

THE SEED OF THE WOMAN

Genesis 3:14, 15

Intro: As we again approach the Christmas season, I am going to be speaking on several passages of Scripture which have to do with the first coming of the Son of God into this world. When I say this, I am thinking about tonight and next Sunday night, as well as three Sunday mornings beginning with December 17.

The earliest reference we have to the first coming of Christ is in Gen. 3:15. These words were spoken by the Lord God to the serpent. You can see this by tracing the beginning of the quotation back to verse 14. I don't think there is any question as to who the serpent was, but if we need any proof from Scripture, we have it in the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, chapter 12, verse 9, which reads,

And the great dragon was cast out, **that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan**, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

The Devil started out in the world by deceiving Eve, and that has been, and will be, the chief characteristic of his work until the very end. But here, early in Scripture, we are told that it is through the seed of the woman that the Devil will finally be destroyed.

Actually the Lord God in verse 15 referred to both the birth of Christ and to His death. We have a reference to His birth in the words, "her seed," speaking of the seed of the woman; the death of the Lord Jesus is to be found in the words, "it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The Seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, but the serpent would only be able to bruise the heel of the woman's Seed.

For those who may not understand, the word "seed" means a child, an offspring, a descendant. A woman's seed is her family. A man's seed is his family.

The Hebrew word which is translated "bruise" is capable of more than one translation. It can mean to bruise, or to scrape, or to crush, or to dash in pieces, or even to injure by rubbing. In one of the leading Hebrew lexicons, this is the suggested translation: "*He shall crush thee as to the head, and thou shalt bruise him as to the heel*" (Gesenius, p. 1045). The difference between a bruised serpent's head and a bruised man's heel shows that a different translation is merited. This statement describes the conflict of the ages, not just a conflict between human beings and the

Devil, but a conflict between the Lord and the Devil. And here, early in Scripture, we learn that the Seed of the Woman is to be the ultimate Victor. The Devil did incalculable damage to the human race when he seduced and deceived Eve, although the race was not condemned until Adam sinned. Yet the door was open, and the Devil was very clever to approach Adam through Eve.

I have mentioned many times that the revelation of truth in the Scriptures is progressive. That is, God begins often with just a brief reference to a truth, and then as we go on through the Bible we learn more and more until, with the completion of the NT we have all that God has intended to reveal. What we want to know beyond what is revealed in the Word of God, we must wait until we get to heaven to learn. But the Bible contains all that God intends for us to know now -- and, even at that, none of us will ever understand all that there is in the Bible.

Now we should notice that the Lord God said to the Devil that it would be the seed of the woman that would bruise, or crush, the Devil's head. What this meant to Eve, we cannot tell, but we must assume that to some degree she understood the words of the Lord. The downfall of the human race into sin had come about through the sin of a woman; the redemption of the race would also come about through the woman.

Now let us look at other passages of Scripture which throw light on what the Lord God said to the Devil.

I. ISAIAH 7:14.

Please turn to this passage although I am sure all of you are acquainted with it. This is what it says:

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

I am just reading the last part of the verse because it is the prophecy which helps us to understand Gen. 3:15. The Lord was speaking to King Ahaz of Judah, and, without going into the details of the circumstances then, the Lord told Ahaz to ask for a sign from Him. Ahaz refused, and so the Lord said that He would give Ahaz a sign -- and this was it!

Commentators have argued all through history about whether or not the word translated "virgin" in Isa. 7:14 meant a virgin, or did it mean a young married woman. That question is answered once and for all when we look at another passage where Isa. 7:14 is quoted in the NT. So now please turn to Matt. 1:22, 23.

II. MATTHEW 1:21, 22.

This is what these verses tell us:

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,
23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

What was the situation in Matthew 1?

Joseph was engaged to be married to Mary. But before their marriage was consummated, he learned that she was pregnant, and was going to have a baby. He could only come to one conclusion as unbelievable as it was to him: Mary had been unfaithful to him, and had committed adultery.

By law, if this were true, she should have been stoned. But even in his grief he loved her too much to do that, and so he planned to break their engagement as quietly as he could without causing her any disgrace. Just as that time the angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife because, as the angel said in verse 20, "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." He went on to tell Joseph that Mary was going to have a Son, that His Name was to be JESUS "for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). And then Matthew, speaking under the direction of that same Holy Spirit, said, "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying," and then Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14. And the Holy Spirit identified that "virgin" about whom the Lord spoke to Ahaz, as the virgin Mary!

Now we can understand why the Lord God in speaking to the Devil spoke of his Adversary as the seed of the woman. The Lord Jesus Christ did not have a human father. He had a human mother, and that is how He became a human being. But He had no human father. If JESUS had had a human father, he would have been a sinner just like we are, and would not have been able to save us from our sins. How accurate are the words of Scripture!

What can we conclude from this episode in the life of Joseph who was engaged to wed the virgin Mary. We have to conclude that the Holy Spirit convinced him by what he knew of Isaiah's prophecy that the virgin Mary was not guilty of adultery, but that at last the long-awaited Messiah and Redeemer was about to be born.

But let me take you to a third Scripture. This one has to do with Mary herself. Please turn to Luke 1 where we are told how the angel Gabriel came to Mary before she and Joseph were married. Obviously this preceded the angel's appeared to Joseph which we have just considered.

III. LUKE 1:26-38.

Gabriel's appearance to Mary came in the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy. He told Mary that she was highly favored by the Lord, and that something very wonderful was going to happen to her. Listen to his words in Luke 1:31:

Luke 1:31

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

He continued by speaking about the ministry that her Son would have. She very reasonably asked how this could be since she was not married. And Gabriel responded in this way:

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

And after referring to what had happened to Elisabeth who was having a child, a son, in her old age, Gabriel assured Mary that nothing was impossible with God. And it was at that point that Mary responded by saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

Does it seem impossible that Mary also knew about Isaiah 7:14, and that she was looking for the promised Messiah, little knowing that she would be His mother? Obviously God enabled her to believe that the unbelievable would happen to her. She would be the human mother of the eternal Son of God. How amazing!

Now let me take you to one more passage:

IV. GALATIANS 4:4, 5.

Here you will find these words:

4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, **made of a woman**, made under the law,
5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

There was never any question in the minds of the writers of Scripture but that our Lord was the seed of the woman, the only Person ever born into this world without a human father. He was God in human flesh, perfect God and perfect Man. Thus, He was not a sinner, and could act as our Savior.

In Rom. 8:3 Paul said that God sent His Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” but not in sinful flesh. And there is a great difference.

But now let me say a word about:

V. THE SERPENT’S SEED.

The Lord God predicted an age-long enmity between the seed of the woman, Whom we now know to be our Lord Jesus Christ, and the seed of the serpent. Who is the serpent’s seed?

One thing you learn when you study the word seed in Scripture is that even in its singular form it can refer to a single person, as in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, or it can be plural.

Man’s enmity against the Lord Jesus Christ has been apparent from the beginning, but it reached its highest intensity when Christ was born, and ever afterwards. Did not the people of Israel stone the prophets who were sent to them? Did not Herod seek to kill the baby Jesus? Were not the scribes and Pharisees doing everything they could to find some accusation that they could bring against the Lord so that they could put Him to death? And the Lord said to the Jews, the Jewish leaders, who were so opposed to Him,

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

I want to bring up one more point having to do with our text:

VI. THE BRUISING OF OUR LORD’S FEET; THE CRUSHING OF THE DEVIL’S HEAD.

This was the prediction that the Lord God gave to the Devil in pronouncing judgment upon him. Has this happened? If not, when will it happen? Let us turn to Scripture for our answer.

