

**Advent of the Savior – Part #1**

The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word meaning “coming.” The four Sundays before Christmas, Advent is observed by remembering that the saints of the Old Testament anticipated the Messiah’s coming and we, as Christians, celebrate the birth of Christ, the Messiah that has come. For Christians Advent is the time of anticipating Christ’s coming for the second time. Advent began last Sunday and will end with our Christmas Eve Worship Service on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December.

This is the second Sunday of Advent. The candle is called the Bethlehem Candle or the Candle of Preparation. It symbolizes that God kept His promise of a Savior and His birth in Bethlehem. It reminds we are to be prepared, to get ready, so that we may gladly welcome Christ’s return. **At this time of year, as we celebrate Advent, our awareness of the world’s need for the hope of Christ and the anticipation of His return should be on our hearts.** I am ready and I am anxious for my Lord to return, how about you? If we knew when Christ was returning our natural tendency would be to live as we desire until just before His return. Not knowing His exact time of return is a positive thing for it gives us hope and a reason to live a holy life in anticipation of His glorious return.

There are two reasons why during Advent we should anticipate and remember our great need for a Savior.

**A Time to Anticipate**

The first reason we are to remember our need for a Savior is that the more acutely we feel our need for a Savior, the more we anticipate His return and the more precious will be the Advent or coming of the Savior. Every generation has

thought, to a certain extent, that they would see Christ return. Christ is coming, but in God's timing not man's. I would like to help us during Advent to anticipate Christ's return in hope that this will deepen our love for Him and quicken our hearts with delight. Our anticipation of His return will deepen our sense of our great need for a Savior. It will give us motivation to share Christ with those who do not yet know Him as their Savior.

### **A Time to Remember**

The second reason for remembering our great need for a Savior this Advent season is that the Word of God commands us to remember. As we heard when Tim's reading from Ephesians chapter 2, the first 10 verses contain the description of how God saved us by His grace. We were children of the world, children of wrath and God reached out to save sinners who deserved the wages of their sin, which is the eternal second death. Recognizing this Paul commands beginning in verse 11, "Therefore remember!" "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' ... <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated ... and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Ephesians 2:11–12) The crucial word here is "remember." Paul wants us to remember our lives before Christ saved us, in order to more appreciate what Christ has done in us. Who would we be if He had not saved us? I can tell you not only would I be lost without the salvation given to me by God, but also my life would be in shambles. At times in the morning when I am spending time with God and His Word, I remember who I was and whom He has made me. I was spiritually dead, cut off from Christ with no hope of salvation – I was damned. Then God out of His grace and mercy saved me and made me His child, a citizen of heaven and told me all the promises in the Bible belong to me for I belong to Him. All the promises of the Bible are yours if you are Christ's. These thoughts make it ease for me to relate to the former slave

trader John Newton's declaration of his salvation by Christ's grace, Newton wrote, "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see." Newton remembered who he was before God saved him. The Apostle Paul remembered who he was and who Christ had made him into and I remember. We, you and me, are called to recognize what wretches we were before Christ saved us. We were people without hope and were given the gift of eternal hope. If we do not feel a great need for a Savior, then we do not recognize He is a great Savior. Remembering who we were prior to receiving Christ should create a desire in us to see Christ's promise fulfilled at His return.

My goal during this Advent season is to help us see how great our need for a Savior is, to see what a great Savior Christ is, to see how He has blessed us with spiritual life and to be motivated to share the gospel of Christ with those who do not yet understand what an amazing Savior He is. This morning we will look at Ephesians chapter 2 with a focus on verse 1, that tells us we were dead in sin. Next Sunday we will examine Ephesians 2:2-3 that says as children of wrath and we were held captive by an alien prince. Then on the week prior to Christmas we will look at verse 4 that begins with "But God ..."

