one's at the wheel. It tests our coping mechanisms and prompts us to ask, "What is even real?"

Isaiah ushers us into what is truly real and gives us just what we need. He lived in Jerusalem during a time of great threats from an evil adversary to the north and from within his own people. In Isaiah 10, he saw God take an ax to both. "The lofty will be brought low" ... a felled forest of human pride. It's a sobering backdrop that primes our hearts for the miracle of grace in Isaiah 11.

Hope for humanity would spring from the stump of Jesse. It had produced a mighty oak before in King David, but this descendant would eclipse everyone who had come before. He would be like us and wholly unlike us: One not consumed by ego but by the Spirit of God. Imagine! A leader with no hidden agenda for self-promotion but solely committed to self-giving.

A man constantly recognized as one who "spoke with authority" because He was the Author of life. He had all knowledge and wisdom because He wove it into the universe Himself. He had a plan and the moral fortitude to execute it at the expense of His very life. A man who delighted in the fear of the Lord. He perfectly opposed the wicked while still abounding in steadfast love for sinners. He saw right through power politics and religious artifice and was not influenced by lies and manipulations. Instead, He set things right for those with no means or power to save themselves. The very center of His being was righteousness and faithfulness. A King who would ascend the throne of glory by way of a Roman cross.

What a wonder that Isaiah could see Jesus so clearly 700 years before His birth. Of course, a King like this would be the very Son of God. And it brings into sharp focus the insanity of bowing the knee to any other. Why do we fear headlines? Or place confidence for our futures in anything of our own making? What higher education, accumulated wealth, political party, or advanced technology could usher in the world foreseen by Isaiah? A place of such beauty and complete wholeness that even the nursing child and cobra dwell in perfect peace.

How we long to live on God's holy mountain and for this reality we take by faith to become sight. Pray He never stops tearing down our false hopes or defending His place as King in our hearts. His reign is and forever will be our blessed reality.

Wednesday November 29, 2023

— ISAIAH 42:1-9 - Jason Byars —

The first of four “servant songs” found in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 42:1-9 tells of a servant chosen by God to establish justice and be a light to all nations throughout the earth. No doubt the nation of Israel was on Isaiah’s mind as he gave words to this prophecy. But God’s design, as affirmed by Jesus, was to use Isaiah’s words to communicate marvelous truths about a particular servant, the promised Messiah, that cause us to worship and adore him still today:

- **This servant was chosen by God.** Just as Israel had been uniquely chosen by God to become a great nation and to bless all the other nations of the earth, so too was this servant chosen by God for unique purposes.
- **This servant is a source of hope - the only hope - for the world.** In Isaiah 42:6, the Lord speaks directly to the servant and specifies his mission. The servant is to represent the people in their covenant with God since they (we!) are unable to maintain right standing with God without him. And the servant is to be a light to the nations, making God known to a dark and lost world. Through the servant, we can know and enjoy the creator of the cosmos!
- **The New Testament makes clear that Jesus is the servant of whom Isaiah spoke.** After Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit rested upon him and a voice from Heaven expressed pleasure in the Son, fulfilling the prophecy of 42:1. And Matthew 12:18-20 quotes verses 1-4 to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s provision for the salvation of humanity. We can be confident that that Jesus is God’s promised servant, worthy of our worship and adoration.

The servant of Isaiah 42 also leads us to long for the return of Christ:

- **Jesus will return to establish justice throughout the earth.** We can be sure that nothing will escape his reach. All things will one day be made right through the inexhaustible power of Christ.
- **Jesus is God’s chosen instrument of salvation.** Filled with the spirit of God, Jesus will save his people from the brokenness and injustice of this world. Sight to the blind, good news to the poor, life to the dead.
- **Tenderness will characterize the justice of Jesus.** It is not the way of Jesus to crush the weak or snuff out hope. Rather, compassion and mercy are the way of Christ.
- **All humanity will experience God’s salvation.** The prophetic future foretold in Isaiah 42 is not just for the benefit of one special subgroup of people. It has come to full blossom in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth and is available to all who put their trust in him.

Thursday November 30, 2023

— ISAIAH 53:11 - *Jordan Kauflin* —

Have you ever gone through something difficult and later said, “if I had only known what was going to happen I would never have gone down that path?” It’s an understandable impulse, to avoid difficulty and pain when we know it is coming. Why would we purposefully choose something that will harm us?

Here we are confronted with an amazing thought, Jesus knew what was going to happen to him, and still he came. Jesus knew the path he had to take on earth was one of suffering, betrayal, and punishment. The depths of human agony.

It was “by his knowledge”. And still he came.

As this prophecy tells us, the Servant of God understood his task was not one of ease and joy, but of anguish and sorrow. He was not surprised, nor was he deterred. Because it had a purpose. It was for our salvation.

Jesus willingly came so that we would know something foreign to us in our sinful state: righteousness.

But in order for him to make sinners righteous, he had to be righteous. His actions and intentions had to be pure and holy so that he could be the perfect lamb, sacrificed on behalf of others. He had to be sinless, that he might bear the weight of the world’s sin. He had to live a life of perfect obedience to God the Father, so that we could know God’s favor.

Maybe there are times when you struggle to believe that God really loves you. It could be due to the suffering in your own life. The deep sorrows in your heart. The pain that you have endured. Consider Jesus’ determined actions to save his people. Ponder his willingness to subject himself to unimaginable pain.

Jesus walked a path of suffering for you. It was out of the anguish of his soul that he saw a work that would lead to great satisfaction. He saw what it would accomplish and he was glad. Our salvation through his sacrifice. Our eternal joy through his sorrow.

And still he came.

Friday December 1, 2023

— MATTHEW 3:13-17 - Erin Glover —

Prophecy declared Christ King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and we know that the angel told Mary that her Son would be called Immanuel, “God with us”. We also know that John the Baptist came before Christ to “prepare the way of the Lord” (Isaiah 40:3). This is part of the backdrop as the Gospel story unfolds in Matthew 3:13-17.

