

Christmas Preparation

Isaiah 40:1-5; Matt. 3:1-3

December 9, 2007 • Panha M. Doeung

INTRODUCTION

It was the night before Christmas
and all through the town
Not a sign of Baby Jesus
was anywhere to be found.

The people were all busy
with Christmas time chores
Like decorating, and baking,
and shopping in stores.

No one sang "Away in a manger,
no crib for a bed".
Instead, they sang of Santa
dressed-up in bright red.

Mama watched Martha Stewart,
Papa drank beer (Diet Coke) from a tap.
As hour upon hour
the presents they'd wrap

When what from the TV
did they suddenly hear?
Of an ad which told
of a big sale at Sears.

So away to the mall
they all flew like a flash
Buying things on credit
and others with cash!

And, as they made their way home
From their trip to the mall,
Did they think about Jesus?
Oh, no... not at all.

Their lives were so busy
with their Christmas time things
No time to remember
Christ Jesus, the King.

There were presents to wrap
and cookies to bake.
How could they stop and remember
who died for their sake?

To pray to the Savior
they had no time to stop.
Because they needed more time
to "Shop til they dropped!"

On to Wal-mart! On to (Kmart) Big Lot!
On to Target and Penney's!
On to Hallmark and Zales!
A quick lunch at Denny's

From the big stores downtown
to the stores at the mall
They would dash away, dash away,
and visit them all!

And up on the roof,
there arose such a clatter
As grandpa hung icicle lights
up on his brand new step ladder.

He hung lights that would flash.
He hung lights that would twirl.
Yet, he never once prayed to Jesus...
Light of the World. (*Source Unknown*)

Everyone is busy, overworked and uptight.
Trying to make preparation for Christmas night.

Christmas is just 16 days away. If we are not careful, those days will fly right by and we have not done anything to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Many people mistake that Christmas preparation is all those things in the poem. Decorating, baking, cooking, cleaning, shopping, wrapping gifts, making travel plans, going to parties and trying to tie loose ends.

We get caught up with so much to do. This time of year can be filled with fears, pressures, worries and anxieties. What supposed to be the most glorious, joyful time of year is turned into the most frantic, frustrating season of all. Instead of seeking the simple manger, we seek the shopping mall. Instead of following the star, we follow the sales. Instead of kneeling to worship the Newborn King, we hurriedly go about doing our things.

Christmas is about the invasion of God's Son into the world to be with us...to save us from our sin. And we need to be prepared for His coming. We need to be ready. We need to stop and pay attention. We need to take time to wonder and ponder the mystery. That's why this season is known as Advent from the Latin word *Adventus* meaning "coming" or "arrival." We look and anticipate His coming. And we need to be prepared.

Today, I want us to look at God's Word and I want to help you prepare for Christmas. My prayer that we would not get so caught up with doing Christmas things that we miss the Christ of Christmas altogether.

Turn with me to Isaiah 40:1-5 and let's see what God's Word has for us today. Read passage...

LESSON

The prophet Isaiah was writing at a time in Israel's history when they were in a deep spiritual decline and they were falling farther and farther away from God. There was a long succession of ungodly kings, and there were enemies on every side. Instead of looking to God for help, they looked to pagan countries and pagan gods for protection and deliverance. Because of their unfaithfulness, Isaiah rebuked the leaders, their idolatry and their unethical behaviors. In the midst of a bleak situation, he offered some hope and prophesized that God will establish His Kingdom on earth and send the Messiah to deliver His people.

From this passage I want to suggest two things to help you prepare for the coming Messiah:

Look in v. 1, "Comfort, O comfort My people." God was speaking to people who were desperately in need of comfort. Their nation and temple were going to be destroyed by the powerful Assyrian army, and many people will be killed and others will be taken away into exile.

Many of you today are in need of comfort. Maybe it's been a rough and tough year. Maybe you're hurting. And Christmas time can be a difficult time. Many people get what the medical profession called Seasonal Affective Disorder. This time of year, they feel lonely, depressed, sad, discouraged, fear and anxious about the coming new year. Some face financial pressures and hardship. Others try to cope with broken relationships. Some lost family members during the year and have to go through the holiday season without them.

“Comfort, O comfort My people.” God is offering you his comfort. In the midst of stressful times, you can have rest. You can have peace. Take some time to reflect and receive God’s comfort.

So the first thing we can do to prepare for Christmas is to receive His comfort and to know that everything is going to be okay. Not only does God offer us His comfort, He wants us to clear out the clutter in our life.

