



Listening For Christmas

“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth” John 1:14.

I love the sounds of Christmas. I love listening to Christmas music without the interruption of someone trying to sell me something or convince me of something. I love the Christmas concerts. I love the fact that

Christmas was first introduced by an angel choir singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” Luke 2:14.

If Christmas is a Word, then perhaps we can receive it by listening. But, what Word was made flesh? It was the Word from God that came to live among us. From the beginning, God has been trying to talk to us. “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets; but, in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, who is appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:1-3). There it is again –word, “powerful word.”

If Christmas is a Word, then it is our part to listen for the sound and the voice of Christmas. We must be perfectly quiet and listen. Our passage calls Christ the *true word*; but, that is not all. “In *this Word* was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:3-4). This Word is God himself.

So often in the sermons of Christ, we are called upon to do just one thing –to listen. Jesus ended many of his stories with, “Let anyone with ears listen!” (Matthew 13:43); “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches: (Revelations 3:22). Why listen? Because God comes to us in a Word. The great zenith of that word is Christ. The ultimate of what God wanted to say to man is Christ. Christ is where God himself becomes the message. It is when God becomes our next door neighbor and comes over for a visit.

The parables of Christ continue to play off the theme of God coming as the Word. In the parables that compare the Kingdom of God to planting, tending and harvesting seeds, we are told, “The sower sows the Word” (Mark 4:14). The seed planted is always the Word. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Words are seeds. Specifically, Christ is the seed planted; Christ is the seed we are to plant. To plant Christ is to plant the most up-to-date, the most comprehensive, the very latest Word that God gives to mankind. It is to plant a seed that cannot be improved upon.

“In him was life,” “Full of grace and truth.” These words can be counted upon to grow –this seed is “full of

life.” This seed is good seed –“full of grace, full of truth.” We are to receive it by our ears –then, plant it by our lives, which become voices for God –true voices for God. Seeds and words are always the same in the Bible. “You have been born anew, not of perishable, but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring Word of God” (1 Peter 1:23).

This Word, this Christ, this seed, this message from God (that is God), is the medium for and the means of our new birth. What is the new birth? It is the planting of new life. It starts with the planting of a seed –a word. Without Christ we would have never known what we must know. He planted new ideas; he planted a new way; he planted a New Testament; the result is a new you, and is resulting in a new world.

Yet, these words are different –“they are not perishable seed.” When we receive God’s Word in Christ a seed is planted in our hearts. Seed is a wonderful thing. We can hold in our hand some seeds of grain. We put them in the ground and they grow. Then, at harvest time, we have more than we can hold in both hands put together. Then, we plant these seeds –and the next year we have bushel baskets full of grain. And after a few years, we have enough to feed the entire world. When we hold an acorn in our hand, we hold a potential forest.

While physical seeds are perishable and will rot in the ground, God’s seed is imperishable –nothing can destroy it. At the moment a heart really opens to receive it, it germinates and produces life that will never die –eternal life. Seeds often lie dormant many years. However, with the soaking of many rains, the freezing and thawing of the seasons and the abrasion and scarifying action of the wind as it blows them across the sharp sand and rock, the hard outer surface is worn down so that the life inside may emerge. We say they sprout.

Many people have hard outer surfaces. The Word can lie dormant in the human mind for many years before the heart is opened to receive it. We must, therefore, keep on with our planting of the seed of God’s good Word, Christ.

Peter called the Scripture the “Word of God.” God called Jesus the Word. One of the greatest proofs of God’s work in the world is the life produced in humankind when Christ is planted in human hearts. I think the real reason people turn away from the church is when they don’t see Christ planted and growing in the hearts of the people of the church. You just can’t do what a lot of Church people are doing in the name of “taking a stand.” “The Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I send it” (Isaiah 55: 10-11). God did not send Christ for nothing. To have a church, we must get Christ back into the Church. The “word” of Moses failed –men think that it should work, so they “double down” on “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” –and it still doesn’t work. They cannot hear Christ saying, “Moses did say that; but I say...” (Matthew 5:38-39). That is, “There is a way that “seems right” to man –but, the end thereof are the ways of death” (Pro. 14:12). It didn’t work last time; why do you think it will work this time?

