

## 12-27-20 Unity Service

Sermon- Victory in Jesus

Scripture- Isaiah 61:10-62:3, CTW Ps 148

Hymns- 181 and TBD with Dave Shover

Theme- Jesus quoted these words from the passage in Isaiah as He spoke to the elders in the synagogue in Nazareth, his boyhood home. Have you accepted this testimony in your heart, and what do you plan to do about it in the coming new year?

### I. So, Now what?

#### **A. Christmas Day has past, and it is now four days later.**

Had Mary been able to give birth to her son in a hospital, she would've already been discharged, probably sometime on Friday. She and Joseph would've checked out of the hospital and gone home.

As such, the manger is now empty, much like the underneath of our Christmas trees and the inside of our stockings. You may have already returned some decorations to the attic. Christmas is over, or is it?

For the past month, our Advent worship has been steadily progressing toward the Christmas event. We have been focusing on the manger, but the manger is now empty.

To what do we cling, now that the manger is empty?

In leading you through this season of Advent, I have spent most of our time in the Old Testament.

In fact, two weeks ago, we were in the first half of this chapter, and now four days after Christmas, we finish up with the final two verses of the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, and the first three verses of Chapter 62.

**B. These verses lay out for us what we cling to now that the manger is empty. We cling to a promise.** The promise is that of protection and deliverance, and the picture that is painted is of a bride and groom preparing for marriage.

**Weddings are joyous and happy events.** I remember in seminary a professor once telling us of the importance of our roles during a wedding ceremony. He said, "People might forgive you if you lose your place and slip up in a sermon, and people may be gracious if you mess up during a funeral, but don't ever mess up anyone's wedding. They'll never forget!"

**Weddings can be really fun.** For the most part, the bride and groom are happy. If not, you kind of wonder why they're there at all.

**Weddings are supposed to be worshipful.** Fewer and fewer weddings take place in churches. The music at weddings is secular and varied.

Weddings are celebrations; two people uniting together as one. Special dresses are bought, tuxedos are rented, and parties take place before and after the blessed day. Weddings now seem to focus on the fun.

But when you strip away all of the "stuff" that gets brought to the wedding and becomes part of the service, from the flowers, to the caterers, to the photographers, to the dresses, to the ring bearers and flower girls, to ice sculptures, to rice and bubbles, what lies at the heart of what the bride and groom are doing are promises – promises made to each other before family, friends, and God.

The usual promises are "to love, honor, and cherish, in both sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, for better, for worse, for as long as they both shall live."

**II. How interesting that the image Isaiah paints as the promise of Christmas is that of a bride and groom decked out and adorned, making life-long promises to each other.**

**A. Think for a moment of how the relationship between a man and a woman starts and evolves to the point of marriage.** A young man meets a young woman. They are immediately attracted to one another. They both say to themselves, "Now there is someone I'd like to marry."

At that point, if emotions had their way, there would be a wedding. But hopefully, the intellect intervenes, questioning the

impulsive emotional response, by asking some important questions: **Would we be compatible? What is she really like? Will he take care of and love me?**

They both conclude that it would be best to take some more time and answer a few questions before they proceed. The two begin spending more time with each other.

He eventually concludes that she is as beautiful on the inside as she is on the outside, so now his intellect has sided with his emotions on the idea of marriage, and they decide to proceed.

But the final and heaviest vote remains to be cast, and that is of the will. The will stops the march toward the altar with the questions, "Am I willing to give up my lifestyle for someone else?"

What about my freedom - is it worth the trade? Am I willing to assume the added responsibility of a spouse?" The marriage will occur only when one's will finally agrees with the emotions and the intellect.

This is the picture Isaiah has painted for us. That of a bride and groom decked out and adorned standing at the marriage preparing to make promises to each other. They're making promises to each other because their emotions have been joined by their intellect and by their will.

