

John 3:16

Dear Friends in Christ,

I can't sufficiently express the horror that passes through my mind when I think of people (friend or foe) entering eternity without Jesus Christ. Specifically, I think of this description Jesus gives: "the outer darkness...(where) there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 22:13) And these words which will be spoken to the unbeliever on Judgement day: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 15:41) Our great systematic theologian, Dr. Francis Pieper wrote:

As a rule our old theologians conclude their presentation with the remark: 'It is wiser to be concerned about escaping this eternal fire by true repentance than to engage in an unprofitable argument as to the nature of this fire.'.... One thing is for sure, hell contains no atheists, because the damned actually experience God as the righteous Judge. There is no more room in hell for the lie that there is no God.

So, the world can throw the Advent/Christmas Season to the wind. We run to it with open arms. It's our eternal blessing - this preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth. And it's wrapped in that loving promise of Jesus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16) Our focus this last Sunday of Advent . . .

HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

I. It's What Was Lost.

I've always wondered what Adam and Eve thought after their fall into sin. You know, their remembrance of God's warning, "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:17) Die. What did they think? What went through their minds? "What's death going to be like?" "When am I going to die?" "How am I going to die?" "What am I going to have to go through before I die?" And did they ever ask each other, "Why did we do what we did?"

And, surely, in the back of their minds were those curses. God spelled it out: "To the woman...pain in child bearing...desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Gen. 3:16) "And to Adam...cursed is the ground...thorns and thistles it shall bring forth...By the sweat of your face you shall eat...". (Gen. 3:17-18) Pain and toil - dying and death.

And then those words, "Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died." (Gen.5:5) "That's a long time!" some would say. It doesn't even register when standing next to eternity. It's what has turned everything and everyone - including you and me - upside down! It's "the wages of sin is death..." (Rom. 6:23a) It's a world full of conflict, hatred, disgust and decay.

"You forgot the good times, Pastor; the high moments and the good things of life! You forgot about the beauty of the woods, the mountains, the lakes - the adventures of life!" So, tell me about them, since you know your time here will end. Tell me what really lies under the facades of architecture and fashion and make-up. Tell me about the greatness of man when you're part of the processional heading to the cemetery; when the siren screams as it races to the hospital - the crime - the fire - or warns against the impending wind funnel of destruction and potential death; when soldiers secure their uniforms and check their gear for the fight.

The realities behind the words had to confront our first parents day and night - for all the centuries they walked the ground. The same words that confront us: "(we) were by nature children of wrath....". (Eph. 2:3b)

II. It's What Christ Won Back.

The love of God for a violent and rejecting humanity defies all human wisdom. In fact, Paul writes:

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (2 Cor. 2:7-8)

I can only assume you carefully heard that; and most specifically the opening words: "...we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages...". **Before the ages.** "For God so loved the world..." was already in place before Adam Eve and Eve walked the earth. And "before the ages" was put into motion in these words of God to Satan: "he (Jesus) shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen 3:15b)

And then, traveling through the Scriptures to the New Testament, Once again, Paul places this commentary before us:

And the free gift (of eternal life through faith in Christ's payment for sin) is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass (Adam's sin) brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses (yours and mine and anyone else looking to Christ) brought justification (the verdict of not-guilty for our sin though we are still sinful!). (Romans 3:16)

And do you know where the justification leads us?

III. It's Our Goal!

To eternal life! Life. Unending. Real life. The life God intended for humans and not the one we know, which is filled with ***you have only so much time to do whatever it is you think you need to do before you die*** motivation.

A Lutheran Pastor by the name of Herbert E. Hoefler wrote:

"Often our sights are lowered during Christmas celebrations. We are urged to look at the good things of life: good cheer, good family times, good presents, goodwill among people. These things certainly are good, but they are not the point of Christmas."

He's right, you know. There are millions in the country who have little to none of "the good things of life." Many will greet Christmas Eve and Christmas morning knowing nothing more than strife, struggle and sadness. Many. Millions. If the thrust of our "Christmas Investment" is made on creating some little fantasy about the good life here - which is what this culture pursues; especially since it has booted Christ out of the picture - if that's it - **what a waste!**

To quote Pastor Hoefler again:

It is the goodness of God, not the goodness of life or of people or of family, that we celebrate. It is on His goodness that we build our lives. His goodness, brought to us in Christ, assures everlasting life to all who believe in Him.

So, you see, our focus of Advent is a focus that lifts our hearts and minds to eternal things - to the love of God in Christ. Well, I have to read this incident to you. It might sound a bit strange - at first, but please hear me out:

“...a large moose...wandered into a residential area in Calgary, Canada. The moose ended up on the lawn of a lady named Lorna Cade. A fish and Wildlife officer was dispatched to try to coax the magnificent animal back into the wild. After two hours of absolutely no progress, the officer finally shot the moose with a tranquilizer dart. The moose bolted down a lane and eventually collapsed on another nearby lawn.

“The reporters who had been following this event interviewed the lady at the house where the moose collapsed. They asked her what she thought about the moose which had passed out on her lawn. ‘I’m surprised,’ she answered, ‘but not as surprised as my husband will be. He’s out moose hunting.’

“Her husband had gone out looking for moose and a large moose had come to him.” (Calgary, MerryHearts@xc.org. Tue,26, May,1998)

So, Christ has been thrown out of Christmas. And people are always hunting and searching for some sort of heart warming fantasy. It’s rarely there. And if it is, it’s just for a moment. God has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Comes to love, forgive and point us to true joy and happiness. Not for a moment - but forever!

Eternal life. It’s ours. It’s ours to embrace. God lift us to the joy of eternal life. God give us strength to present that gift to the truly giftless.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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*John 3:16: “**Have Eternal Life**”*

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II. It's What Christ Won Back.

III. It's Our Goal.

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