Christ’s ministry began here in the Jordan River, and from this day on the Son of Man would move about fulfilling His mission. John immediately recognizes Jesus as God’s own anointed Messiah who had come to fulfill God’s redemptive purpose as he announces Him as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). John is fully aware of Christ’s deity, sinlessness, and role as Savior as he tries to prevent Christ from being baptized. John’s baptism was one of repentance and a dedication to a life of following God. John, knowing that baptism was needed for confession of sin and repentance, knew it was himself that needed to be baptized, not Jesus. Yet, we see Jesus’s answer: “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus knew that this must take place to fulfill both His and John’s ministries. In submitting to John’s baptism, Jesus shows Himself to be the good and obedient Son who does God’s will perfectly. Although Jesus has no sin to repent of, Jesus’s baptism does include, just as ours does, a sense of dedicating Himself to follow God’s will fully on earth. The words “fulfill all righteousness” are important. Jesus is the fulfillment, and He is the final goal of all God’s saving activity. As Jesus comes up from the water, we see the heavens open to declare Jesus, the Son of God, and to anoint Him for the ministry that is beginning. This is indeed the long-awaited Messianic King! Jesus is the perfect Son of Man with whom God was well pleased.

As believers looking back to Jesus’s ministry, this act of obedience should cause us to worship and adore Him. We see Jesus, who was without sin, submit to a baptism for sinners. These sinners include all of us, and we know that Jesus’s continued obedience would eventually take our promised Messianic King to the cross. His life of complete obedience from birth to baptism and finally to resurrection was so we could become, through Jesus alone, the righteousness of God. This act of obedience should also call us to follow our Savior’s example by dedicating ourselves to follow God’s will fully on earth. Will you?

Christmas is the celebration of the coming of Christ our Savior. Just as John longed for “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” to come, we too long and hope for the return of Christ. We long and hope for the day when sin is no more and our faith becomes sight. God’s redemptive plan was fulfilled in Christ, so we wait expectantly and hopefully. God never disappoints; what He promises, He will do.

Saturday December 2, 2023

— MATTHEW 5:1-12 - *Gregg Conley* —

How blessed are we to receive these words from the mouth of our Lord and Savior? The Beatitudes are famous words to both Christians and unbelievers alike. They both stir our hearts to glorify the infinite love of our God, and quicken our longing to be united with Him. Parallel to the manner in which the solemnity of Good Friday leads to the Hope of Easter. The Beatitudes come to us as we are – mourning, meek, and hungering for righteousness – and they grant us the hope of all things being made new by our God.

Christian, you may have read these words a thousand times. But today, allow yourself to sit with them, be engulfed by them, luxuriate over them. Ponder what the Lord Jesus is saying to us. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Are you constantly aware of your own sin? Do you struggle with the idea of grace and your own unworthiness? My friend, you shall be satisfied! One day, the trump will sound, the clouds will roll back like a scroll, and you will see Jesus face to face. You will be embraced by He who knew no sin, and you will find rest and satisfaction for your soul.

Brother, do you mourn? Do you mourn the loss of a loved one? Of a job? Of a relationship? Do you mourn the horror that sin afflicts on this world? There is a balm in Gilead: He who mourns the separation between Himself and mankind that our sin creates, He who took pity on the crowds when he saw them in distress, He who suffered the little children to come to Him, He who was humiliated and murdered on the cross for us. He will comfort you today. And He promises that one day, there will be no more mourning, no more loss, no more sin, no more tears. One day, He will make all paths straight and all things right. There is comfort for you today and forevermore.

Sister, are you persecuted? Do you suffer for the Gospel? Has proclaiming the name of Jesus cost you? Or does your heart cry out for our brothers and sisters around the world who suffer daily for the cause of Christ? Take comfort in knowing that this world is not all there is. That there will come a day when the perfect paradox, the God-man who reconciles us to the Father, will say to you, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.” One day, your suffering will be no more; you will be welcomed as a co-heir with Christ. One day, we will embrace the martyrs and see the joy made complete of our brothers and sisters who suffer for His name even now.

Christian, you and I are blessed! Not because we are meek or because we mourn, but because we know Jesus. We know Him now and are in awe of Him. Yet, one fine day we will be united with Him and our present awe will be overwhelmed by finally standing in the presence of He who is our very reason for being. Oh, come Lord Jesus!

Sunday December 3, 2023



TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS

MATTHEW 11:18-30



Monday December 4, 2023

— MATTHEW 6:1-4 - Barrett Fisher —

When you hear this passage, Matthew 6:1-4, what immediately comes to mind? Some might think, "It's in one of the four gospels, so I'm pretty sure it's about Jesus or Jesus is speaking." Others might recognize that this passage is in the middle of Jesus's famous Sermon on the Mount. Many are very familiar with the following passage in Matthew 6, which contains the commonly quoted Lord's Prayer. But some may not know that Matthew 6:1-4 also contains a well-known saying of Jesus, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."

Matthew 6:1-4 records Jesus's words about how we should be focused on doing good toward other people but not for the purpose of being seen. Jesus says, "When you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you." There are apparently people, whom Jesus calls "hypocrites", who are seemingly doing good and helpful things for others, but it's primarily for the purpose of being seen by others and praised by others. If we're honest, we all have some of this inside each one of us. We may tell ourselves we do things purely for the good of a person in need, but often we love for someone to notice and relish it if someone praises us for our actions towards others. Jesus warns us not to practice our righteousness in order to be seen. In other words, we should not allow our right hand to see what our left hand is doing.

Jesus is the perfect example of one who did not come to be seen by others or praised by onlookers. John 6:38 seems to capture Jesus's mentality in coming from heaven to earth: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." Jesus's focus was always rightly on the Father and His will. As Jesus went from city to city, He always focused on others. But as He was doing this, He was only carrying out what the Father had entrusted to Him at that time. He was not doing anything for show or to be seen.

As we enter this Advent season, don't ask yourself if you struggle with the desire to be seen and praised by others. Rather, ask the Lord to reveal to you how much you struggle with this. Look to Jesus as the ultimate example of someone who had His priorities rightly ordered by focusing only on what the Father entrusted to Him. Look to Jesus as one who did not seek to be seen or praised by others. Look to Jesus as the perfect example of one who did not allow His left hand to see what His right hand was doing. Jesus has saved us from ourselves so that we do not have to be motivated by the desire to be noticed or praised by others. May we walk in the way of Jesus and only look to focus on what the Father has entrusted to us, and through that, may God receive all glory and praise for any and all of our actions.

Tuesday December 5, 2023

— MATTHEW 6:25-34 - *Will Carlisle* —

When I got the first phone call that signified the beginning of the 2020 Covid-19 Lockdown, I was in Arches National Park. Not only was I in the park, but my friends and I had just completed the famous hike to the iconic Delicate Arch which overlooks miles and miles of the park's stunning terrain. That moment is deeply ingrained in my memory. According to the messages rolling into my phone, the world was melting into panic and chaos. However, the world that was right in front of me in that moment told a different story. That stunning landscape was overwhelmingly undisturbed and unchanging. There was no current event that could challenge the peace of those plains.

