

Christ's Advent, Part III- The Death and Resurrection of the Christ

Call to Worship: Isaiah 53

1st Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

2nd Scripture: Matthew 27:45-28:8

Hymn #164- *Angels, From the Realms of Glory*

Hymn #160- *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen*

Hymn #168- *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*

Introduction

We've been working through a mini-series on the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. So far, we have considered the "Foretelling of the Christ," where we went back to the beginning and looked at the first prophetic text, which told of Christ's coming, given in Genesis, Chapter 3. And then, last Sunday, we considered the actual "Coming of the Christ," where we pondered the chants of praise, proclaimed by the angelic beings, to God, in the presence of the shepherds. This was found in Luke, Chapter 2, which we read again, in our first Scripture reading.

This morning then, we move into the third part of our Advent series, where we will fix our attention on the most critical aspect of the Christ's coming, centered upon His death and resurrection. Sadly, for many, the whole concept of Christmas, begins and ends with a cute little infant, born in a manger, with hardly an understanding of the central glory of this Christ's incarnation. God became man for a significant reason. And if the whole emphasis of Christmas leaves us in Bethlehem, and doesn't take us to Mount Golgotha; if we remain gazing in the face of a smooth-skinned, bright eyed baby, and not in the face of a marred, bloodied, beaten, abused, and hardly recognizable Savior, then we have truly missed the boat. And so, this morning, we cast our eyes into the dark and pitiful scene of the Christ's crucifixion. But, we won't stay there. We will conclude by making our way to His empty tomb, on that calm and peaceful Sunday morning, three days after His death.

I. The Sobering Glory of the Death of the Christ

We began our primary reading at the apex of the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has already endured the mocking, beating, whipping and abuse of the Jewish leaders and the Romans. He has already been nailed to His cross, and lifted up into the air. And here, He faces the most dreadful, terrifying and painful experience of the cross; when His God and Father had

turned His own righteous and hellish wrath upon Him, leaving Him without an iota of the comfort that He had always enjoyed in fellowship with the Father. In one sense, He is here abandoned by God, left to Himself, to endure the most agonizing hours of His suffering. And in another sense, God was right there, but not in any comforting sense, whatsoever. Every drop of God's kindness, comfort and goodwill was turned away from the Christ, and it was replaced with nothing but the undiluted, pure and fierce expression of God's holy and righteous wrath, toward the sin which His Son was now bearing. It is summed up in the Apostle Paul's statement to the Corinthians, when he declared, "God made Him (the Christ) who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (the Christ)." It was the fiercest moments of the great exchange, where the Christ stood in the place of sinners, offering Himself as the only worthy sacrifice on their behalf. [Read verses 45-46 again]

Once the Lord had accomplished the fullness of all that was necessary to redeem His people; once He had finished drinking the full cup of God's wrath on behalf of unworthy sinners, we are told that He yielded up His spirit. The wrath of God was propitiated, the sin of man was expiated, and now He could die; His spirit could leave His body and be joined to the Father. [Read verse 50].

Now, before we turn to consider the resurrection of the Christ, I want to look at what had happened the moment He had died; something Matthew alone provides a little information about, and which also leaves us with a profound and glorious sense of the powerful accomplishment of His vicarious (His substitutionary) atonement. [Read verses 51-54]

Here, we find a series of events that take place, following our Lord's death, when He had yielded up His spirit to the Father. And this is significant because it testifies to the profound nature of what exactly took place, when our Lord had completed His suffering under the wrath of God.

1) The veil in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Consider this for a moment. That veil, which was the great veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place of the temple, meant to keep those in the Holy Place from seeing into the Most Holy Place, was over 40 feet tall and four inches thick. Try tearing a 7-8 foot blanket, less than an inch thick, in half. Not a very easy task.

Now, what makes this event particularly profound, is that this thick veil was hanging from over 40 feet high, and it was torn from top to bottom, in one instant motion, the moment that Jesus had died. Now, what does that tell us? Well, very clearly, first, that God was the One who tore the veil in two. But why? What is the significance of this. Well, simply put, God was telling mankind something. God was telling us that a great change had just taken place. Something that was absolutely impossible since the time that our first parents had fallen into sin (and were kicked out of the Garden of Eden), was now made possible. Man could have direct access to, and fellowship with God!

