

Matt 1: 20-23 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

Some of you might think this is very **unusual** for our church- a Christmas sermon at Christmas. Well, the topic I originally scheduled for today was the **spiritual warfare** of the Christian. I thought, just in case we get any visitors, maybe a different topic would be more encouraging.

I will start with a disclaimer. We know that Christ was not actually born on December 25th. He was probably born in the spring some time. The Catholic church came up with a date for Christ's birth using less than reputable motives. But none the less, Christ **did** come and **most** of us celebrate his birth on this arbitrary date. His birth is certainly **worth celebrating**, even if one never assigns a date to it.

Now Christ came. Our text from Matthew says that this baby that is to be named Jesus will save his people from their sins. He will be "**God with us**".

So God came to us. And He will save his people from their sins.

That is what is emphasized in the text. Christ came for the salvation from sin.

And this is not the only place that is mentioned as His primary purpose.

Let's look at a few other scriptures. We will be looking, this morning, primarily at scriptures that use the words I came or I come, and primarily the words of Christ or the words about Christ.

[Luk 5:32 ESV] 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

[Luk 19:10 ESV] 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

[Gal 3:24 ESV] 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

[1Ti 1:15 ESV] 15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Why is this rescue from sin so core to Christ's mission? Calling sinners to repentance, saving the lost, justifying people who were not justified, to save sinners. This is all saying the same thing.

I think we can understand it like this. Suppose I had a very expensive and effective **cure for cancer**. And you were diagnosed with a lethal, fast acting **cancer**.

Now I am very rich, so I can give you world travel, or a new house, or an income stream for life, or a cure for cancer. If you can only pick one thing, what would you pick?

You would probably pick the cancer cure, because without it, nothing else will have any value to you. Your life needs saved before any of the other benefits will be useful.

That is just like us. For us, **sin** is the big enemy. Sin is the thing that will **doom us** eternally. Sin will **take our lives away**. Sin is the enemy **we cannot beat**. Sin is the thing that **robs us** from ever experiencing the rest of God's gifts. If God were to give us health, wealth and happiness **without** saving us from our sin problem, we would be left in a desperate spot. When we see our lives clearly, we would trade **every other benefit** so that we could finally have a relationship with God without guilt. We would long to be **clean of sin experientially**, and to be **free of it's guilt legally**, more than any other gift that God could give us.

Sin is the barrier that keeps us from that which we need most. But we could not appreciate the gift of having our sins forgiven until we realized the **enormity** of the problem. Just like the cancer patient who does not **know** he has cancer, he would have originally gladly chosen **any** of the **other** gifts. The cancer cure would have no importance to him until he understood that he **had cancer** and it was going to **kill him** without a cure.

If Christ left heaven and came to earth as a baby, to grow up, minister for 3 years, to die an agonizing death, to be buried and to raise on the third day, if Christ did all that **primarily** to meet the **sin need**, we have really got to conclude **that sin is our greatest need**, our most **primary** need, our most **desperate** need.

At some point every believer must come to grips with this truth. Maybe God does not begin His work of drawing us to Himself at that point, but He must **get us** to that point. And it is not so we can grovel in our sin. The point is really the huge **chasm** between **holiness of God** and the **sinfulness of sin**. The point is not that I am the **greatest** sinner and the most **awful** person. The point is really just that I **AM THE sinner**, like the tax collector prayed. The ground truly is level at the foot of the cross. When we grasp the goodness of God and the badness of sin, when

we grasp the absolute justice it would be to punish our sin forever, when that weight dawns on us and we begin to be desperate for the cure, then we are ready for Christmas.

The song writer captured it:

Years I spend in Vanity and pride,
Caring not my Lord was crucified,
Knowing not it was for me He died on Calvary.
By God's Word at last my sin I learned;
Then I trembled at the law I'd spurned,
Till my guilty soul imploring turned to Calvary.

Now I've given to Jesus everything;
Now I gladly own Him as my King;
Now my raptured soul can only sing of Calvary
Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span, at Calvary!

