

December 20, 2020

“Living in the Light of Christmas”

1 John 3:5

FCF: The problem with sin. And our blindness to it.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus came to deal with our sin.
(magnet) We must live in light of that.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

When asked, “What is the greatest problem facing the world today?” the answer varies, often depending upon our personal politics and perspectives. But if asked, “What is wrong with the world today?” surveys have shown that 98% agree, “People do not show enough love.” Now a funny thing happens with the next question. When asked, “Do you show the kind of love that would make the world a better place?” 95% say they do. Hmm. Okay. Something is off here.

Think with me. If even a significant minority was as loving as they said they were, the world would, in fact, be better off. But it’s not and it would seem that we are not. Something is indeed off, not just with the numbers but with us. This is the problem of our self-rule, what the Bible calls our sin. And the problem is so deep that we are blind to it. How we do need a rescue.

SCRIPTURE READING: [1 John 3:4-10](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Christmas is a time for singing. It’s a time for song, patterned on what we see with the angels appearing to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem. The best of the carols do two things. First, they help us to express our hearts. Second, they shape and form our hearts’ expression.

Last week, I mentioned Christina Rossetti’s “In the Bleak Midwinter” ([READ 1st](#)):

In the bleak mid-winter frosty wind made moan;
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter long ago.

This is not about the weather but the spiritual condition of the world. The next stanzas set out a series of contrasts between the Lord’s first and second coming, His identity and surroundings, and the adoration of the angels and then that of His mother. The last is a reflection ([READ 5th](#)):

What can I give Him, poor as I am? —
If I were a Shepherd I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man I would do my part, —
Yet what I can I give Him, — give my heart.

This is the response of a heart that has been gripped by what they have seen and the realization that nothing can be the same. The Savior has arrived, the long awaited Messiah. He has come. John wants us to know Jesus has come to deal with our sin. And we must live in light of that.

What would it mean to live in light of Jesus’ coming? Laying hold of three things. First, the event of Christmas. Second, the reason for Christmas. And, third, the impact of Christmas.

I. THE EVENT OF CHRISTMAS

First, the event of Christmas - the fact, truth, and reality of it ([READ 1 John 3:5a](#)).

A) Not Mythical

1. The claim of a witness

John means us to understand that this is not mythical. He is not passing on a tale of events “once upon a time”. Note his earlier assertion ([READ 1 John 1:1-3a](#)). This is the claim of a witness.

2. The details of testimony

If you go back and read the Gospel of John, you see the details of eyewitness testimony. Case in point, John 6 and Jesus’ walking on the water ([READ John 6:16-21](#)). This is not the way ancient legends read. Think back to *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey*. John is giving eyewitness testimony.

B) But Historical

1. With verifiable details

In no way does he give us room to dismiss this as something mythical. He means for us to see this as something historical with verifiable details - names, places, events, and time proximity.

2. With inevitable effect

And, given all of that, given this is not something mythical but historical, it then should have an inevitable effect upon us. Just as anything else would that stands in the flow of time and space.

What do we make of this? We need to live in light of the event of Christmas.

Illustration:

Think with me of one of the fixtures of our Christmas celebrations from an historical view. How did we get to Santa Claus from St. Nicholas? How did we get to the Jolly Old Elf of “The Night before Christmas” from a 4th century bishop in modern day Turkey? That’s a long story that can be traced. But there’s something else to consider that’s just as historical. How did we get to St. Nicholas from Jesus of Nazareth? The eyewitness testimony of men like John.

Application:

Friends, we need to grapple with the event of Christmas. We need to be thinking not just about our preparations for the seasonal celebration but the historical roots beneath and behind it all. The idea of this being nothing but a legend has been swept off the table. Which then clears the way for C. S. Lewis’ famous and pointed “Lunatic, Liar, or Lord” argument ([READ CSL](#)):

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. . . . Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.

“Legend” is not an option John leaves open. So we need to face what’s been thrust in front of us.

Jesus came to deal with our sin. He really came. We must live in light of that.

II. THE REASON FOR CHRISTMAS

Which brings us to the reason for Christmas - its basic purpose ([READ 1 John 3:5a-b](#)).

A) Great Anticipation

This was something long awaited. There was great anticipation (**READ John 1:29**).

1. The Passover lamb

John the Baptist was alluding to the Passover lamb. The context is the exodus, God's rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt. As the last plague came, they were commanded to put the blood of the lamb on the door so that death would pass over. And this they celebrated for centuries.

2. The Lamb of God

It was a picture of the heinousness of their sin and the graciousness of their Savior, One to come who would be the final sacrifice. His blood shed, His death for us (**READ Isaiah 53:10-11**).

B) True Forgiveness

In Jesus, the anticipation was met. And true forgiveness has come (**READ 1 John 1:8-9**).

1. Heart's corruption

Listen to what John is saying. The heart is so corrupt that, not only do Jesus' disciples continue to sin, there is a real temptation to deny it, to downplay and dismiss it. That is the deception.

