

From The Beginning

Last week was “Christ the King” Sunday. It was the last Sunday of the Christian year, for those who keep time with the Christian seasons. I spoke of the reason Christ came into our world. As it says, *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work, 1 John 3:8. Christ was there before the foundation of the world*, prepared to do the work of our heavenly Father to redeem us all from the darkness of sin. Today, as we begin the Christian year and the season of preparation called Advent. We prepare to receive Him who was and is the first born of all creation, our Savior from the darkness of sin.

It’s four weeks to Christmas ... we often talk about preparing for Christmas ... there’s activities – like the wonderful bazaar coming up – there’s special foods, gatherings, cards, and gifts. But God has been preparing for Christmas long before you and I came on the scene. From the beginning there has been a need in our world for the healing and restoration that only the Creator can bring. Christ the Savior and His coming into this world has been in the works for a long, long time.

Christ B. C.

That sounds funny doesn’t it? Christ b. c. How can there be Christ before Christ? Let’s consider: our Lord, as the Second Person of the Trinity, being fully God in all aspects, existed long before Bethlehem. *The only begotten Son of God, equal to the Father, was manifested to the angels before the foundation of the world. The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him, Col. 1:15-16.*

Jesus the man came into being through Mary’s womb. Yet Christ the Son of God existed from all eternity. That is what our Lord meant when he said, *“Before Abraham was born, I am” John 8:58.* So, *we shouldn’t be surprised to find Christ in the Old Testament.* The Old Testament bears witness to him through symbols and images, and also through direct prophecy of His coming to the earth. During these weeks while we’re preparing for Christmas, I want to look at some of the preparations God made and how our understanding of these will better prepare us to receive Him into our lives.

I. The Context

To understand Jesus, we must understand the background. The Bible tells us how God created the heavens and the earth and all living creatures and called it good. And everyone lived happily ever after, right? Not so much ... any honest observation will reveal just how broken this world is. Along came Satan – in the form of a serpent – and he tempted the man and the woman into disobeying God. They ate the forbidden fruit – the knowledge of good and evil. It was downhill from there... Suddenly, paradise was not so beautiful because sin and death entered into life.

But the devil was happy! *Satan intended to humiliate God by ruining paradise.* He did it by deceiving the crown of God’s creation - the man and the woman - beguiling them into believing themselves wiser than God and knowing a better way to make paradise. He turned them away from God and to the pride and self-will that says, “I will be like the Most High.” Satan’s goal was to show the whole universe that God’s great experiment would not work – that no race of beings could ever be trusted to freely obey God; because left to themselves they always disobey, even in paradise.

II. A Prediction

God surveyed the moral wreckage that resulted and immediately passed judgment on the serpent for his part in the fall of humanity: he will be cursed above every other animal; he will crawl on his belly forever; he will eat dust all the days of his life. Then God said to the serpent, *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel, Genesis 3:15.* That was a **prediction**. Sure, he deceived Adam and Eve and he wrecked God's plan for paradise. For a brief time, he won the great battle with God. But the devil's victory will be short-lived. **In the prediction is God's first promise of redemption found in the Bible.** You may not see it at first glance, but Christ is in this verse. He is the ultimate Offspring of the Woman who would one day come to crush the serpent's ugly head. His "heel" would be bruised on the cross, yet Jesus would defeat Satan and his schemes. This can be summed up in three short phrases.

A. Endless Conflict - The word enmity means "hostility" or "animosity." One translation says, "There will be war." Eve made a huge mistake, but she would never join the serpent's fan club. Everyone dreams of living in paradise and every hard day will remind us to hate the serpent-devil fiercely. But a deeper meaning lies in the word often translated as "offspring." In the Hebrew, the word is "seed," referring to the generations yet unborn that would trace their lineage from Adam and Eve, and then the men and women of faith in every generation who believe in God.

Then there's the seed of Satan. Throughout history in every generation, in every country, in every city, every village, in every tribe, clan, and family, Satan has had his people. That line starts with Cain who killed Abel and then, like a cancer, spread through the generations, to the present day. This is the real **"Conflict of the Ages" - the contention between those who believe in God and those who don't.**

It was the devil that put it into the heart of Herod to try to kill the baby Jesus, of Judas to betray Christ, of Peter to deny Him, of the chief priests to prosecute Him, of the false witnesses to accuse Him, and of Pilate to condemn Him. The devil's aim in every instance was to destroy the Savior and ruin God's salvation plan.

The "seed of the woman" and the "seed of the serpent" have opposed each other continuously across the centuries, right up to this present hour. Remember the words of Jesus, *If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you, John 15:18-19.* Jesus never promised that people wouldn't criticize us. He just told us not to let it stop us. Being hated by the world is part of the continual conflict that goes all the way back to the beginning.

B. Temporary Defeat - "You will strike his heel." If you've ever had a heel spur, or pulled your Achilles' tendon, or suffer from plantar fasciitis, you know how painful it can be. We normally don't think about heels until we start having problems.

