

Message Date: 12-06-20

ADVENT 2020: **God's Gift for Right Now**

Week 1: The Gift of the New Way

- *In 1994 I was working for a multi-county governmental planning agency in central Indiana. I was the agency's landscape architect.*
- *One day as I walked into the office, I noticed my friend ALICE was working on an excel spreadsheet, and clearly doing so with great frustration. I asked her why she was distraught, and she said 'I hate this program, it's worthless!'. Now, I LOVE excel, so I asked her what the problem was. Looking around to make sure no one else was there, she sheepishly reached into her drawer and pulled out a calculator. Wait, what!?*
- *It turns out that she had no clue how to use a spreadsheet, and instead of using Excel's formulas (whole point of the program), she was doing all the math manually on her calculator and just typing in the numbers.*
- *Rather than asking for help to learn how to use the incredible power of a spreadsheet, she chose to do things the OLD WAY.*

- *This advent season we are exploring the incredibly important truth...*

✠ Reality! In Christ, God has opened the door into a NEW WAY. In the midst of the many pressures of life, a New Way of living where we begin to let go of our desire to control the OUTCOME, and instead engage life fully while trusting GOD with the outcome.

- *As we choose this NEW WAY, we will begin to experience the GIFTS of God to sustain us and bless us in the midst of the reality of life. We opened the first of these gifts last Sunday- the great hope that IN CHRIST, THE PRESSURE IS OFF. THE GIFT OF SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL REST.*
 - *TODAY, we will press deeper into the biblical foundation of this concept, as we unwrap our second gift of this Advent season... the GIFT OF THE NEW WAY. BUT FIRST, today is SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6th, 2020... pastor Ethan, Trinity Online.*
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✠ God's Gift for right now

- *Obvious thing about a gift. You can receive it with great appreciation.. but it won't do you any good until you KNOW you have received it, you understand what it is you have received, and you choose to use it.*
- *This is true of any gift, and it is true of God's gift to us for LIFE RIGHT NOW. IN CHRIST, there are things that are true of us- that we possess, but we won't experience them unless we understand them, and by faith, choose to live in the good of this truth.*

- *Part of this is remembering what God's gift is NOT. We like to claim promises God hasn't made, and this leads to confusion. To that point, God has not promised us deliverance from difficult circumstances. We will encounter times and things that will put us under pressure. For most people in human history, this is the predominant reality of life.*

- *In contrast, GOD'S PROMISE is that regardless of what's going on around us, or even in us, IN CHRIST, our soul may be at peace. We really can engage the challenges of life from a place of inner rest. But just as we need to understand God's gift to experience this, we need to understand our problem.*

✠ The old way

- **Author Larry Crabb describes how OUR PRESSURE come from what is called the ‘law of linearity’ (MYTH of linearity)- There is an outcome that we think is best, and it will happen if we do the right things. This creates the requirement for us to do what is right so that we can receive what we think is best. THE NT calls his the OLD WAY, and it is a chief characteristic of the OLD COVENANT.**
- **No detail now, but one of the most important theological concepts in interpreting the Bible is the crucial distinction between the OLD COVENANT and the NEW COVENANT. This roughly follows the OT and NT, but more specifically, the NEW COVENANT is what came into being through DBR of Jesus Christ, coming of the Holy Spirit**
- **We will look at this in detail later in ACTS, but this is important right now because even though IN CHRIST we have been brought into a NEW WAY of being in relationship with God, our default is still to live the OLD WAY- both in how we relate to GOD, and in how we deal with our struggles in life.**
- **We see the OLD WAY summed up in Deuteronomy 12:28 (many other places)**

^{12:28} *Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the LORD your God.*

- **This is the law of linearity. A+B=C. God told his people- obey my commands, do what is good and right, and it will go well with you. When you read this broader in the OT, the phrase ‘well with you’ is described as good health, long life, good crops, protection from enemies, etc. In other words, your circumstances will be good. You will be blessed in the circumstances of your life.**
- **But there’s a flipside. If you DON’T obey my law, and you DON’T do what is good and right, well, then, it will NOT go well for you.**
- **We take this formula- the OLD WAY OF THE LAW- and try to apply it to details of life. If I do the right things, say the right things, if I perform well enough, I can control the outcome of my situation and make things be the way I want them. If things don’t work out the way I desire, then I didn’t do the right thing, or enough of the right thing. LIFE WITH THE PRESSURE ON.**
- **This would all be great except for one problem. The old way doesn’t work. It never did, and it never will. God tells us this himself in scripture. HEBREWS 7:18-19**

^{7:18} *The former regulation (THE LAW) is set aside because it was weak and useless ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.*

† **A better hope! (see contrast!) In the old way, the goal of the law was God’s provision. In the New Way, the better hope is not what God does for us, it is GOD HIMSELF.**

- **Paul calls this as the NEW WAY OF THE SPIRIT. It is a way of living centered in our faith relationship with God, NOT our best efforts to achieve circumstantial blessings from God.**
- **In Romans 7 Paul puts it this way:**

Romans 7:4-6 *So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. ⁵ For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit*

for death. ⁶ But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

- **The old way is defined by our best efforts to live up to an impossible standard (be it the perfection of God’s moral law, or the expectations we and society place upon us)... and our default is to do this out of our own strength and wisdom. The result is what Paul calls ‘fruit for death’... burnout, pride, legalism, resentment, frustration, you name it.**
- **BUT NOW, IN CHRIST, as we begin to change our default from carrying these burdens to trusting God, we are RELEASED FROM the pressure of living up to the impossible expectations of always making life work on our own. THEN, in the NEW WAY OF THE SPIRIT, our trust and hope for tomorrow are in God, not ourselves or other people...**

✠ This is a paradigm shift in how we think about life and about God! Instead of seeing God’s gift as his PRESENTS (*circumstantial outcomes based on our performance*), the New Way invites us to continually receive the Gift of God’s PRESENCE.