Please turn to Hebrews 2. Later this month I want to deal with the latter part of this chapter in three messages dealing with the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Tonight I must refer to the second of the three. Please turn to Hebrews 2 and follow me as I read verses 14 and 15:

- 14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that **through death** he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;
15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Notice those words, “through death.” This means that at the Cross the Lord defeated the Devil forever, and that the Cross, among other things, was the place where the Devil bruised our Lord’s heel.

The Devil is still given his freedom. He knows that his time is short, and he is doing everything he can to destroy the work of the Lord, and to destroy as many human souls as he can. But the Lord is the Victor, a victory which was won at the Cross. So the outcome of this conflict of the ages is not in doubt. It has already been settled by our Lord in His death and resurrection, and will finally be consummated when the Devil and his angels are cast forever into the lake of fire.

Concl: Before I close let me say a word about our Lord’s heel. The prediction is that the Devil would bruise His heel. What are we to learn from this?

Do you remember that when Esau and Jacob were born, Jacob had a hold of Esau’s heel? And he was named Jacob which means a heel-catcher. And when Esau had been “supplanted” (Gen. 27:36) two times, he said that he had rightly been named, Jacob.

The Devil is a heel-catcher and a heel-bruise. Look at a football game and you will see a field full of heel-catchers. It means to trip a person up, and usually in the Devil’s case it means deceit. The Devil tried to catch the Lord’s heel at the temptation. That would have meant victory for the Devil, and there would have been no salvation -- if such a thing had been possible. But the Lord overcame Him by the Word of God.

The Devil did succeed in getting the Lord condemned and crucified, but only because it was in the plan and purpose of God for our salvation. And as terrible as the Cross was for our Lord Jesus Christ, it was only a bruising of His heel compared with the eternal doom that was sealed at

the Cross for the Devil.

How thankful we can be for the sovereign power of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Much was accomplished at the Cross, but one thing that we can be eternally thankful for is that not only did the Lord get the victory over the Devil, but there He won our victory over the Enemy, too. Thus, Gen. 3:15 has been proven true. Our Lord is glorified, and we have redemption through His blood which includes deliverance from sin's penalty, sin's power, and from the Devil himself.

THE MANIFESTATION OF CHRIST

1 John 3:5

Intro: I am continually amazed at how much truth is revealed in some of the shortest statements in Scripture. But we really shouldn't be surprised at this because the Bible is the Word of God, and God can accomplish so much in very few words. Our text tonight is an illustration of this fact. In 1 John 3:5 where the Apostle John was speaking of our Lord, we have in the first statement, His incarnation as well as the life that our Lord lived upon earth -- "And ye know that he was manifested." Next we have His mission -- "to take away our sins." And lastly we have His Deity -- "and in him is no sin." The first two statements give us our Lord's humiliation; the last gives us His glory. I invite you to consider this precious little verse as again we approach the season when we as believers remember the birth of our Lord. I used to say years ago that the world remembers the birth of our Lord. But with a few exceptions I am afraid that our Lord has been forgotten in all of the commercialism of the season, and in the emphasis that is placed upon Santa Claus. Businesses are too busy comparing their income with last year that they never take the time to reflect on how their lives compare with the One Whose birthday we commemorate at this time. But how different it is when we understand Who it was Who came, and why He came, and what qualified Him to be able to do when He indeed did. These are the truths that I want to consider with you tonight

Let us think, first, about:

I. THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST: "And we know that he was manifested."

For those who may not be familiar with the word incarnation, the word speaks of the time when the Son of God came to earth as a man. The Son of God became a human being when He was born as a human baby with the virgin Mary as His mother.

But we do not usually speak of a birth as a manifestation. Lucille and I have received hundreds of birth announcements during the time that we have been married, and we have sent out four of our own, but I don't remember a single one on which the parents spoke of their birth of their child as a manifestation. That is not the ordinary way that we speak of the birth of our children. And so this word "manifested" ought to catch our attention immediately. Obviously John was speaking of a very special birth. In fact, one commentator on the Greek text said that the

idea of a manifestation suggests “a previous being.” That is, this person who “was manifested” had an existence before becoming a man; His birth was a new existence which He had not had before. Although the Apostle John did not mention our Lord specifically until we get down to verse 8, yet we know he was speaking of Christ because no one else fits this description. And this is why we do not speak of the birth of our children as a manifestation. We know that our children did not have a previous existence. But Jesus Christ did. Note what we are told in verse 8 of this chapter: “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”

So the Son of God is the One we are talking about. He came from Heaven, was born of the virgin Mary, and His birth and all of His life were a manifestation of the Person He was. Nothing He ever said, nothing He ever did, would contradict that His coming to earth was a manifestation. Instead, His birth, His life, His teaching, His miracles -- everything proved that He was a manifestation.

Now a manifestation has to be a revelation of something. It has to prove something. It has to make something very clear to all who have the eyes to see Him and the ears to hear Him. In other words, the fact that He was a manifestation indicates that there is something very unique about the Person to whom John was referring.

In John’s Gospel He spoke of the uniqueness of the Son of God when after he said in chapter 1, verse 1, that the Word was in the beginning with God, and that He was God, he added in John 1:18 that this Person whose Name was “the Word...became flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” Even our Lord’s enemies believed that He was a man, but what they failed to realize was that He was God in human flesh.

In our text the Apostle John said, “**And we know that he was manifested.**” By the “we” he meant, “You know it, and I know it.” This was not knowledge possessed only by the Apostles, but it was basic to the faith of all of the Lord’s people. You will see no special and urgent need to believe in Him if you do not believe this. A person who denies this cannot be a true Christian in spite of whatever else they might say about our Lord. This is a vital part of our faith. We believe that Jesus Christ is God manifested in human flesh. It is not enough to say that He was a great humanitarian Who went about doing good. It is not enough to say that He was a great Teacher. He was the greatest of all teachers, but He was the greatest of all impostors if He were not the Son of God because it

was the Son of God whom He claimed to be. The Apostle John wrote almost 100 years after Christ was born. As far as we know he was the only living Apostle. But after all of the years He had lived since the Lord returned to heaven, there was not the slightest doubt in his mind but that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God Who became Man, and Who showed Himself to be the Son of God all through His life here on earth. For Him this would include His death and His resurrection.

I trust that all of us can say this as well: “We know.” Not we think, not that we hope, but that “we know”!

Secondly, let us consider:

II. THE PURPOSE OF HIS COMING.

You and I will have to admit that for the Son of God to go through all of the humiliation that He experienced in becoming a man, there must have been an immensely important reason for His coming. It must have been that He came to do something that no one else was capable of doing. And if you think that, you are exactly right! He came “to take away our sins.”

This was the message that John the Baptist had preached. Cf. John 1:29. And this is what David said about “our sins” in Psa. 103:12: “As far as the east is...” That is a distance which cannot be measured because there is no way to depict how far the east is from the west. It is a distance so great that the idea is we will never see them again. The statement shows God’s complete abhorrence and hostility toward sin. Cf. Westcott, p. 103.

