

The Violence of Christmas 2017

Last Sunday we talked about the Comfort of Christmas. This morning I want to talk about the violence of Christmas. I know that sounds strange when you consider the message of that first Christmas was “peace on earth good will toward men.” But Christmas is not just about peace on earth. It’s also about violence, about something being torn open and torn apart. From the beginning Christ’s coming involved tearing and pain. There was the tearing of relationship as the announcement of the angel to Mary brought pain and separation between Joseph and his young bride to be since Matthew tells us when Joseph heard of Mary’s pregnancy he intended to break their engagement, to separate from her quietly, thinking he had been betrayed.

There was the physical tearing of the virgin Mary’s body in childbirth, the infant Jesus delivered in the blood and pain of the birth experience. But there was another tearing more significant than the rest. Christ’s coming into the world meant the tearing open of time. The Eternal and Timeless One stepped out of eternity and into time and all of its’ limitations. His coming meant a tear in that mysterious veil that separated man from God. The God who dwelt in mystery, smoke and fire in the Old Testament becomes the New Testament God in flesh in a manger in Bethlehem. Jesus’ birth allows more than a glimpse behind the veil or from within the cleft of the rock as we now gaze upon the face of God. We see and understand as God the Son appears in flesh among us.

It wasn’t just about peace on earth. The coming of the King and his Kingdom involves violence. Jesus said, **“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Matthew 10:34.** Jesus was the Prince of Peace. He gave peace to all who would come to him and believe upon him, receiving him as Savior and Lord, but his coming was not just about peace. There was violence involved as well.

Luke tells of the old man Simeon holding Jesus in his arms in the temple, prophesying to Mary and Joseph, **“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against [opposed], so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” Luke 2:34-35.** His coming, his birth and life was a sign that would be opposed and would culminate in his death on the cross.

The prophet Jeremiah had prophesied concerning the circumstances surrounding the Messiah’s birth and Matthew quotes that prophecy in his gospel. **“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be**

comforted, because they are no more.” Matthew 2:18. Jesus’ birth was surrounded by violence and opposition. Herod, paranoid and frightened by news of the birth of a Jewish king, orders the killing of all boys in Bethlehem under the age of two. You can bet Satan is always behind such acts of violence, trying to destroy God’s plan of redemption. This isn’t what we think of when we think of Christmas, but the coming of Jesus was met with violence. To understand why we need to go back behind the scenes to the very beginning.

In the innocence of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve succumb to Satan’s temptation and sin against God. In God’s judgement he tells Satan, **“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.** The stage was set for a violent confrontation between Satan and the seed of the woman, Jesus. It was the prediction of a show down not just between Satan and Jesus, but between kingdoms and authority. The prophet Isaiah wrote,

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.” Isaiah 9:6-7

Isaiah introduces us to this idea of the Messiah ruling over a kingdom. But it is not just the earthly kingdom of Israel, but a spiritual kingdom, a heavenly kingdom opposed by Satan’s kingdom. It is God’s righteous government and rule opposed by Satan’s evil kingdom and influence, it is heaven’s authority opposed by hell’s authority. The bible assures us there will be no end to Christ’s kingdom, but from the beginning Satan has been trying to undermine God’s authority and rule in his stead.

In Genesis 1 and 2 the bible tells us “God created man to enjoy the earth.” This was God’s intent. We were told to subdue the earth and care for it as good stewards. But our rule and dominion of the earth, though God given and God ordained, was lost through our sin and disobedience. We forfeited control and Satan stepped in to illegitimately seize dominion and control of the earth.

You remember at one time Satan had a leadership position in heaven. Isaiah 14:12-15 speaks of him raising his throne against God’s throne. Satan was kicked out of his place in heaven, but through Adam and Eve’s sin and rebellion, the door was opened allowing Satan to

become the ruler of this world. If he can't rule in heaven, he will try to rule on earth. He will establish a kingdom and enlist followers here to oppose God's kingdom and order. Through rebellion against God we become followers of the ruler of this world. By disobeying God we embolden Satan's schemes and by default we submit ourselves to his authority, his rule in our world. Is there Scripture to back this up?