At this point in Matthew 6, Jesus invites his audience into a similar moment. The context, however, is crucial for us to understand the weight of this famous image. At the beginning of chapter six, Jesus instructs his followers to give to the needy at all times, drawing no attention or accolade. He then teaches them to pray not for abundance or excess, but for "daily bread" in the Lord's Prayer, meanwhile forgiving those who sin against them just as God has forgiven them. This is followed by an instruction to fast zealously in a manner that conceals all discomfort. And lastly, Jesus ties all these together by commending his followers to seek the treasures of Heaven rather than the temporal, tangible treasures of earth. Can you feel the weight of this moment? The Way of the Cross can often seem toilsome, stressful, and even reckless to us when truly understand how Jesus calls us to live.

So what comfort does our Lord offer in the wake of such weighty words? Birds and flowers. Jesus offers of a view of the world outside ourself. How could we ever live lives of such daring generosity, self-abandoning ambition, and indiscriminate mercy? By knowing that we sit in the crosshairs of God's attention and affection. Imagine standing on the mountain as Jesus was preaching. Imagine him pointing to the heavens as he proclaimed "Look at the birds!" or across the hills as he declared "Consider the lilies!" This poetic passage is more than a breath of therapeutic whimsy. Jesus is reminding you of your inestimable value, and he wants you to live dangerously as a demonstration of the love and care that you have found in Him. This Christmas, as we consider his first Advent and await his return, take a moment to reflect on these words in Matthew 6. Are you living the daring life of faith that reflects the hope of His return? Do you live fearlessly in the unrelenting care of Jesus?

Wednesday December 6, 2023

— MATTHEW 27:15-23 - Tali Kauflin —

The Ultimate Exchange of Grace

As the scene unfolds, on the cusp of Passover, we are told that we are about to witness an act of mercy. The governor, positioned to be the generous giver of mercy, is faced with a choice. However, the true unfolding of mercy and grace we are about to witness is far beyond anything Pilate could ever offer. What we are about to witness is not the act of mercy any government had planned or what the crowds expected.

This great exchange went far beyond the imagination of any human being.

Suddenly, we are introduced to a new character, one that is well-known to the watching crowds.

Barabbas was a notorious criminal – a violent insurrectionist, a murderer whose hands were stained with the innocent blood of others, and a thief who plundered his victims.

Beside him stands another man, one not known for violence but for being the Prince of Peace. He was not a notorious criminal, but one known for healing the sick and oppressed, embracing little children, loving the outcast, and washing His followers' feet. Not a plundering thief, but the ultimate giver.

Two figures stand side by side: Barabbas and Jesus.

There are two contrasts for us to observe:

- A human offering of mercy and the ultimate act of mercy
- A criminal deserving of punishment and the innocent Savior

Here we see that Pilate knows Jesus is innocent. Pilate saw through the manipulative words of the religious leaders. He knew their motive was hateful envy and fear. Pilate, caught between political pressure and an unsettling realization of Jesus's innocence, gives the choice over to the crowds.

As we contemplate the choice presented to the crowd – Jesus or Barabbas – we often assume that we would fight for Jesus to be released. The obvious choice for death was Barabbas, yet he is set free while Jesus, the sinless Son of God, is unjustly condemned.

One would be set free and the other would go on to experience crucifixion – a form of punishment so brutal that even the Roman orator Marcus Cicero referred to it as “an abomination.” One of these men would experience an almost unthinkable level of suffering on this day.

But God's rescue plan will not be thwarted.

The cross was not a random event but a deliberate act of redemption.

Because of His love for violent insurrectionists and the envious and fanatical crowds, Jesus endured the cross. When I speak of the criminal and the crowds, I'm not just referring to Barabbas and the religious leaders. I'm talking about you and me. I am Barabbas. I am in the crowd.

- I am a violent insurrectionist – how many times have I put myself and my desires above God?
- I am a murderer – how many times have I held anger and bitterness in my heart towards others?
- I am full of hateful envy – always craving what I lack, hurling accusations at God, questioning His character and goodness.

Thursday December 7, 2023

— LUKE 23:44-49 - Blake Rogers —

Some people love flying. Well, I kind of hate it. I really don't like schlepping bags and luggage through an airport. I don't love that I have no control over the plane I am in. I don't love the experience of being crammed into a metal tube with a couple hundred strangers. There is only one remedy for me to somewhat enjoy the modern flying experience – a window seat.

If I must be in a metal tube that I cannot control with hundreds of strangers whom I do not know, I at least need the gift that one can only get by gazing out of a small oval window 30,000 feet above the ground – perspective. From the window seat, I can see the plane's progress. I can see the terrain that would take hours to traverse as I pass by in minutes. I can see the beauty of the lakes, mountain ranges, clouds, and the horizon's edge.

You see, perspective can dramatically affect how we interpret our experiences. In the passage above, we are given insight into the people's perspective, gazing upon history's most heinous moment. The response from the people who witnessed the death of Jesus in this passage was one of grief. The centurion proclaims the innocence of Jesus as he watches the God-man breathing His last. The crowds who saw this heinous event turned and went home, pounding their chests in anguish and sadness along the way. The fallen nature of the world that we see on the 5 o'clock news was on fullest display that day – the genuinely innocent caused to genuinely suffer. The perspective at the foot of the bloody cross did not offer a sense of justice; instead, it created a sense of despair, pain, and angst.

But it's all about perspective. When you overlay the gruesome death of Jesus with the image of a mother holding her miracle baby in a barn, it makes you wonder – was it worth it? Was the short-lived life worth the pain? Well, it's all about perspective.

The Christian's perspective as we read this passage is unique. On one hand, it acknowledges the pain and mourns the suffering of our brother, Jesus. On the other hand, it boasts in the death of Christ because we know of the coming resurrection. Jesus was born into this world freed from the curse of Adam's race; He painfully bore the weighty punishment for the worst of Adam's race, and now He stands victorious over our final earthly enemy, death itself. It's all about perspective.

Friday December 8, 2023

— JOHN 16:1-11 - Jackson Randall —

John 16 opens by peeling back the curtains of Jesus's heart. Speeding towards the cross, Jesus sits His beloved disciples down to have a heart-to-heart. He knew He was about to leave them. In short order, He was going to leave this world after having suffered a grizzly death on the cross and a glorious resurrection to life. Jesus knew that after He left, after He ascended to the right hand of the Father, it would be as if the spotlight was taken off of Him and put directly on His followers. This would result in untold suffering, persecution, and even death. So, In John 16:1 Jesus says, "I have said all these things to keep you from falling away."