John was speaking of “our sins,” i.e., the sins of all believers, and of all who will ever believe on Christ. And notice that “sins” is plural, indicating that no a single sin of any believer has been left behind.

This is a work which no man could possibly do for himself. We all are under the judgment of God. Our record stands against us. The wages of sin is death. By nature we are the children of wrath, facing eternal judgment because we belong to the human race, alienated and condemned by God because of our sins. Jesus Christ came to take away our sins. He came to remove them. He came to pay our penalty, to take our place, so that we might be justified instead of being condemned. This is the reason for the birth of Christ. He came to be a Savior, and He is the only One Who is capable of assuming such a responsibility. But the question is: How could Jesus Christ qualify for such a work. This takes us to the third

and last statement of our text.

III. OUR LORD'S QUALIFICATION TO BE OUR SAVIOR.

— We have it in the words, “and in him is no sin.”

If Jesus Christ had been an illegitimate child, or even the child of Joseph and Mary after they had been married, He would have been just as guilty and condemned before God as we are. He could not have been our Savior; He would have needed a Savior Himself. This is the reason it is so important to understand that He was the Son of God manifested in human flesh -- that He was both God and man, and that His birth as a real baby in no way changed His Deity.

One major reason we have more space in our Bibles devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ than to any other person from Adam to the New Heaven and the New Earth, is to convince us that Jesus Christ was truly God and truly man. This is what John wanted us to know according to this text. All of Scripture which speaks of Christ fully supports His Deity as well as His humanity.

— The Apostle Peter, who was very close to our Lord, has told us in 1 Pet. 2:22 that our Lord “did no sin.” This statement of Peter’s is according to many commentators drawn from Isa. 53:9,

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Peter also said in 1 Pet. 1:19 that our Lord was “as a lamb without blemish and without spot.” In 2 Cor. 5:21 Paul declared his belief in the sinlessness of our Lord. The writer of Hebrews tells us in chapter 4, verse 15, that our Lord was “without sin.” In Heb. 7:26 we are told that our Lord was “separate from sinners.” And in Heb. 9:14 we are told that our Lord offered Himself “without spot to God,” that is, without any sin at all upon Him. Our Lord Himself challenged His enemies with the question, “Which of you convinceth [convicteth] me of sin” (John 8:46).

— But the Apostle John gives us what is probably the greatest of all statements concerning our Lord and sin when he said, speaking of our Lord, “And in him is no sin.” This speaks of “the eternal character of the Redeemer” (Westcott, p. 103). He did not have a sin nature. He could not sin even though He was a man because He was God. And notice the present tense of the verb here. John did not say that there was no sin in

Him. That might have meant that somehow He had been contaminated by our sins when He offered Himself for us. Our sins were laid upon Him. He bore them in His body when He went to the Cross. He died as our Substitute. But He was without sin before He died, and He is still without sin. And He will forever be what He has been for all eternity. Look as hard as you might, subject Him to the merciless scrutiny of His enemies, and, if they are honest, they will have to come to the same conclusion: "In him is no sin."

Concl: Do you see why it was important that our Lord come, that He be born of the virgin Mary, live a perfect life, die a sacrificial death, and be raised again from the dead? It was because no other person who had ever been born could qualify for such a work. We all would have to die for our own sins; He, being "without sin" because "in him is no sin," was the only One Who could qualify as our Redeemer -- He was the only One Whose sacrifice could satisfy God, and meet our every need.

In closing let me relate this to the verses at the beginning of this chapter -- verses 1 through 3. Some day we shall be like Him. Then it can be said of us that there is no sin in us. We are delivered from sin's penalty by the death of Christ. Day by day we are delivered from sin's power so that we don't have to sin. But when we finally see the Lord we will be so completely delivered from sin itself that God Himself will be able to say of us, "In them is no sin."

How thankful we should be that we know who Jesus is, and that we know why He came, and that we also know that He is the only One Who can save us. Let us be praying that as this Christmas season, we may be able to pass this good news along to those who cannot join us when we say, as the Apostle John said, "**And we know...**"

MESSAGES FROM THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Passages from 1 John and Philipians

Scripture Reading: 1 John 3:1-10

Intro: The word incarnation is a word which actually belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. Lit. it means in the flesh. In theology it is used to describe the uniting of Deity and humanity in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. When our Lord was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, it meant that the Son of God was to become a man. His birth in Bethlehem was the most unique birth ever. It was a long-awaited birth because it had been predicted many places in the OT. It had been planned from eternity past. The Lord Jesus was a real human being, but He was also the Son of God. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer said in his work on Christology in his Systematic Theology that "this Person [referring to our Lord] retained His Deity undiminished and untarnished" (Vol. V, p. 48). It is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith that Jesus of Nazareth was both God and man. In this way He was able to die for sinners. He came to provide salvation for those whom the Father had given to Him. And the only way that could be done was for the Lord to become a man.

Isaiah the prophet had predicted hundreds of years before Christ was born that a virgin would conceive and bear a son, and that His Name would be Immanuel, which means God with us. Cf. Isa. 7:14. When the angel Gabriel explained to Mary how it would be possible for her to have a child without having a relationship with a man, she was told what we read in Luke 1:35,

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: **therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.**

When Joseph, to whom Mary was engaged to be married, found out about her pregnancy, he felt that he could not go ahead with the marriage. But he loved Mary too much to disgrace her, and so he sought to break the engagement as quietly as he could. And while he was still considering what to do, the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said,

20b Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.
21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:20b-21).

Passages from 1 John and Philippians (2)

Joseph knew the meaning of the name, Jesus. He knew that it meant Jehovah is salvation, or simply Jehovah saves. And so Joseph was greatly relieved, and he went ahead with the marriage although they did not live together as husband and wife until the baby Jesus was born.

We all are familiar with the message given to the shepherds when the angel of the Lord came to them as they were surrounded with the glory of the Lord. And this is what the angel said:

10b Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10b, 11).

A baby was to be born Who was “Christ,” meaning the Anointed One, or Messiah; “the Lord,” which indicates His Deity. There can be no denial about the incarnation when we read these passages.

At our Lord’s baptism, and again on the mount of Transfiguration, the Father spoke from heaven and said, “This is my beloved Son...” (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Following our Lord’s baptism, in the light of what had been told him before about the Holy Spirit descending upon the Lord, John said this: “And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

John 1, Romans 1, Colossians 1 and 2, and Hebrews 1 testify to the Deity of the Lord Jesus. In John 1:1 John said,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And then using the same Name for our Lord and to show that in His birth His Deity was unchanged from what it had been forever before, John the Apostle said later in the same chapter,

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

In Rom. 1:3, 4 we have this clear statement of both the Deity and humanity of our Lord. Paul was speaking of the Gospel and said that it was concerned with God’s Son

3 ... Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:3-4).

Passages from 1 John and Philippians (3)

Nothing could be clearer than that Jesus Christ was both God and man.

In Col. 1:19 the Apostle Paul said this:

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.

What “fulness”? The answer is found in Col. 2:9,

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

This means that all Deity was in Him, our Lord, as a Man. This is what we mean by the incarnation.

