

# GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY (LUKE 2.1-20)

## I. INTRODUCTION

- A. What do we do when reality does not match our expectations? This is a fundamental question that every person has to deal with at some point in their life. This fundamental question takes on much more significant meaning when related to the ways that God works in the world and how they rarely (if ever) align with our pre-formed expectations of how he should act.
- B. This morning I want us to look at the Christmas story — a story that has become so familiar to us — and use it as an example of what it means to have the “eyes of faith” required to see how God works, to receive his work as good news, and to choose joy (rejoice!) in the midst of our world.

## II. THE STORY

- A. God had created all things in accordance with his own purpose and so that he might display his glory (his character, his nature). The Triune God existed forever in absolute joy, contentment, delight, and a glorious fellowship of love and eternal satisfaction.
- B. He created the heavens and the earth as a grand theatre upon which he might demonstrate his character — and he created a being with the unique capacity to know him and delight in him.
- C. Mankind was placed in a Garden of delight that was created by God, in order to relate with him (intimacy) and from the place of living in communion with him, fill the earth and bring it under the righteous reign of God Most High.
- D. Almost as quickly as it began, the man and the woman rebelled against God in sin, listening to the voice of the serpent who declared that they could have everything they wanted, and that God was not in fact able to bring about his purposes — sending the world into a chaotic downward spiral that has been marked by sin, decay, destruction, and rebellion since that day.
- E. Yet, from the first moments after the fall of man and woman, God gave a promise to bring forth redemption from the seed of the woman — a child who would come and crush the head of the serpent, and bring an end to the destruction, the curse, the reality of sin, and even death itself.
- F. However, from the inception of that promise, the story was to unfold in ways that would not have been expected. The ways of the Lord are not our ways, and his purposes were to unfold over millennia — at times making large steps forward (Abraham; Exodus) or dispensing new promises (David, ‘new covenant’). But, yet, it didn’t happen the way anyone expected.
- G. This is where we find ourselves even in the story of Christmas itself. At the time of our story in Luke 2, the people of God had walked through over 400 years of silence. Much like the 400 years of slavery in Egypt, the people of God lived again under an oppressive rule, waiting for the day when God would bring salvation and deliverance as he had promised.
- H. Many were the days when the people of God would be tempted to grow bitter to the promises of God, to become offended, to despair and say “where is the promise of his coming”.
- I. It is into that silence that our story erupts — but, unlike how many of us would have written it, it is full of all of the poetic marks of God’s writing that you see throughout the Scripture.
  - 1. God comes to a young virgin girl of no reputation. She and the man she is betrothed to are poor and of little significance in the world (cf. Luke 2.24).

2. Notice the marks of God's sovereign leadership using Caesar Augustus as a 'pawn' in his hands. He moves the world around to get his Messiah born just where he said he would be (cf. Mic 5.2) — but in a way that is remarkable to our natural minds.
  3. Thirdly, the child who has been promised (called the Son of the Most High, promised to sit on David's throne) was born in absolute obscurity and laid in a manger because there was no room for the family. Imagine how Mary had to navigate the difference between her expectations and reality.
  4. Fourthly, the receiving party for the newborn King of Glory are shepherds — and they only believe because they are given specific instruction by an angel (and accompanied by a host of heavenly multitudes).
- J. The inbreaking of the Lord of glory at Christmas invites us to step back for a moment and understand the importance of seeing with eyes of faith — of experiencing the truth of hope in what God has promised — believing that he is who he says he is, and that he will do (is doing) exactly what he promised *even when it looks fundamentally different than what we think it should look like!*
  - K. The difference between expectation and reality did not stop with the incarnation. Examples: (1) the flight to Egypt; (2) years of obscurity; (3) the uneducated rabbi; (4) John the Baptist (Matt 11.1-6); and (5) the cross.
  - L. God continues to work this way even now. Many are in the middle of a place in your life where you are wondering how God can be at work in the midst of your circumstances. Some wonder how a good God could lead in the way he does. Some wonder why God didn't show up in the way you hoped/desired/ prayed for.

### III. HOW DO WE 'SEE' AT CHRISTMAS

- A. ***Meditate on the Incarnation:*** Come to the manger in thought/prayer and *behold* the God of creation laying in helpless obscurity — accomplishing his plan exactly how he intended (on time, perfectly accomplishing, etc.). Spend time this Christmas season meditating upon the reality of God coming to earth in this manner — come and behold Emmanuel!
- B. ***Ask the Lord for eyes of faith:*** in order to rightly assess and evaluate the ways that God is at work in the world, we have to believe that his ways are not our ways. Many of us wrongly assess the situations of our lives (difficulty, hardship, etc.) because we assess the world with our own presuppositions and our own beliefs. We must receive God's truth (his word, revelation of his Spirit, etc.) in order to *see rightly*.
- C. ***Pray for tenderness to replace offense:*** One of the most important places in our spiritual lives is the moments when what we expect (long for, desire) does not match God's reality. These places are essential to our spiritual health and growth, and how we walk through them will determine our maturity. When we face these realities we stand at a crossroad between bitterness/offense and greater dependence and maturity.
- D. ***Practice "acceptance":*** Practicing acceptance is to turn away from *despair* (the belief that nothing will ever be different) and *self-pity* (the belief that it is different for you).
- E. ***Choose joy:*** This is what it means to rejoice. Choosing joy is not sentimental, and it isn't pasting a smile over our hardships. However, it is *choosing* to delight in God's truth. Even looking back at these truths we see that God has given a message that is good news of great joy! You have something to rejoice about!
- F. ***Look to the Cross:*** The reason that the Son of God came into the world. Looking at the cross as the greatest place where God was accomplishing his purposes in a way that *no one* expected, desired, or could have imagined. The place where it looked like he was silent, losing, defeated, he was offering up himself for the sins of the world and opening the door to salvation for any who would look to him!