That is the Christmas gift held out to us when we understand what **we really need**. That is the cancer cure that sets us free to fully enjoy all of God's other benefits. Now, after our sin problem is taken care of, now we are free to fully appreciate all the other gifts God brings out of His rich storehouse.

It is interesting, though, what Christ says to the crowd when the crowd had it backwards. The Jewish crowd, for the most part, wanted Christ to bring out the gifts, but they were not all that interested in their sin problem. They wanted Christ to come in, kick the Romans out, make the Jews the top dogs again. They wanted Christ to endorse and support their rich family heritages.

Remember we are looking at quotes where Christ says I came for this and I came for that. He has a few interesting quotes for the crowd. I wanted to avoid these quotes but I couldn't. They are very important. But they are very different than the ones we just looked at.

He says this about why He came.

[Mat 10:34-35 ESV] 34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

We also see in Luke a similar quote. [Luk 12:49 ESV] 49 "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! 51 Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 52 For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.

You might be thinking by now, Jon doesn't even know how to preach a Christmas sermon right. I just read (reed) these quotes because they are what **Christ said** about **why He came**. And I think that we really need to understand the importance of a **person grasping the significance of their need for salvation**. What Christ said here was very harsh. It was spoken to those who had their understanding **backwards**. They wanted His gifts but not His salvation. And that kind of thing does not end well. Christ let these people know, in no uncertain terms, that He was **not** going to do what they expected. He did not come for what they thought He came for. By coming **to save some** from their sin, he will alienate those **he saves from their sins**, from those who just want Christ to just **give his temporal benefits** without His salvation. The second group is not yet ready for His Christmas gift. Nor do they want it. Because they don't think they need it.

Some of you were in the adult Sunday School when I asked the question about what is **good** and what is **bad** when people come to Christ for **the benefits** he offers? This was what I was trying to get at. If a person never gets to the place where **no gift** is greater than their **salvation**, than their **forgiveness of sin** so they can be brought into right relationship with God, if that never happens, Christ will eventually be a source of huge disappointment. They will eventually experience Christ as a **divisive factor** that gets in their way of enjoying life on planet earth. These people are **not ready yet** for a Savior who came primarily to seek and to save those who are lost. They are looking for a Santa Claus to give them presents, not a doctor to cure their terminal disease.

But to those who **are** ready, we see more of what happens. This gift of salvation is a very comprehensive gift.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Christ did not just come to keep His people from going to Hell. He came to prepare them to live in eternity. He came to give them the best kind of life, both now and forever.

Let me read a quote from John Piper-

None of us wants to be merely safe. We were not created merely to be safe. The human heart wants infinitely more than safety. Oh yes, safety is basic and necessary. We want to be protected from what can destroy us. We want life. Life. But we want more than mere life. We want abundant life. Overflowing life. Deep life. Weighty life. Joyful life. We don't just want to survive. We want to thrive at every level of our human being. We were made for this.

And so Jesus says more: "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved [yes, and more, so much more] and will go in and out and find pasture." The point of saying this is that the sheepfold itself represents safety and protection. But sheep don't want to stay there. In fact, they will die if they stay in the safety of the fold. They want green pastures and still waters.

And I think that when Jesus says in verse 10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly," he means, "I came that they might be saved and go out and come and find pasture" — protection and plenty, solid safety and deep soul satisfaction. Abundant life is not about having stuff. It's about having peace, having joy, having God.

You and I, as Christians, have the opportunity to live in a way that those around us who do not know Christ cannot live. We have safety and we have pasture. Our environment is often hostile, but in the midst of it we have the blessings of Christ. Even as we face lives in a hostile environment, we are in a process of experiencing that abundant life. We live in a state of blessing.

Our lives involve **putting on** character qualities that will fit into heaven, and **enjoying** the qualities of heavenly living among the body of Christ. We learn how to live a life that contains lots of things that enrich **this** life while we **prepare** for the next. Even trials bring about patient endurance and other qualities that are part of abundant living. Christ promises relationships with other believers that will enrich us. When those believers are also members of our own flesh and blood family, that is like hitting the jackpot.

