

“THE WORD IS HERE”
Isaiah 53:1-12, Colossians 1:15-23, Luke 2:1-7
Christmas Day, December 25, 2022

“Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian, told a story about a certain kingdom wherein there was a handsome prince, searching for a woman worthy enough to be his wife and to become queen of the land. One day while running an errand for his father he passed through a poor village. As he glanced out the window of his carriage his eyes fell on a beautiful peasant maiden. During ensuing days, he often passed by the young lady and soon fell in love with her by sight. But he had a problem. How could he seek her hand?

“He could command her to marry him, but the prince wanted someone who would marry him out of love, not coercion. He could show up at her door in his splendid uniform in a gold carriage drawn by six horses, attendants in tow, and bearing a chest of jewels and gold coins. But then how would he know if she really loved him or if she was just overawed and overwhelmed with his splendor? Finally he came up with another solution.

“The prince stripped off his royal robes, put on common dress, moved into the village, and got to know the maiden without revealing his identity. As he lived among the people, the prince and the maiden became friend, shared each other’s interests, and talked about their concerns. By and by, the young lady grew to love him for who he was and because he had first loved her.

“This is exactly the Gospel. The Prince of Peace Himself, Jesus Christ, laid aside the robes of His glory, garbed Himself as a peasant, became a human being, and moved into our village, onto our planet, to woo us to Himself. Both the one who makes us holy and those who are being made holy are the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers [and sisters].

“He who was shadowed out in Eden, He to whom Abel looked, He who was Abraham’s seed and David’s offspring and the sweet theme of every prophet’s word, He who was pierced on Calvary and laid in the grave, [and rose again on the third day], is the same Jesus who shall shortly come again. No sinner escapes death, but through one victim, one righteousness, one faith, one hope, one clinging to the

cross, one cleaving to one Lord, one journeying in one blood-stained path. There is one only Savior of all the saved, one only door of heaven, one only plea before the judgment seat, one only ransom of a guilty soul.”¹ And that is our hope on this Christmas Day.

It had been prophesied that God would send His Messiah who would take “*up our pain and bear our suffering.*” He would be “*pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities and the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed*” (Is. 53:4-5). This Messiah would stand in the gap for all humanity so that we would not have to pay the price of the penalty of our sins. That penalty is eternal death, in separation from the Lord God Almighty.

Yet God desperately wanted us to be with Him, so the Suffering Messiah would step into our time and space to do what was necessary to remove our condemnation because of our sins. Since humanity had all wandered away from the ways of God, we were all lost from His glorious kingdom without any hope of salvation. Yet God had not given up on us.

Jesus, the Word of God - with God at the very beginning of creation - saw our situation, and in love for all of us, decided to come to the earth as a human. His beginning did not start at His conception in the body of Mary, nor at His birth in Bethlehem. Jesus was the One who made all things come into being, having created the very woman who would carry Him and give birth to Him. Jesus, as God in the flesh, began His human life here humbly, in the form of a baby so that He could be completely like us, yet without sin. But being God, He existed long before the world came into being.

You see, Jesus humbled Himself to become a human, the Almighty confined into the single cell that began life here in this world. That one divine cell then took on human likeness and human characteristic and conformed to the human process of life. Jesus would be completely human, but at the same time, completely God, the two characters comingling in the same body with all of the human restrictions and limitations, until the right time for Jesus to control all that was His to control.

But it was not Jesus as a baby that saved us from the penalty of sin. A baby is not what bore all

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 483)

our sins upon himself. Jesus came in our likeness, yes, vulnerable to the things of this earth. But as a human baby He was not able to feed Himself, or care for Himself, or provide shelter for Himself, or even protect Himself from those who desired His destruction. He had become just like any other human baby. So God charged Mary and Joseph to care for this unique and special baby so that He could grow up to become the Savior of the world. Because He became human like us, Jesus humbled Himself to be like us in every way, and that meant that He had to grow up in order to be the Messiah for us all.

Though “*God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven*” (Colossians 1:19-20), Jesus did not have the capacity to use all the power of God to be our Savior at His birth. He submitted to human restrictions.

It was not His birth that brought Salvation to us, however. Though Jesus’ life here on the earth had to begin at birth, this is not the reason we worship Him. We do not worship the little baby in a manger, meek and mild, helpless and vulnerable. We recognize Jesus’ divinity at His birth, certainly, but His birth was not the point in His life where He would save us.

