

The Advents of Christ

Christ's Purpose

Selected Texts

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Christ's Purpose

Scripture

Today is the First Sunday after Christmas in 2020.

For the past month, we have been exploring the advents of Christ in a sermon series I am calling, "The Advents of Christ."

So far, we have examined "Christ's Entrance," "Christ's Timing," "Christ's Appearance," and "Christ's Arrival."

Today, I would like to examine "Christ's Purpose." Christ's first advent was to save the lost (Luke 19:10). His second advent, however, will be to judge the lost (Matthew 25:31-33, 41-46).

For background to our study today, let us read Isaiah 64:1-4:

**¹ Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake**

at your presence—

**² as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—**

**to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble**

at your presence!

**³ When you did awesome things that
we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked
at your presence.**

**⁴ From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.**

(Isaiah 64:1-4)

Introduction

Some people had a very stressful load this Christmas season.

Take Santa, for instance. Phillip Bump, a technology writer for *The Atlantic*, has attempted to provide a *tongue-in-cheek* answer to an important question: *What exactly is Santa's yearly workload?*

Bump calculated the number of Christian children in the world and the geographic distribution of those children around the globe. After factoring in all the nuances of time zones, distance between houses, and how many children live in each house, Bump shared his conclusions about Santa's yearly task:

[Based on CIA estimates] there are just over 526,000,000 Christian kids under the age of 14 in the world who celebrate Christmas on December 25. In other words, Santa has to deliver presents to almost 22 million kids an hour, every hour, on the night before Christmas. That's about 365,000 kids a minute; about 6,100 a second.

Bump mentions a few caveats: not all Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25, the CIA's data isn't always up-to-date, and some non-Christians celebrate Christmas too. But all in all, Santa has an enormous job to do! He has to serve over a half billion kids in one night as he pulls a huge sleigh with nine reindeer, while he tries to avoid being detected and shot down by the North America Aerospace Defense Command—and don't forget that one of his reindeer has a *very* shiny nose.¹

Santa Claus would have to possess superhuman qualities to be able to deliver so many gifts and so much love. And while some may be skeptical of Santa's ability, we should recognize that Jesus is the only one who is truly able to deliver gifts of grace and love to people all over the world.

Lesson

In today's lesson, we learn about Christ's purpose for his first

¹ Phillip Bump, "Santa's Christmas Eve Workload, Calculated," *The Atlantic* (12-14-11).

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and second advents.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Christ's Purpose for His First Advent
2. Christ's Purpose for His Second Advent

I. Christ's Purpose for His First Advent

First, let's look at Christ's purpose for his first advent.

"The Hound of Heaven" is a 182-line poem written by 19th century English poet Francis Thompson (1859–1907). Although Thompson was a follower of Christ, he struggled with poverty, poor health, and an addiction to opium (which in those days was sold as an "over-the-counter" medication).

In the depths of his despair, Thompson described his flight from God:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways,
of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped...
from those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

But Thompson also knew the unrelenting love of Jesus, "the hound of heaven." In the poem Jesus pursues Thompson, as he writes:

But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

In a recent biography of John Stott, Stott refers to Thompson's poem. According to Stott, he [Stott] owes his faith in Christ not to his parents or teachers or even his own decision, but to Jesus, "the hound of heaven." Stott writes:

[My faith is] due to Jesus Christ himself, who pursued me relentlessly even when I was running away from him in order to go my own way. And if it were not for the gracious pursuit of the hound of heaven I would today be on the scrap-heap of wasted and discarded lives.²

A story in the Bible that illustrates Jesus' relentless love for sinners is the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus, found in Luke 19:1-10.

About a week before his crucifixion, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He entered Jericho, which was about 10 miles from Jerusalem, and was passing through. And in Jericho was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.

Zacchaeus was curious about the national buzz concerning Jesus and wanted to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. But Zacchaeus was determined to get a glimpse of Jesus, so he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for Jesus was about to pass that way.

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." That is astonishing. Of all the people in the crowd, Jesus singled out Zacchaeus and called him by name. Moreover, Jesus said that he *must* stay at Zacchaeus' house and the Greek word that Jesus used for *must* (*dei*) indicates divine necessity. Jesus *had* to stay at Zacchaeus' house to underscore his divine mission, which was "to seek and to save the lost," as he says in verse 10.

² Roger Steer, *Basic Christian: The Inside Story of John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 262-263.

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So Zacchaeus hurried and came down and received Jesus joyfully. But when the crowd saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” The crowds loved to hear Jesus preach. They loved to see the miracles that Jesus performed. But they did not love the company that Jesus kept.

I wonder what Jesus said to Zacchaeus in his home. However, it is not hard to speculate that Jesus told Zacchaeus about God’s love, grace, and mercy to sinners, the kingdom of God, and how to inherit eternal life. Clearly, Zacchaeus responded to Jesus’ message because he stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”

There is no question that at this point, Zacchaeus was converted. He immediately demonstrated his repentance by generosity and restitution, unlike the rich ruler (in Luke 18:18-30) who would not part with his finances as a demonstration of his repentance.

The reason we know that Zacchaeus was saved because Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.” Yes, Zacchaeus was a *physical* descendant of Abraham but, now, because of his repentance and faith, he had become a *spiritual* son of Abraham.

Then Jesus concluded his conversation with Zacchaeus by saying in verse 10, **“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”** Friends, here is the purpose of Jesus’ first advent: **to seek and to save the lost.** Jesus is unrelenting in fulfilling his purpose and he is always successful in accomplishing his purpose. He never loses a single soul that the Father intends for him to seek and to save.

Zacchaeus was sought and saved by Jesus.

Francis Thompson was sought and saved by Jesus.

John Stott was sought and saved by Jesus.

I was sought and saved by Jesus.

Have you been sought and saved by Jesus?

Gregory Boyle retells the story of a 15-year-old gang member named Rigo. Rigo was getting ready for a special worship service for incarcerated youth when Boyle casually asked if Rigo's father would be coming. The following is a summary of their conversation.

"No," he said, "He's a heroin addict and never been in my life. Used to always beat me."

Then something snapped inside Rigo as he recalled an image from his childhood.

"I think I was in fourth grade," he began, "I came home. Sent home in the middle of the day.... [When I got home] my dad says, 'Why did they send you home?' And cuz my dad always beat me, I said, 'If I tell you, promise you won't hit me?' He just said, 'I'm your father. Course I'm not gonna hit you.' So I told him."

Rigo began to cry, and in a moment he started wailing and rocking back and forth. Boyle put his arm around him until he slowly calmed down. When Rigo could finally speak again, he spoke quietly, still in a state of shock: "He beat me with a pipe...with...a pipe."

After Rigo composed himself, Boyle asked about his mom. Rigo pointed to a small woman and said, "That's her over there.... There's no one like her."

Then Rigo paused and said, "I've been locked up for a year and half. She comes to see me every Sunday. You know how many buses she takes every Sunday [to see me]?"

Rigo started sobbing with the same ferocity as before. After catching his breath, he gasped through the sobs, "Seven buses. She takes...seven...buses. Imagine."

Jesus loves his own like Rigo's mother loves her son—with commitment, steadfastness, relentlessness, and sacrifice. Jesus is a Savior who "takes seven buses, just to arrive at us." All throughout Jesus' ministry—his birth in Bethlehem, his life in Israel, his preaching the good news of the gospel, his healing of the sick, his

meals with sinners, his rejection by the crowd, his death on the cross for the elect—he has shown us his love and how much he has done to seek and to save the lost.³

Christ's purpose for his first advent was to save the lost.

II. Christ's Purpose for His Second Advent

Second, let's look at Christ's purpose for his second advent.

On the Tuesday of his final week on earth, Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

Then Jesus and his disciples walked down the little valley outside the temple and up the Mount of Olives. As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:1-3).

Jesus then gave an explanation called the Olivet Discourse in which he gave his disciples a prophetic overview of events that were to transpire in the near and distant future. Regarding the purpose of his second advent, Jesus said in Matthew 25:31-33:

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left."

Then Jesus said that the blessing to the **"sheep,"** the believers, consists of their inheritance in his Father's kingdom, which is given not as a reward for good works but because of their saving

³ Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2010), 26-27.

relationship with the Father and the Son.

Regarding the **“goats,”** the unbelievers, Jesus had this to say in Matthew 25:41-46:

⁴¹“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Whereas Christ’s purpose for his first advent was to save the lost, the purpose for his second advent will be to judge the lost.

Friends, when Jesus returns the second time, all history is over. There is no second chance to get right with God at that time. Multitudes of people are going to be shocked and surprised and stunned when Jesus returns for his second advent. They will cry and scream and curse at being judged for their sin against God. They will object to having to answer for rebelling against God.

I have previously shared the following illustration from Colin Smith who addresses people who object to God’s judgment on sin:

You may say, “Wait a minute. How can any sin deserve everlasting destruction? If God is just, how can he punish like this?”

The best answer I ever heard to that question was given by a friend of mine who is a middle school pastor. He outlined the stages of the following scenario:

- Suppose a middle school student punches another student in class. What happens? The student is given a detention.

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- Suppose during the detention, this boy punches the teacher. What happens? The student gets suspended from school.
- Suppose on the way home, the same boy punches a policeman on the nose. What happens? He finds himself in jail.
- Suppose some years later, the very same boy is in a crowd waiting to see the President of the United States. As the President passes by, the boy lunges forward to punch the President. What happens? He is shot dead by the secret service.

In every case the crime is precisely the same, but the severity of the crime is measured by the one against whom it is committed. What comes from sinning against God? Answer: Everlasting destruction.⁴

Friends, every person should carefully consider his or her eternal destiny. Every person has a body and a soul. The body will eventually die but the soul will never die. The soul will live throughout all eternity. Every person will spend eternity either in heaven or in hell. When Jesus comes for his second advent, he will come to judge the lost.

Conclusion

Therefore, having examined Christ's purpose for his first and second advents, let us be prepared for Christ's purpose at his second advent.

In an interview with *Relevant Magazine*, Tim Keller addressed the question about why Christmas matters. He says:

If Jesus didn't come, the story of Christmas is one more moral paradigm to crush you. If Jesus didn't come, I wouldn't want to be anywhere around these Christmas stories that say we need to be sacrificing, we need to be humble, we need to be loving. All that will do is crush you into the ground....

⁴ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/august/5081511.html>.

[But] if Jesus Christ is actually God come in the flesh, you're going to know much more about God.... If Jesus is who he says he is, we have a 500-page autobiography from God, in a sense. And our understanding will be vastly more personal and specific than any philosophy or religion could give us. [Because of Christmas] look at what God has done to get you to know him personally. If the Son would come all this way to become a real person to you, don't you think the Holy Spirit will do anything in his power to make Jesus a real person to you in your heart? Christmas is an invitation by God: *Look what I've done to come near to you. Now draw near to Me. I don't want to be a concept; I want to be a friend.*⁵

When Jesus came that first Christmas, he did not come as a concept. He came as a friend to save the lost. But when he comes the next time, he will come to judge the lost.

Turn to Jesus today in repentance and faith so that he will be your Friend and not your Judge when he comes again. Amen.

⁵ Tim Keller, "Why Christmas Matters," *Relevant Magazine* (12-10-2011), n. p.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
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