### **Death by Sin**

The first reason we need a Savior is that without a Savior we are all dead in our trespasses and sins. Paul says this twice in the first five verses. In verse 1 Paul writes, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins." Then in verse 5, "even when we were dead in our trespasses..." If you surveyed people and asked them why sin is a problem, assuming they believe there is such a thing as sin, many would respond something like this, "Sin makes us guilty and separates us from God, therefore, we need a Savior to forgive our sins and remove our punishment." This

is a true statement, but it is not the key idea found in Ephesians 2:1 and 5. This is not all we need a Savior to do - forgive our sins. Without faith in Christ, we are not just separated from God by sin and we have not just offended His glory, but we are spiritually dead. We cannot cry out for mercy when we are dead, the dead can do nothing. We need to understand what “dead in our trespasses” means. It means we do not need just any ordinary Savior but we needed a great Savior an amazing Savior. You and I were spiritually dead, cold and stiff lying in the spiritual morgue. **God the Father raised Christ from the tomb by a supernatural act. So, too, He supernaturally raises our dead souls to spiritual life.** No prophet can do this for millions of dead people. No, only a Savior who has power over the whole universe is capable of such an amazing grace – to bring millions upon millions over the millennia to spiritual life and make them children of the almighty God.

All people and that means, absolutely every person ever born are sinners by their fallen nature. Verse 3 clarifies that by our passion of the flesh we “carry out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Ephesians 2:3) This means what we have done to bring the wrath of God upon us, we have done by our natural nature. We need a Savior not just because we have sinned, but also because we have sinned by our nature. We are by nature sinners. At the end of verse 2 it says that we are “sons of disobedience.” Which is another way of saying that disobedience is in our spiritual genes inherited from Adam and Eve. Rebellion runs in the human family. It simply is part of our sinful nature; it is who we are by our fallen nature.

Paul writes in verse 1, “you were dead in the trespasses and sins.” How does rebellion and disobedience relate to being dead? Both rebellion and disobedience sound to me like one who is not only alive but also very active in their efforts to sin. Indeed this describes the former you and me, and it describes all of those who are unsaved. **In being alive to disobedience we were dead to**

obedience. In being alive to rebellion we were dead to submission. In being alive to unbelief we were dead to faith. We had no living spiritual nature to incline us to do anything for the glory of God and to live in reliance on His power. Lacking a spiritual nature, we were dead: dead to righteousness, dead to holiness, dead to obedience and dead to faith.

Spiritually speaking, I was dead. Without a Savior my soul was empty and dead. Before Christ there was no spiritual life in me at all, my soul lay in the morgue dead! Therefore, I needed a Savior not only to forgive me for my sins, but also to give me spiritual life so that my heart and soul would trust Him and obey Him. I needed a Savior who required me to become His slave and find joy in living as the slave of Christ. Our natural thoughts are that being a slave is oppressive and horrible. As John Newton could testify being a slave to other men is the most horrible and oppressive state, but being a slave to Christ is amazing grace.

This is what Paul was referring to in verse 10, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10) It says, “For we are ... created in Christ Jesus.” Do you understand what this implies? Think of the depth of verse 10, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ...” (Ephesians 2:10) Focus in on the word “created.” Do you see what that implies? The condition we were in before we had Christ, as our Savior, was so bad that we needed someone not only to forgive us but also to create us. Only God creates something alive and new from nothing, just as “the LORD God formed the man Adam of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Genesis 2:7) This is an even more radical image than the one we saw in verse 5. There we were only made alive out of our deadness, but in verse 10, we were created spiritually out of nothing. The point of both these images of conversion is that it took a miracle like resurrection or

creation to give us spiritual life. It was non-existent and had to be created. We were dead and had to be supernaturally raised to spiritual life.

Before Christ we lay spiritually dead in the morgue. **Before Christ created a living soul in us, whatever thoughts we thought or whatever feelings we felt or whatever deeds we did were not the thoughts or feelings or deeds of the Spirit but of the flesh.** Nothing that we thought or felt or did was spiritual, because our souls were empty of God's Spirit, we were dead spiritually. Everything we thought and felt and did was based on our fallen nature and by nature we were children of wrath.

### **Dead or Alive**

Are you beginning to see how utterly horrible our condition was without a Savior? Since we had no spiritual life within us, we possessed only death so then everything we did was sin. For what is sin but falling short of the glory of God and who does anything for the glory of God when he is spiritually dead? The Savior sought us out as verse 10 says, **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** (Ephesians 2:10) God choose each one of us before the creation of the universe. Before God quickened us and made us alive, all we did was sin. We would have stayed in the state of sin if God had not chosen us for salvation. Everything every person does without the Savior is sin!