Yet that is what Satan wants us to focus on, a baby in a manger. If our whole lives can be centered on a baby born to a peasant woman, announced by angels, visited by shepherds, attended by wise men, and even saved from extinction by a nightmare, then we have missed the whole reason that Jesus came to the earth. If we get so caught up in Christmas trees, lights and decorations, the gift giving, the parties, and even the special worship services, we miss the whole reason for Jesus’ becoming human like us. Yes, Christmas was the beginning of Jesus’ life, but it is not to be our main focus of Jesus’ life.

Henry Nouwen said it best for us to comprehend the reason for the season. “Songs, good feelings, beautiful liturgies, nice presents, big dinners, and sweet words do not make Christmas. Christmas is saying yes to something beyond all emotion and feelings. Christmas is saying yes to a hope based on God’s initiative, which has nothing to do with what I think or feel. Christmas is believing

that the salvation of the world is God's work and not mine."²

You see, Jesus came to reconcile us with God. Since we "*were alienated from God and were enemies in [our] minds because of [our] evil behavior*" (Col. 1:21), there was no way that we could redeem ourselves from the penalty of sin. The Sacrifice had to be a pure, spotless, sinless human, taking the sins of all those who would profess Him as their Savior upon Himself, and then paying the ultimate price for those sins. Only One without sin could give Himself for the sinful in order to remove their sins from them. So Jesus could not just be a human baby, born into the sin of His parents, but a divine human, like us in every way, yet without sin.

And that was the reason for the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary and conceiving in her the holy seed of God at the Incarnation. Jesus came in love for us to give us the path back to God. Listen to how God orchestrated this whole event, fulfilling every prophecy about Him at the same time. This is Luke 2:1-7. (READ Luke 2:1-7)

Nine months had passed since Mary had given permission to the angel for God to use her to bring Jesus into the world. Much had happened during that time. Because of his own encounter with the angel, Joseph had consented to remain engaged to Mary so that they could be married to each other and he could care for Mary and the baby Jesus. But Nazareth was not the place for the Messiah to be born. The Scriptures prophesied that it would be in David's town, Bethlehem in Judea where the Messiah would be born (Micah 5:2). That was 70 miles away from Nazareth. And there was no pressing reason for Joseph to make that trip. He had established his home and life in Nazareth.

But God works in mysterious ways, even through human governments, to bring about His perfect will. So as Caesar Augustus was contemplating another tax on the people of Israel, there first had to be an accounting of the people. So each person was to return to the place of their ancestors, and since Joseph was from the line of David, that means he had to return home to Bethlehem to register. So Mary also went with him as his wife, very far along in her pregnancy. I can only imagine the difficulty they

² (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 39)

had traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It would not have been easy for either one of them. We're not told how long it took them to make the trip, but they made it, and soon afterwards, Mary went into labor. So Jesus' earthly life began, there in Bethlehem, the city of David, fulfilling prophecies along the way, and preparing the pathway back to God in the process.

I like the way that Charles Swindoll explains Jesus' timely appearance here with us. He says,

“If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator.

If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.

If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.

If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.

But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior!”³

So the Word is here among us, humbly born so that all people might have access to Him. His birth set in motion the whole plan of Salvation for all who would believe in Him and let Him become the Lord of their life. The major question for us to consider, however, is “What are we going to do with Jesus now that He has become present here on the earth?” Will we receive Him and let Him become the Lord of our life? Or will we use Him to get the most out of this life by claiming His Name, but ruling our own lives? Or will we totally reject Him and live our life the way we determine?

There are dangers to each one of these options, however. If we choose to let Jesus become the Savior and Lord of our lives, we face ridicule and persecution from those who do not receive Him. We risk being made fun of because of our faith. We risk going head to head with authorities who make decisions totally against the way that the Bible teaches. If we let Jesus be the Lord of our lives, we risk losing out on many of the amenities that the world has to offer, because we let the Lord be the One to guide our lives and use us the way He desires.

If we choose to claim the Name of Jesus, but not let Him become the Lord of our lives, even if we make a profession of faith in Him as our Savior, we risk being accepted by the world, but rejected by

³ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 315)

the Lord God Almighty. If we use the Name of Jesus to be in good graces in the eyes of the church, but refuse to live according to His will and His way, we risk falling in love with all the things of this world and losing the love and protection of the Lord Jesus. We risk being enamored by all the wonders of this world, and miss the wonders of His love. We risk giving up the security and hope and life that Jesus provides to all those who are faithful to Him. And we risk being rejected by God, since we are only lukewarm God says, “...*because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth*” (Revelation 3:16).

