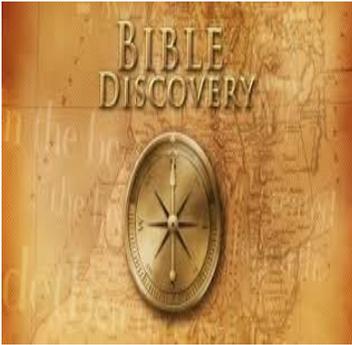


Our Wonder: Called as Heirs with Jesus

(Musical prelude)

***“So this is Christmas, and what have you done?
Another year over and a new one just begun.
So this is Christmas, I hope you have fun;
The near and the dear ones;
The old and the young.”***



These John Lennon lyrics remind us even the world questions where we're headed – with longing and hope for those we care about. Catching the nightly news, watching the news channel, even listening to friends with their worries and woes can lead us to wonder what the future holds for us. How long will the Lord tarry? We know the Lord is a patient God not wishing that any should perish, but given the state of a world that's turned its back on God, can it be long until He tells his Son, Jesus to come and bring his children home?

But then as we celebrate the baby born in a manger, as we tell of the shepherds and the wise men who visited him following his birth, as we consider the lessons learned from Mary and Joseph, even we sometimes fail to consider Christmas is about opening our hearts to the gift of salvation brought to us that first Christmas morning. Who's the one through whom this great salvation comes? The same Jesus born in a manger is the Jesus who spoke the Sermon on the Mount, cleared the temple, challenged the thinking of the day, was paraded through the charade of trials and sentenced to death. At Christmas we don't usually talk about the cross, the grave, the resurrection or the promise that Jesus is coming back – in glory, in triumph, in victory! But not only did He promise this, it's the reason we celebrate the season. Jesus came from heaven, separated from the trinity with the Father to be the sacrificial lamb as payment for your sins and mine – the only perfect and only acceptable sacrifice is none other than the Lord Messiah Jesus who alone has the power to take away the sins of the world. John introduced Jesus, not by telling of his birth in a manger but with these words: *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* [John 1:29] Jesus who alone was without sin; Jesus who alone was acceptable to meet the requirement of the law; brings us back to our heavenly Father.

There's something within the heart of each of us that naturally knows and understands we need to make a sacrifice – we each have a consciousness of sin whether we declare it or not. That fact leaves each of us with a choice. If we've not pushed our consciousness to the point that we're no longer listening at all then we can either jump on the politically correct bandwagon, broadcast peace and joy and love through every belief and mechanism and manmade strategy as equally effective, telling everyone that there's no sin, no shame, no cost to the way we choose to live – that all roads are equal or we can fall on our collective knees, confess we're sinners, unworthy of forgiveness, having been given mercy through God's grace – grace which came packaged as a baby in a manger. I think that's why Christian evangelist Joshua Feuerstein lambasted the red cups of Starbucks this year devoid of any "Christmas" inscription saying, *"I think in the age of political correctness we've become so open minded our brains have literally fallen out of our head"*. I've noticed Tim Horton's has a very generic "Christmas" pattern on their cups as well.



May I suggest we never lose sight that our sins have been nailed to the cross at Calvary; through that sacrificial act of love we've been welcomed into the family of God as His dearly loved children. Who's welcomed into the family of God? Author Frank Powell writes, "God is setting a new precedent with baby Jesus... salvation is for everyone. God's people are not marked by an ethnicity. They are marked by a cross." God sent his Son Jesus in the fullness of time – a

time when travel and commerce opened a way to carry the good news previously impossible. Add to this the world was sunk in a moral abyss so low even pagans cried out and spiritual hunger was everywhere.

Sounds a lot like today doesn't it?

Against this backdrop, when God's plan was in place, we've the perfect time for Jesus coming into the world to save sinners – to save you and me. In that way it became the fullness of time because God Himself filled it with meaning!

Yes, there are always choices! For King Ahaz, when an Israeli and Syrian alliance threatened Judah, Isaiah told him to trust in God, to stand firm in the assurance of God's presence, power and protection. God even invited Ahaz to ask for a sign to confirm his promise of deliverance. But Ahaz refused. He wasn't interested in trusting God but rather turned to Assyria for help. He placed his hope and the future of God's people for salvation in human power rather than in the never ending power of almighty God. Ahaz thought the cost was too great to depend on God rather than his own ingenuity. Though Ahaz chose not to receive a sign from God, God gave one anyway. At Christmas we often hear Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" without recognizing its root in the prophecy given at the time of Ahaz woeful choice to follow the world rather than God. The One who is truly God, for our sakes became man; and the One who was Lord of all agreed to come in subjection taking upon himself the form of a servant; and all this was for one end - all this was to redeem those burdened under the law — to save us from that intolerable yoke and to give a gospel rational and easy.

But God not only gave a promise— He kept it! So, what's our response? God's love can't make any difference in our hearts unless we open ourselves to Him and receive Him. If Christmas is anything it's we've heard the Good News: God is with us – Emmanuel – and respond by inviting Him into our hearts to stay! So it is fitting as we close out Christmas celebrations, as we close out another calendar, as we press forward to a New Year with new hopes and determination - How Will We Respond to the Birth of the Saviour, Jesus Christ?