Christ came to add tremendous benefits to the lives of all those who follow Him. Gal 5:22-24 says **The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

This is just one of many descriptions of the benefits of following Christ. These are an outflow of our lives that we would **not have** apart from a relationship with Christ and the infusion of His Holy Spirit. These are **a benefit** both to us and to all those around us. Those around us may not **experience** them as a benefit if they do not know Christ, but they are.

Christ came to bring us that rich life in Him. It is completely different than the life the thief had in mind for us.

Now we could still ask why? Why would Christ do this for us? What did He hope to gain by it? What is the underlying purpose for God reaching out to save us.

What is the underlying purpose for God doing those things necessary to save His people from their sins and offering them eternal life in Christ. What is His motivation.

Let's go to the book of Ephesians.

Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

OK, every believer was granted every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Remember that we are in Christ. It is like my name and your name are on the back of His name tag. He has granted us **His status** of rightness before God.

Now look at the initial plan of God. This was started before we existed or did anything. We were chosen before the beginning of time to receive this incredible blessing. He chooses us to be holy and blameless before we even existed.

Why? Scripture says **in love**. That means that it was simply **like God** to do such a thing. It was certainly not that we **deserved** love. It was driven by this quality of God, not the quality of us.

5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

Look at what was going on here. He chose us and determined that we would come to Christ and that He would adopt us. He chose this before we existed, before we did anything. Why. According to the purpose of his will. I like how the NKJ version translates it better. It says **“According to the good pleasure of His will.”** In other words you could say Christ determines to save us because it gives

Him pleasure. God certainly did not save us to **torture Himself**. When God regenerates us, when He brings us back to right relationship, there is an element of the relationship that pleases Him. He restores us to that state because it gives Him pleasure. That is why I say that there are elements of the way that God designed you that He enjoys. We **maximize His pleasure** by obedience and trust in Him. We **grieve His Spirit** when we disobey and rebel. But God is pleased by His design of you. You are created to please God in a way that no other human can, because you are fearfully and wonderfully created unique. God likes that. It was His idea.

Did he then save me because I am so naturally attractive to God, that He could not resist saving me? No. That is taking it too far. How attractive to you are people that hate you? Generally we try to avoid those people. We must remember, no matter what capacity to please God He created us with, we were at spiritual enmity with God when He saved us. There was no virtue in us that won God's heart toward us. God's pleasure with us would come **after** He saved us, not **before**.

Moving on.

I think verse 6 describes the motive behind the whole Christmas story. I think it gives us the WHY behind the whole story.

6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Do you want to know why Christ chose you from the beginning of time? Do you want to know why?

Maybe we think it is because He knew we would choose Him so it was safe for Him to choose us. That isn't what this implies.

Maybe we down deep think it is because we had some inherent virtue that those who are not chosen do not have. I know I want to think that. I want to think there is something about me that is simply **more desirable**, more **superior**, than a lost person. Maybe it is just that, when given the chance I would choose God.

Maybe that is the only thing. But at least it is **something** that makes me preferable to the person that God bypasses. But that isn't what this verse implies.

Why did God send Christ to this planet in poverty conditions knowing that His **own creation** and even His own **chosen people** would put Christ to death? Why did God determine from the beginning of time that there were people that He was going **to rescue from their sin by sending** Christ to this planet on whatever day Christmas really was? Why would he do all of this?

Verse 6 tells us.

to the praise of his glorious grace

If God chose you it was for one reason that we know of. He picked you because by picking you He will best show off His unmerited favor. By picking you His **unmerited favor of you will bring praise to Himself**. Wow. Not exactly a Christmas lift me up sermon. This is essentially saying, who did not deserve salvation? Well, Jon did not deserve salvation. So who will I save in order to have my grace praised. I will save Jon. I will say a little more about this in a little bit. That is all of us.

