

Props – wrapped gift

“Bookends - Fulfillment”

My last message, on the first Sunday of Advent, was entitled “Anticipation”. This morning, it is “Fulfillment”.

- Christ’s anticipated Birth is fulfilled, he has arrived

So, another Christmas has come and gone. The first Sunday of Advent I brought along a gift. It’s still here, unopened. Since we haven’t opened the gift yet, let’s do so now.

“Connor, would you come and open the gift for me?”

Wow, it’s only a speaker. This may be a great gift for someone. But, I bought it for myself several months ago. My laptop computer’s speaker is not very loud. I was using it for the ladies group to show the session’s video. My brother had one of these for his computer and it worked great. I thought it would solve my problem. But, this speaker works with Bluetooth. My computer has Bluetooth capabilities, but obviously not the same generation as this unit. Technology is not!! my gift. I was disappointed.

Were any of you disappointed with Christmas this year? Perhaps you didn’t get the gift you wanted. Perhaps you were with difficult family members and you didn’t have a “picture perfect” kind of Christmas. Maybe you’re going through financial difficulties and you weren’t able to give what you wanted to. Our modern-day Christmas’s can carry a lot of baggage. Loved ones were missing due to distance. Others are no longer here on earth to celebrate with us, and leave an empty spot within us.

The New Testament believers were also eventually disappointed in their Christmas, the birth of their Savior. They didn't understand the way that He came. He claimed to be the Son of God and performed many miracles. They expected a conquering hero, and all they got was a baby, who grew into a man who claimed he was the Son of God and performed many miracles, but who was ultimately betrayed, led away and was crucified. They thought that was the end.

- They didn't know the plan God had in place.

And what was that plan? Ever since the beginning, God loved us and continually sought to bring us back to himself. He made covenants with his people, promising to be with them if they were obedient. Christ came to defeat evil. By his death and resurrection, we are able to have a relationship with Him.

- Christ was the fulfillment of the promise God made through the ages, that Satan would be defeated, that death would be defeated, and that Christ's Kingdom would triumph. There will be a second coming where Jesus will not come as a baby, but as a King. He will make all things new. He will restore creation to his original intention. At the Second Coming – Satan will be destroyed. God will be victorious. Rev. 21 tells of the new heaven and the new earth—“The dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

At His second coming, he will be Priest and King.

As Christians, we pray for his return. We wait anxiously for his return. We become upset at the world we live in. We want out. Lord Jesus, return for us. Give us the everlasting life and peace you promised.

But, He doesn't anyone to miss the opportunity to accept Him, and so we are still waiting. We are caught in what is sometimes called the "now and not yet".

Like the Jewish nation and the early Christians, we are anticipating and expecting the return of Christ. The culmination of Christmas is not the end, it is just the beginning of His glorious reign.

This morning I want to bring some encouragement to you.

Christ came, not just to save us, but so that we can have new life, here and now.

- We receive our fulfillment by **accepting Him**—we are a **new** creation. By accepting Him, we receive the Holy Spirit who indwells us and changes us. He gives us power and enables us to do His will.

I'd like to share a story from the Old Testament that may not seem like it relates to us becoming a **new creation**, but stick with me.

In Judges 6:1, we're told that the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.

In Judges 6:7 he sent them a prophet who said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: 'I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I

snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. I said to you, 'I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live. But you have not listened to me.'

I am always amazed at the Israelites. God gave them so many promises and provisions, and they continually turn their back on him to follow other nations, other gods. Then when they get in trouble, they cry out for help.

But here we are, thousands of years later, with the New Testament and the story of God's redemption through Christ. We have so much more knowledge than they had—and yet, we continue to want to go our own way and do our own thing. Then we cry out when trouble comes.

We need to listen to God and be obedient to him. Sometimes we need a prophet in our lives, willing to tell us what we need to hear, and guide us back to the right path.

We believe that when we accept Christ, he comes to live within us. It's not just a matter of belief and acceptance. We also believe in the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit came upon the prophets. Since Christ's death and resurrection, when we receive Christ, He lives within us. He is no longer coming and going, but is here to stay.

God offers change. He doesn't leave us where we are. Acts 1:8 tells us "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my

witnesses. We need to live with that power. As **we allow Him to fill us, we are enabled to do amazing things for God.**

God see us totally different than we see ourselves. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. We need to see what we're really capable of.

My being on the platform this morning is ridiculous. I don't have the ability within myself to do it--I don't have the knowledge--I don't have the confidence.

But, when we clothe ourselves with God, or when God clothes us with himself, (it's what he does, not what we do), we receive His power.