Heb. 1:1-3 tells us that God in these last days has spoken unto us by his Son...Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person [one of the strongest statements of the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ to be found anywhere in the Bible], ...when he had by himself purged our sins [for which He had to be a Man], sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

These are all passages with which we are familiar, Scriptures which we love because they declare so plainly that our Lord Jesus Christ was both God and Man -- absolutely God in every sense of the word, and perfect Man. He was the only perfect Man Who has ever lived, and His perfection qualified Him to be able to die as our Substitute, which He did on the Cross. As I said in the beginning, this is a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. No one can rightly claim to be a Christian if he, or she, denies this clear teaching of Scripture.

Today, however, I want to go beyond what we usually do when we think of the incarnation of our Lord. I want us to notice from Scripture itself some of the ways the incarnation and all that it led to, is to be applied to our lives. Every truth of Scripture should have some practical effects upon our lives, and that is true when we say that we believe in the incarnation of the Son of God. What does this truth tell us about the way we should live. I am going to limit myself to two books of the Bible: 1 John and Philippians. We could go into others, but our time is limited and so I am going to limit my sources. Let us begin with 1 John. Please turn to 1 John 4, and let us look together at the first three verses.

I. THE INCARNATION TEACHES US TO BE DISCERNING (1 John 4:1-3).

(Read 1 John 4:1-3).

Passages from 1 John and Philippians (4)

When we talk about practical matters relating to our lives as Christians, we don't normally think of discernment. But the ability to discern between right and wrong, between truth and error, is a gift which we have from God, and we need to be exercising it all of the time. And there is one truth concerning which we need to be especially discerning. It is the truth of the incarnation.

From the time that the Devil appeared to Eve in the Garden of Eden, there has been false teaching in the world. The Devil is a liar, and the father of lies, and there is nothing that he enjoys more than to tell lies about God. That is what he did with Eve in the Garden. He lied about God.

When the Lord Jesus came into the world, the Devil started telling lies about Him. He did everything, and used every means and every human being he could to get people to believe that Jesus Christ was an impostor, and that He was not really the Son of God after all. He knew that if he could get people even to question our Lord's Deity, that was the first step in dragging them with himself down into hell. This was the big issue all during our Lord's ministry here on earth, wasn't it? And from those days until now he has had his servants who have denied this basic truth about our Lord. There are people who say many good things about Him -- that He was a great humanitarian because of the way He helped people, or that He was a great teacher because He talked about things no one had ever talked about before. But if you suggest to these same people that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God in human form, then the trouble starts. None of us has the time to study all of the things that are being taught, or not taught, about God and about Christ and about the Holy Spirit, but the key to any system of teaching can be spotted immediately by answering one question: What are they teaching about Jesus Christ? If they teach that He is the Son of God Who has come in the flesh, the Apostle John said that they are of God. If they deny that great truth, they are of the spirit of the Antichrist.

The incarnation demands that we be discerning. It demands that we know how to "try the spirits." If people deny this, you can be sure that you are going to disagree with them about other things that they have to say about Christ. If they deny that He is the incarnate Son of God, they have already started on the path that is going to lead them farther and farther from God. The test of any person's faith is, What do you believe about Jesus Christ?

I have asked people to tell me what a Christian is, and have them give

their complete answer without saying anything about Christ -- and many of these have been people who go to church every Sunday. You can't be a Christian without Christ, and you can't believe in the Christ of the Bible unless you believe that He is the incarnate Son of God. If He is anything less than that, He is only a man, and therefore He, too, is a sinner, and is disqualified from ever being our Savior.

We live in a day when people, church people, have grown very careless about doctrine, especially the doctrine of Christ. I hope you can see from the Scriptures that I have read to you how basic this is to our faith. And we need to be constantly on our guard against any attempt to make the doctrine of Christ less than what it is in the Word of God.

So let us remember at this Christmas season and throughout the year that we must not be gullible and accept any religious teaching that comes along -- even though it might come from the old line denominations. The incarnation demands that we be discerning. Find out what people believe about Christ. If they deny either His perfect humanity or His absolute Deity, or both, you tell them the truth, but don't spend any time listening to what they have to say.

In the Apostle John's third epistle he had this to say in verses 9 through 11:

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Don't agree to have a Bible study with any such teacher. And don't receive his literature. If they reject what the Bible says about Christ, then you must not have anything to do with them. If they want to listen to you, then give them the truth. But most false teachers are not concerned with learning; they want to do the teaching.

Let me give you a second practical lesson to be learned from the incarnation of Christ.

**II. THE INCARNATION SHOWS US HOW WE ARE TO LIVE
(1 John 4:7-11).**

Passages from 1 John and Philippians (6)

The incarnation teaches us how we are to “live through him,” that is, through Christ. You have the incarnation is in verse 9, isn't it? Verse 9 is simply another version of John 3:16, but it emphasizes a truth which we often overlook in John 3:16: that it is through the incarnation of Christ which led to His death that we have “eternal life” -- a new way of life which we need to live now.

But what is to be the outstanding characteristic of the life that we have in Christ. The whole tone of this passage has to do with LOVE. (Read verses 7 through 11.)

The incarnation of Jesus Christ speaks of God's love for us. If we had not been loved by all three Members of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus would never have come. But because His love for unlovely and unworthy and defiled and ugly sinners was shown in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world, all that resulted from His coming, then we who know Him should be characterized by the same kind of love that caused Him to come to us. It is not human love. Human love is very imperfect, often very selfish. We love those who love us, but if people don't love us, we don't care to have anything to do with them. That often is human love. We love people for what they can do for us. If that had been descriptive of the love of God, Christ would never have come. And so we need to live out the life that we have in Christ, a life which is identified because it displays God's love, not mere human love.

One thing we learned from Titus about our lives before we were saved was that we were “hateful, and hating one another” (Tit. 3:3b). Our world is full of hate. The basic problem is Bosnia and Serbia and Croatia is that they hate each other. That is the problem in Haiti -- hatred. We are torn apart with hatred here in our own country. We have the racial problems. We have a campaign against the rich which is fostered by many in our government -- many at the top of our government. Child abuse, divorce, jealousy, envy, and on and on have some connection with hatred.

We as Christians are to be different. We are to love God, and we are to love each other, and we are to be loving toward the people of the world. Sinning people are never loveable. It is hard to accept what they do. Their language is offensive. If we loved people just because of what they can do for us, or what we see in them that is loveable, we are not going to love people. God loved people not because of any good He saw in them, nor because of anything that they could do for Him. He loved them

Passages from 1 John and Philippians (7)

because of what He desired to do for them, in setting them free from sin's penalty, and from sin's power, making them new creature through Christ, His Son.

The incarnation of Christ teaches us that we should love one another. We need to learn this in a deeper way in our churches if we expect to have any influence at all in the world.

But let me give you a third message, practical message, that comes out of the incarnation of our Savior. And for this let us turn to 1 John 3:5.

III. THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST TEACHES US THAT WE NEED TO BE HOLY (1 John 3:1-10).

Last Sunday night I spoke on 1 John 3:5. This is the verse in this passage which speaks of the incarnation. "He was manifested." It began and His birth and extended for the full period of time that He was on earth. But it all began with His birth. If the Lord had not been born of the virgin Mary, this verse could not have been written.

