

On this last Sunday of 2018, as Christmas Day is past but the season of Christmas is still in our hearts, I want to share with us "The Gospel of Christmas." We should know that the gospel is fully taught in the Easter story of Jesus' death and resurrection. But do we realize that it is also taught in the Christmas story?

To reflect on the gospel = "good news" of God's message to us is always appropriate. But every now and then it is good to focus on it, letting the good news of God's message sink deep into our hearts and souls. This is helpful on a number of levels: (1) there might well be those who need to hear the gospel and receive it into their lives for the first time; (2) believers can be encouraged once again as to what God has done to bring us into His family; and (3) we all can learn and relearn the gospel message that we must pass on to our world.

THE KEY POINTS

I remember as a young man learning what Campus Crusade for Christ (now CRU) under the leadership of Bill Bright called "The Four Spiritual Laws." And shortly thereafter I remember hearing what the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association called "Steps To Peace With God." Both organizations wanted to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in a simple, easy to learn, format. And both of them came up with the same 4 key points:

1. God loves you, and has a wonderful plan for your life
2. You have sinned, and have thus separated yourself from God
3. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for your sin and for restoring relationship with Him
4. You must personally receive Jesus Christ as Savior of your sins and Lord of your life

Or, to simplify even more:

1. God loves you
2. You have sinned
3. Jesus is the only answer
4. Receive Jesus, receive eternal life

Or more:

1. GOD'S LOVE
2. MY SIN
3. JESUS CHRIST
4. RECEIVE HIM

THE CHRISTMAS GOSPEL: GOD'S LOVE

To begin, I offer three verses that reveal the love of God the Father in sending His Son.

The first is the familiar. "God so loved that He gave ..."

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

The second is the clearest teaching of the love of God that sent Jesus:

1 John 4:9 *By this the love of God was manifest in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.*

And the third is Jesus telling why He was sent, revealing the heart of the Father:

Luke 4:18 *(Jesus quoting from Isaiah 61:2) The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.*

So where do we see this love of God specifically in the Christmas story?

First, let's look at Gabriel's words to Mary when He visits her in Luke 1:26 and following. In verse 28 he greets her as "favored one." Though Mary is clearly the favored one in that she is to be the mother of the Messiah Jesus, by extension, all those who receive this Child as their Savior are also "favored" or loved by God. As you receive the provision of Jesus into your life, God in essence calls you "favored one,"

demonstrating His love.

In Mary's praise to God, called the "Magnificat," she quotes Psalm 103:17 in Luke 1:50 and proclaims: "*His mercy is upon generation after generation ...*" This speaks of God's amazing love to the generations of those who have received His mercy through the provision of Jesus.

In the angel's visit to the shepherd in Luke 2:10 he said, "*I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people.*" (Luke 2:10) This shouts loud and clear of God's love, for "good news" is "God news" and "great joy" is the result of great love expressed.

Indeed, "*God so loved the world that He gave...*" us Jesus!

And His wonderful plan for your life includes being released from the bondage of your sin, given sight to your spiritual blindness and given freedom from your spiritual oppression.

THE CHRISTMAS GOSPEL: MY SIN

We need only hear the angels' message to the shepherds and then to Joseph.

The shepherds heard that unto them a Savior had been born. (Luke 2:11) That clearly implies the need to be saved from sin. And Joseph heard that he was to name the child, "Jesus." for He would save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)

And when Jesus was only 8 days old, his parents took him to the temple to be circumcised, as was the custom. And there a righteous and devout man named Simeon had been promised not to die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah in the flesh. And when he saw and held the baby Jesus, he said to God, "*my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.*" (Luke 2:30) In Jesus, Simeon saw the Savior of the peoples of the earth – God's provision for sin.

Without question, the Christmas story reveals my need and your need for a Savior because of our sins.

I must see the birth of the baby Jesus not only as God's gift of a marvelous teacher and spiritual example. I must see this birth as God's merciful gift of a Savior for my sins.

THE CHRISTMAS GOSPEL: JESUS AS THE ONLY ANSWER

Jesus, the night before He died on the cross, declared to His disciples that He was "*the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but through Me.*" (John 14:6) In this classic affirmation we know that Jesus was aware that He was the one and only provision to reunite God with man. But where do we find that truth in the Christmas story?