Isn't this a beautiful testament to the compassion of Jesus? He doesn't dwell on the intensity of His own impending suffering but is deeply concerned about the faith and resilience of His friends. His heart is filled with a profound love for them, just as His heart is filled with a profound love for us today.

In the face of the impending storm, what words of solace does Jesus offer His disciples? What can anchor them in the midst of the trials to come? In John 16:7, He shares these astonishing words: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away..." How could it possibly be advantageous for the disciples for Jesus to depart? He clarifies, "...For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." You see, when Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father, He sends the Holy Spirit to His people.

What does the Holy Spirit do? He helps! He convicts the world of sin, He applies salvation, He brings justice and righteousness, He illuminates, He guides, and so much more. Jesus going away means a precious gift is bestowed upon the Church. Today, we live in the age of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit didn't merely descend upon Jesus's followers two millennia ago; He is with us today. If you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit has applied the redemption accomplished by Jesus to you. He reminds you of grace, convicts you of sin, leads you to truth, fortifies you to persevere, and offers an abundance of blessings.

Advent can be a bittersweet season as we recall the brokenness and suffering that sin has brought into the world. Fortunately, Advent also serves as a reminder that God was not content to let sin have the final say. Thus, Jesus came, lived, died, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. As a result, we have the Holy Spirit with us today. God is with us! May this truth bless you this Advent season.

Saturday December 9, 2023

— ACTS 3:11-16 - Jennifer McClish —

From the beginning of Genesis, God is declaring to us who He is. In chapter one, He is introduced as Elohim, God Almighty, the transcendent Creator God. In chapter two, He is called the LORD God, Yahweh Elohim. It's a personal name revealing that this transcendent God intends to commune with us. This makes the Fall particularly offensive and heartbreaking. Who are we to challenge Elohim and worse, reject the love of Yahweh? The effects of sin take disastrous effect, and by the end of chapter four, sinners are calling on His name.

Alec Motyer points out that there was a time in our society when using a person's personal name "was a privilege granted, not to be presumed upon." How much more so in the Scriptures, where names are more than mere labels. They declare to us who the name-bearer is and what He will do. When we respond to the LORD God's invitation to call on His name, we are ascribing to His glorious character and affirming that He alone can save us.

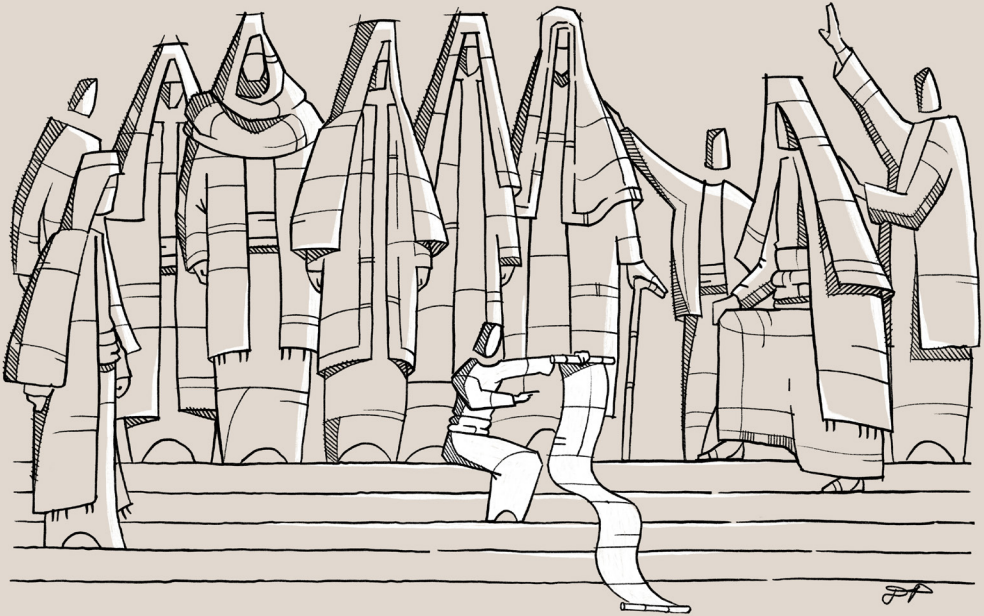
We are calling on "the LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:6-7). God's name reveals that He is love and rich in mercy while simultaneously wholly committed to justice and righteousness. How can this be?

Peter explains in Acts 3. It's the wonder of the first Advent. Jesus is the LORD God come to save us. Yahweh Elohim had become like us to live the righteous life we cannot and die the death that we deserve. His resurrection would defeat death and restore us to Himself. The righteousness of God and peace with Him could kiss in Christ alone (Psalm 85:10b).

Jesus's miracles of healing demonstrate His power to restore creation. And all those sick bodies point to the true nature of our sin-sick souls and our greatest need. Sin deafens our hearts to loving instruction, blinds us to truth, paralyzes us in selfishness, and leads to eternal separation from God. The greater miracle is that He restores our souls. If only, we repent and believe.

By grace, His healing and reconciliation continue. How will the weak be made strong? How will the sick be made whole? How will the guilty be cleared? By faith in His name! How we should love and proclaim the name of Jesus! How we should thrill with hope for a weary world! And live in anticipation of the day when, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow.

Sunday December 10, 2023



PARENT



LUKE 2:22-40



Monday December 11, 2023

— ACTS 22:12-16 - Matt Nolan —

This passage is part of Paul's testimony and defense he gives speaking to the tribune and the people who had just been beating him and seeking to kill him. He shares the incredible story of his conversion - which is clearly the result of divine intervention; it was miraculous and inescapable. Paul was blinded by the Lord, then healed through the ministry of Ananias. We can be encouraged that someone so bent on persecuting Christians was not outside the reach of Jesus. No one has transgressed so far, sinned too deeply, or persecuted Jesus enough to be outside the reach of His grace.

Paul clearly believes that God chose and appointed him to know His will and to do it - to see Jesus and to be a witness of him. May we all consider that God has chosen us as well for a similar commission: to know His plan of salvation, to be restored and invited into His Kingdom family, and to go share the good news and make disciples. It is by Jesus that God has made His will known, and we are saved by grace through faith in him.