But I want to concentrate on a point that I did not take up on Sunday night. I did point out that our Lord was manifested to take away our sins, and that there is no sin in Him. But from verse 6 on we see that a part of what the Apostle John meant when he spoke of the Lord taking away our sins, was that Christ became a Man and eventually suffered and died on the Cross, not just to deliver us from the penalty of our sins, but He came to deliver us from sinning! Thus the incarnation of Christ teaches us that God wants us to be holy. He wants us to stop our sinning. He wants us to pursue righteousness. He wants us to be holy. In our Lord there was not sin before He came, nor after He came, nor when He died, nor after He rose from the dead. John was speaking in the present tense: "In Him **IS** no sin." And, as I tried to bring out on Sunday night, when the Lord's work in us is complete, and we are like Him, then the Lord Himself will be able to say of us, "In **THEM** is no sin."

But the point in all of this for the present is that if Christ came to take away our sins, then we can't live in sin like we did before; we can't continue on sinning. But we need to see that we have the responsibility by the grace of God to see that we keep as far away from sin and sinning as we can get. The incarnation of Christ ought to convict us of our carelessness with regard to sin, but it also should cause us to pursue righteousness. Christ came to make us like He is. Sin slows down the

Passages from 1 John and Philippians (8)

work of salvation in our hearts. We must not love the world. We must not be conformed to the world. But our delight every day should be in doing the will of our Father. Obedience leads to holiness; disobedience is sin and leads always to more sin.

Finally I am going to ask you to turn to Philippians, chapter 2. Verses 5-8 give us a classic passage on the incarnation of our Lord. Here we see that:

IV. THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST TEACHES US TO BE HUMBLE (Phil. 2:5-11).

We can't look at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and remain objective. We have another practical lesson growing out of the fact that He came to earth as a Man. If we are to gain even a basic idea of what it meant to the Lord Jesus Christ to become a Man, we need to dwell on His place in glory, and His infinite majesty, before He became a Man. There never has been a person on earth who could fully comprehend this because we are "of the earth, earthy." But meditating on a passage like the one we have here in Phil. 2 can be of great help to us. Notice I said, "meditating," not just reading. One of the greatest failings among believers today is that we know so little about quiet meditation on the words of Scripture. It is good to be reading the Word, but it is better to be reading and meditating on the Word. It is as we meditate on the Word that we are feeding on the Word. It is meditation that strengthens and blesses us as we consider what God has told us in His Word.

Jesus Christ was God before He became Man. His Deity was no different from the Deity of the Father, or the Deity of the Holy Spirit. He was the Creator of the universe. And Hebrews 1 tells us that He is the One Who is moving human history along according to the eternal purposes of God. Angels adored our Lord. His fellowship with the Father and with the Holy Spirit had never known any interruption. In the glory of heaven all is absolute perfection.

But the Lord did not feel that He had to hang on to His exalted position, and so He emptied Himself by becoming a Man. This does not mean that He ceased in any way to be God, but it does mean that He willingly refused to use many of His attributes in order that He might become like one of His creatures. But more than that, He not only became a man, becoming lower than the angels who worshiped Him, but He obeyed the Father to the extent that He died the most humiliating of all deaths, the

Passages from 1 John and Philippians (9)

death of the Cross. And it was all that He might be perfectly obedient to the Father. He humbled Himself by becoming a Man, but He humbled Himself even more by His death on the Cross. He died as a criminal. He died as the crowd was jeering at Him and doing all that they could to intensify His sufferings. But remember that a part of His sufferings, a major part, which men could not see, was when the Father made the soul of His Son “an offering for sin.” No one has ever come from such great heights, nor gone to such great depths, as our Lord Jesus Christ did.

The point that I want to make from the incarnation of Christ is that Paul prefaced all of this by saying, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” That is, you and I are to walk the path of humility, following the example of our blessed Lord. This doesn’t sound like self-love, or self-worth, or self-esteem. It was not the Lord’s purpose in life to feel good about Himself. He had ever right to feel that way, but that was not His objective. His objective was to do the Father’s will, and this purpose overshadowed every other purpose that the Lord had in coming into the world. He came to save us from our sins, but before that, His purpose was to do the will of His Father Who had sent Him.

So this fourth and final lesson which I bring to you today which the incarnation teaches us is that just as the Lord humbled Himself, so we need to humble ourselves. In the kingdom of God, the greatest is the lowest. We have no reason to be proud. We need to be humbled when we think of not only what our Lord went through to save us, but it should humble us into the dust that He had to do everything He did or we would still be in our sins, lost, and without God. Anyone who truly understands the meaning of the incarnation will know that it is a message which behooves us to be humble, and to avoid anything that speaks of personal pride. Our Lord humbled Himself, and it is unbelievable that we would even think of doing anything else.

Concl: I have no doubt at all but that there are more messages in the incarnation of Christ than I have given you, but if we can learn these three, and then look for others, God will be glorified and we will experience the blessing which we so desperately need. Let us be discerning about the religious teaching that we hear, listening to see if the teacher believes in the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ, and that He became a real Man without ceasing to be God. Let us remember that the incarnation teaches us that because Christ came and died, we have life, eternal life, a life to be lived, and that the great characteristic of our new life is seen in our love for each other, in the fellowship that we enjoy

Passages from 1 John and Philippians (10)

together in the Lord. Let us also remember that the incarnation teaches us that God wants us to be holy, and that if we really know Christ as our Savior, it is impossible for us to continue living a life of sin. Finally, the incarnation teaches us that we need to be humble, humble following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. We do what we can to humble ourselves, trusting the Lord, and Him alone, to raise us up and to use us as He sees fit for the glory of His Name, not ours.

May our prayer be that the messages of the incarnation will be seen increasingly in our lives as we await that glorious day when we will be forever with the Lord.

THE VICTORIOUS CHRIST

Hebrews 2:14-16; 1 John 3:8

Intro: I remember as a young man just starting out in the ministry that there was a great deal of discussion among theologians, and would-be theologians, as to which was the greater, which was the more important, the birth of Christ or the death of Christ. It really was a ridiculous discussion except for the fact that it focused attention on these two great events in the life of our Lord here on earth. The birth of Jesus led to His death. It was for the purpose of dying that He was born. And so it was in order to die that he became Man. The Eternal took on Himself that which was temporal. The infinite God became finite Man. The Son of God became the Son of man. He Who was perfect righteousness was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He Who knew no sin was to be made sin for us. The Word Who was with God and Who was God, was made flesh. He Who was the image and likeness of God was made in the likeness of men. He Who was the Master of the universe became a servant Who was obedient unto death. He Who was infinitely greater than angels was made lower than the angels. It is clear from all human history that there never was a person like our Lord before He came, nor will there ever be another throughout all eternity. And it is unthinkable that any person would recognize these contrasts about our Lord Jesus Christ (and others which could be mentioned) and yet not inquire into the purposes for which He came. There surely had to be reasons of the greatest importance for the Lord Jesus Christ to come to earth as a Man, not ceasing in any way to be God, and yet becoming in one Person a real and perfect human being.

The Bible does not leave us in the dark on this subject. In fact, the whole message of Scripture is designed to explain for us the incarnation of the Son of God. There is not just one reason, but several, even though we can say that there are two reasons which stand at the top of the list of reasons, and that all other reasons flow from those two.

