

Christmas, A Season of Faith

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, God's favored one, to reveal to her that she would give birth to the Savior of the world. She listened to him, questioned him with an open mind, believed, and then she responded saying, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." - Luke 1:38 The Christmas season is an announcement of joy for anyone who believes in the height, depth, length, and width of God's love appearing in the earth through the Savior Jesus Christ. But the true joy of Christmas is known and lived when we respond as Mary did by faith in the God who saves by grace. A "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" response of faith is one that loves him for what he has done for us. Mary did not know or understand the great depth of love the Son of God would go to for her at this point, not like we do. She did not know God's love demonstrated at the cross. Yet, she was willing to go down in the world, accepting God's will for her even at the risk of life 'as it was meant to be in her culture'. But we know that Jesus accepted God's will knowing it would cost him everything to give us the weight of glory in his love for us. This enables us to respond by faith saying with John Wesley,

*I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
Exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Thou art mine, and I am thine.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen*

With Christ in us the hope of glory we can say with Mary and John Wesley and a host of other faithful witnesses, "Lord, if you have done this for me in your love, then I can trust you and do this for you, whatever the "this" is."

Let me ask you to consider the Lord's love, to trust him for his grace, and to do this for him:

Commit yourself to a year end offering to Christ Covenant Church

We are approaching the end of 2019 with a significant budget deficit of \$69,535 in our giving. Please consider a year end offering that will help the church out of this deficit in 2019.

Commit yourself to continued faithfulness at Christ Covenant Church in 2020

Continue to commit to doing worship, life, and ministry together.
Continue to pray and participate for a movement of the gospel that brings personal conversions and renewal, community formation, and generous lives of humble cultural engagement in our city and beyond.
Continue to support Christ Covenant Church financially trusting God to share his graces through you.
Continue to pray for the sale of the Barnwell Street property and commit to giving out of your resources to the "Building Fund" for the revitalization of the property at Covenant Road.

In this Christmas season let us together respond to our Lord's grace and love toward us by putting ourselves in his care, trusting him with what he can do through us.

A king went into the village streets to greet his subjects. A beggar sitting by the roadside eagerly held up his alms bowl, sure that king would give handsomely. Instead the king asked the beggar to give him something. Taken aback, the beggar fished three grains of rice from his bowl and dropped them in the king's outstretched hand. When at the end of the day the beggar poured out what he had received, he found to his astonishment three grains of pure gold in the bottom of his bowl. *O, that I had given them all.* Let us give ourselves wholly to him who gave himself fully for us.

Orthodoxy: The Law's Purpose

New City Catechism Q.15: Since no one can keep the law, what is its purpose?

Answer: That we may know the holy nature and will of God, and the sinful nature and disobedience of our hearts; and thus our need of a Savior. The law also teaches and exhorts us to live a life worthy of our Savior.

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. - Romans 3:20

The law has a purpose. We enjoy things that have a purpose in our lives. We know this when we expect something to fulfill a certain purpose we've assigned to it and it doesn't. A person expects a tool to achieve a purpose as they hold it in their hand and apply it with force to object that needs moving or loosening or tightening. If that tool fails in its purpose, we will not use it again or recommend it to a friend. Another person expects their alma mater's team to win so that they can be both proud and happy. Therefore, when they inevitably lose, their team has not fulfilled the purpose that person assigned them. Therefore, they will sell their season tickets or recommend by way of social media that their school find themselves another coach. We should expect God's law to have a purpose because it comes from him and we are fashioned in his image.

The law of God reveals the true God and the truth about our ungodliness. Paul says, "Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." (Rom. 7:7) Therefore the law is good. Paul says, "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." (Rom.7:12) It comes from God so it is holy and righteous and good. But it's not so good, when in it's mirror, we see a reflection, not of God, but ourselves not holy and not righteous and not good. Therefore, the law reveals our need for a rescuing Savior.

The law continues to reveal how great the gap is between ourselves and God. A simple examination of our life through the lenses of God's law exposes our dying selves. If we were in a living relationship with God we would find ourselves able to live for his glory, trusting him, desiring his will, and loving him for his sake and others good alone. But as it is we cannot keep God's law, and when we break it at any one part we are violating the whole. We do not desire God or his will, and if there is any "good" that is done it is out of motivation for our own exaltation without any love to God. This kind of honest examination reveals our walking dead state and the ever widening gap between ourselves and God. We cannot honestly congratulate ourselves, but we can honestly ask him to have mercy through his saving grace. This is the law's good purpose in our lives.

How would we know God is holy, righteous, and good, if he didn't say, "You shall have no other gods before me?" (Ex.20:3) How would we know that he is the only true and living God unless he commands his creatures to love him by keeping his commands? (Jn.15:10) How would we know that he is the only God who will satisfy our deepest desires if he didn't say, "You shall not covet." (Ex.20:17) How would we know that all our over desires reveal our idolatrous hearts unless he commands his creatures to put to death covetousness which is idolatry (Col.3:5)? How would we know our God, our sin, and our need of a Savior without knowing his commands?

The law has a purpose. Jesus says to a man who would try to justify himself and himself before others and his God, that he was good by his works of the law, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone....One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (Lk.18:19, 22). Paul says, "yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Gal. 2:16). The law has a good purpose - to show us our God, our sin, and our need for our Savior, Jesus Christ, who kept the law perfectly and was condemned to death on the cross for all our law breaking transgressions and sins. This is what Jesus and Paul are giving us through the law and the gospel.

Those who are justified by God through faith in Christ find a new purpose in the law. Fulfilling it. In our walking dead state, before faith in Christ, we can only break God's law. But now we who have died to sin and are alive to God by faith in Christ are able to love God and our neighbors according to God's pleasure for his glory. It is not a life of perfection according to the law, but the law can be fulfilled by Christ in us and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord Jesus stands in heaven with the law in his bloodied hands revealing to those he's not ashamed to call his brothers and sisters a true, good, and beautiful life for those in his kingdom. Those who, no longer live for themselves, but by faith in him who loves them and gave himself for them, are compelled by his love with gratitude to walk in his grace, toward the living God and his living creatures for his glory. The law of God has its purpose in all our lives for all time.