It's interesting that Ananias asks Paul why he's waiting around: "And now why do you wait?" (v.16). Was Paul just staring at Ananias, stunned? The first thing Ananias tells him to do is be baptized. This is before going out to "be a witness for him." Why not immediately start witnessing? Implied here is the importance of baptism.

In baptism we are uniting with Christ in his death and resurrection. Romans 6:3-4 says " Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

And here Paul is, proclaiming the gospel as a new man, a new creation, walking in newness of life. The same Jesus who saved Paul saved us.

May we all this Advent consider how Jesus came to live a perfect life, die for our sin, and rise again to give us a new relationship with God. We have been united with him in his death and resurrection to walk in newness of life.

Tuesday December 12, 2023

— ROMANS 1:16-17 - Thomas Nelson —

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” Romans 1:16-17

When the birth of Jesus was announced to Mary and Joseph, the temptation to be ashamed of the Gospel began. Mary, an unwed mother-to-be, and Joseph, facing the disgrace of what looked like an unfaithful engaged partner, were well on their way to understanding the cost of embracing Jesus. Christmastime is our first reminder that following Jesus is costly. But Christmas also reminds us what it cost God to free us from our sins. The cost of following Jesus is everything. We are called to bankrupt ourselves for the Gospel. However, our freedom cost God everything as well. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”

So this Christmas, let us consider the first couple who raised Jesus. The faithfulness of Mary and Joseph to face criticism, murmurs behind their backs, threats to their reputation, and persecution from the king is a motivation for us to be brave. Jesus calls for unflinching devotion from us just as the Father called from Mary and Joseph. Why is it so tempting to cower in shame over following Jesus? Because following Jesus is so radical that it costs us everything. And when most people are clinging to their lives and we are losing ours for Jesus, we stand out. But take heart! We are anchored to the immovable love of God and He promises to return and redeem His people. So, cast overboard that deceitful voice of fear and let the anchor of our souls hold us fast. Hebrews 6:19 reads, “We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain...”

We are left on this earth to bring the Lord glory. We can only bring Him glory when He’s moving through us. So let us uncover the light He has placed in us and stand boldly and calmly in Jesus as a beacon of hope. That first night in Bethlehem, the Light of the World shone in the night. The shepherds bore witness as Mary and Joseph huddled together in wonder. As you allow Jesus to shine His light through you because you know the Gospel is the “power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,” may the world come to you as the shepherds did to Jesus “to see this thing which has happened which the Lord has made known to us.”

Wednesday December 13, 2023

— ROMANS 3:21-31 - *Jordan Kauflin* —

Growing up, one of my family's occasional traditions was to act out the nativity story. It was a way to get ourselves into the story of Jesus' birth beyond just reading it. I would like to say that it was a well put together excellent production, but that would be lying. It was the opposite of that. It typically ended with fighting kids and frustrated parents. But I was one of six kids so at least we had most of the cast taken care of.

I remember wanting to play the most important part each time we did it. Or at least, for my part to really matter. If I was going to be an angel, I was going to deliver my lines with perfection. If I was Joseph, I was going to make sure that whoever watched this video remembered me (and by 'whoever' I mean, no one really). If I was the donkey carrying Mary (which I often was), I was going to steal the show by making it funny and interesting, like pretending I couldn't bear her weight.

This desire I had in our silly plays illustrates an impulse we all have, to try and make any story about us.

Here in our passage we see that the story of Jesus coming to this world is a celebration of something that God has done. Not us.

Notice how often these verses speak of God's acts. Our contribution? That we have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Rather than being the heroes, we are the needy and the unworthy. We are the ones needing to be rescued.

This passage is one of the most important in Scripture. It clearly defines God's work of salvation whereby those who deserved the punishment of God are able to receive mercy and grace. How is this possible? How can God be just and merciful? Because Jesus willingly took our place.

This gift from God is a reason for boasting, but not about us. It is a story worth celebrating, but not because we are the center of attention. We rejoice because we are the grateful recipients.

Christmas is a time to reflect and wonder at what God has done. To receive with faith the incredible news that we can be saved from our sins and be in right relationship with God. Christmas is a season to take our eyes off ourselves and celebrate our Savior.

Thursday December 14, 2023

— ROMANS 5:12-21 - *Abbie Rogers* —

My husband and I have four wonderful, fun children. But, the thing about them is that while they are wonderful in so many ways, they simultaneously are disobedient and defiant. And, we didn't teach them this. I often say that the sin nature shows up on the changing table. Without fail, all four of my sweet, happy babies have turned into little monsters around the 6-month mark when it's time for a diaper change or a change of clothes. This defiance is in them. No one taught them. It is their nature.

This is what Romans 12 is telling us. Through one man, Adam, sin entered the world. Adam's nature was altered when he and Eve disobeyed, just as God had warned them would happen in Genesis 2:17. And since all mankind has come from these two, all mankind has received this nature and the consequence of death. This death is a spiritual, physical, and eternal death.

Though the first Adam failed and through him, sin entered the world, through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, we find the forgiveness of sin and a right relationship with God. Jesus fulfilled all that Adam could not – he obeyed God perfectly. And through His sacrificial death on the cross, all of mankind can experience the free gift of grace and justification for sins.

This truth, when rightly understood, should bring us to our knees in worship. We have no control over our existence – the fact that we are here, living and breathing. We did not choose to be born and neither did our parents or their parents. But, we are here and we are recipients of and participants in Adam and Eve's disobedience. God had every right to strike them down and end humanity before it even really began. But that's not what God did. He preserved humanity because He wanted us to know the kind of God that He is. He wanted us to know that, in spite of the fact that we have disobeyed Him, He has grace for those who know Him by faith and who trust in the sufficient work of the Second Adam. Because of His grace and goodness, we have life, but not just physical life; we can have spiritual and eternal life through a relationship with this Second Adam: Jesus, who lived the perfect life we cannot live and accepted the consequences of our sin on the cross.

This act of salvation is beautiful and brings us hope as we live in this broken world. We still feel the effects of Adam's disobedience. We still endure the consequence of physical death. But one day, when Christ returns, He will put an end to physical death. And those of us who are united with Christ – who have accepted salvation through faith in Jesus – will live eternally in communion with God.