And certainly, if we choose to reject Jesus and live life the way we want to live, we risk the ultimate rejection of the Lord God, refusing to acknowledge or even recognize Jesus as anything but a good man and a wise teacher. By refusing to let Jesus be the Savior of our lives, we risk eternal judgment against us and we will stand before God to be held accountable for all our own sins. By refusing Jesus, we give up all avenues to any saving grace of the Lord, because we have rejected His pathway to forgiveness, giving up eternal life. By rejecting Jesus we are left only to our own wisdom, our own strength, and our own decisions. And we risk being told by God, “*Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matthew 25:41).

But that’s not God’s desire for any of us. He loves us and desires a close relationship with Him so that we might find His protection, His guidance, His care, and His forgiveness. Jesus came to the earth so that we could have life, in fact abundant life. That is God’s desire for us. And it starts as we receive Jesus as the Word made flesh to dwell with us, born to set His people free, born to live in us forever as children of God.

I recently came across an interesting story that really lays this out. Let me finish today with it.

“A wealthy man shared a passion for art collecting with his devoted son. They traveled around the world together, adding only the finest paintings to their collection. Included among them were works by Picasso, Van Gogh, and Monet. The old man was a widower, but his son filled up the void in his life, and this was their common bond.

“But war erupted, and the young man enlisted and was sent overseas. Day after day, the old father prayed, held his breath, and waited for news. One autumn day near Thanksgiving the dreaded telegram came, bordered in black. The young man had died bravely in combat, trying to evacuate those caught under fire. Distraught and lonely, the old man faced the upcoming holidays with anguish and sorrow. On Christmas morning, a knock sounded at the door. The father opened it to find a soldier there, carrying a small package. As they talked, the soldier said, ‘Your son and I became very close, and he told me all about your joint art collection. I myself am an artist, and I wanted to give you this.’

The man took this package in his feeble hands, unwrapped it, and there was a portrait of his son in striking detail. It wasn’t a masterpiece, but it was the most precious work of art the man had ever seen. As he gazed at it, he wept. And as the young soldier left, the lonely father pushed aside thousands of dollars worth of art and hung the portrait of his son in the prized spot over the fireplace.

As the months passed, the old man received letter after letter, telling him of the son’s bravery and selflessness, and how many lives he had saved and how many more he had touched. With each passing day the portrait over the fireplace became more precious, and he told his friends that it was the greatest gift he had ever received.

The following Spring, the old man grew ill and passed away. The art world was full of anticipation, wanting to get its hands on this man’s fabulous collection. A day was set to auction it all off, and according to the old man’s instructions the first painting was one that was not on any museum’s list - the painting of the man’s son. When the auctioneer asked for an opening bid, the room was silent.

‘Who will open the bidding at \$100?’ he asked. The moments stretched on awkwardly, and finally someone in the back of the room said, ‘Let’s go on to the next piece.’

“No,” replied the auctioneer. “We have to sell this one first.”

“Finally a neighbor of the man spoke. ‘Will you take fifty dollars for the painting? That’s all I have, but I knew the boy and I liked him, so I’d like to have it.’

“Fifty dollars, we have fifty dollars,” shouted the auctioneer. “Will anyone go higher?” No one

did. ‘Going once, going twice, gone.’ And the gavel fell.

“Everyone breathed a deep sigh of relief, thankful that now they could proceed with the ‘real’ auction and get their hands on the masterpieces. But imagine their shock when the auctioneer suddenly declared that the proceeds were over. A loud clamor arose. Stunned disbelief. ‘What do you mean it’s over?’ the people shouted. ‘What about all the masterpieces?’

“The auctioneer replied, ‘It’s very simple. According to the will, whoever takes the son gets it all.’

“The Bible says, ‘*God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life*’ (I John 5:11-12).”⁴

Friends, don’t miss the life that is given by God through the Son, Jesus. Don’t throw out Jesus along with all the Christmas wrapping paper and miss out on His abundant blessings. Don’t just go back to ‘business as usual’ without seeing the great love that God has for you. Don’t reject the forgiveness that only Jesus gives as we let Him be our Savior and Lord.

Jesus came to us humbly so that we could all have access to Him. But the price is expensive, as we must give Him our all so that we might live for Him each day. Think of all those you could touch as you share this great Good News with them, that the Word of God is here with us, to bring life to each of us as we trust in Him. Let Him live and grow in you so that He may be your all in all. Let’s pray.

Father, thank You for your great love for us. Thank You that You have given Jesus to us so that we might find abundant life through Him. Help us to boldly believe that He is our Messiah, the Savior Who takes away the sins of the world. Then, let us so live our lives focused on Jesus that we might bring about life to those around us as we encounter them in this war-torn world of ours. Let us so love Your Son that we might take Him with us wherever we go, choosing to follow Him all the days of our lives. Grant us new life, so that the whole world might know Him through us. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. Amen

⁴ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 485-486)