

## Sermon for December 25, 2014 – Christmas Day

### Titus 2:11-14 (NIV84)

Theme: **What Christmas means for you.**

- 1) *It means you have been redeemed from wickedness.*
- 2) *It means you have been purified for Christ.*

*<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, <sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

Do you remember the holiday classic: A Charlie Brown Christmas? In this T.V. special, Charlie Brown searches for the true meaning of Christmas but isn't able to discover it. His friend, Linus, finally shows him where it can be found by reciting the Christmas story from Luke's Gospel.

Like Charlie Brown, there are many people trying to understand the meaning of Christmas. Why do Christians decorate trees, hand out candy canes, sing carols and give gifts to each other? The reason is Jesus' birth.

But why is Jesus birth so important for us to celebrate some 2000 years after it happened? What meaning does it have for us today? Our sermon will answer that question for us this morning under the theme: **What Christmas means for you.** 1) *It means you have been redeemed from wickedness.* 2) *It means you have been purified for Christ.*

Part One: It means you have been redeemed from wickedness.

Our sermon text for this morning is part of a letter Paul wrote to a young pastor named Titus. Right before our text Paul encouraged Titus to teach the various groups of people one might find in a congregation how to live in a God pleasing manner. And why? Because, as our text says, *the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.*

A better translation of this verse reads: *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people."* (ESV) What is God's grace? It is not something we can earn or deserve. Grace is God's undeserved kindness. Grace is God's love in action.

Do you want to know where you can find the purest, most complete form of God's undeserved love for lost sinners? Look in the manger and there you see it swaddled in cloth and laying on a bed of hay. Jesus is God's love, his grace, personified.

How so? Because He, being in very nature God and needing nothing, gave up his heavenly home, power and glory, in order to take on our human nature so that He might save us. Just

think: the one who created and helps all, and upon whom everything depends, humbled himself to be born helpless and dependent to his mother for life. He became one of us: born into a sinful world in order to be tempted in every way – just like we are - but remain without sin. And even though he was perfectly free from sin, he still suffered and died. Why? For us! He willingly took all our sins upon himself and told his heavenly Father to punish him for them all so that we might be declared forgiven.

And towards whom is Jesus' love directed? Whom did it save? All people. God's love and salvation is for everyone - even for the souls lost in hell. Jesus most certainly paid for their sins too. Sadly, they refused to receive his free gift of love and forgiveness through faith, but this does not negate the fact that God certainly loved them and even went so far as to have Jesus pay for all their sins too.

Baby Jesus was born for a purpose. And what might that purpose be? Do you see the cross and communion set on the altar? There's the purpose: Jesus was born to sacrifice his body and blood on the cross in order to redeem us, as the last verse of our text states:

*[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

The word "redeem" means to purchase or buy something back. Jesus bought us back from our sins, death and our slavery to the devil. How? Through his perfect life and innocent death on our behalf – this was the payment Jesus offered God the Father for our forgiveness. And how was this payment received? Well, look above the altar cross and what do you see? You see Jesus resurrected and ascended from the grave. Jesus' resurrection proves that God the Father has accepted Jesus' payment for our sins. If God hadn't, then Jesus would not have risen from the dead. So yes, we are fully redeemed from sin, death and the power of the devil. We have been bought back, not with gold or silver, but with Jesus' holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death. This, then, is the meaning Christmas has for us: it is the birth of our redemption – not only from the consequences of our wickedness, but also from our slavery to the devil so that we might live a new and purified life to the glory of God the Father.

Part Two: It means you have been purified for Christ.

There is not a single one of us who is perfect. Whether it be selfishness, laziness, internet pornography, gossip or the many other forms sin may take, we all have weakness towards certain temptations that sometimes seem impossible for us to overcome. We may ask ourselves: How can God love me when I keep falling into the same, shameful sin? How can I overcome these temptations so that I can get right with God in order to be saved?

And right there is the problem: it's not up to us to get right with God in order for him to save us. God knows that we can not get right with him on our own, and this is exactly why he sent Jesus to win righteousness for us: so that He could declare us right with him through faith in the Gospel.

And look at what Paul says happens because we already have God's favor in Christ: <sup>11</sup> *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.* <sup>12</sup> *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,* <sup>13</sup> *while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

Jesus' grace has not only saved us from something, but also for something. And what is that something? To do good works. Christ's coming teaches us to say "No!" to ungodliness and worldly passions. How does it do it? By laying down an example for us? That is what many think, and this is why so many people bought into the whole "What would Jesus Do" fad several years ago. Did wearing WWJD bracelets keep people from sinning? No. If we have Jesus as our example, that is great, but if he is only our example, then we lack the power to do any good.

The grace God demonstrated for us at Christmas does not merely provide an example for us to follow, God's grace *causes* us to love Him and others – so much so that we want to give up sinning. His grace teaches us to say "no" to sin because his love for us moves us to love him like little children love their dear father. And we are able to do this only because God, in his great love, has poured out his Spirit on us, as St. Paul once said: *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.* (Galatians 4:4-7, NIV84)

Does this mean Christians never sin? No, we still have our sinful flesh clinging to us until the day we die. That evil nature will cause us to sin. But here is the key: our sins continue to be forgiven in Christ. As we turn to God in repentance and look to Christ for forgiveness, we receive it because of his work for us. And this forgiveness increases our love for God – teaching us to say no to the passions and desires of this world that we may live self-controlled, and godly lives in this present age: thanking God for his salvation by obeying his law.

How exactly does God's grace teach us to say no to sin and yes to good works? God, through his grace, has given us a new heart. You know the song we sing after the sermon on certain communion Sundays: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit with-in me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free Spirit.* That song is taken from Psalm 51 and it is a prayer that God promises to answer. Through the Gospel, God has placed a new heart in every Christian: a heart that loves God and does not want to displease Him.

It is so sad that many people on this earth think that they have to earn God's love by what they do: that it is up to them to change their lives in order to be saved. Can a person perform heart surgery on himself? No, and neither do we have the ability to change our sinful heart on our own. The truth is that we are saved by God's grace, and this has changed our hearts and lives to such a degree that we are no longer slaves of the devil. We are children of God. We no longer look forward to the end of time with dread, rather we look forward to Christ's return in hopeful anticipation. We know that when Jesus comes, he will bring the wonderful deliverance he

promised us. And how we long for that day. And as we wait for it, we live patient and self-controlled lives, realizing that we have been set apart as God's people to do his works.

What does Christmas mean for you? It means that you have been redeemed from wickedness through the grace of God. It means that you have been purified by that same grace to live for him. Jesus' birth certainly has brought about a change in us, to God be the glory. May we ever rejoice in this grace and live in it, all the days of our lives. Amen.