Friday December 15, 2023

— ROMANS 8:1-11 - *Will Carlisle* —

I'd be willing to bet that somewhere in your collection of Christmas decorations, you have at least one or two items that proudly display, "Peace" (written in a red, cursive font, as I imagine). It may be an ornament on the tree, a plaque on a wall, or a sign by your front door; I've seen more than I can count! This association of "peace" with Christmas reaches far outside of Christian culture. Even the most secular retailers take the last two months of the year to sell clothes and home decor that commemorate "Peace on Earth" or "Peace, Joy, and Love" or any number of similar platitudes. However, peace can often seem evasive at this time of year. The loss of loved ones, cold divisions among family or friends, unemployment, and countless other hardships make this Hallmark spirit of "Peace" seem unattainable. But in today's passage, Paul provides a blueprint for "life and peace" that reaches high above our circumstances and far outside the season of Advent.

Paul begins Romans 8 with one of the most simple and astonishing statements in the entire Bible: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Do you hear the finality in these words? To be in Jesus is to be outside of condemnation. To be joined with Jesus is to be removed from punishment. And how could that be so irreversible? Because "God has done" it (v3). Paul recounts how Jesus, clothed in the "appearance of sinful flesh" defeated sin, once and for all. Why? So that God's "righteous requirement" could be met by those who throw themselves at the feet of God's mercy. But this is only the beginning of the good news. In verses 9-11, Paul explains that for all who are found in Jesus, the Spirit of God is found in them. Thus, the Believer is surrounded by the triumph of Jesus and filled with the power of His Spirit. Take time to contemplate that truth. You belong to Jesus, and his triumph does not merely offer you a second chance to accomplish what you originally failed to do. His work has accomplished what you could not do. And now, you get to share in a life that is free from condemnation and death because of what He's done.

This is Peace. It's not a seasonal emotion, a pattern of positive thinking, or the lack of threatening circumstances. It's the all-pervading awareness that no matter what you encounter in life, you will never face condemnation or death. It is the humbled confidence that flows from a heart filled with God's presence as we eagerly await the day we see Him face-to-face.

Saturday December 16, 2023

— ROMANS 10:1-13 - *Jeremy Brooks* —

What is righteousness?

Righteousness defines standards. What is acceptable and worthy of approval? Subsequently, righteousness also determines the rejectable. In a sense, righteousness determines the “in-crowd” and the “out-crowd”. That is Paul’s concern here in Romans 10, for the outsiders to come in: “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” But who is on the outside? Unexpectedly, God’s chosen people Israel (Rom. 9:31).

None of us wants to be an outsider.

C.S Lewis describes this reality in his essay titled, “The Inner Ring”. He says, “I believe that in all men’s lives...one of the most dominant elements is the desire to be inside the local Ring and the terror of being left outside...It is a terrible bore, of course, when [someone] draws you aside and whispers...“Charles and I saw at once that you’ve got to be on this committee.” A terrible bore... ah, but how much more terrible if you were left out! It is tiring and unhealthy to lose your Saturday afternoons: but to have them free because you don’t matter, that is much worse.

Our desire to be on the inside isn’t always wrong, but our natural tendency is toward proving why we deserve to be on the inside. We point to several reasons why we ought to be included. “I’m qualified. I’m just as fun and smart. I am worthy.” We point to our own righteousness.

The same heart condition is seen in what Paul is saying about Israel: “and seeking to establish their own [righteousness], they did not submit to God’s righteousness” (10:3).

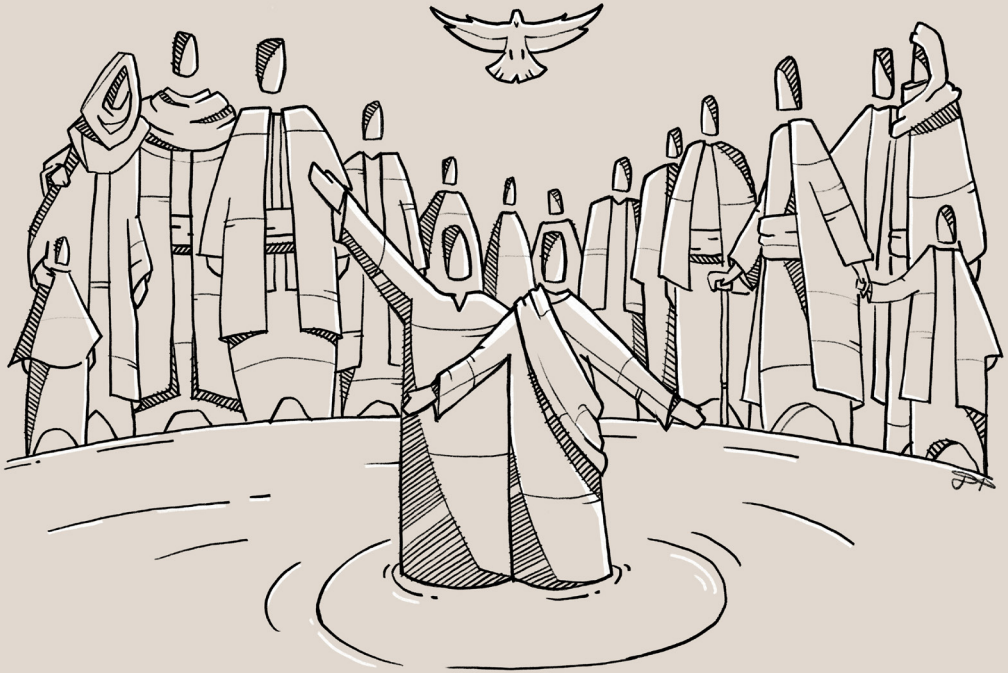
The problem is, though we may indeed be qualified for the inner rings of this world—none are righteous enough for the inner ring of God (9:31). But in this very predicament lies the good news of Advent: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes.”

The advent of Christ means freedom from establishing your own righteousness.

The only true insider came to bring outsiders in. From his birth to the cross, he became an outsider so righteousness can come to you—if by faith you trust in the risen Christ, the righteous One whom the law points us toward (Rom. 9:32, 10:8-11).

The inner rings of this world always have another ring. But Christ, without distinction, bestows upon us all the riches of his inner circle (Rom. 10:12). So as you await the second advent, be free from endless pursuits. Instead, by faith look forward to the endlessly satisfying joy and acceptance of his kingdom, which you possess now—and like Paul, may we also desire for outsiders, without distinction, to become insiders through his righteousness: “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” (Rom. 10:13)

Sunday December 17, 2023



RELIGION

MATTHEW 3:13-17



Monday December 18, 2023

— 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-6:2 - *Graham Thompson* —

I'm someone who loves Christmas music even before Thanksgiving, though I understand it's a controversial choice.