The first reason our Lord came was to finish what God had been doing from the time of creation. We have this referred to in Hebrews 1, and verse 1. God has spoken at various times in and different ways. What has He been speaking about? Primarily He has been speaking about Himself. He has made Himself known in many different ways. He did this even in creation itself because "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psa. 19:1). But He has done this primarily in the Scriptures. However, all that we can learn about God in the OT, as glorious as it is and as perfect as it is, is incomplete. It was

not until the Lord Jesus Christ became a Man that the revelation of God was finally complete. He has spoken to us in His Son, or as Heb. 1:2 can be translated, He has spoken to us in such a One as His Son. As great as the revelations of God are in the OT, they are not complete. Jesus Christ came to complete that revelation. And so if we want to know God, we can see Him in His Son, Jesus of Nazareth, God manifest in human flesh. No treatment of the incarnation would be complete which did not include this, that Christ came to reveal God to us.

But the Scriptures also make it clear that our Lord had another great purpose in coming to the earth in human form, and I have been speaking of this for the past two Sunday. We have it stated in 1 John 3:5,

And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

He came to take away our sins, and He was qualified to do that because, as the Apostle John said, "In him is no sin." He came to bring us salvation. He came to pay our penalty. He came to die in our place. He came to deliver us from our sins. This is the Gospel. This is the good news. He came to do what we could never have done for ourselves, and what we could never have done for each other.

This is what was read to us in our Scripture reading. I am referring to Heb. 2:9, 10. (Read.) Our Lord was born to die. He tasted death for every son He would bring to glory -- not just bring to heaven, but whom He would bring to glorification. He paid the penalty for our sins in full. And He paid the penalty for all who had believed on Him up to that time, and for all who would believe on Him to the end of time. And the resurrection of Christ is confirmation that God has accepted His work on our behalf.

However, I want to move ahead from this point to two other purposes God had in sending His Son into the world as a Man, two other purposes which are related to our Lord's work on the Cross. I want to take up the first of these today, and we will reserve the second for next Sunday, the Lord willing.

The purpose that I want to consider with you today is the one we find in verses 14, 15, and 16. (Read.)

This purpose is described by two words: "destroy" and "deliver." You have the first of these in verse 14; the second, in verse 15. Verse 16 points out that the Lord did not do this for angels, but He did it for those who are "the seed of Abraham" -- and we will see what that means as we

go ahead today.

But let us look first into:

I. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE DEVIL (Heb. 2:14).

The first part of verse 14 describes the incarnation of Christ. Since we were partakers of flesh and blood, He took part of the same, meaning that He became a human being, born, as we know, as the Son of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was not born a sinner; He was born as a perfect human being. As we learned from 1 John 3:5, in Him was no sin.

He partook of our humanity without partaking of our sins. At the Cross He was charged by God with our sins, but He had no sins of His own. So the expression here in Heb. 2:14 simply means that He became a true, a real human being. The Creator became like His creatures, but let me repeat, except for their sin.

When Christ went to the Cross He went to satisfy God's righteousness concerning our sins. God could not have been righteous in dealing with our sins if He had just decided to overlook them. He had to punish sin. But instead of punishing each of us for our sins, He punished the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins. But He also did something else by His death. Through His death He destroyed the Devil who had the power of death. We have this same teaching in 1 John 3:8,

He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Let us see what this means.

Now we know that the Devil is not dead. So he did not die as a result of the death of Christ on the Cross. And we know that he is not powerless. He continues to cause the worst of troubles in human lives. "Devil" means accuser; his other name, Satan, means an adversary. In 1 Pet. 5:8 Paul called him, "your adversary the devil," when he wrote,

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.

So we know that he still has power, that he is still our enemy and a threat to our lives. What did the Apostle in writing Hebrews mean then when he said that Christ by His death destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the Devil?

Perhaps I can best answer that by referring to another passage which speaks of the relationship which we as believers now have with sin. Please turn to Romans 6:5, 6. This word “destroy” is used in verse 6. But let me read both verses:

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, **that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin** (Rom. 6:5-6).

The expression, “the body of sin,” refers to our sin nature. Now we know that our sin nature is not dead. We as believers can still be tempted, and we are responsive to sin. More than that, we know that we can sin and that we do sin. What did Paul mean, then, that since we were crucified with Christ, and “our old man,” the old nature, was crucified with Him, “the body of sin” has been destroyed? He explained it in the last statement of verse 6: “that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

“Destroyed” does not mean that it no longer exists, nor that it does not have power. But it means that the power which sin once had over us before we were saved, has now been broken. We still can sin, but we do not have to sin. Sin is no longer our master as it was before.

Now let’s apply this to our text. When Jesus Christ died on the Cross, He not only died to save us from our sins, but He died to save us from our Enemy, the Devil. He once dominated our lives. We were helpless under His control. He is “the god of this world.” But Jesus Christ died to save us from our slave master, the Devil.

When Paul was writing in his second epistle to Timothy, he gave Timothy this instruction which is absolutely essential for us to remember when we witness to others about Christ. Listen to what he said, and particularly how Paul ended his exhortation. I am reading from 2 Tim. 2:24-26:

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

When Jesus Christ died on the Cross, He died not only to save us from

our sins, but He died to deliver us from the bondage of the Devil. He still tempts us. He still seeks to ruin us, to get us to dishonor the Savior Who died for us. But He is no longer our Master, and we do not have to do what he wants us to do. The Devil's power was broken, and His ultimate doom was sealed when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross. The only way that people can be delivered from their sins and from their sinning, is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. As our Lord said in John 8:34, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." And then he added two verses later, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

The reason people sin, and go on sinning, even though they can see that it is ruining their lives, is because they are slaves to sin and can no more set themselves free than a Roman slave could set himself free from his Roman master. The only way we can be set free from our sins, and kept free, is by trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and then learning to walk in daily fellowship with Him. We don't like to call our sins what they are. And consequently many people spend their lives trying to put out little fires of habit and refuse to believe that the Devil is a real person, that he is a slave master, and that he refuses to let anyone loose until Christ sets the sinner free.

This is wonderful truth, but it is truth which is not really being taught today -- even in many churches. Pastors turn their people over to psychiatrists, or to some professional counselor, instead of taking people to the Word of God to show them that Christ died not only to forgive sinners, but he died to set sinners free from the bondage, the tyranny, of their sins. The Devil is a slave master, and so are our sins. Christ in His death on the Cross died to set us free from both. This is a part of the purpose of Christ's birth which is rarely told. And yet it is in our Christmas carols. Listen to the third verse of *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen*:

'Fear not then,' said the angel, 'Let nothing you affright,
This day is born a Saviour of a pure virgin bright,
To free all those who trust in Him from Satan's power and might.'
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

Oh, the great victory which Christ won on the Cross! That which the Devil engineered to destroy the Son of God, was the very work which was to seal his own doom.

But let me go on to my second and final point:

II. DELIVERANCE FROM FEAR OF DEATH (Heb. 2:15, 16).

“The wages of sin is death” -- spiritual death, which is separation from God; physical death, which is what we experience when we die -- the separation of the soul from the body; and eternal death, which is hell, eternal separation from God. Sin brought death, and the fear of death. And the Apostle John has told us that “fear hath torment” (1 John 4:18).