Well, Mary knew that she was chosen to be the blessed mother of the Messiah for which the Jews had been waiting for centuries. And there was only one promised Messiah. Isaiah was one of the prophets who prophesied of this unique provision to come.

Isaiah 7:14 *Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*

We learn that "Immanuel" or "Emmanuel" means "God with us" – and there is only one God, and therefore only one "God with us" Messiah child.

Isaiah goes on to prophesy more of this unique Messiah-child:

Isaiah 9:6 *For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore.*

It is clear that this prophesied child will be one of a kind, being the One to reign on the eternal throne of King David forever. It is also clear that this child will be Divine – called "Mighty God" and "Eternal Father."

There was only one visit to shepherds, and they went to find the one promised Messiah-Savior. And the magi travelled to find the one King of the Jews, and when they found Him they bowed to worship Him as the unique Divinity.

Just as Simeon saw Jesus as the unique promised Messiah, so we are to see Him as well. No other

supposed alternative way to God or supposed provision for our sins ever had a spectacular star accompany his or her birth, nor has a procession of magi cross a desert to worship a Messiah-King. Nor did any multitude of angels ever pronounce such a birth. If we read the Christmas story with an open heart we can come to no other conclusion but that Jesus was a unique, one of a kind provision of God to give us a bridge to God and give us eternal life – the very life of God.

THE CHRISTMAS GOSPEL: I MUST RECEIVE HIM

James, the earthly brother of Jesus, made a profound claim.

James 2:19 *You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*

He could just as easily have written that the demons believe that God sent Jesus in love to be the only provision for the sins of all humanity, and tremble. In other words, the devil and his entourage of demons believe the first three points of the gospel message to be true.

Many people fail to find salvation because (1) they don't believe God loves them, or (2) they don't believe they need a savior, or (3) they don't believe that Jesus is the only way to God.

But just as true, many people fail to find salvation because they believe all three of these points, but don't believe the fourth – to receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord. The demons believe points one, two and three, but they will never receive Jesus as the provision for their sins, even if God allowed them to. And the demons will only bow to acknowledge Jesus as Lord when at the end of the age every knee will bow before Jesus. But they will never bow before they are forced to do so.

The fourth critical point of the gospel is that each person must personalize the provision of Jesus to himself in order to be saved and receive God's gift of eternal life. We can't get into heaven on the coattails of another's faith – whether father or mother or pastor or friend. We can't get into heaven based on what we perceive to be our good deeds. We can't get into heaven because we have gone to church, or read the Bible, or been born into a Christian family or Christian nation. We can only get into heaven by personally receiving Jesus as Savior – the provision for sins, and then living out our life with Him as Lord.

And where do we find this truth in the Christmas story? Mary personally submitted to the bidding of the angel Gabriel, and humbled her heart to be the mother of the Messiah. Joseph personally repented of forsaking Mary as his wife, and chose to marry her to be the earthly father of the Messiah. The shepherds left their flock to each personally seek and find the baby Messiah, glorifying and praising God for what they had found. And the magi from the east personally travelled hundreds of miles in search of the Messiah-King of the Jews that they might offer gifts of worship.

Now of course, there could be no gospel of salvation without the cross of Calvary. But it can just as rightly be said that there could be no gospel of salvation without the incarnation of Bethlehem. They must go hand in hand. The manger and the cross both shout of the love of God, the sin of man, the unique provision of Jesus and the need to personally receive Him.

Christian brother and sister – hopefully today's message both encouraged you once again in your faith, and challenged you to once again share this glorious message of hope to those in your world.

And seeker of God – hopefully today's message has convicted you to make the journey of the shepherds and wise men your journey of faith.

1. Acknowledge that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life
2. Confess your sin to Him and need of a Savior, determining with God's help never to return to your sins again
3. Acknowledge Jesus as the one and only provision for your sin and hope for heaven
4. Receive Him now in quiet and sincere faith as your Savior and your Lord.

MERRY CHRISTMAS !