**B. A similar process must take place in our lives before we can receive the promises of our Lord.** What is the promise that comes with Christmas? What is the promise that comes with the birth of Jesus Christ?

**Isaiah tells us that the Lord has clothed him with the garments of salvation and covered him with the robe of righteousness. This is the promise of Christmas: salvation and righteousness.**

Salvation and righteousness are "church" words that we tend to throw around loosely, often times not pausing to consider their meaning.

**Salvation is deliverance from sin and its consequences and coming to peace and reconciliation with God.**

**Righteousness means being upright, standing tall and correct.**

So the promise that God has made through his son Jesus Christ is the promise of salvation, deliverance from sin, and the promise of righteousness, standing tall; and as the Lord is not merely making them available, but using them to clothe and cover us, this is an image of protection and deliverance.

**III. The promise of Christmas is the promise of protection and deliverance, and it is a process much like the courtship that leads to marriage.**

**A. The courtship that leads to the promise of Christmas may also start out with an emotional reaction where the thought is, "Man this looks great. John 3: 16 says God is love. He loves me. I love him. Let's start this relationship."** We emotionally rush into a relationship with God.

Our emotions definitely play a part in how we relate to God, and there's nothing wrong with our emotions being involved, but we all know that in any relationship, emotions will only carry us so far.

The tug on our heart or the overwhelming guilt or conviction of our sins is the beginning of our receiving the promise of Christmas.

**B. Our intellect then kicks in and we start asking questions: What is this really going to be like?** Did God really send his Son to live and die? Did he really rise again on the third day? Did Jesus really walk on water? Did Jesus really feed 5,000 people?

Is this church really the place for my family and me to be nurtured in the faith? Can this church really meet my needs? Intellect must enter into the process and move over and join our emotion.

But then, just as in our current-day marriage relationship, the will takes over.

Isn't it ironic how the same questions that are relevant for our marriages are also relevant for our receiving the promise of

Christmas: Am I willing to change my lifestyle? What about my freedom - is it worth the trade? Am I willing to assume this added responsibility? Am I willing to put someone else first?"

God stands ready to clothe us with the garments of salvation. He stands ready to cover us with the robe of righteousness. He stands at the altar as the bride awaiting her bridegroom.

**In Luke Chapter 2**, we see the shepherds coming to Bethlehem and the wise men following a star for almost two years illustrates for us the faith that is necessary to receive the garments that make up the promise of salvation and righteousness, but it does require an act of faith on our part.

**C. You may find it interesting that the word "faith" is rarely used in the Old Testament, but "trust" is frequently used.** Who do you trust? Who are the ones that you're willing to rely on them instead of yourself? Who are the ones that you can count on to come through for you?

The promise of Christmas is dependent upon our trusting, our having faith in God. If you don't have that trust, if you don't have that faith, what are you celebrating?

#### **IV. Concluding Thoughts**

##### **A. I read of a man who was learning to fly an airplane.**

The instructor told him to put the plane into a steep and extended dive.

The student was totally unprepared for what was about to happen.

After a brief time the engine stalled, and the plane began to plunge out-of-control. It soon became evident that the instructor was not going to help him at all. After a few seconds that seemed like eternity, the student's mind began to function again, and he quickly corrected the situation.

Immediately he turned to the instructor and began to vent his fearful frustrations. The instructor very calmly replied, "There is no position you can get this airplane into that I cannot get you out of. If you want to learn to fly, go up there and do it again."

**B. The same is true in our lives. There is no situation we can get ourselves into that God won't walk with us and lead us out of.**

If we want to learn to fly, if we want to receive the promise of Christmas, we have to trust God. We have to learn to fly, and to do that, we have to go up there and trust God.

God stands ready to clothe us with the garments of salvation. He stands ready to cover us with the robe of righteousness.

Your decorations may be in the attic, and the manger may be empty, but the promise of Christmas is not. My prayer is that each of you will come to know and live the promise of Christmas, joining Christ at the altar.

Amen? Let Us Pray...