

“He Came To Save”
John 3:16-18; Matthew 1:20-21

In our Advent series we’ve asked the question, “Why? Why did Jesus come?” Over the last three Sundays we’ve seen that Jesus came to testify to (that is, to declare) the truth, He came to serve, not be served, and He came to bring life, eternal life. Today’s message sums up these three, and brings us to the pinnacle, the primary reason Jesus came. As He Himself put it, Jesus came not “to condemn the world, but to save the world.” Jesus makes two very clear statements here, which are the basis of the “good news of great joy” the angel announced to the shepherds. But both of those statements are also potentially very offensive to us.

The first is that the world is condemned; it’s under God’s condemnation. What could we have possibly done that puts us under the condemnation of God? The answer is sin. Anything and everything that we think or say or do that falls short of God’s perfect standard of righteousness is sin. Note that it is not a human standard, but God’s perfect standard of righteousness that we do not meet. Romans 3:23 declares that we have “all sinned, we have all fallen short of the glory of God.” In I John 1:8 we read, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” In His perfection and holiness, God hates sin, it is detestable to Him (Proverbs 6:16). His only possible response to sin is condemnation and subsequent judgment and punishment. All this is offensive because we like to think of ourselves as moral free agents; that before we exercise freedom of choice, we suffer no consequences from a lack of decision on our part. That is, we stand on neutral ground. When it comes to God, I can choose to follow and obey Him, or I can choose to reject Him and go my own way. But the consequences of that decision don’t come until after I’ve made the decision. And if I don’t make a decision, there’s no impact on me. According to God’s Word, there is no neutral ground. We have already made our choice. As the prophet Isaiah writes, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). We have already chosen sin, we have already gone our own way, the result being that every one of us already stands under God’s condemnation. We may not like this, but whether we like it or not, this is the truth from God’s perspective, truth Jesus came to declare, to testify to.

Jesus’ second clear statement that is potentially very offensive to us is that we need a Savior, someone to save us from condemnation. Here we see the critical importance of Jesus’ name. When the angel appeared to Joseph in Matthew 1:20 he said, “You are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.” If you look at Jesus’ name in its original language, you know that the first two letters of the name are the first two letters of the Old Testament name for God, Yahweh. The remaining letters are from the word “save” or “salvation.” The name Jesus means, “Yahweh (or God) saves” or “God will save.” Jesus’ name is a description of Who He is, God, and what He came to do: He came to save. How did He do this? Did He save us by teaching us, saying, “You need to know this if you’re going to be saved?” No. Did He save us by the example He set with His life, telling us, “You need to follow my example if you’re going to be saved”? No. This is how Jesus saved us. He took all our sins, that is, the cause of our condemnation on Himself. As I Peter 2:24 says, Jesus “bore our sins in His body on the tree,” that is, the cross. In doing that, He substituted Himself for us, for me, for you. He took your place and was condemned in your place. He bore God’s punishment for your sin, which is death. This is how Jesus “saves His people from their sins,” by dying on the cross. There is no other way to be saved but by the saving work of Jesus Christ. If it were possible for us to save ourselves, there would have been no reason for Jesus to come, no reason for Jesus to have been born. There would have been no need for His life, no need for His death on the cross, no need for His resurrection. The truth: we cannot save ourselves from sin. It’s just not possible. Jesus had to come. It was absolutely necessary for the salvation of His people. As the Apostle Peter declared in Acts 4:12, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” There is a reason why there is only one permanent Christian symbol in this room, only one. The cross is the only one that matters. We don’t want any other symbols drawing our attention away from

the fact that Jesus came to save sinners, and He saves sinners by giving His life, by dying on the cross, for us, for you, for me.

The result of being saved by the Savior is summarized beautifully in Romans 8:1: “Therefore,” (that is, because of Jesus’ death for us on the cross) “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” When you claim Jesus as your Savior, you escape condemnation and punishment and you receive the “good news of great joy!” that is salvation and life, eternal life!

Now if escaping condemnation and punishment is good news of great joy that the angels sang “would be for all people,” why do people resist and reject Jesus Christ? A major reason is that they cannot and will not accept the fact that they need a Savior. This is the hardest thing for people to do. If you’ve shared Jesus Christ with others, you know that there is much in the Gospel that is attractive, there is much that non-Christians do not have trouble accepting. Most people do not have difficulty believing in the existence of God. Most people do not have difficulty accepting the fact of God’s love or power. Many find Jesus and His teachings attractive, a good (even excellent) example to follow. However, if you talk about Jesus as Savior, as the One who died to save sinners, there you find rejection and even hostility: “Me, a sinner? Me, a helpless sinner in need of a Savior? Who are you kidding?” Their attitude is a lot like the little boy who sent the following letter to Santa Claus: “Dear Santa, There are three boys living in my house. Jeffrey is two, David is four, and Norman is seven. Jeffrey is good some of the time, David is good some of the time, and Norman is good all of the time. I am Norman.” Norman doesn’t need a Savior. He’s a good person. He can certainly point out others who aren’t good. They may need a Savior, but not Norman! “I am Norman” is the viewpoint of an awful lot of people. A recent George Barna survey showed that almost half of the people in our country who are not Christians are not interested in talking about salvation in Jesus Christ because they’ve already settled this issue in their minds. They’ve decided that they will enjoy eternal life in heaven for one of two reasons. First, they’re “Norman,” a good person. The “good” they do in life will far outweigh the “bad,” and on this basis, God will admit them into heaven. Or second, because they believe God is love, He will forgive whatever bad they have done. No need for a Savior, no need for help. I ask you to compare these views of God with the truth: what God says about Himself, and why He sent His Son into the world, to help us, to meet our need for a Savior.

The good news of Christmas is that though the world is under spiritual condemnation, it is never necessary for anyone to remain there. Today there is a way to be saved. Do you believe in the Savior, in Jesus, or are you still in the category of those who stand condemned? There are only two roads, two destinies. If you have not already put your trust in Jesus and in what He has done for you, will you do it today? Will you believe in Him? You may say, “I’ll think about it.” Thinking about it will not do. The great preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote that if you consent to only think about it, “you will think yourself into hell.” You may respond, “I’ll pray about it.” The Bible does not ask you to pray about it, either. If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, God through His Word calls on you to believe, to believe in Him. That is the only useful response. Today God sends you this message: “The times of your avoidance or ignorance or rejection have come to an end. I now command you to turn from the way of sin and condemnation, and turn to my Son Jesus.” If you are willing to accept and obey that command, I invite you to pray this prayer with me, and speak to me or to Pastor Wilson at the close of the service today. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Jesus came to save, to save His people from their sins.