Last holiday season, as I played Michael Buble's Christmas album, the song "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town" caught my attention. Have you ever focused on its lyrics? They can be surprisingly unsettling. The song implies that Santa maintains a list, watching everyone and judging whether they've been naughty or nice. It's an eerie concept.

Imagine if such a record existed – it's a chilling thought.

While it may seem like a whimsical kids' Christmas tune, there's a deeper message. In reality, there is a record of your actions, good and bad, as indicated just a few verses earlier in 2 Corinthians 5:10, where it mentions that you will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to account for your deeds.

This is a sobering reality. Your actions will be laid bare, secrets exposed, and darkness brought to light. What would appear on your record? Lies to a teacher, cheating on exams, road rage, selfishness, lustful thoughts?

The consequence of your deeds is death, leading to eternal separation from your Creator – a truth we should never grow numb to, as Romans 6:23 reminds us: "The wages of sin is death."

But here's the reason for hope: This passage in Scripture assures us that in Christ, your sins are not held against you. God proved His love for you as He exchanged your sins for Jesus's righteousness (verse 21). 2 Corinthians 5:19 confirms that in Christ, God reconciled the world to Himself, not counting your trespasses against you.

This truth is profound, comforting, and worth sharing. God entrusts you with the message of reconciliation (verse 19). What's remarkable is that it's not merely a noble cause; it's how God reaches others. You are Christ's ambassador, and God makes His appeal through you (verse 20).


God could use countless means to reach the lost. He could call down from the heavens, dispatch signs through doves, or even speak through burning bushes. Despite having countless options at His disposal, God chose you as the vessel to deliver this profound message.

Consider this: You are the most important person your non-believing family and friends will see this Christmas. Not because you're so special, but because you carry a special message.

So, enjoy the peace of a reconciled relationship with God and carry the message of reconciliation well.

Tuesday December 19, 2023

— PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11 - *Abbie Montgomery* —



Just as Paul opens his letter to the Philippians with thanksgiving, we too should have a posture of thanks as we read these verses in light of the Advent season. The lines that Paul writes would not have flown from the pen had it not been for the first coming of Jesus – the first Advent when God came to the world as a babe. Without that first Advent, Paul would not be able to write to his friends the encouragement that “he who started a good work in you will bring it to completion...” Paul would not have a yearning for his friends to love more and more, grow in knowledge and discernment, or be filled with righteousness. But Jesus did come. God kept His promise to send a rescuer, and He will come again. With the hope that Paul writes in his letter, we can long for “the day of Jesus Christ ” – the second Advent. This day is coming when God will complete the work that He has started in His followers. With the help of the Spirit, we will stand before Him pure and blameless to God’s glory, and Jesus will return, not as a meek baby, but in victory.

But while we wait for this day, we don’t sit idly by. We partake in the same grace that Paul and the Philippians received – this grace of God that is unmatched and incomprehensible in its fullness. The grace that God showed by sending Jesus, the first Advent, to live and grow on this earth as man. The grace that God showed by ultimately turning His face away from the Son as He took on our punishment for our sin. We didn’t deserve this, but we can receive it. And Jesus was raised to life and continued to proclaim the mysteries of Heaven until He ascended to sit beside His Father where He will be until He comes again, and oh may he come soon! Come, Lord Jesus, that we may be made complete as we behold You with unveiled face on the day of Christ Jesus.

Wednesday December 20, 2023

— PHILIPPIANS 3:2-11 - *Chris Boynton* —

In the embrace of Christmas, believers often stand at a crossroads. Some are captivated by advent— remembering Jesus' first arrival, waiting expectantly for His return. Yet for others, the season's allure can draw them away from His essence, steering them toward personal ambitions. We have a choice to trust in His grace or to rely on ourselves—Confidence in Christ vs. confidence in ourselves.

The season of Advent reminds us that the arrival of Christ sets the church apart from the rest of the world, for “we are the [new] circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” When our passage says, “watch out for the dogs...”, we are called to vigilantly guard against anything that deters us from wholehearted, Christ-exalting worship.

Yet, the distractions of the season are often subtle - like our achievements, cherished memories, or the legacy we aim to forge. The glitz of a commercialized Christmas may elevate our recent successes, urging us to measure our worth by worldly standards - be it festive preparations, gifts exchanged, or a great party.

Consider Paul, a man of immense stature among the Jews. Bathed in accomplishments, he recognized their fleeting value. Like us, he discovered a truth that transcends the flesh. With profound clarity, he declared, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.”

Let us not settle for less, for it could lead to destruction. As C.S. Lewis puts it, “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Conversely, some may be distracted by a lack of accomplishments or a lack of holiday bliss. The season may be a heartbreaking reminder of losses rather than wins. But, the hope of advent overcomes the adversity. Paul reveals the purpose in his pain, “For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

I pray that we will be consumed by Christ. I pray that our confidence is found in Jesus, not in the flesh. This Christmas season, let us be reminded of the infinite joy offered to us in Christ Jesus and the “surpassing worth of knowing Jesus [our] Lord.”

Thursday December 21, 2023

— 1 TIMOTHY 3:16 - *Will Carlisle* —

Have you ever read straight through the entire Bible from start to end? Or have you ever spent an extensive amount of time reading through the books of prophecy like Jeremiah, Zechariah, Obadiah, and so forth? It's easy for Christians to spend most of their time in the New Testament because it is generally easier to understand and apply. However, this tendency comes at a great cost. When we read the ancient words of History, Prophecy, Poetry, and Law, a great mystery begins to emerge. On one hand, we see God the Judge, a deity of immense holiness and intense righteousness. His covenant is one of moral perfection, and his judgment is final and swift. But on the other hand, we see God the Friend: The God who pursued Hagar the slave girl into the wilderness, offering comfort and favor; the God who pardons sin and invites outcasts to his table; the God who spoke face-to-face with Moses "as a man speaks with his friend;" the God who warns wicked nations of fiery judgment while also promising a salvation that will pervade all nations, tribes, and tongues.

The entirety of human history and biblical revelation before Christ's Advent leave two searing questions in the mind of the reader: "What is this God like? And how is he going to accomplish this salvation?" This tension is what makes the Advent of Christ such a striking event. When Jesus was born, it was not the advent the Jewish people expected. There were no swords, chariots, or trumpet blasts to announce his arrival. In fact, the group of heralds that announced his birth, a host of angelic beings, appeared exclusively to a group of lowly shepherds. The life of self-sacrificing ministry that ensued only underlines such a surprising salvation.