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” Ephesians 2:1-2

Jesus, in speaking of his death and resurrection said, **“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.” John 12:31.**

Jesus also said to his disciples, **“I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.” John 14:30-31**

Paul spoke of Satan, referring to him as the god of this age. **“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God...” 2 Corinthians 4:4**

Satan gained control through our rebellion and sin and set himself up as the god of this world with men and women blindly, ignorantly following him, trapped in their bondage to sin. Satan opposes God's plans and deprives us of God's purposes, robbing us of hope for recovery and redemption. I think it is Satan's primary tool, to rob us of hope. He wants us to believe we are lost, beyond God's reach, beyond God's love, beyond God's redemption.

But from the beginning God has been reaching out to us in redeeming love. In the Old Testament, God established the nation of Israel to bring hope and to show us his ways. He established the law to show us our sinfulness and the sacrificial system to show us the path to redemption and the forgiveness of our sins. He told Israel to obey his law, to offer the sacrifices, that obedience to God and his word would bring victory, blessing and life. But Israel kept rebelling against God and his ways. The truth is, the nation of Israel represented all of us. We all kept sinning. Romans 3 tells us all of us have sinned and missed the mark. Our sin nature kept us from obeying God's law and it's at this point of our helplessness and sinfulness that God enters the scene. What we would not do because of our sinful nature and what the law could not do because it was powerless to change us, God did through the sacrificial gift of his son, Jesus.

God enters the scene to save us from sin and hopelessness and death and oh the wonder of his redemption plan! A virgin conceives and brings forth a Son and calls his name Emmanuel, God with us. John's gospel declares, **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."** **John 1:14** In the midst of all the darkness, the light of the world broke through and began to shine, giving us life and hope once again. God is near to us. Salvation is possible.

Jesus was born and the babe in the manger had a clear message for the god of this world: "An invasion has begun and your days are numbered!" **"The kingdom of heaven is at hand"** Jesus said. To a world held hostage by Satan and sin and death the arrival of the Messiah declared "another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of light, of hope, of life and salvation is here and you have immediate access to it. The original ruler, God, has come to you in Christ and if you choose to receive him as Savior and Lord and King, he will give you power to become a child of God. Through faith in Christ as Savior and Lord you can become part of his kingdom and you can know freedom from sin and have peace and joy in your life." It's the good news. The oppressor's heavy burden is lifted as Jesus begins to rule and reign as King in the hearts and lives of men and women, ruling over a kingdom that has no end.

An invasion began at Bethlehem, announced to a bunch of shepherds on a Judean hillside. It was an invasion overlooked by much of the world, but it caused the inhabitants of hell to shudder and tremble. There was violence in the spiritual realm on the night of his birth. God had come down to dwell among the people. To save them. It was a spiritual D-Day!

Jack Hayford writes, **"A planet acclimated to death and dying, to sickness and suffering, to weakness and failure, to sin and strife, to war and heartbreak, to trouble and tragedy, to division and divorce, to accepting the insolubility of the impossible, was being invaded. The invading force was only one, but that One was the creator of all things, who from the beginning had calculated a plan which would not only mystify the enemy and release his prisoners; it would introduce the redeemed to a pathway of sharing with Him in His conquest. So, it began to happen. Life was beginning to infect this poisoned planet with health. Love was beginning to flow purely into the muddied cisterns of man's being."**
...Jack Hayford

Life came to the world in Jesus Christ. The violence of Christmas was seen as health crashed into the domain of sickness, truth struck a blow against the father of lies. Deliverance and freedom began breaking the shackles of bondage, love began conquering fear, forgiveness

began overwhelming guilt and hatred, mercy began covering the scars of sin.

