November 28/29, 2020

A Christmas Full of Worship

Hope-Filled Christmas Series

Isaiah 9:6

Pastor Bryan Clark

Good morning! I hope you had a great Thanksgiving.

So, I just want to ask you an honest question, "How are you doing?" I think we all understand the world is pretty messed up right now. There has been a lot coming on people since March and, to be honest, there's a lot of people that aren't doing very well. That's why we would like to offer you a hope-filled December. And hope starts with worship and as we want to talk about that this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Isaiah, Chapter nine, verse 6:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful,
Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

It's a familiar passage, especially at Christmas time. To share a little bit of the background of Isaiah, in 722 BC, the Assyrians attacked and conquered the northern tribes known as Israel, and it was now only a matter of time until they would cross the border and attack and devastate the southern tribes known as Judah. So, the people are terrified. They know it's coming. Isaiah is writing somewhere around 700 BC, so about twenty years after the takeover of the north, and he writes that there is still hope. There is a light in the darkness because there is a promised King that is coming. He says in verse 6:

For a child will be born to us,

That's His humanity,

…a son will be given to us.

That's His deity. We saw this in the Gospel of John.

And the government will rest on His shoulders;

So, a representative democracy has a lot of many good qualities. But when the system is broken, it turns into gridlock, and everyone suffers. In the ancient world, they had no sense of democracy. It was all about a king. If you had a king that was good and was strong, the people flourished. If you had a king that was weak or evil, the people suffered. The promise is of a king—the ultimate King—unlike any other king, who would sit on the throne and He is both powerful and He is good.

Isaiah then goes on to describe the King through five names. In the ancient world, names were descriptions. So this ultimate King, His name shall be called **Wonderful**. There's always conversation as to whether it's Wonderful, comma, Counselor, or Wonderful Counselor. Scholars debated back and forth; there's really no way to settle the issue. But there are many Hebrew scholars that do think it is **Wonderful**, comma, **Counselor**. The thing I don't like about taking it as **Wonderful Counselor** is, we just skip **Wonderful**, which I think is a mistake. He is the one who fills our lives with *wonder*. We were made for wonder.

In Genesis one and two, the description before sin brought chaos into this world, is that the garden was pleasurable both to *look at* and to *eat from.* We were made with the capacity to drink in the wonder of God and what He has made. We were made to wonder. This deals with the boredom of life. Boredom is a significant problem! We're busy, but we're bored. In many ways, we're busy because we're bored. Life seems to have no meaning; it has no purpose. We are busy…but we're bored.

In many ways, technology has drained the wonder out of life. What is it that allows a child to sit on the sidewalk and for an hour watch a bug? God has made us to wonder. But I do wonder how much of that is changing with children spending so much time in front of devices and screens. Do you realize that by the age of 40, you have lost 98% of the wonder and creativity you had when you were 5 years old? We were created to wonder. This deals with the boredom of life. There was a time when life was full of adventure. It was full of mystery. It was full of discovery. Now we have remarkable information available at our fingertips in seconds. We Google; we Zoom; we Skype, but we no longer wonder. The amount of information that is accessible to us in seconds was unimaginable to anyone in the world twenty years ago. As a result of that, we've lost our sense of mystery and adventure.

A couple of years ago in a sermon, I referenced Patti and my's trip to the Grand Canyon. I was mesmerized by the beauty of the Grand Canyon. About a week later, a young adult stopped me in the hall and said, "You know, I googled that, and it *is* really amazing," to which I replied, "You do understand that's not the same don't you?" To which he shrugged his shoulders and walked off. Do we not understand: "That's not the same?"

Here's what I would like to invite us into in the month of December. I want to invite us to recapture wonder, for worship starts with wonder. I'm inviting us to shut down the technology, to push the devices aside, and intentionally spend time in wonder. I'm inviting us to take in the sunrises and the sunsets. I'm inviting us to go out on a December night and behold the wonder of the night sky, and wonder that the God who created all this became a baby, to become the Savior of the world. I'm inviting us into a December of wonder.

Anybody confused these days? Anybody frustrated at trying to figure out what's true? Anybody looking for guidance or direction in life? What if I could offer you a **Counselor**, available 24/7, no charge? He's always right. He knows the beginning from the end. His name shall be called, **Counselor**.

We have a truth problem in our culture today. For years, the politicians and the media have lied to us, and now they wonder why people won't listen to what they have to say in this hour of crisis.

It's frightening today what people are willing to believe is true. It no longer has to be true to be believed. It only has to be repeated again and again and again. Years ago, G. K. Chesterton said, "When men choose to no longer believe in God, he will not thereafter believe in nothing. It is then that he is capable of believing anything."

That's the culture in which we live, which does raise an interesting question: Who are the voices that you are allowing to speak into your life…who are the voices that you're allowing to speak into your life? Here's a way to think about it. Our emotions reflect the voices. To which I would say, "What's with all the anger? Where is that coming from? Who are the voices you're allowing to speak into your life that's creating so much anger? Where's all the frustration coming from? Where's all the fear coming from? Where's all the anxiety coming from? Who are the voices you're allowing to speak into your life?" We lock our doors. We set our alarms, but we seem unaware of the greatest thief of all, who is going to steal your joy…who is going to steal your peace…who is going to steal your hope? And he comes into your home a hundred different ways. You're making a choice to allow those voices to speak into your life.

So, here's what I'm suggesting for the month of December. I'm suggesting we shut down the noise. I'm suggesting we turn off the negativity, we separate ourselves from the fear, and we have a December of hope. It may even require separating yourself from certain people who are determined to be angry, who are determined to be fearful or determined to keep things agitated. At some point you have to say, "I don't want that in my life. I don't want those voices." Because here's the deal. You have available to you the ultimate **Counselor**. But this **Counselor** does not yell. He doesn't. So, the only way you're going to hear the still small voice of God is if you shut down the noise for one month. Let's shut it down, and let's listen to the voice of hope.