Thus, Paul, alongside the other apostles and church fathers, spent his ministry making the assertion that Jesus Christ himself is the fulfillment of that "mystery of godliness" that spans the Scriptures. As Matthew Henry states, "The mystery of godliness is Christ." Through Him, we behold God and his salvation. He is the Savior who was revealed by the Father, confirmed publicly by the Holy Spirit at His baptism and transfiguration, beheld by the angels, and then proclaimed and believed far beyond the borders of Israel. Paul concludes this poetic creed by pointing Timothy toward the ascension of Jesus. If you follow Jesus, you likely think often of His ministry, death, and resurrection, but do you often think of his posture now? The story doesn't at all end with the empty grave; rather, that Jesus rose to the Father's right hand, where He intercedes for His people and prepares to return for them. This is the hope that Paul is pointing Timothy toward, and it's the same hope we anticipate this Advent season as we remember Christ's first descent.

1. What is God like?

2. How does God's character bring you to worship?

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

Friday December 22, 2023

— 2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8 - Jennifer McClish —

At the first appearance of Jesus, you can imagine how much Mary must have longed for it. Here she lies in dirt and danger as the unseen forces of childbirth bear down on her body. Her pain in childbearing is a searing reminder of the fall that precipitated His promised coming. The drama of her labor and delivery endured with the hope of all mamas that the baby will indeed appear. But Mary's hope went even deeper because this particular child was "the Son of the Most High ... and of his kingdom there would be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). And so we sing:

*O holy night!
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.*

Paul knew better than most the worth of a sin-sick soul. His zeal and self-righteousness had led to the deaths of many men and women belonging to the Way. How he must have loved the memory of that day when grace appeared on the road to Damascus. Eyes opened to his own rebellion before a holy God. Overcome by the richness of His mercy. This Jesus whom he had persecuted had willingly suffered and died in his place. It's the same realization of any sinner arrested by His grace and demands the same response: repentance and faith in Christ resulting in loving obedience.

Paul willingly poured out his life in response to Jesus pouring out His blood on the cross. He contended mightily against the very sin for which Christ died to save him. Because the more you love the cross of Christ the more you hate the sin that put Him there. He gladly ran a grueling race, keeping pace until the end because he was "not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16a). Even in the face of a martyr's death, he kept the faith and lived to pass it on.

Fights and races are exhausting. How do we persevere in faith and continue in our labor? By looking to the finish line, where we will see Him face to face. He who declared you righteous will now make your righteousness complete. You'll see His delight and hear His affirmation. And your heart will sing when He says, "well done my good and faithful servant ... enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:23) Press on, dear ones! For "in [His] presence there is fullness of joy; at [His] right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11b).

Saturday December 23, 2023

— HEBREWS 1:7-9 - *Jordan Kauflin* —

Have you ever seen an angel in real life? No? Neither have I.

But angel sightings are all over the Bible, particularly in the story of the birth of Jesus. An angel appeared to Zechariah, John the Baptist's father. An angel appeared to Mary, the mother of Jesus. An angel appeared to Joseph (twice) in dreams. An angel appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus.

The common reaction to seeing these angels was fear. The one exception was Joseph, but that was probably because he was asleep both times! To see an angel seems to be a fearful experience. Each time the angel's first words were, "fear not."

The writer of Hebrews begins his book by declaring that Jesus is superior to angels. Though we might assume that angels are worthy of our worship and admiration, they don't compare to the Son of God.

Our passage quotes from two different Psalms. The first is Psalm 104:4, which reminds us that the source of angel's power and awesome appearance is God Almighty. Though they are great, there is One who is greater.

He contrasts angels with what Scripture says about Jesus. Psalm 45 was originally addressed to a king, most likely king Solomon. But the writer of Hebrews tells us it is actually speaking of Jesus.

The Son of God reigns far above everything and everyone else. His throne is the place where angels bow down and worship. He is exalted and anointed because of the perfection of his character and his actions. He loves righteousness. He hates wickedness. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

This Christmas season as we consider the humanity and humility of Jesus, let's not forget he is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Let us wonder and worship. (And keep an eye out for angels).

Sunday December 24, 2023



SUCCESS

JOHN 6:15, 35-40, 66-71



Monday December 25, 2023

— 1 PETER 2:18-25 - Jackson Randall —

1 Peter 2:18 gives a hard word: “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.” This verse was directed to slaves and servants in the 1st century who very likely endured terribly difficult circumstances. It can be jarring to see Peter offer instruction instead of critique in this verse. But, we must remember that Peter’s goal is to offer instruction to Christians living in the various contexts that exist in the world. How are these servants or slaves to respond to unjust masters? They are to respond with respect serving well to the glory of God. How is it possible for Peter to give such a difficult word? What hope do these servants and slaves have of fulfilling Peter’s instruction?

The answer is Jesus. 1 Peter 2:21 says, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” Servants and slaves can endure suffering because they are following in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus shows us the way! Peter draws on Isaiah 53, which prophesies the suffering servant, to describe Jesus’s example. Jesus was without sin; no deceit was in His mouth. He was reviled and He didn’t revile in return. He suffered and didn’t threaten. We see the truth of Peter’s statement and Isaiah’s prophecy in the Gospels. Jesus was betrayed by His friends, including the man writing this! Jesus was slandered by His countrymen. Jesus was betrayed and beaten. Jesus was spit upon, He had insults hurled at Him, He was scourged, He was humiliated, and He was hung upon a cross. In all of this, how did Jesus respond? He did not revile in return; He didn’t threaten. He trusted Him who judges justly.

But, Jesus is not simply our example. He is our substitute. Jesus suffered, not simply as an example, but He suffered “for” you. Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree. By His wounds, we have been healed. In these verses, Jesus not only goes before us as an example, but He stands in our place. The scary reality is that, in every way, Christ succeeds in these verses where we have failed. Christ committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. This is not true of us. Christ did not revile or return suffering for suffering. Again, this is simply not true of us.

As we conclude this Advent season, let us remember that if we were left to ourselves we wouldn’t be able to stand. We lack righteousness in ourselves. But, gloriously, Jesus came and lived the righteous life we could not live. Because He fulfilled all righteousness, He was uniquely qualified to serve as the Savior of the world. Now, by His stripes, we are healed. May we rest in everything Jesus accomplished at His first Advent and faithfully and expectantly look forward to His second Advent.



CHRIST COVENANT