Satan screamed and fought desperately. In response to His message of the kingdom, Jesus was crucified by sinful men. Thinking he had destroyed God's redemption plan once and for all, Satan must have rejoiced. But in that one divine act of redeeming love and mercy, by a power unknown to man, Jesus' blood that was shed became the means to break Satan's hold on this planet and his reign of death. On that Easter Sunday morning the tomb was emptied, the stone was rolled away and God delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. Through his sacrifice the blessings and the order of a new kingdom were established in our hearts.

It wasn't just forgiveness of our sins, he gave us power to live the life for which we were created. Romans 5 tells us that by the sin of one man, Adam, death now reigns over every one, but by the obedience of one man, Jesus, many will be made righteous and all who receive him will then reign in life through Christ. (Romans 5:17-19).

An invasion began on Christmas day and it has not stopped yet. Some days after his resurrection from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven, but before he did, he announced that he would return and at that time would drive out the last vestiges of Satan's power and dominion. In the meantime, the invasion continues. You see, he gave orders to us, his church. He gave us the keys of the kingdom of God and told us to go into all the world, as Oral Roberts said, "into everyman's world" and establish the influence of the kingdom of God.

We've been given authority to go into all the world, to continue invading the strongholds of the enemy. We've been sent to announce and establish his kingdom, to bring his influence to bear on every circumstance of life. We've been sent to tell those still in bondage to sin, still living in fear, tormented by hopelessness and despair that the giver of life has come. Salvation is available to all who will believe and receive it by faith. There is hope after all.

We are part of the invading force. We are part of the force that's taking back the spiritual territory that fell under Satan's control. We are part of a kingdom that began its invasion in a manger in Bethlehem and now has spread to every part of the globe. We are part of an invasionary force determined and committed to bring good news, the message of release and redemption to every broken heart and life that's ruled and controlled by the enemy.

We are not only part of the invading force, we are part of the occupying force. We live in this world, but we are citizens of his heavenly kingdom. We reflect the character and values of

His kingdom. That means we love when it's easier to hate, we forgive when it's easier to hold a grudge. We give when the world values getting, we build up when the world tears down. We hold to the values of Christ's kingdom while being opposed by the kingdom of this world.

Understand, we are in a spiritual battle against a real devil and the forces of hell, but we won't be defeated. Christ has come and the kingdom of which we are a part by faith, of his kingdom there will be no end. There are martyrs dying for the faith today, but the kingdom of God still stands. There are dictators and governments trying to stamp out Christ's kingdom and his church, but of his kingdom there will be no end.

Satan tries to find ways to defeat us, to get us to deny the values of the kingdom of heaven of which we're a part. We'll be opposed, don't think we won't. Satan is a defeated foe, but he continues to desperately fight this war of terror, striking wherever and whenever he can. Our lives may not always be quiet and peaceful because there is a war going on, but don't forget what the prophet said, "of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end." We are part of his kingdom and that kingdom will never, ever end. (I love that line in Handel's Messiah that declares, "the kingdoms of this world will become, the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.")

The violence of Christmas tore open the veil and allowed us to see the face of God, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The violence of Christmas heralded defeat for Satan and assured us that through faith in Christ we have won the victory. The violence of Christmas speaks to us today, that the day will come, in spite of the headlines, in spite of all we see, when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ and he will reign forever, and forever, and forever. Amen.

There is a battle for your soul. Who is ruling in your life today? Jesus wants to rule and reign in your life. He wants to save you and give you eternal life. Will you give him access and open your life to him today? And if you have surrendered your life to Jesus and yet you are struggling, Satan is opposing you, tormenting and attacking you - remember, you are a part of the ever advancing kingdom of God. You have victory through Christ. And Isaiah said there will be no end to his rule and his peace as well. There is peace for you, even in the midst of Satan's attack and of his peace there will be no end. May the peace of the Lord, that ever increasing peace, surround you and keep you today.