Remember, the Most Holy Place of the temple, which was where God's glory was stationed, was only accessible once a year, and that, by the high priest alone, and he, carrying the blood of the atonement with him. This separation between God and man, who once walked together in perfect fellowship in the Garden of Eden, was profoundly emphasized by the large veil that blocked the entrance way into the Most Holy Place.

But, what happened here, when our Lord had died? Access to God; direct access to God, not in a mere earthly tabernacle, but further, in His heavenly tabernacle, was now granted to all, who would come under the atonement that the Lord Jesus Christ had just successfully provided in His own offering on the cross. He finished the work of reconciliation, providing a means of access to God (permanent access to God), which no amount of animal blood could ever do. And so, in essence, when God tore that long, thick veil in half, He was saying, not only to Jews, but to the whole entire world, "Welcome! Come, come through My Son, and have unfettered access to Me. My holiness will not be compromised, because my wrath has been righteously propitiated (expended) in My Son. Welcome! Come! Come!"

But, something else happened as well, following the Lord's death.

2) We are told that the earth quaked, the rocks were split, the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And interestingly enough, they came out of the graves *after* Christ Himself had been resurrected from the dead. And they appeared to many in Jerusalem.

Now, we are not given anymore information about this unusual event (we don't know how many were raised, how long they remained alive after this... etc), but clearly, we are told this much for a reason.

And I believe that the reason for this event, and the reason for why we are told the little that we are told, is that it is a very loud proclamation, which affirms the union which all who die with Christ, will have with His resurrection. Here, we see in a very literal sense, that Christ is the first-fruits of a harvest of souls, who will be redeemed unto God through Him. In other words, it is a clear affirmation of both, God's justification and approval of all who are in union with Christ, and the fact, that all who are in Christ, will experience the resurrection of the body unto eternal life. Notice, one thing we are told very clearly, is that, those who were raised were "saints." They were believers alone, who had experienced this resurrection. Now, this does not negate the fact that everyone (believers and unbelievers) will ultimately be raised up unto their eternal destination, but, only the saints (only those who are truly in union with Christ by faith) will experience the resurrection unto eternal life, in fellowship with God and Christ. Clearly, this coordinates well with what had happened when the veil was torn, bringing about full access to God. The author of Hebrews states it this way:

"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19-22).

3) Finally, there is the testimony of the Centurion and the Roman soldiers, who were guarding Jesus, stating that when they had witnessed these events, they "feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God.'"

We don't know what happened in the lives of these soldiers afterwards, but we do know that this particular crucifixion had brought about events that had never transpired before. They witnessed the power of God, which had accompanied the death and resurrection of the Christ, and they were overcome with great fear, and they knew that this was no ordinary man. This was certainly the Son of God!

And so, in this single event surrounding the Lord's death, Matthew reveals to us an immediate, three-fold testimony. The testimony of God's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice on behalf of sinners, welcoming all into His holy presence, through Christ. The testimony of a guaranteed resurrection unto eternal life, for all who are in union with Christ. And the testimony of the Christ's divine Sonship, out of the mouths of Roman soldiers.

II. The Sobering Glory of the Resurrection of the Christ

While the events already mentioned had greatly testified to the success of the Christ's offering and the glory of His Person, it wasn't until three days later, that the fullness of His victory and triumph had been realized. The One who had declared and prophesied many things concerning the Kingdom of God; the One who had claimed to be the Son of God, one with the Father and in the bosom of the Father; the One who had claimed to be the long awaited Messiah and the only means of reconciliation with God, for sinners, had been raised from the dead!

[Read verses 57-66]

His death was undeniable. The Roman Centurion had pierced His side with a spear, bringing out a mixture of water and blood, indicating the rupture of His heart. His limp body was taken down from the cross by the Romans and moved into the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, which was sealed with a large bolder. And the tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers, lest His disciples should come and attempt to take the body out, claiming He had been raised. And so, His death was undeniable. And His tomb lay silent, sealed and guarded for three days.

But then, we are told this [Read 28:1-8]. As the Lord Jesus Christ had reiterated to His disciples over and over again, "The Son of Man must be delivered over to the Romans. He must be killed. And He must be raised up on the third day." And that is exactly what happened. The Christ was raised from the dead!

