

The Promise of Advent

Ephesians 1:3-4, Genesis 3:15

Slide one

Today is the 2nd Sunday of Advent. Advent, as I mentioned last week, means the coming or the arrival.

As we considered Scripture's testimony in Romans 3, we came to the conclusive decision that there was a desperate need for Advent because people are sinners by nature.

We learned that sin has corrupted our character, defiled our conversation and perverted our conduct.

Even knowing this, God made a promise that one day, Someone would come that would make right what had been made wrong by Adam and Eve.

One would come that would deal with sin that had become a part of man's nature. He would make it possible for mankind to have a relationship with a holy, righteous and perfect God.

Therefore, the subject we want to consider on this second Sunday of Advent is - The Promise of Advent.

We've established that there's a need for Advent and now flowing out of that need let's reflect on the promise that God made pertaining to the advent of Christ in order to meet that need.

Slide 2

Thinking about the promise of Advent, that God was going to send Christ to save us from sin, where would you go to begin studying this topic? Many would go to Genesis 3:15.

Genesis 3:15, *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

Now, this is the first mention of advent or coming of Christ even though He’s not specifically named at that point.

It just says that the woman’s seed will bruise the serpent’s head. Is that where we should begin? Not really.

The place where we want to start thinking about the promise of Advent is found in the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:3-4, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”*

This passage predates Genesis 3:15, not in terms of when it was written but in terms of when it’s talking.

It’s speaking about before man, the earth, and the universe were created and therefore before Adam and Eve sinned.

I want you to think about what the implications of this verse means. It means that God chose us knowing that we’d be a sinner and therefore in need of Him to pay for our sins.

The implication is that the original promise of Advent was made before anything was created and since no living being had been created at that time, God made that promise of Advent to Himself.

Think about it. Sometimes we make decisions not really knowing what we’re getting ourselves into. But this isn’t true of God.

He knew exactly what He was getting Himself into, to what He was committing Himself. That's not like us.

When we think about doing a project or fixing something that's in need of repair and see the challenge it poses, we may get second thoughts.

As we evaluate the project our response might be, *"It's not worth my time"* or *"It's just not worth the effort."* So, we don't do it or we throw the broken item away and buy a new one.

It's amazing to me, in light of human history and its rejection and rebellion against God, that before the foundations of the world God didn't say, *"It's just not worth the effort."*

It's also amazing and humbling to me, in light of my history, my failures, my stubbornness, and my selfishness, that God didn't say, *"He's just not worth the effort."*

It's like the minister who sat in the vestry of his church waiting to meet anyone who might have spiritual difficulties. Finally, someone came. *"What is your difficulty?"* asked the minister.

The man answered, *"My difficulty is the ninth chapter of Romans, where it says, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.'"* "Yes," said the minister, *"there's great difficulty in that verse; but which part of the verse is difficult for you?"*

"The latter part, of course," said the man. *"I can't understand why God should hate Esau."*

The minister replied, *"That verse is difficult, but my difficulty has always been with the first part. I never could understand how God could love that wily, deceitful scoundrel Jacob."*

When we begin to comprehend this truth, it forces us to say that God's choosing us was all His doing. It had nothing to do with our goodness or our worth.

If our devotion to Him was the consideration for God choosing us, any logical person would say that it's not worth the effort. Yet, because of who God is, He said it's worth the effort and the cost.

Slide 3

Entertainer Garrison Keilor recalls the childhood pain of being chosen last for the baseball team.

"The captains are down to their last grudging choices: a slow kid for catcher, someone to stick out in right field where nobody hits it. They choose the last ones two at a time—"you and you"—because it makes no difference.

And the remaining kids—the scrubs, the excess—they deal for us as handicaps. "If I take him, then you gotta take him," they say.

Sometimes I'd go as high as sixth, usually lower. But just once I'd like Darrel to pick me first and say, "Him! I want him! The skinny kid with the glasses and the black shoes. You, c'mon!" But I've never been chosen with much enthusiasm."

Some of you may know exactly what Garrison's talking about. Well, I've got some exciting news.

We're so valuable to God, He chose us early, with enthusiasm, even though He was fully aware of all our handicaps and what it would cost Him.

How many of you would be inclined to make a promise if somehow you were able to know in advance what it would cost.

The incredible hardship, inconvenience, suffering, disappointment, rejection, mocking, and slander on your name and character that keeping that promise would cost.

If you could know that, how many of you would make that promise? I doubt I would. Yet that's exactly what God did. The all-wise and loving God, knowing fully what it would cost Him made the promise.

He created us with free will. He knew that we'd reject Him. He knew He would need to come and buy us back, redeem us through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

He chose us before the foundation of the world and, by choosing us, He committed Himself at that point to coming into this world as a baby.