Look at v. 3. “A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley;”

This is a prophecy of John the Baptist coming to prepare the way of the Lord. John was a messenger, a forerunner (not Toyota) God used to prepare the way for Jesus’ coming.

Isaiah’s prophecy was about 700 years before Christ. All four Gospel writers recorded this prophecy of John crying out in the wilderness saying:

- Prepare the way for the Lord
- He is coming. Get ready
- Get your acts together
- Make your path straight

John was preparing and clearing the way for people to receive Jesus. A forerunner is someone who goes before to make ready for the arrival of someone important.

If President Bush were to come visit our church, someone would come beforehand to talk to us, tell us what we need to do, and to prepare the way for his coming. And if we pay attention, we all would clean up and do our best to get everything ready to receive him.

The phrase “clear the way” or “prepare the way” in the original language carries an important word picture of turning away from something and turning to face something else.

You see the people had been living far away from God, and their faces were turned away from God. They were facing and worshipping idols and engaging in all sort of evil things.

And Isaiah is prophesizing that one will come who cry out “clear the way, prepare the way for God to come, turn back to face God.”

And we see this prophesy of John come true in Matthew 3. Let me read for you Matthew 3.

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'"

Do you see the connection here? What Isaiah wrote 700 years about clearing the way is being fulfilled by John. Notice the very first thing that came out of John’s mouth, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

What he’s saying is “clear the way, turn to face God, get ready to receive Him.”

The call to clear the way in Isaiah is the call to repent by John. Repent mean to make a turn about face. John is saying, “whatever you’ve been facing and if it’s not God, then repent. Turn back to face God.”

Throughout Scripture, we see that when people worship God, they are before Him, facing Him, and that He is in front of them. As we worship, we imagine His place in relation to us always in front and we lift Him high. He is never to our side nor at our feet. Worshipping God with Him to our back is inconceivable. The Bible speaks of “behold the glory of the Lord.” To behold him, we have to face Him.

So whatever you’re looking at or facing is what you worship. You don’t worship something you’re not facing to or looking at. You worship what you face.

During a season where we are lured to spend money we don't have, to eat out, to see, to do, to treat ourselves. God's Word reminds us to get ready for His coming, to clear the way for Him, to turn to face Him. There will be many things and temptations that will keep you from facing God. And we need to heed the word of Isaiah and John, "Clear the way for the Lord." "Repent!"

And here is an important lesson as we try to connect everything together. The theology of the Gospel or the central theme of the Gospel is the kingdom of God. Jesus came to establish His kingdom on earth. Remember we said earlier that one of Isaiah's themes is that God will establish His Kingdom and rule over the earth and all the peoples. His kingdom, his rule is realized through Jesus Christ.

And people misunderstood Jesus. They thought His kingdom is a physical one since they wanted him to feed them, protect them and deliver them from the Roman's rule. Instead Jesus came to bring spiritual kingdom where he rules and reign in the hearts of His people.

So when John calls for people to repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand, he is saying, "turn away from whatever you're facing and worshipping and make room for the King of kings and Lord of lords to rule and reign in your heart."

APPLICATION

You may ask, "what do I need to repent from?" For the Israelites, it was repenting from idolatry, from self reliance, from pride and unethical behaviors. John even tells them in v. 11, "if you have two tunics, share with him who has none. If you have food, do the same. To the tax collector, he said, "collect no more than you're required. Don't cheat and abuse others. To the soldiers, he said, "don't take money by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with what you have." For us today, it could be money and material things that we are facing. It could be power and position, job, career, jealousy and greed, an unforgiving spirit. It could be living for yourself or other people or things instead of living for God.

Whatever rules, controls and has power over your life, repent. “Clear the way. Make smooth the road. Prepare the way for the coming Lord.”

CONCLUSION

God’s people, if you want to see God’s blessing in your life, in your home, in your church, it begins with clearing the way for Him to rule and reign your hearts. God wants your heart more than anything. If your heart is facing something else, would you clear the way and turn back to face Him?

The way of blessing is a heart totally turned over to God. If God does not have your heart, He doesn’t have you. Jesus came on that first Christmas to establish His Kingdom on earth. He came to rule our hearts and one day He will return to take us home so we can rule with Him.

Prepare for Christmas by receiving God’s comfort and clear the way for His coming by preparing your heart to receive Him.

Would you pray with me?

Some of you need to be comforted today. God loves you and cares for you. Receive His comfort.

Some of you are living far away from God. Would you repent and turn back to face Him?

Some of you need to give your heart to God. You’re tired and weary. Stop trying so hard. Just come to Him by faith. John 1:12 says, “for as many as received Him to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name.”