Now, what does all of this mean? We go back to where it all began, in Genesis three. There, our first parents, upon disobeying God, had introduced the wicked corruption of sin into the world, and all of mankind, from that day forward, would be naturally at enmity with God. But, God had a plan. God had decreed a means of redeeming man from His sin; satisfying His righteous justice, and removing the indelible wedge that had been fixed between God and man.

He had set up a sacrificial system, where the blood of bulls and goats would temporarily cover the sins of man, allowing some reduced level of fellowship to exist between Him and His people; those who were set apart by God to declare His glory until the Christ should come. And blood was shed, day in and day out, by an imperfect priesthood (later to be grossly defiled, as well), holding some frail connection to the Most High, until mankind's sins were truly dealt with.

And in the fullness of the time, God sent His Son, born of a virgin (without any sin of His own); one who would finally strip the devil of his power, trampling upon the devil and the power of sin, by His own righteous life, death and resurrection. And that is exactly what we have witnessed here, in the testimony of Matthew, who was there to witness these events, along with literally thousands of others. The Christ stood as the High Priest of His people, offering Himself as the only true, worthy and pure sacrifice, on behalf of sinners, and He succeeded! He bore the wrath of God, on behalf of sinners, yielded up His Spirit, was raised from the dead three days later, and has ascended to the right hand of the Father.

III. What Now?

Where then does that leave us, some two thousand years after these events had transpired? We are continuing to build on the foundation that was laid by Christ (as the Cornerstone) and His Apostles. Two thousand years later, and we are continuing the great and glorious work of leading people into the Kingdom of God, through the same Gospel of the good news of what Jesus Christ has done on behalf of sinners. We proclaim His death as that sole means of finding complete forgiveness for all of our sins, and reconciliation with our God, whom we have all greatly offended. And we proclaim His resurrection, affirming the justification of all who come to this Christ by faith. And as we will see next time, Lord willing, in the conclusion of this short series, we look forward to the Second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will return to gather His people into His Kingdom, to bring judgment upon the world, and to bring about a resurrection of all people, unto eternal life or eternal damnation.

Now, consider this. Everything that exists in this creation; the whole reason that this all exists, is to serve God's redemptive purposes in Christ. And what a sad, sad, state it would be, to find yourself arriving at the end of this short life, walking through the corridor of death, only to

be found outside of Jesus Christ. Let me state it another way: To live this short, momentary life, remaining under Adam's curse, having heard the Gospel of what God has done for sinners in Christ; and to die in that state... it would have been better if you had never existed. It would have been better if you had never been born. You see, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is "good news," but it is only good news for those who actually partake of it. The death and resurrection of the Christ will provide you with absolutely no benefit, whatsoever; indeed, it will add to your judgment, unless you yourself come to this Christ by faith. You must repent of your sins and believe into the Lord Jesus Christ, to be saved from your sins.

It doesn't matter how religious you might be. It doesn't matter if you believe that there is a God and you celebrate Christmas and Easter...etc. It doesn't matter if you do good deeds, give all of your money to the poor or exhibit any kind of good moral behaviors. You must be united to Christ by faith. He must be the entire object of your faith, trusting in nothing and no one else but Him (least of all, yourself). Unless your sins were paid for by Him on the cross; unless you truly receive Him as your Lord and Savior, you will not be saved. But, the good news is that He will willingly and freely receive you, if you call upon Him in truth. If you repent of your and call upon Him, receiving Him as your Lord and Savior, you will be saved! And all of your sins; no matter what you have done; no matter how evil you have been... He can wash you and make you as white as snow. He can remove every skeleton from your closet, and He can give you a new heart that will learn to love, obey and enjoy your God! Will you not come to Him, right now, this day, and be saved? Will you not forsake the lusts and idols of this temporal world, and invest in an eternal kingdom?

And brethren; those of you who are in Christ; rejoice! For, yes, another year has swept right by us, but our salvation draws near. We are almost home! And although we have not seen our Savior; we have walked with Him, haven't we? And we have known His presence, His joy, His faithfulness, His patience and His love. And soon; very soon, we will see Him face to face, and we will be like Him! And we will marvel forever over the fact that this Blessed Christ has chosen us to be His very own, and He has loved us to the end!

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25