But what is it that gives death its sting? And I am speaking especially now about the fear of physical death because most people’s thoughts don’t go beyond that aspect of death. We all know that we are going to die -- unless for us as believers in Christ, He should come first. But what gives death its sting? Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 15:56 that “the sting of death is sin.” But when the Lord saves us from our sins He takes the sting out of death. We know then that to depart is to be with Christ, and that is far better than anything that we have here. Death is the gateway for believers into glory. Oh, we don’t relish the idea that we are going to die, but a believer in Christ feels altogether different from the person who does not know the Lord. We have been delivered from our spiritual death, and we know that for us there will never be the possibility of eternal death because in Christ we have eternal life.

What bondage there is for the unbeliever in facing even physical death. It can take the joy out of life. People like to stay so busy, and they try to keep having so much fun that they won’t have time to think about it. But they do think about it, and it is a bondage to them. And that is what God intends that it should be. He can use that, and often does, to cause people to cry out to Him for mercy and forgiveness. And that is when people’s hearts are being opened by God to the message of the Gospel -- “That Christ died for our sins...” (1 Cor. 15:3, 4).

You see, there are two things that God brings to bear upon the hearts of sinners to show them that they need God, and that they need help beyond what they can do for themselves. One is the bondage and unhappiness that we experience in sin, and the other is the fear of death. Both of these are feelings we try to conceal, but we know that they are there. And we know that nothing we have done can get rid of them. There is only One Who can take them away, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. So, if Christ is not your Savior, come to Him today, put your trust in Him for the forgiveness of your sins, and let Him bring the peace and joy that you have sought in your sins and in the world, but have never found. Jesus Christ died so that sinners could be forgiven, and so we could have the very life of God in us to strengthen us to do His will, which is where real joy is to be found.

Let me close by saying just a word about verse 16.

Christ did not come to earth as an angel. He did not take “on him the nature of angels.” He did not come to die for angels. There is no salvation for angels. He took upon him “the seed of Abraham.”

Here the Apostle was taking us back to the promise of salvation given to Abraham in Gen. 22:18:

And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

And then Paul quoted from the Genesis passage in Gal. 3:16:

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

Thus, the promise of a Savior which was given to Abraham was a promise of the incarnation, that the Redeemer would be a human being, a descendant of Abraham, as our Lord Jesus Christ was.

Did Abraham understand this? He evidently did because our Lord said this in John 8:56 speaking to a group of Jews:

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

This should make us realize that OT saints understood more about the coming of the Redeemer than we usually give them credit for understanding. And how exactly God stands by His Word. The prophecies of Christ give us one of the strongest proofs that we have that the Bible is the Word of God.

Concl: There is a message here for every believer, and there is hope for any of you who have not yet received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

For those of us who know the Lord, how thankful we should be not only on Christmas Day, but every day, that the Lord Jesus Christ has not only saved us from our sins, but that He has saved us from the Devil, and from the bondage of our sins. And along with that He has delivered us from the bondage that goes with the fear of death. We know that not only is the Devil a defeated Enemy, but that death is also. And we rest in Him Who has the keys of death and the grave. We have a hope in Christ which not even death can take from us.

Those of you, whoever you may be, who do not know the Lord, should be thankful that the call to come to Christ can still be given to you. Oh, let me plead with you to come to Christ today. Do not delay. We don't know what a day holds for any of us. Today is the day of salvation. Come to Christ. Put your trust in Him to save you from the penalty of your sins, and from the power of the Devil himself. The promise of the Lord is that if you come to Him, He will never cast you out. So come now, and be saved.

THE INCARNATION AND CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

Hebrews 2:17-18

Intro: Perhaps for some in our considerations of the incarnation of Christ, there has been an increased understanding of what it meant for Christ to become a Man as well as an enlarged understanding of the reasons for Christ's coming.

With regard to the first of these, I am sure that no expositor has ever had the wisdom to explore the depths of what it meant to Christ to become a Man, a human being -- the Creator becoming a creature, and yet never for a moment ceasing to be what He was when He said, "Let there be light." It was humiliating for our Lord to become a Man, and His humiliation was increased many times over when He not only died, but died the death of the Cross. All through our lives it is to be hoped that the truth of Christ's incarnation will not only be increased in our understanding, but that it also will become more and more that which calls forth true worship and adoration from our hearts.

With regard to the reasons for the coming of Christ into the world., we have seen that it went beyond the provision of salvation for believing sinners. We have seen that Christ came as a Man to complete all that had been done before He was born to reveal God. We have glorious revelations of God in the OT, but never before Christ, and never since Christ came, has anyone ever been able to say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). But He said it. And it was true. He so completely revealed the Father that it would not have been any different if the Father Himself had come to earth as a Man.

Here in Hebrews 2 we have three specific reasons for the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, nothing could be more important for us than the fact that the Lord came to taste death for all of us who are numbered among the sons He is bringing to glory. Christ redeemed us by the shedding of His blood. It is through the death of Christ that our sins have been forgiven. This is the first reason mentioned in Hebrews 2 for the incarnation. See vv. 9-10.

The second reason which is twofold, we considered last Sunday morning. Christ died to put an end to the power of death held by the Devil, and also to deliver us from even the fear of death. You see this in verses 14 and 15. Today I want to take up with you the third reason mentioned in Hebrews 2. Here we are told that through the incarnation our Lord has become our High Priest. And you find this in vv. 17 and 18. (Read.)

The ministry of our Lord has been often divided into three parts. During His earthly ministry He was a Prophet of God. Beginning at the Cross and continuing on throughout time He is our great High Priest. When He comes again in power and great glory, He will come as King of kings and Lord of lords. So He is our Prophet, our Priest, and our coming King. Today let us focus our attention upon His priesthood as it is described in Heb. 2:17-18.

Let me discuss this verse with you under three headings:

- I. THE OBLIGATION CHRIST WAS UNDER: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.”
- II. WHAT CHRIST NEEDED TO BECOME: “That He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.”
- III. WHAT CHRIST NEEDED TO DO:
 - A. “To make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”
 - B. “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”

The first point is:

- I. THE OBLIGATION CHRIST WAS UNDER: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17a).**

Let me call your attention to the word “behooved.” The spelling of this word is called Middle English -- that is, English that was used from c. 1150 A.D. to 1475. Today we spell it with two o’s; behooved. This is a word which we don’t use very often, and possibly many of us ran across it for the first time here in the word of God. It speaks of an inescapable obligation. It refers to something that is an absolute necessity. It behooves a court, for example, to consider all of the evidence presented to it in a particular case. That is, it is obligated by law not to omit any evidence presented to it. Or we can say that it behooves a President of the United States to fulfill all of the obligations of his office. He has no choice, whether he likes it or doesn’t like it. If you have a driver’s license, it behooves you to obey the traffic laws. That is the responsibility you accept when you are issued a license.

The Lord Jesus Christ was under an inescapable obligation, he was bound by a necessity which He could not ignore, that “in all things” He would “be made like his brethren.” We could say that it was His duty “to be made like unto his brethren.” What was the Apostle saying here about our Lord? Is He obligated to us? Was it His duty to us that He provide

salvation for us?

We have to answer these questions with a no! We know that our salvation is by grace, not by debt. Christ was not indebted to us to do anything about our salvation. To whom then was He obligated? To whom was He obligated to become a human being “in all things”?

The obvious answer is that He was obligated to God. We know that we were chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world. We are told in Ephesians 1 that the Father chose us. And it was at that time that it was determined that Christ would die for us, and also that the Holy Spirit would gather us in -- one by one! This was all according to the decree of God, and the Word of God cannot be broken. Therefore, Christ was obligated to God to become a human being in order that He might by His death assure the salvation of all whom the Father had chosen.