- **ILLUSTRATION... back to advent story, this time the story of the SHEPHERDS. LUKE 2.**

Luke 2:8... And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

- **You know this... but life of shepherd was NOT easy.**
- **Keeping watch... from what? Predators. Injury. By night! Cold! Outside! Away from family...**
- **CODE: Shepherd= what is hard about life**

⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

- **QUESTION! To what did the shepherds return? THE FIELDS! THEIR JOB. EVERYTHING THAT WAS HARD ABOUT LIFE! At the end of this incredible event, what had changed for them? Not their situation! What had changed was their perspective. What had changed was their experience of GOD.**

✠ Reality! The miracle of the Shepherds isn’t that they received any change to challenging situation of life. They were still shepherds, but shepherds who had experienced the GLORY of GOD.

- **AND In the light of God’s glory- GOD’S PROMISE which they now knew, the pressure of their lives was lightened. They were praising God as they went back to their fields.**
- **CHURCH, we live under pressure because we are still trying to live the OLD WAY. We’ve embraced the error that we seek God so that He will make our situation better, rather than seeking God himself.**

- **In His Book 'TPO', Larry Crabb describes how many people who go to church are living a Christianized version of the old way...**
 - **If you want good kids, raise them according to Christian principles**
 - **Yes, but we have no control over our children's decisions and lives**
 - **If you want a good marriage, understand biblical model for marriage, and live it as closely as you can**
 - **Yes, but there will be times when we fail, there will be times of struggle, even crisis.**
 - **If you want God to bless your ministry, follow Godly principles of leadership**
 - **Yes, but ministries can change. Our best laid plans seemingly bear no fruit.**
 - **If you want to be emotionally healthy, practice spiritual disciplines.**
 - **Yes, but life can hit us hard, we can find ourselves struggling**
 - **If you want close friends, learn to be authentic, forgiving, and be part of group.**
 - **YES, but friends are fallable. People may move. We may find ourselves alone.**
- **Friends... hear me. We all want these for ourselves. GOD wants these for us. But what do all these have in common? What we WANT, our focus, is on a better life, rather than GOD HIMSELF. We want God as a means to an end, with the end being some resolution to whatever crisis, struggle, or purpose we have. LOOK AT THESE AGAIN**
- **(AFTER)... when these things happen, we may look at God and say.. GOD! I did the right things! Why has this happened! I don't understand.**

† Our tendency is to seek first what is EFFECTIVE. Christ's call is for us to seek first GOD.

- **In our positive flesh, we want to be effective- and being effective is GOOD. But far more importantly, in our SPIRIT, Christ calls us to be HOLY.**
 - **Set apart to Him. Our identity is rooted in Christ, who we are as his disciples.**
 - **Our trust resting in HIM.**
 - **Our obedience being to HIM.**
 - **Our sense of self-worth coming from HIM. True of us IN CHRIST.**
 - **Our hope, peace, joy, love, flowing from HIM.**
- **Paul captures this in his famous confession in Philippians...**

Philippians 3:7-14 *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

¹² *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

- **Does Jesus want you to live free from sin. Yes**
- **Does Jesus want you to be better wives, better husbands? YES**
- **Does Jesus want you to be good parents, discipling and raising your children in his word? YES**

- **Does Jesus want you to be emotionally healthy, free from fear, resentment, and hurt? YES**
- **Does Jesus want you to be generous, to be part of his church, to be active in his work? YES**
- **He wants ALL OF THESE for you. But his FIRST desire is that you KNOW HIM, and by faith, live each day in the goodness of his Love, presence.**

† Reality! Only in the New Way, as *we seek God first, (the better hope of drawing near to God)* will we begin to truly experience freedom from the sin, brokenness, and pressure that all the laws, expectations, and circumstances of this world pile upon us.

- **Like Paul, and the shepherds all those years ago, he TOOK HOLD OF YOU so that you could KNOW HIM. BEHOLD HIS GLORY, and choose to live in the Good of it.**
- **In Matthew six, Jesus said “I know there are so many things you are worried about. So many things that put you under pressure. But don’t worry. Seek me first. Seek first my kingdom, my righteousness, and all these things will come in their proper place. Yes, some of these things are important. Some of them are from me... But they are not me. They will not give you rest. Come to ME, and I will give you rest. IN ME, and in ME ALONE, the pressure is off.**
- **This is the gift of the NEW WAY. MORE TO COME!**