Have we celebrated Christ's coming as the center of our Christmas? Do we comprehend the great gift given to us through God's amazing grace? When we look back to that first Christmas morning, we discover up until the time of Christ's birth, there'd been 400 years of silence from God. The book of Malachi records the last communication with God for the Jewish nation. However, the Lord hadn't abandoned His people – God had made a promise and He always keeps His promises! So we're told it was at just the right time – "when the time had fully come" God put His plan into place through a woman – a virgin just as He had promised. After 400 years of silence, God bursts on the scene of the human history with a glorious announcement – He's brought forth the much anticipated Saviour, His very own Son, Jesus the Christ. Paul's telling us salvation consists in its fullness by God the Father sending both God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. God sent His Son in order that believers might have their position as dearly loved children, and He sent His Spirit which connects us to God so we can experience God's power bringing us an understanding of that reality. If we've the Spirit of God, we're not strangers to God, we're not orphans; we're not forgotten - not left alone. Rather, we're adopted by God to be his children, to belong to his family. The Holy Spirit binds us, connects us to God's family, all in a spirit of bountiful grace. That leads us to pause and confirm in our hearts that the gift of God's Spirit is in fact a gift – not something for which the child of God can strive to achieve after having been given his salvation. Yes, the Spirit is the gift of God to every believer because he or she is God's child.

So it's because of the birth of Jesus Christ, that we're able to know God. Christmas is where it begins. The songs have been sung, the good news declared, the invitation extended. We don't have to sit through 400 years of silence from God. We have daily communion with our Creator - we can live in His presence - we can be assured of eternal life - all because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the gift which came wrapped as a baby in a manger. In a day and age that wants to remove Christ from Christmas, God brings the same message to you

today that He brought to the shepherds over 2,000 years ago. How will you respond to the birth of the Saviour? Will you also make haste and embrace the Gospel message, or will you ignore the joyous message of Christmas?

How will you respond to the birth of the Saviour?

Here at Paul's letter to the Galatians we see his argument against those who endeavour to place believers under the burden of living up to an arduous Law rather than receive the grace of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many aren't ready to abandon their bondage, they're tied to burdensome rituals they've been taught as a child and trusting in their works to save them. Thank God we've His wonderful grace calling us as His children – members of His family. Listen to Matthew Henry's insight on the gospel message found in Paul's words...

"From these verses see the wonders of Divine love and mercy; particularly of God the Father, in sending his Son into the world to redeem and save us; of the Son of God, in submitting so low, and suffering so much for us; and of the Holy Spirit, in condescending to dwell in the hearts of believers, for such gracious purposes." ~ Matthew Henry

Grace in a nutshell is presented by this Epistle so we might recognize we, though by nature children of wrath, disobedient and sinners one and all, have become by God's mercy children of love, participants in the nature of God as His own children. Yet He indeed provided a greater something in coming to the world, more than merely redeeming us from the bondage of ceremonial law; He came in our nature, consented to suffer and die for us, to redeem us from God's just wrath, from the curse of the moral law, which, as sinners, we all have failed to abide by. While we need redemption – and thank our God for His mercy - we're given yet even more – we're adopted by God! Not only are we moved from bondage to freedom but invited into the household of God – *"heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ"* [Romans 8:17] and it doesn't stop there. In human families in biblical times it was customary only the eldest son became the heir, but all God's children receive the inheritance of the Father.

How does the Christian live this life as a child of God? While primarily through the reality of God's presence made known to us through prayer, as members of God's family we're permitted to call to Him as Father, "Abba" – a Greek diminutive term for father similar to our use of the term "daddy". It denotes the intimacy and love associated in our relationship with our Heavenly Father. It was the word Jesus habitually used in his prayers to the Father and which he passed on to those who through Him became God's children.

If we're to communicate and learn from our Heavenly Father we must accept the Spirit not only draws us into adoption but calls us to prayer.

If we're to communicate and learn from our Heavenly Father we must accept the Spirit not only draws us into adoption but calls us to prayer. Formerly slaves to our sinful state, trapped by the enemy's ploys, set for damnation with no way out; we've been rescued and given an inheritance as God's children. Why wouldn't we want to communicate regularly with God? We've been given God's Spirit, sent forth into our hearts, which cries out Abba, Father. This relationship's a deposit on our heavenly inheritance; leads to connect with our Lord. I don't think it's insignificant Paul here changes from reflecting a plural "children" in verse 6 to a singular "child" in verse 7 bringing his argument home to each of us as individual believers of our relationship with God. Each of us must then ask ***"Do I know the reality of such an internal witness by God's Spirit?" "Am I assured of such things?"***

Take a deep breath my friends. Even this is not of our own doing. In the Greek the final words of this section are "through God". Confidence in all Paul has spoken of comes – not from looking to man, but solely from looking to God and from receiving through faith in what our Heavenly Father

has done in sending His Son, born of a woman, laid in a manger, grown to become the Saviour of every believer – and providing His Holy Spirit to live within and direct each of us in our daily lives as we are God's children. Is this your testimony today?

I hope that you will take time to give us a call or send an email our way and let us know that Jesus is the reality of your life. My prayer is that this Christmas you discovered the joy, the hope, the peace and the love of God because you have Jesus as your Saviour.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave