

Sermon: Waiting for Salvation

Gen 49:10; Ps 119:166; Isa 25:9; 40:1f.; 66:13.

Scripture: Isa 25:6-9

Sunday, December 13, 2015

As we approach Christmas I have been wondering what I should do with my journey through the Gospel of John that does not have any details of Jesus' infancy. I finally decided that I would pause the John series for a couple weeks and pick up the Sunday after Christmas. So today we are going to talk about the meaning and significance of the season of Advent, which is what the church calls the month before Christmas. Now from a commercial standpoint the way you prepare for Christmas is you go shopping. And all the stores you go to, are piping Christmas carols that research has shown makes people buy more. In fact it worked so when in the case of one lady in UK that she bought 300 gifts for her 3 children, to the point where you cannot see the Christmas tree, the pile was taller than the tree itself. Now here is the deal, if Christians want to reclaim Christmas by putting Christ back into Christmas, to truly be successful we have to start way before Christmas, to this period the Church calls Advent and put the waiting back into Advent.

To understand the importance of Advent we have to travel in time to the period before the first Christmas to the period of the first Advent. And that is exactly what our scripture portion for the day takes us so let us stand up and read together. Isa 25:6-9 NLT

In Jerusalem,^[a] the LORD of Heaven's Armies
will spread a wonderful feast
for all the people of the world.

It will be a delicious banquet
with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat.

⁷ There he will remove the cloud of gloom,
the shadow of death that hangs over the earth.

⁸ He will swallow up death forever!
The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all tears.
He will remove forever all insults and mockery
against his land and people.
The LORD has spoken!

⁹ In that day the people will proclaim,
"This is our God!
We trusted in him, and he saved us!
This is the LORD, in whom we trusted.
Let us rejoice in the salvation he brings!"

This portion of Isa and many scriptures like it in the Old Testament painted a picture of a coming salvation where there would be an incredible liberation waiting not just for Israel but for the whole world. It would be a liberation from sin. This liberation would happen because a savior would come. When the people of Israel heard this message there were two kinds of responses to this message. One group of people ignored it and went on with their own daily existence of buying and selling. You see their daily existence consumed them and they had all the satisfaction they needed in their worldly pursuits. In fact if there was going to be any change in the way the world functioned it would change their life to and they were too happy with their life to want to change anything. On the other hand there was another kind of person, actually a very small group who looked at the promise in Isaiah 25:9 and absolutely cannot wait for that time to come true. Take for example two people described in Luke chap 2 Simeon and Anna.---- Now to me people like Simeon and Anna are really fascinating because they were so guided by the Holy Spirit that when they read Isa 25 and other passages that pointed to the Messiah they were able to understand the significance of what God was promising here and they devote their whole life to waiting for this promise to be fulfilled. And then God recognized the longing of their heart and rewards their genuine longing by bring Christ to them, even as a baby. And not just that but even giving them the capacity to recognize this baby as the savior without any special signs that we know off. This is really amazing because so many people saw Jesus when he was in his ministry doing so many miracles and speaking with the power of God and still rejected him.

So the question is what made this one small group of people in the first Advent recognize Jesus and others not recognize him. This is really important because if we do not understand this we too could miss our Savior when he comes knocking on our door.

To help us solve this problem we have to go to a portion of Isaiah 9, Isa 9:2 that Jesus himself quotes in Mathew early in his ministry, it goes like this THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES-- [16](#)"THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.

When you look at this passage you realize that Jesus is saying, yes a great light is coming but the only people who saw this great light were people who were sitting either in darkness or in the land of the shadow of death. What does it mean to be sitting in darkness or the shadow of death? Well, to be sitting in darkness, means to be aware that the world they are living in is desperately evil and wicked and it hurts them to the point of realizing that that evil can even claim their life. Now here is the issue. If Satan wants to prevent people from recognizing the light of Christ all he has to do is blind

people to the darkness of their lives by surrounding them with all kinds of alternative lights. This is exactly what he has done.