2. God's justice

But that is not all John is saying. He also says that, if we humbly confess our sin to God, He would be unjust not to forgive us. How can that be? Because His wrath has already been poured out on Jesus. The demands of justice have already been met. It is finished. So we are forgiven.

Oh, how we desperately need to live in light of the reason for Christmas.

Application:

This reason is the cause for our celebration. It is why it is good for us to put up the lights and sing "Joy to the World". Why? Because God's Christmas card to us is not filled with instruction and advice. Open it up. Read what it says. It's not "Do this and you'll be right with God." No, His card does not come with instruction and advice but pronouncement and news. Yes, our sins are real, as real as Jesus' coming. But the Lamb has come to take them away.

Jesus came to deal with our sin. Each and all of them. We must live in light of that.

III. THE IMPACT OF CHRISTMAS

Which brings us to the third point, the impact of Christmas - its result and effect (**READ 1 John 3:5**). You see, this is not just about the forgiveness of sin. It is about freedom from it.

A) The Question of Perfection

1. Not sinlessness

But let's address the question of perfection. And we need to be clear on this point. John is not calling for a life of sinless living. That flies in the face of biblical teaching and our experience. John repeatedly speaks of "the practice of sinning" and one who "keeps on sinning". He is not warning of individual snapshots but the theme of our lives, the overall story and plot line.

2. But striving

This is not sinless living but humble striving. The true disciple longs for holiness, to please the God who has already declared His pleasure. So the true disciple does not play with sin but opposes it. When we fails and falls, we do not belittle it but grieve, repent, and confess.

B) The Mark of Obedience

And such a life, such a heart, can be identified by the mark of obedience to the Lord.

1. United to Jesus

For we are united to Jesus. We are in Him ([READ 1 John 3:6](#)). This is the abiding of the branch to the vine, the disciple looking to and relying upon the Lord. We are in Him. And we are of Him ([READ 1 John 3:9](#)). We have been reborn by the Spirit of the Lord and He is at work in us.

2. With an obvious result

Which then has an obvious result as this new root bears its fruit. Note the stark contrast ([READ 1 John 3:10](#)). It's a striking claim. Not that John is saying there is an impossibility of sin in the life of a Christian. But there is an incongruity, an inconsistency, given the reality of who we are.

Oh, how we need to live in light of the impact of Christmas.

Illustration:

To illustrate this, it is worth looking at Christmas history ([READ Collins, pp.9-10](#)):

Only in relatively recent times, the past two hundred years, has Christmas ever been celebrated by most Christians. Up until the 1800s, the day recognizing Christ's birthday was largely a pagan celebration. Those who bemoan the lack of religious zeal in modern Christmases would have been appalled at the way people in early America celebrated the day. For a majority of people who embraced Christmas throughout history, Christ wasn't a part of the day at all. In most of the world, especially in England and America, Christmas was not a day of worship, prayer, and reflection; rather, it was a day set aside to sing bawdy songs, drink rum, and riot in the streets.

It was little more than a parade of excess, a drunken mishmash of Mardi Gras and Halloween. It was dreaded by many and even outlawed in some cases. It was sad and ugly, incongruous and inconsistent with the occasion. As is sin in the life of the believer. It simply doesn't fit.

Application:

John means to warn us here, to give us a sobering reminder. But also to give us a soaring encouragement. "Christian, whatever else is going on in your life, you are new!" True freedom is possible. It is being held forth. No more lawlessness. No more of a life given over in offense to God and the destruction and enslavement to our self-asserting governance and passions. We are new and can live anew. We can actually become the men and women God created us to be.

How? Jesus came to deal with our sin. And we must live in light of that.

CONCLUSION:

Christmas is a time for singing. Consider this song by Reginald Heber, the 19th c. British poet, pastor, and bishop of Calcutta. Heber is best known by his lyrics for "Holy, Holy, Holy" but there is another song worth noting, "Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning." It's written from the vantage point of the wise men in their quest to find Jesus. And it raises an interesting question, "Given who He is, what is the best gift we could give him?" ([READ](#)):

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid;
star of the east, the horizon adorning,
guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.
Cold on his cradle the dew-drops are shining;
low lies his head with the beasts of the stall;
angels adore him in slumber reclining,
Maker and Monarch and Saviour of all.
Say, shall we yield him, in costly devotion,
odours of Edom, and offerings divine,
gems of the mountain, and pearls of the ocean,
myrrh from the forest, or gold from the mine?
Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
vainly with gifts would his favour secure:
richer by far is the heart's adoration,
dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

The flow of the song starts with an address to the star. It shifts to Jesus' entrance into the world, the prompting of this question, and then the answer. This gift has to be something costly, the whole of our very selves. Consider who has come and why - the very thing John is saying to us.

Jesus has come to deal with our sin. Think of it. We must and can live in light of that.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus came to deal with our sin.
(magnet) We must live in light of that.