This is the Christmas present of all Christmas presents.

That really is what Ephesians is saying. Do you see yourself that way? Until you do, you don't really get what Christmas is all about. Christmas is God's effort to show off His grace to people who did not in any way deserve the gift that they had been given.

Vs 11 and 12 say

In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

We are the people who are used in the display floor as the show off examples of how gracious Christ is. When people who know us look at our salvation they can only conclude one thing. God is gracious. He isn't giving **righteousness** awards. He is not giving **popularity** awards. He is not giving **wisdom** awards. He is not giving **cleverness** awards. He is not giving **attractiveness** awards. He is showing grace, all grace. His gifts are intended to **benefit** us and display to all the world His wonderful features.

Ephesians 2:4-8

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

If you are anything like me, when you read the lists of the qualities of Christ you might blend them all together like a salad. You see them as the general goodness

of Christ. And that is so true. But it is good for us to also see those qualities individually.

There is a theme in the New Testament. The gift of Christ is consistently referred to as the ultimate display of at least two things. **Love and grace**, just like the passage I just read. **Because of the great love with which he loved us, ...by grace you have been saved.**

How do you show off extravagant love? Think about it. How would you show that off? Love is shown off by the extravagance of the gift. **For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.** We know how much God loves us by the size of the gift sent to meet our need.

But grace, how do you show off grace? Grace is best showed off by the unworthiness of the recipient of the gift.

Think about this. How much would it show off God's grace if he gave a great gift to the obedient angels? It would not show off His grace at all. We would look at it and say, look at those wonderful obedient angels. They have no sin. They deserve good treatment.

How about the fallen angels? They appear unreconcilable so if a gift were given to them, it would accomplish **nothing** and it would fail to be appreciated. They would not give glory to God's grace.

How about the animals? What if God gave them a great gift? Well the animals have done nothing wrong and the animals cannot appreciate grace.

But humans, that is something different. Humans are born in sin. But we are made in the image of God. We need rescued. We need a great gift. We have the **capacity** for appreciation. And all we have to offer God, in our lost state, is our need. **THAT** is how you show off grace. You send a Savior of **inestimable value** to save people who are, in their current state, **antagonistic** to their Savior. **THAT** is how you show off grace.

Now is God's grace displayed any greater when He saves a murderer than when He saves a great humanitarian. From our perspective it might. But from God's there isn't. We tend to think that degrees matter. We think notorious sins are more evil than cookie stealing sins. But from God's perspective they are both equally displays of our lostness. Every sin is the same by **kind**, even if it is different in **degree**. Every sin is damn worthy. Every single salvation is an equal display of grace.

Christ's coming is so wonderful because God sent the most extravagant gift for the most undeserving recipients. **Christ** is the greatest display of the **love** and **grace** of God.

When we allow this principle of, **God- being motivated to display His grace**, when we allow that idea to penetrate our thinking from the beginning to the end, we come to one conclusion. God is astoundingly and overwhelmingly **good**. He gives from a position of **His character**. He is not responding to His **stimulus** like we so often do. He does not respond to the attractiveness of his people. If he did there would be no one saved. We need never fear that He will reject us if we become unattractive. No. We are safe because our salvation rests on **His** attributes, not ours.

The focus on our salvation is always on Christ.

So up until now we have focused on why Christ said He came. It is such a wonderful truth that while Christ tells us why **He** came, now He calls on **us** to come.

He says this:

[Mat 11:28 ESV] 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

That is us He is calling to. We can try and try and try to meet the requirements of God. But we never can. We can labor and labor to no effect. But we can come to Christ and He will do all the heavy lifting in our salvation. What a wonderful Lord we have. That is what we got for Christmas.

[Mat 19:14 ESV] 14 but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

Isn't that wonderful. Our Lord is quick to take those who have the least status. His criteria is not ours. His selection choice is not ours. His love is great. His mercy and grace are great.

Let's reread our text in closing:

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us).