St Augustine in his famous work written in the 5th century titled City of God describes two cities. One is the Earthly City or the City of Man and the other is the City of God. Now the city of Man is a city that is filled with earthly pleasures, earthly troubles and earthly substitutes for God without attributing it to God. If you go back to Genesis 4 you will find that when Cain is driven away from God he is the one that founds the first city in the world and he names it after his son Enoch. This city is completely godless and the god substitutes where actually 4 human inventions. The first was the raising of livestock, the second was living in tents, the third was the invention of musical instruments like the harp and flute and the fourth is the invention of bronze and iron tools. So the city of Enoch for the first time had a food industry, housing, entertainment and machines. The only problem with all these inventions were that they were used as substitutes for God and not used to glorify God in any way. In other words all these inventions were used to make a statement that we don't need god and can have everything we need apart from God. In other words, the city of Enoch was the first City of Man. The first human institution designed to function independent of God. Before I go let me clarify. I am not saying that all human cities are Cities of Man in the St Augustine sense where people are all living apart from God. Most present day cities have both kinds of people in it. But the Bible also talks about cities like Enoch and Sodom and Gomorrah, even cities like Admah and Zeboimm which were so devoid of God that they had to be completely destroyed. But the Bible also talks about a different kind of city, the City of God kind of city called the New Jerusalem which will be completely filled with the presence and worship of God. The rest of the world's cities, including Kansas City would be somewhere in between the city of Enoch and the city of the New Jerusalem. This is where all of us live. And our lives are filled with work and pleasure and earthly troubles. And in the cities that we live we get two messages, one is the message from God to not despair of the darkness because your salvation is coming. And the second message is from the evil one who is saying, you have all you need, the tools to get your work done, the pleasure and even sustenance and all kind of things to keep you occupied like a hamster on a wheel. So why do you need God? Why do you need the promise of Is 25:9? There is nothing you need saved from.

So when Christ came into the world most people could not recognize the presence of God because those who had the means had surrounded themselves with everything they needed and the presence of the God of the universe was as much a non-factor in their world as it was in the city of Enoch. These were people who thought that the

cities they created were their salvation. On the other hand there were people in Jesus' day living with broken spirits. People like Simeon and Anna and Mary and Joseph and some shepherds and even a few wise men from the East. For them the salvation that Jesus offered meant everything. And this small group of people were empowered by the Holy Spirit to recognize Jesus.

When you bring this to our own world, we still have the same two basic kinds of people. Those who say myself or the world I have surrounded myself with is my salvation. And the second kind of people who have a true broken spirit and look to Jesus as their only hope or would look to Jesus if they only heard the Good News.

So the Advent question for us is this. Where do we find ourselves? Hear the words of Isaiah 25:9 once again.

⁹In that day the people will proclaim,
“This is our God!

We trusted in him, and he saved us!
This is the LORD, in whom we trusted.

Let us rejoice in the salvation he brings!”

Now honestly ask yourselves, how do these words sound to you? When you hear about God bringing salvation, what do you feel? Do you feel a yearning in your heart for this salvation? Do you feel an intense hope that enables you to hover over all your circumstances? Do you feel a joy at the thought of Christ coming again as a glow that can light a 1000 Christmas trees.

If you are honest you will say, you are not where Simeon and Anna are. And if you are not there then the Advent season of waiting is the perfect season to focus on preparing yourself for Christ's Second coming. So how would you prepare. Three things. 1. Clean up. 2. Anticipate. 3. Get others ready.

1. Clean up. The way to clean up your life is to de-clutter your life of all non-Jesus things. The fact is all of us pick up God substitutes from the cities we live in. Even the food, entertainment and work that we do can all become elements that take the place of God in our life. And if it takes God's place it is an idol. So how do we de-clutter all the idols in our life? The best way to do this is to fast. In fact for most of history, the period of Advent was as much a time of fasting as the period of Lent. Till today the Eastern churches still observe Advent fasts although the period has been reduced. The way fasting works is that it exposes the things that you crave for or are dependent on. You then tell yourself I need God more than whatever you are craving. As you do this more and more the things of this world will grow dim and

God will truly take first priority in your life. So when God actually comes you will have no difficulty in recognizing him because you were not distracted by the false lights of God alternatives.

2. The second aspect is the anticipation of Christ's coming in all your celebrations. So when you actually celebrate at a Christmas party make sure that your celebration looks forward to Christ. Sometimes you are forced to attend a holiday party which is a Christmas party where no mention is made of Christ. This is a completely meaningless celebration especially because it is held at Christmas time. You see secular people have always been all about grabbing the benefits of Christ and discarding Christ from whom the benefits come. But when you have your own Christmas celebrations imagine your decorated home as a place that is prepared to receive Christ at his Second coming. When you eat holiday food, imagine the food you are eating as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet that you will be invited for when Christ returns. This way your Advent celebrations will also reflect your waiting and preparation for Christ's return.
3. The third and most important aspect of the waiting is to tell others who do not know or care about Christ's return. Because people only have second chances till his return. After that the door is shut and the feast will begin and all those who were not prepared for the bridegroom will be lost. These people would be friends and family. They would be strangers even. It does not matter. If you care about the things God cares about then you would care about the fact that God does not desire that even one person be lost.

Advent is a season of preparing for Christ's return. May your Advent be different from the way the world celebrates the holiday season. As you clean your house don't forget to fast from the things that are important to you so that you can identify the idols in your life. As you celebrate don't forget to think of the celebration as a foretaste of the great celebration to come. And don't forget to tell others also to get ready for Christ's return. Let us pray.