Listen, **sometimes in this life Satan wins the battle** - sometimes we are "wounded" by discouragement, criticism, anger, bitterness, falling into temptation. And sometimes we wound others. If you really want proof that Satan wins a temporary victory, visit the cemetery. Every grave testifies to his infernal power. We'll all spend time there eventually. So, this Bible verse reminds us that the Christian life is not a bed of roses. There is continual conflict, and the bad guys win a fair number of the battles.

Think about it: **when Christ died on the cross, Satan struck his heel.** When they took the dead body of Jesus down from the cross, it appeared that Satan had won the battle. Maybe Satan thought he had thrown a knockout punch. But all he did was strike Jesus on the heel, for on Sunday morning, the true Victor walked out of the grave, alive forevermore.

C. Eventual Victory - "He will crush your head." Head wounds may kill you. But heel wounds, though painful, do not. Satan thought he had killed Jesus on **the Cross** but it **was really God's death-blow against Satan**. When Jesus died and rose from the dead He utterly defeated Satan and his works, including death. When Jesus rose from the tomb He was pulling each of us out too.

You might ask: If Satan has been crushed, why does he still seem to be doing so well 2000 years later? How can he still exercise so much power? The answer is that at the Cross Satan was judged and his sentence pronounced. However, he is still roaming the earth awaiting his final execution. Satan's destructive power on the earth may well grow even greater in the last days. But in the end he will be destroyed and all those who follow him will follow him to destruction.

III. What It Means For Us

A. Christian Life Includes Struggle - The Christian life is hard work that demands your full commitment and the full engagement of your soul. **Until the day you die you will struggle against temptation**. Sometimes you'll win. Sometimes you'll lose. The enemy attacks on every side, we're at war! Salvation is assured, but no one gets a free ride to heaven.

B. Wounded In Victory - If God's only Son was bruised, how shall we escape the wounds of life? Even after his resurrection His body bore the marks of His suffering. **There is no victory without wounding, no progress without pain**. You and I will struggle hard in this life and likely we will be wounded. But do not despair. Be thankful, faithful, and keep on! If you feel like running away from your struggles, just remember that if you leave the moral or spiritual battlefield today you will wake up to find yourself on another battlefield tomorrow. So, you might as well stand and fight.

To quote Phillips Brooks:ⁱ "He is a foolish dreamer who expects an easy and bloodless victory for any noble plan. But yet, success waits before every good cause if it can only persevere and struggle on with its wounded heel." The coward who shrinks from the wounds and the boaster who forgets there are wounds have both missed the true meaning of this Bible verse.

C. Salvation Found In A Person - **Genesis 3:15 is the first hint of the gospel in the entire Bible**. You might have missed it because the name Jesus isn't in the text, but He is there, nonetheless. Jesus is the "seed of the woman," who would one day make His entrance into this world in a most unlikely fashion.

As the centuries rolled on, Satan kept recruiting followers and God kept raising up men and women who would continue the godly line on earth. When the promise was given, no one could have imagined the coming of Jesus Christ. The "seed of the woman" simply meant that he must be a member of the human race. After the flood the line was narrowed to Noah's descendants, and later came to rest on Abraham and his descendants, the nation Israel. They were to be a light to the nations. But that was narrowed down to the tribe of Judah, and then to the house of David. Finally, some nine centuries after that, the line came to rest on the firstborn son of a virgin named Mary. What started with the whole human race has narrowed to just one man - Jesus Christ.

When God wanted to save the world, he didn't send a committee; he sent his Son. When God wanted to say, "I love you," he wrapped his love note in swaddling clothes. When God wanted to crush Satan, he started from a stable in Bethlehem.

The Woman's Conquering Seed

Charles Wesley's familiar carol "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," includes a verse based on Genesis 3:15. Modern hymnals often omit this verse, which is unfortunate since it contains excellent theology.

*Come, Desire of Nations, come, Fix in us Thy humble home.
Rise the woman's conquering Seed, Bruise in us the serpent's head.
Adam's likeness now efface, Stamp Thine image in its place,
Second Adam from above, Reinstale us in Thy love,
Hark, the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King.*

Our church mission statement says we are “to bring people to the transforming power of Jesus Christ...” That means transforming the fallen, sinful nature we inherited from Adam and Eve, into the image of Christ – just as the hymn says. To help others **we've got to be on the way of transformation ourselves.** Are you? So many things can get in the way of getting close to Him. In this season of preparation stay focused on Him, remember why He came, hold fast to the true meaning of Christmas.

The Bible says: **To all who received him, to those who believed in him, he gave the right to become children of God, John 1:12.**

¹Phillips Brooks (December 13, 1835 – January 23, 1893) was an American Episcopal clergyman and author. He is best remembered as lyricist of the Christmas hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem".