

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2009

Watch young parents teaching their toddlers, to talk or learn numbers or write. Watch parents teaching young children about dangers of running into the street, or wandering off with strangers. How do we bridge the gap of understanding between adults and little people just beginning the journey of life? How does God bridge the gap? The gap between Himself... Omniscient, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Creator of the Universe, Originator of all life... and humanity in all our selfish, limited ability and unwillingness to comprehend God?

The most famous verse of the Bible says...*"For God so loved the world that He gave/sent His only Son into the world..."*. You probably learned John 3:16 as a child, but is it true?

Is it primarily LOVE that motivated God to come to our world? YES, because if He hadn't, no hope would exist for the human race. No hope to know God, free from our sin condemnation. No hope we would ever see God or spend eternity any other place than in hell, separated from God! If you've ever known the ache of a woman who longed to be a mother, or the ache of a broken engagement when all seemed right, or the pain of being turned down for the job you always wanted...you have some little idea of the pain God must have felt as He watched the human race He created to live in a love relationship with Him...simply run at breakneck speed toward decadent living in total rejection of Him.

The "gap" between Holy, Loving God and sinful, angry humanity grows wider when left to run its natural course. Why? Because humanity is born with a sinful nature which naturally rebels against authority, against holiness, against God. But listen to this: *"Say to the people: 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their wicked ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die?'"* (Ezekiel 33:11) And so I write this Digging Deeper for you, and I bring you God's message verbally each weekend, and Calvary offers ministries of every kind ...TURN we cry, from anything you are thinking or doing that pushes God away! Christmas is a BRIDGE God built from heaven to earth... from Himself to YOU, inviting you to come to Him! Will you?

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2009

Trust Me... How often have you heard that in your life? Parents standing in the swimming pool, arms outstretched, inviting their toddler to jump to them. Teenagers with hand outstretched asking for the car keys. Financial advisors offering you the pen to sign legal documents.

The Christmas story of the Bible is essentially God saying to humanity...*"Trust Me"*, as He came here among us in the person of Jesus Christ. *"Mary, trust Me in a divine conception"*. *"Joseph, trust Me and take Mary to be your wife, then be step-daddy to Jesus"*. *"Joseph, trust Me, get up now and leave Bethlehem. Take your family to Egypt, death is coming to Bethlehem."*

Last weekend, if you worshipped with us at Calvary, I invited you to *"fill in the blanks"*, remember? What is God inviting you to trust Him with or for? What is holding you back? What faith steps have you taken toward *"Trust Me"* in response to God's invite? Go ahead, read Matthew 1:18-2:23 once more. Take note of the times Joseph was asked to take specific action in response to *"Trust Me"*. What do you find? What about you?

In re-reading the Christmas account, I counted each time an 'angel' was part of the story. I was amazed. Try it, how many do you see and more importantly, what is their role in the world changing events we call Christmas?

Yes, angels really exist. The Bible simply weaves them into God's story, rather than explaining their origin. I gather they were created before our universe, thus before Genesis 1, since Satan's first appearance as a snake is in his fallen, rebellious state rather than the magnificent, beautiful angel he was originally created to be. The heavenly rebellion apparently occurred before Genesis 1 and is referred to in metaphorical language in Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. Those angels who rebelled with Lucifer have been permanently judged by God and exist now as "evil spirits/demons" opposing God and God's people at all times. The angels who remained with God are holy and do His bidding, including visiting our planet often with messages from Him. The presence of the Holy Spirit among us reduces the present day need for angelic messengers to speak to us. The Holy Spirit does that personally! Do you hear Him?

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2009

"I see it, but I still don't believe it!" Have you said or heard that? Our Christmas theme in 2009 is *"Behold and Believe"*, but what about those who *"Behold"* Jesus Christ but refuse to believe?

John 10 is one place in the Bible where Jesus deals with this problem head on...it's the problem in much of Western Europe and North America! The Christmas story, as you recall, has several key characters, perhaps the most friendly of whom are the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20). Flocks of sheep were familiar sights in Jesus' day almost everywhere in Israel. Even most city dwellers understood the unusual relationship between a shepherd and his/her sheep. Sheep follow their shepherd much more by sound of his voice than by sight or smell. Sheep are emotionally volatile and by nature fearful of almost everything, and are fully trusting of their shepherd to protect them, lead them to good food and water, care for them when sick or injured etc. I'm sure you can easily see the comparison with God and the people He loves, right?

