

**God's Story Written On Your Heart**

**Advent: a time to prepare room in your life for Christ to reign.**

**Advent: a time to slow down enough to grasp the awesome meaning and implications of God's story in Jesus, and then make it your own.**

**Each of the four Sundays in Advent carry a theme to direct our focus to the astounding fact and meaning of Christ's entry into our world.**

**Advent, the days of preparation before Christmas is a season to ask ourselves: who or what gives meaning to my life? Who or what guides my life's ambitions and directions? What is the story I live by?**

Last week I spoke of God's story ... the story that has been handed down to us, received by us, and believed by us. It is the story that has shaped our lives and our view of the world. The Bible tells this story, recounting how God, Creator of all and everything, has revealed Himself through history and people, and why He does so. This narrative of life, meaning, and destiny is centered on God, beginning and ending with Him. It is a story that moves straight ahead on a time line from Genesis to Revelation, and it is the key to understanding the plot of history and our place in it. This story has the power to redeem the human condition like no other. Yes, there are other stories or narratives ... yet it is in this story that people of all races, nations, languages, cultures, and ages have found truth and meaning, and they proclaim it to the world.

Many of you know God's story, or at least parts of it. Here we are coming up to Christmas, the most decisive chapter of God's story. But there was much that led up to this miraculous moment and much has followed. It is good that we understand as much as we can.

**Good News, Bad News**

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And ... God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them ... God saw all that He had made, and it was very good. But God warned the humans that they should not seek to be gods themselves, determining for them selves what is good and evil, right and wrong. Nevertheless, they did. They fell for the temptation to make their own story THE story. In a sense they said, "God we don't need your story, we can create our own story." That's when tragedy struck. In that act of disobedience to God humans dis-connected themselves from the good and eternal God, they severed their tie to the Source of goodness and life. Human*

**arrogance ushered into the world death and all the deadening behaviors and attitudes that we know in life before our final breath. This dis-connect from God is what we call sin. God simply wanted to have a close and life-giving relationship with the crown of His creation - humans ... us ... you and me – and humans spurned Him.**

### **God's Rescue Plan**

**Yet God did not give up on us - His own creation. *For God so loved the world ... that He set about rescuing humanity from their sin and a sin-broken world.***

**Part 1 of God's rescue plan began with one man:**

**Abraham. This man and his extended family would be a prototype of what humanity can look like when fully trusting God and restored to intimacy with Him. His descendants are the people of Israel. God sent prophets to Israel exhorting them to return to their true life found in relationship with God. *Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel?* Ezekiel 18:31. The new heart, a heart with room for God to write His story, was sung about in the Psalms: *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me,* Psalm 51:10. God even offered to help: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh,* Ezekiel 36:26. This rescue plan, a chapter of God's story, is found in the Old Testament.**

**Part 2 of God's rescue plan began with: Christmas. *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth,* John 1:14. The most decisive milestone in history was when God himself walked the earth as a human being: Jesus of Nazareth. Think about it: what an awesome wonder that God, full of grace and truth, would make His dwelling among us! God cared enough for us, and our condition, that He came in person. That's something to celebrate! Jesus said, *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,* John 14:9. Have you seen Him in his fullness and glory?**

**Part 3 of God's rescue plan began when Jesus trained disciples. His followers were and are to speak to others of what God, through Him, has said and done. He gave them a mission to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. And he bestowed upon this, His church, the Holy Spirit to give strength, guidance, wisdom, and comfort for their mission. During this time there is preparation for the coming kingdom of God by people who have given themselves over to**

**Christ who in turn lives through them. They plant seeds of the kingdom by introducing others to Christ. Have you found yourself in this chapter of God's story?**

**Many Christians want to rush through this one, forgetting the one thing necessary: a restored relationship with God. Hey God I've got it! They set off then on *their* mission, which for some becomes a cause. So ensnaring is sin that we can easily begin to think "that God is unnecessary and that by human effort and devotion we can reach the standard God wants. In a fallen world this can never be done. I am called to live in perfect relationship to God so that my life produces a longing after God in other lives, not admiration for myself."<sup>1</sup> It is in a restored relationship to God through Jesus Christ that God does His greatest work among us. *If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing*, John 15:5, Jesus said.**

**A restored relationship to God opens the way for the Holy Spirit to do His work in and among us. After His resurrection Jesus told His disciples to expect power from above: *I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high*, Luke 24:49; reminding them of what He had told them before His death and resurrection: ... *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you*, John 14:16-17.**

### **A Prepared Heart**

**So what can you and I do with this profound story of God's rescue plan? Pray, pray, pray to be part of God's plan. I don't believe we do enough praying ... we aren't as connected to God as we could be. God offers the greatest resource we could ever want in the Holy Spirit, and do we invite Him in? Pray ... intercede for one another, pray for the church, pray for people to come to Christ, pray to have a heart receptive to Jesus. Ask the mighty God to reveal Himself to you; pray for the Holy Spirit to fill our church. And remember that wanting my prayers to be answered and wanting God to be God are two very different things.**

***Create in me a pure heart, O God...* is the most difficult prayer to make and be genuine about it. Yes, God's grace that cleanses us of all sin awakens a longing in the human heart ... "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest, He says. Freedom from guilt and entrance into a new and right relationship with our**

**heavenly Father is the wellspring of joy. But there is an equally intense resentment of God's grace because of what it reveals in the human heart. "I will give my life to martyrdom, I will give myself in consecration, I will do anything, but do not humiliate me to the level of the most hell-deserving sinner and tell me that all I have to do is to accept the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>**

**Yet the truth is, our hearts must be erased clean of any pretension that we are good enough – *create a clean heart in me O God* - then we either receive God's gift of salvation or do without it. New men and new women, and even new children, are made when they return to God destitute. "The greatest spiritual blessing is the knowledge that we are destitute. As long as we have anything in us in the way of pride or self-sufficiency, God cannot do anything for us. It is only when we get hungry spiritually that we receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup>**

**My hope and prayer for each one of us during this Advent season is that we will experience a personal, passionate devotion to the Person of Jesus Christ. Every other type of Christian experience is detached from Jesus ... attending church on Sunday, singing in the choir, participating in a Bible study, a service project, or church family event, putting up decorations, singing Christmas carols, none of these can take the place of knowing the Person of Jesus. Acknowledging Him as our pattern or example brings no new life or regeneration. Jesus Christ is Savior long before He is our pattern or example. He is salvation itself – God's offer to us. He is the Gospel of God.**

**Pray that we become letters from Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

**"Let every heart prepare Him room..."**

#### **Take-Away**

A restored relationship to God opens the way for the Holy Spirit to do His work in and among us.

It is in a restored relationship to God through Jesus Christ that God does His greatest work among us.

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<sup>1</sup>Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Dec. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Nov. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Nov. 28.