This does not mean that Christ came reluctantly. It was just as much His will that He come as it was His Father’s will, and the will of the Holy Spirit. But the Apostle wanted us to know that when Christ was born of the virgin Mary He was submitting Himself to an obligation He had made with the Father that He would be the Redeemer of those whom the Father had chosen. So the coming of Christ was never in doubt, and it was revealed first to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Even the time was determined by the Father because Paul told the Galatian believers that it was “in the fulness of time” that “God sent forth His Son.

So Christ was not under any obligation to us; His obligation was to God, an obligation that He could not, and would not, fail to fulfill. This ought to give us even greater assurance concerning our salvation.

But what is the next thing that our text tells us?

II. WHAT CHRIST NEEDED TO BECOME: “That he might be a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17m).

I believe that Dr. Griffith Thomas was right when he said that in the two adjectives, “merciful and faithful,” the “merciful” refers to us the sinners who were to be saved, and “faithful” refers to what Christ had to do as a high priest in His responsibility toward God.

Paul, in writing to Titus, had this to say about our salvation:

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, **but according to his mercy he saved us**, by the washing of

regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit;

6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7).

I have told you before, and I believe it is generally agreed upon by devout students of the Greek New Testament, that “grace” has to do with our guilt, and that “mercy” has to do with relieving the misery caused by our sins. It is easy to remember the distinction: Grace -- guilt; mercy -- misery.

So a merciful High Priest is one who is merciful toward us because of our sins. This is an amazing characteristic of God when you realize that He is absolutely perfect, never has sinned, and never will sin. He is the eternally sinless One. And this applies equally to Christ and to the Holy Spirit. God is compassionate toward us when we are deserving of His harshest judgment. He has chosen to save us, and to forgive us, and to change our lives, rather than to cast us forever from His presence (which He has every right to do). He would not only save us from the penalty of our sins, but from the present misery which sin always causes. Look at society today, and you see illustration after illustration of the fact that sinners are miserable. A man may be the wealthiest man in the world, but his riches don't bring him happiness. Some of the most miserable people in the world are the richest people. And yet the misery of sin can be seen in the lowest as well as in the highest. Visit our prisons and see the miserable results of sin. What man needs is a Savior Who will extend mercy, and we have such a Savior in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But in exercising mercy toward us, our Lord did not forget what it would take to satisfy the wrath of God toward guilty sinners. And so He had to be “faithful” -- faithful to God. God had declared that sin brings death. The soul that sins shall die. The wages of sin is death. Therefore, if Christ is going to be faithful to God, He must die in the place of all of those who are to be forgiven. If the death of Christ had not satisfied the righteousness of God, none of us could possibly have been saved. This is why I say so often that the major requirement of Christ's death was that it satisfy God. He must be satisfied if we are to be justified.

So Christ became a Man in order that He might both manifest God's mercy to us, and at the same time satisfy the righteous requirement of a holy God. And we can thank God that He did both -- as our text goes on to say.

Now let us move on to the third point:

III. WHAT CHRIST NEEDED TO DO (Heb. 2:17b, 18).

As our High Priest He needed to do two things. The first was:

A. “To make reconciliation (propitiation) for the sins of the people” (v. 17b).

The Greek says propitiation, not “reconciliation.” He, of course, has reconciled us to God, but propitiation tells how He has done it. Christ’s death has satisfied God that the full penalty for our sins has been paid. Nothing remains for you and me to do. This is what our Lord meant when He said from the Cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

One commentator has described propitiation with these words:

It means “that which makes it consistent for God to pardon... His justice could not overlook sin and His love could not be indifferent to the sinner, and so what His righteousness demanded, His love provided” (Griffith Thomas, pp. 36, 37).

Please notice that in this passage the Apostle was speaking of a particular redemption. In verse 9 we read that he tasted death for every man. The Greek says, for all. Who was he referring to? When you go on into verse 10 you see that he meant those “many sons” he was “bringing...unto glory.” In verse 17 Christ is said to have been “made like unto his brethren.” Who are they? See v. 11. And it is for the sins of these “people” (v. 17b) that Christ has made propitiation. The whole passage points to the salvation of God’s elect people.

God is never satisfied with any work we might do, any promise we might make, any gift we might give, for our salvation. No person is good enough for heaven, no one can do enough to wipe out past sins nor to care for future sins. Only in Christ is there salvation. Sinners must come to God depending upon Christ, or they will be forever under the judgment of God. No one can possibly come to God except through Christ.

What is the other work that we need?

B. “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (v. 18).

This is one of the grandest of all truths found in the Bible for each of us as the people of God.

Our trials are not over when we are saved. Nor are our struggles with sin over when we come to Christ. Our trials continue, and in most respects increase. The struggle with sin becomes stronger than ever. But the same High Priest Who went to the Cross to purchase our redemption, is the One Who sympathizes with us in our trials, because He suffered in every way that we do --but with this difference: He never was guilty of sin. And so He is able to "succour" us. The word means not only that He will help us, but that He will deliver us. In His death He was victorious over our sins. In His death He was victorious over our Enemy, the Devil. And in His death, because of all that He experienced here on earth, He gives us victory in our trials and victory over our sins. How we need to be like the Apostle Paul who continually gloried, not in the Cross of the Christ, but in the Christ of the Cross. Cf. Gal. 6:14.

(Read also Heb. 4:14-16.)

Here again we come to great and wonderful truths which we cannot fully appreciate because we cannot fully understand all that our Lord endured as a Man while He was here on earth. But let us believe it. Let us come with confidence to the Throne of Grace. It is there, and there only, that we can find mercy and grace to help and deliver us in our times of need.

Concl: Our great High Priest lives to make intercession for us. He is "the same yesterday, today, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). And our need for God's grace, mercy, and peace never changes. And it seems that the older we get to be in the Lord, the greater our needs are, or at least we see our needs more clearly. The word "come" in Heb. 4:16 is in the present tense meaning that we need to come now, come this afternoon, come tonight, come tomorrow, and keep coming to our great High Priest as long as we live. Christ is sufficient for every need we have, and He is the only One Who can make things right and keep things right in our relationship with the Lord.

Yesterday at our men's prayer meeting I spoke to the men about Psa. 34:6,

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

Our trials, like David's, are designed to show us how much we need the Lord. And it is the recognition of our needs that keeps us coming to the Lord. It is easy to blame others for our troubles, but the Lord wants us to

see that He is concerned about our needs, and that we come to Him, not for what someone else needs, but for what we need. Job, according to what God said about him, was the godliest man on earth in the time that he lived. But he had needs which the Lord wanted him to see, and so his trials came. They were not to destroy him, but to make him see more clearly his own need so that he would abhor himself, repent in dust and ashes, and seek the Lord as He had never sought Him before. When that happened, then God's blessing was restored.

It may be that many of us are waiting for God's blessing upon our lives in some special way. But we are waiting for God to change our circumstances, or to change some of the people we have to do deal with, when what the Lord is waiting for is that we, you and I, might see that we are the ones who need to change, we are the ones who need the Lord, we need His mercy and His grace. When we get to that place, we will be amazed to see how gracious and merciful God can be, and will be, as we look only to Him.

Closing verses: Phil. 4:6, 7.