But some may say, “This cannot be, this is not right, because I know many unbelievers who do good deeds.” But you see, when someone says this it is because they do not have the perspective of God. When you judge what is sin and what is righteousness do not just think as man but you need to think as God thinks. People can only think as God thinks if their soul has been brought to life and they spend time learning about God and understanding who God is and this is only found in the Bible. **God made us for His own good pleasure. His ownership of us**

is an expression of His deep sacrificial love. Therefore, He is worthy of all of our love, trust, honor, obedience and worship. We may build hospitals and feed the hungry and educate the ignorant, but if these works do not spring from trust in God, our love of God, our faith in Christ and if we do not do them to give Him glory, and if we do not have a view to the salvation of others, all we do is sin.

Paul stated it simply, “For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” (Romans 14:23) So, without faith in Christ “... there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.” (Romans 3:22–25) Therefore, presuming to or even doing good towards others without pointing people to God - is sin. All that any of us can do without a Savior - is sin! For by our nature we are spiritually dead and until our Savior makes us alive, nothing we do is spiritual, everything comes from the flesh. Therefore, without a Savior all our so-called good deeds are filthy rags and burnt ashes.

There is one more problem with being spiritually dead. Paul makes this clear in Romans chapter 8. “For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” The mind of flesh cannot comprehend God for it has no spiritual wisdom apart from God. Until God creates new life in our souls, we are of the flesh and know not God. Paul continues in verse 9, “You, (*speaking of believers*) however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” (Romans 8:6–9) The principal is simple – you are no longer in the flesh if God’s Spirit dwells in you, but if God’s Spirit is not in you, you are spiritually

dead and belong to the world and Satan. There is no gray, there is no in-between, there is only black and white. If you do not have the Spirit of God in you, then you are of the flesh and are among the sons of disobedience. Being devoid of God's Spirit means a person is unable to submit to God or please God. Therefore everything in a spiritually dead person's life is insubordinate to God and is sin. Sin separates a person from God. Paul wrote of those who are of the flesh and those of the Spirit, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14) Prior to redemption, a man is so perverted in his thinking that when he hears the truth of the gospel, he regards it as foolishness. So our perverse sense of values will make us unable to grasp the truth of God for ourselves and be saved.

Let us begin closing out our time this morning with Jesus' own words concerning the deadness of sin. The state of our dead souls before God saves us was not just Paul's idea, but it was founded in the teachings of Christ. For example, there was a disciple who had been following Jesus and listened to His teachings and said he would follow Jesus as His disciple, but first he told Jesus, " 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' <sup>22</sup> And Jesus said to him, 'Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.' " (Matthew 8:21–22) Here Jesus refers to people who are physically alive but spiritually dead. "Leave the dead to bury their own dead." The spiritually alive live in a different world from those who are spiritually dead. Those alive in Christ are to reach out to those who are spiritually dead to lovingly share the gospel of hope with them.

Did Jesus excuse those who were spiritually dead? He made His position clear as recorded later in Matthew saying, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. <sup>28</sup> So you also outwardly



appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

(Matthew 23:27–28) Here we see an example of outwardly righteous men who are spiritually dead. They are men clean and righteous on the outside, they are like the beautiful casket at the funeral that everyone in attendance sees, but on the inside of the casket lays a dead man in his decay and filthiness of sin. **An unredeemed person may appear to be clean and righteous before men, but before God is filled with decay, hypocrisy and sin.** Our deadness is not excusable in God's sight. It is detestable. Our inability to submit to God and please God does not excuse us. The reason we cannot submit without a Savior is because we do not want to. The power of our cannot, in truth, is the depth of our will not!

### **A Time to Believe**

As we close, first let me give Jesus' warning and then His blessing. Jesus warns us in Matthew 23:27, **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.”** This makes it clear that you can have your life squeaky clean on the outside and still be dead on the inside. We need a Savior not just to give extra credit to our good deeds and not just to forgive our sins. We need a Savior because we are spiritually dead and helpless without Him, no matter how good we look on the outside.

The Lord encourages you who are still dead in your sins and who have not yet accepted Jesus as your Savior, saying, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”**<sup>25</sup> **Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”** (John 5:24–25) So, my beloved, if you have spiritual life within you, you owe your life to the sovereign Savior Jesus Christ who created

new life in you by raising you from the dead. For those who do not yet know Christ as their Savior, listen now to His voice, “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.” (Revelation 22:17) Leave the land of the living dead and let Christ create in you new life, the spiritual life of God!

If you know Christ as your Savior this Advent season may you anxiously await His return and remember who you were before Christ saved you and the new creation He has made you. If you do not know Christ as your Savior come see me after we close and let me guide you through God’s Word and pray with you to know Christ in your heart and soul.

Amen!