This message is for me, as much as for you. God convicted me as I was writing it. Christmas this year was difficult. This was my second Christmas without my husband. Things are so much different than they were. Ralph LOVED

Christmas, as those of you who knew him, remember. And I've been feeling kind of sorry for myself.

You know, Satan would love to see us sitting around and thinking that we're not good enough, thinking about what we don't have, what we can't do, what we haven't got, and comparing ourselves with everyone else out there. But God wants you to see yourself as He sees you, and learn what his word says about you.

God sees so much more potential in us than what we see.

Judges 6:12 continues the story. God tells Gideon, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." Gideon tells God, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.

What a pathetic response. It sounds wimpy. “I am not a man of courage, you’ve got the wrong man. Who, me? You want me to do what? Oh, no, that’s way too much for me—you’ve got the wrong person.” He questions, “If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt? But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.’

In other words--If you’re really with us, why are we having all these problems and why aren’t you working miracles? Have you ever asked that question?

Maybe...

God doesn’t want to come and deliver us from everything. Maybe He would like us to stand up against things and say, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” and move forward.

When Lazarus died and Christ went to the tomb, he said to the people “roll away the stone.” If Christ could raise Lazarus from the dead, surely he could have moved the stone. Why did he need people to do it?

He wants us to do what we can do, and then he’ll step in and do what we can’t do.

- **Col 3:12-17 tells us how to live while we’re waiting. Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.**

This is something we can't do in ourselves. We need the Holy Spirit to enable us to live like this.

We get discouraged. Instead of compassion, we sometimes show judgment—

What about poverty, refugees, immigrants?

Kindness—there are many times just a smile or word of encouragement would be helpful, but we're too busy or self-absorbed to be bothered.

Humility—do we serve God out of pure motives, or so that people will recognize all the “good works” we are doing.

Gentleness and patience—I think sometimes they go together. Because we're often impatient, we don't treat others with gentleness. We can be rude or harsh in our busyness.

Is there someone you need to forgive that you're mad at?

Love—easy if the person loves you back. Not so easy if they don't like you, or you have completely different perspectives and temperaments.

Do you have a spirit of fear, and worry and anxiety?

What is there in your life that you are capable of doing? We need to know God well enough to trust that He will enable us. We need to recognize and see him.

Stop looking at what we don't have, and look at who we do have.

Luke 10:19 tells us, “I will give you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.”

His **power** is available to us. You may say, but harm has come to me. And in a way that's true. We still suffer here on earth. But this verse means nothing can cause permanent and eternal damage if we keep our eyes on Christ.

- As we close this year, participate in the **fulfillment of His plan**.

Give him your life and your heart. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

How can we encourage the Holy Spirit to work in us?

The Holy Spirit is dwelling in each believer. He wants to express Himself in our actions and attitudes. I Thessalonians 5:19 tells us “do not put out the Spirit’s fire”. When we don’t allow the Spirit to be seen in our actions, when we do what we know is wrong, we suppress or quench the Spirit. We do not allow the Spirit to reveal Himself the way that He wants to. We grieve the Spirit by living like those who do not believe, by lying, by being angry, by stealing, by cursing, by being bitter, by being unforgiving. To grieve the Spirit is to act out in a sinful manner, whether it is in thought only or in both thought and deed. We need to follow God, rather than our own desires. We need to follow his lead. So, how can we make this possible? I have five suggestions.

First—

- Be thankful—*in all circumstances*.
 - Look for “God sightings”. Recently, I went to WalMart. It was raining and as I pulled into the parking lot, a spot opened near the doorway. Coincidence? Probably, but I chose to see it as God sending a special blessing my way. Look at life through different eyes. Even little things, a break of sunshine through the clouds, a flower blooming out of season, a child’s laughter, can make us thankful amidst some of the troubles we’re living with.

Next--

- Let the word of God dwell in your richly – *read God’s Word. Take time to reflect and apply it to your life and situation*

We are the most privileged people in the world. We have the freedom to read our Bibles anytime we want. They are readily available, in many different translations and languages. The Bible is available to us in written form, we can get audio tapes and listen to the Word while we’re driving or anywhere we are. The Bible is available on video and we can watch it being enacted or read.

Yet, how often do days go by when we don’t even pick it up.

Read it. Be encouraged by it.

- *Be willing to accept teaching and criticism when given in God’s love. Be active in a study group where you can discuss what is being taught and learn from others*
- Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart – *church is important. We need to be here to show God our gratitude with our worship and to join with others in expressing our love.*

And finally,

- Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Ephesians 3:20—“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Final hymn-

Ushers come forward and collect communication forms.

Ways we can serve God this week—

Closing prayer