Anybody need a Christmas miracle? I don't know what's going on in your life right now. What is it that you need? Remind me, "What is it going on in your life right now that's just too big for God?" His name shall be called the **Mighty God**. What is it that you need? Are you hungry? He's the *bread of life*. Are you thirsty? He's the *living water*. Are you confused? He's the *light of the world*. What do you need? You need some water turned to wine? You need five thousand fed with a few loaves and fishes? Do you remember He's the one that makes the lame to walk and the blind to see? He is the one that raised the dead to life. He's the one that gave life to a discouraged Samaritan woman, and forgiveness to an adulteress. He is the one that has conquered sin and death forever and offers life eternal to those who believe! So remind me again this morning, "What is it that you're going through that's just too big for this God?" I'm not suggesting He is going to wave a magic wand, and everything will be okay. It doesn't work that way. I am suggesting that He will be there and take you by the hand and walk you through whatever it is you're going through—and that He will be enough!

His name shall be called **Eternal Father**. The Hebrew for Father means *author* or *originator*. He is the *originator of eternity*. Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes that God has put eternity in our hearts. What he means by that is there's something deep within our souls that feels like we were made for something different than this. "It feels like I was made for something more." Why do I feel so dissatisfied with this life? The answer is, "Because you were. You *were* made for something different and for something more!"

Ultimately, this King will deliver us to that world—the new heaven and earth—that will be everything our hearts long for. For now, we just get moments. For now, time is the enemy because time steals moments. There's perhaps no time of the year when this is truer than at Christmas time. There are moments we experience at Christmas that seem almost magical, but we don't get to keep those moments. Time steals them away. Even in the midst of the moments, we know this isn't going to last. It feels like the world is teasing us with a moment, but it is a moment that won't last. It's why so many people struggle with sadness and loneliness at Christmas time. Because there have been moments, but the moments are gone, and we don't get them back again.

But what if those moments weren't so much teasers? What if they are glimpses? What if they are glimpses of the world as God intended it to be and glimpses of the world as if, one day, will be again? This is the hope of the resurrection. No matter what, this story isn't over, and we get glimpses of the world to come that will be everything we long for it to be. What if those glimpses are actually reasons for hope? But here's the deal: It's easy to miss the moments. People miss them all the time. We get so distracted by things that don't really matter. We get so agitated; we get so frustrated; we get so angry; we get so anxious; we get so fearful that we're distracted, and we miss moments that we'll never get back again. Think of it this way: If Jesus returned tomorrow, what is it that would actually matter today? That's what matters. To recapture moments, you have to be clear on what matters.

The one who will sit on the throne of David will be the **Prince of Peace**. The word **Prince**, is a Hebrew word that can mean *Lord*, can mean *Master*. The word **Peace** is the Hebrew word, *shalom*. The one who will sit on the throne is the Master of shalom. Shalom is about mutual flourishing. It's about a kingdom where God will gather people from every tribe and tongue and nation, and they will flourish together under the Master of shalom. It's the kingdom that our souls long for. One day that will come in its fullness. But part of our calling today is to create pockets of flourishing, glimpses of flourishing. It's part of our witness to a lost and dying world. It's just a pocket that says it doesn't have to be this way. Life doesn't have to be filled with so much anger and so much fear and so much hatred and so much anxiety. Each of us has a responsibility to our little part of the world to do what we can to create flourishing.

What would that look like for us in the month of December, to create pockets of flourishing, to bring people hope in the midst of very discouraging times? But here's the deal: In 21st century American culture, the enemy of shalom is the media. At some point, we as Christians have to come to grips with this. This is poisoning our souls and it's contrary to our calling. The media has a vested interest in keeping the fight going. Their intent is to make people angry and far too many Christians feed on it hour after hour after hour. We're supposed to love our neighbors, not argue with our neighbors. We find ourselves rejecting the people we're supposed to be reaching and loving. You cannot get serious about flourishing if you keep allowing an angry media to poison your soul.

Here's my suggestion, and some of you are not going to like this. For the month of December—four weeks—let's create a season of wonder. Let's create a season of worship. Let's create a season of shalom. Let's create a season of hope and to do that, I am inviting us all to turn off the noise. Turn it off for one month. It's enough. It's enough negativity. It's enough anger. It's enough fighting. This may come as a surprise to you but every device you have does have an on-off button. Turn it

off for one month. The world will get along without us and it will create the possibility, in a season of darkness, that we can be the light.

But here's the deal. Some of you can't. Yes, I am suggesting some of you can't…you can't! The addiction to media is just as real as an addiction to alcohol or drugs. I'm suggesting some of you can't. It isn't uncommon that someone will say, "Pastor Clark, I think I may have a problem with alcohol," to which I always say the same thing. "Okay, let's see. Let's go six months without a drop and let's just find out." Usually they call me a week later, "Pastor, I have a problem!"

I am suggesting the same problem. Like with any addiction, there'll be excuses and rationalizations and all the reasons why I am suggesting for some of you, "You can't do it!" If you can, then do it. One month…one month where we stop the noise. We stop the negativity. We stopped the anger. We stop the fear mongering, and we devote ourselves to a season of wonder…to a season of peace…to a season of hope.

For unto us is born this day in the city of David, a Savior.
His name shall be called Wonderful,
Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father.
The Prince of Peace.

Our Father, we are so thankful that in the midst of the most difficult of times, we have the One who is the Master of shalom, who offers this hope if we will open ourselves up to listening to His still small voice as we recapture the wonder of Christmas. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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