He committed Himself to grow up to be despised and rejected and put to death by the people He created and loved in order to pay their penalty.

We've read this story so much in a religious context that we've lost the incredible drama that's involved. But understand, God didn't create Adam and Eve unaware of what they were going to do.

When they chose sin, the Godhead didn't group together for an emergency meeting where one of them said, "*Well, what should we do now?*" "*What are our options?*" And another one said, "*Well, we could...*" and then present the program of redemption.

No, this was all foreseen and decided upon before the first act of creation took place.

If you could take this story and put it in any other context, our response would be, "*What a fool a person would be to reject so great a love from such a wonderful person.*"

God chose us before the foundation of the world and by doing so, committed Himself to the Advent, the coming of Jesus into this world.

So, everything we read in the Bible, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21 flows from this decision, commitment and promise that was made before the foundation of the world, before anything was created.

If we're going to talk about the promise of Advent, we have to start back then, not in Genesis 3:15. Genesis 3:15 was just the first time it was told to a human, it had been made long before that day.

Slide 4

Can you remember when someone made you a promise that involved something in the future, and the anticipation of waiting for the day when that promise would be fulfilled.

I think it'd be hard to find two people who anticipated the fulfillment of a promise more than Adam and Eve.

Sometimes we just breeze past Adam and Eve, not really giving much thought to what their situation was like or, if we do, we think of it only in negative terms in connection with them bringing sin into the world.

We need to think about them in connection with this promise God made to them in Genesis 3:15 and the anticipation that must have been theirs because of this promise.

Genesis 3:15, *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."*

Who hasn't read in Genesis about God walking in the cool of the day with Adam and Eve and not been a little envious and longed to be able to do such a thing.

What an exciting thing if God came at the end of each day, personally and visibly, and walked and talked with you, but that stopped after they sinned.

Sometimes I wonder if Adam and Eve fully comprehended how badly they had messed up. I wonder if anyone could have anticipated the promise of the coming One as much as Adam and Eve.

They're the only ones in the entire history of mankind, to have a before and after picture.

They're the only ones to have seen a perfect world, to have seen themselves perfect, to have seen creation in perfect harmony with its creator.

Then "bam," to see the after picture, to see creation changed, to see the ground and the serpent cursed.

Think about it. They saw the change in their own hearts, then they as their children began to grow up, they observed the selfishness and the sin in them, and they saw their own son kill his brother.

Can anything be as tragic as that? But not only that, to know the vileness in their own hearts that had not been there at one point in their lives.

They probably longed for the coming of that seed of the woman more than anybody else in history.

Sometimes we pass so quickly over Adam and Eve that we don't stop to think of what must have been going through their minds through all this.

I don't know what kind of people they were like after they sinned, but if anybody was ever a candidate for deep regret it was those two. I don't see how they could've lived with that guilt on their conscience.

It makes you wonder what they thought whenever they walked around and saw people sinning or heard about some wrong act being committed.

Remember they lived some 900+ years, so they saw quite a bit of wickedness.

It makes me wonder if every time they saw or heard about some sin if it didn't just pierce them in a certain way, knowing that in one sense they were the cause of what was happening.

I wonder how often they reflected on God's promise to them in Genesis 3:15 and longed for the day when that promise would be fulfilled.

Slide 5

Conclusion

Today, instead of looking forward, we look backward to the birth, life and death of Christ as He came in fulfillment of God's promise.

God chose us before the foundation of the world and that's why we celebrate this season. It's the fulfillment of that promise.

God chose us before the foundation of the world, but He didn't choose us just so we could now live anyway we want.

Ephesians 1:4, *"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."*

He is the One who makes us holy and blameless as He accepts the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

As we put our trust in Christ, He imputes (credits) Christ's righteousness to us, and then calls us to walk according to the people we now are - God's holy children.

Ephesians 4:1, *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."*

Colossians 1:10a, *"So that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way."*

When we view Advent in light of what we have learned today and its implications as we've considered them, the command to *"live a life worthy of the calling you have received"* or to live holy and godly lives is not something we should do grudgingly.

There ought to be such love, devotion and gratitude for what God did that it should be our delight to walk and live this way.

I wonder how many Christians think about living godly lives in that light. It shouldn't be a burden, but rather a delight flowing out of deep gratitude and love.

He chose us that we might know Him, not just know about Him or know of Him, but know personally and intimately the person of God.

In choosing us, He looked across the years from that point before the creation of anything and saw the desperate need we'd be in because of sin.

In choosing us, He chose to take the awful penalty of our sin upon Himself so that we might be made new knowing full well all that would be involved in that choice.

He chose us before the foundation of the world and thus made the promise of the advent of Christ.

If that doesn't stir within your heart a response of praise and worship, love and humbleness, something is radically wrong. I urge you to spend time this week reflecting on the Promise of Advent.