At one time, Voltaire said that in 50 years not one Bible would be left. One hundred years later, thousands of Bibles were being printed in the very building in which he said that. Today, we have Bibles in every major language and in easy to understand language. It is easier than ever to hear the Voice of Christ. Scripture is engraved on public buildings all over the world. You cannot get rid of the Word. It is more than living; it is living and imperishable. Human life is limited. Methuselah lived 969 years; but, died. Christ lives forever. "The Word of God lives and abides forever." The voice of Christ is always there; it is the "listen part" that is missing in our churches. There is no shortage of Bibles; there is a shortage of "listen."

In many ways, John is different than the other 3 gospels. It contains many things they omit, and omits many things they contain. One thing is that John presents Jesus as the Word –"the Son of God." Matthew presents him as a king, Mark as a servant, Luke as the "son of man." This is why John does not begin with a genealogy –God has no beginning. God goes way back. "In the beginning was God." The Word was there in the beginning; Christ was already there in the beginning. God spoke and the worlds came into being. There, again, is the Word of God. If you could only have one gospel, John would be a good one to have.

John introduced Jesus as the Word. Jesus is the last word in religion. Jesus is what we needed to know, that we could not know in any other way. "The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2).

The Word was God; the Word was God the Creator of all. In the beginning God said (And there you have the Word again –God said), Let there be light, and there was light." "He commanded and they were created" (Psalm 40:8). This Word was the source of light and life in the beginning; it is the source of light and life now. Whatever understanding and spiritual life Adam and Eve had before the fall, they got from Christ --Christ, the Word. For most of human history we have not had a written word; still, we have always had the Word. It is unlikely that the shepherds were able to read; still, they heard the voice of God as it came to us all on the first Christmas night.

The vast majority of people have forgotten the fall of man. Yet, it is all around us. The "light has been shining in darkness" but, the darkness is so deep that "It comprehended it not." Our News is simply a commentary on "who is the worst sinner." It is hard to find any light in that.

The new life we have, we owe to Christ. Nothing less would do; nothing less would penetrate the darkness. How dark was that darkness. What is darkness? Darkness is when we fail to see what we are doing. It is when we cannot see ourselves for what we are. It is when we incorporate injustice, prejudice, and greed into our social fabric (and our Christian message or methods) and do not see the hurt and harm we do to others by so doing. That is darkness. So often, I listen to Christians doing what they claim is ministry –and I think, "Could somebody turn on the lights?" What would it take to make us see ourselves? Nothing less than God himself. Words came from prophets, words came from angels, words were written on stones, words were written on paper; yet, to make us listen, God had to become the Word himself.

What is the strength of our foundation? It is a Word, it is a Word that is God. "The Word became

flesh and dwelt among us.” There is, therefore, the one great task for us all in the receiving of another Christmas. That is to listen. We must listen for Christmas. Perhaps our weakest skill in Christian worship and service is that we do not know how to listen. We do not know how to listen to each other; we do not know how to listen to God. We talk, we shout, we justify, we argue, we posture, we crusade, we march --we do not listen.

Since God came to earth as the “Word,” it is paramount that we learn how to listen. It is by listening that these Words can grow, as seeds planted deep in our hearts, and by which new life will spring forth. In counseling there is an acronym that helps a listener give his or her full attention to the speaker. The acronym spells SOLER. S, face the speaker Squarely. O, adapt an Open body posture. L, Lean toward the speaker. E, make Eye contact with the speaker. R, Relax in the presence of the speaker. Be comfortable in his or her presence.

Few of us listen well. Yet, here is a time we cannot afford to shirk. We must give God, at least, the same attention that we give others in good listening. We must face God squarely; we must look into his eyes –not look away; we must be open with him; we must lean toward him; we must learn to be comfortable in his presence.

The first Christmas came to us as the Word. Words require that we listen. Christmas will come in songs, just as the angels sang. They come –these messages come, in silent moments. “Silent night, holy night.” “Be still and know that I am God.” Christmas will come in the “body language” of Jesus Christ. Mechanical, academic words were not sufficient for the voice of God. He had already sent such words by the prophets; many of them are recorded in the Bible. Yet, people who study communication tell us that 70 to 90 percent of any message is sent in body language.

So, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” God spoke in body language. See Jesus healing the people with his touch. See Jesus weeping over his people. See Jesus praying in Gethsemane. See Jesus dying on a cross for us all. Listen to his body language. Christmas comes only when we listen. Be sure to take time to listen –it was the Word that became flesh on the first Christmas. Today, we ask you to come and do just one thing –listen. Listen for Christmas. Christ will come if you listen. It is only required that you listen.