Read John 10 carefully looking for the contrast between John's commentary and Jesus' words. Recognize that John places this shepherd picture between the healing of a man born blind in John 9 and Jesus' raising of His dead friend Lazarus in John 11! Can you hear God saying...*"regardless of your uniqueness as an individual, I know you and I've sent Jesus to be your good, faithful, reliable, self-sacrificing Shepherd"*.

But note please the *"push back"* from many who simply didn't want to Behold and Believe. Oh, they saw Him, heard Him, watched the miracles...but refused to Believe Him, refused to trust Him to be truthful. Why?

Of course it's hard to believe a normal looking human being is God in the flesh...but the purpose of the miracles was to prove it, and of course without Belief there could be no true Relationship with Him. And without a trust relationship there could be no Salvation from sin. And without salvation, we remain in our sin (John 8:24), both helpless and hopeless!!

So dig deeply, slowly, carefully into John 10...and decide. Is Jesus God incarnate? Is He able to be your Savior?

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2009

What happens to the toddler with cookie crumbs on their face who insists they know nothing about the broken cookie jar pieces on the floor? Or the teen who hands back the car keys insisting they know nothing about the long scratch on the side of the car and the mailbox leaning to one side? Or the adult who claims they didn't know about the deadline penalties when three notices and two phone calls have been sent to their home? Of course the answer is "they remain in their sin", as we saw yesterday in John 8:24 and John 10. Christmas is fact, whether a person or family or nation wants to admit it or not...God came here, to Bethlehem, and lived among us in the person of Jesus Christ! While none of us saw it with our eyes, we have the opportunity to Believe it with our hearts and minds, and as we do, then we Behold Him...we come to know Him and experience the impact He has in our lives! Right?

John 13-17, as you know, is John's perspective on that final night Jesus had with His close friends, before He went to the cross! I hope, if you are building a relationship with Jesus Christ, those five chapters are well worn in your Bible!

Consider John 14 carefully, for Jesus is sharing at the deepest level of intimate truth. Do you see that again, Jesus challenges His friends to consider the depth of their trust in who He is, why He has been with them for these years, and what He will accomplish in their lives if they live trusting Him?

By my count nearly 30 dear friends of Calvary Church have stepped across the finish line of earthly living in my nearly 3 years with you, most recently Carol Solheim this past week. Death is absolutely certain for all of us. Unavoidable, it is predictable and calls for preparation...yet amazingly most people live apparently oblivious to the obvious! Today I'm asking you, straight up...are you ready to die, TODAY? Is your relationship with Jesus Christ ready for you to stand before him TODAY? Is your family prepared for your departure, will they know everything they should know about your "stuff" (insurance, banking, investments, obligations, commitments etc) so they are not left "cleaning up a mess" if you die today? John 14 is a call to live ready, in anticipation of an endless future with Jesus. Do you see how important a "Behold & Believe" Christmas is in preparing you for a Jesus celebrating departure?

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2009

This week I've tried to help us consider the various alternatives with our Christmas 2009 theme. . .

- **Behold and Believe!** Encounter God and experience Jesus Christ and all His truth. It's our privilege everyday as people who believe in Jesus Christ.
- **Behold and disbelieve!** It's what many people do with Jesus, refusing to accept Him or His truth. It's John 10. They could not deny His reality, but refused to accept His identity.
- **Believe and Behold!** Choosing to believe Jesus, you will see God! As the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to understand, this becomes more and more a daily relationship, in anticipation of an eternal reality!

Today let's consider the fourth alternative...**Refuse to Believe and never Behold!** Oh I wish it were not so, but the truth is that the vast majority of the human race lives in this final category this Christmas. With the evidence of God all around them (as I write this I look out on a 12 inch snowfall, a bright sunrise and clear sky...the fingerprint of God on the landscape of Walworth County), and each time they look in the mirror...still they refuse to believe God exists, or that God has anything to do with Christmas, or that God has any interest in them. That refusal positions them in the category of "disqualified to Behold"!


Can hardness of heart result in blindness of the mind? Yes! Can refusal to accept truth result in hardness of heart? Yes! Can God break through either or both? Yes! Will God force Himself through, insisting that you both Behold and Believe? NO! True love does not demand, it invites. As someone has said, "God is a gentleman, He invites, He offers, He paid the full price, but He will never demand or dominate."

Yes, this Christmas for those who hear the carols but refuse to Believe, those who see the nativities but refuse to Believe, those who reject the concept of Jesus coming to earth and living here to die a sacrificial death to pave the only way to God ... refusal to Believe will result in seeing God only as Judge when one day they stand before Him, never as Savior! (Revelation 20)



Pastor Doug Anderson

DECEMBER 14 - 18, 2009



behold
&
believe

THE MIRACLES

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