

Purposes of the Advent: To Destroy the Devil's Work

Text: 1 JOHN 3:8

Scripture Reading: 1 JOHN 3:1-10

Pastor Andrew B. Pigott

Chinese Christian Church of New Jersey

Sunday, December 7, 2003

Today I would like to begin a series of four sermons that I hope will add meaning to the Christmas season that is now upon us. I hope that, through this series of messages, we can all grow to appreciate more the reasons we have to rejoice during this season.

I have entitled the series **"Purposes of the Advent"** (the Advent I am talking about is the appearance or arrival of God in the form of human flesh). I have chosen 1 JOHN 3:1-10 as the main text I will use to reveal these purposes. Altogether I find four purposes in this passage of scripture, two of them are explicitly stated and two are implied. Please follow along with me as I read this passage, and see if you can (at least) pick out the two purposes of the Advent that are explicitly stated.

¹*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.* ²*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* ³*Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

⁴*Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.* ⁵*But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.* ⁶*No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.*

⁷*Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.* ⁸*He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.* ⁹*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.* ¹⁰*This is how we know who the children of God are*

and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

Twice in this passage of scripture we find the words, "He (the Son of God) appeared" followed by an explanation of why He appeared. 1 JOHN 3:5 says, "He appeared so that He might take away our sins." Then, in verse 8 we read, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." Those are the two purposes of the Advent that are explicitly stated in this passage of scripture. Now let's look at two other purposes that are implied.

Verse 1 of this passage talks about the love of God the Father that has been lavished on us—not just so we can intellectually understand the love of the Father, but so that we may become like the Father, adopted into His family. Verse 1 does not explicitly tell us that Jesus appeared to make His Father known to us, but I am certain that was one of the purposes of His Advent. In another place in the Bible, the same author quoted Jesus as saying "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." Therefore, I believe revealing the Father was one of the purposes of the Advent.

The other purpose of the Advent implied in our scripture reading is the purpose of preparing for a Second Advent. Verse 2 of 1 JOHN 3 refers to a future appearing of the Son of God when "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." HEBREWS 9:28 puts it like this, "...so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him." The first appearing where Christ was sacrificed to take away sins was necessary to prepare for the second appearing.

So the four purposes of the Advent that I will use for our Sunday morning meditations during this Advent season are:

- 1) to destroy the works of the devil;
- 2) to take away sin;
- 3) to reveal the Father; and
- 4) to prepare for the Second Advent.

The order that I have chosen to speak on these purposes is not the order they appear in the scripture reading, nor is it the order in which the purposes were

fulfilled in Christ. If I were to go according to the order these purposes were fulfilled in Christ, then I probably would put the purpose of revealing the Father as number one. When Jesus was born in the manger and grew to be a man, every one of His actions and every word He spoke revealed the Father. At the end of His life He went to the cross to take away our sins. A day will come when He will return again. At that time He will completely destroy the works of the devil, making it possible for His children to live in an environment completely free from sin. That is the order I would use if I were trying to follow the sequence in which these purposes are fulfilled.

But, instead, I have chosen to order these purposes in the way I believe they would have appeared to the average person who first met Jesus Christ. I believe the first impression the average person who met Jesus had was not the impression that "here is a Person who is revealing God the Father to us." Even after three years of being in close contact with Jesus, his own disciples still failed to notice the connection between their Lord and God the Father. But, there was something they did notice. They noticed a man who was engaged in an intense battle with everything that was out of line with the will of God. Jesus appeared to them as a person in conflict with traditions and teachings and behavior that were out of harmony with the truth of God's Word.

Every time I read through the Gospel of John, I am reminded of the intense conflict that surrounded the life of Christ. We first see it in the prologue. When the Word became flesh, "the light shown in the darkness, but the darkness did not comprehend it... He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." In chapter 2 of JOHN we see Jesus making a whip out of cords and driving out the men who were selling animals for sacrifice. Later on, serious conflict begins when Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath. Even after He feeds the five thousand, people grumble and argue about His teachings that contradict their own. By the time we reach the seventh chapter of John, it is clear that people are determined to take His life. At the end of chapter eight, people who had believed in Jesus because of the miracles He had performed were actually picking up stones to kill Him. On and on the conflict continues until it reaches its final culmination on the cross.

I am personally convinced that the first thing people noticed when they saw Jesus was not the fact that He was one with God the Father. It was the fact that He was in conflict with everything around Him that was evil. He was in conflict with the works of the devil.

So, I have chosen to make destroying the works of the devil to be the first purpose of the Advent for us to

consider. Let's begin our consideration by trying to make a list of the works of the devil. Then, let us [see] how Jesus, by Himself, worked to destroyed the works of the devil. Then, finally, let us attempt to understand how Jesus uses us in the present to destroy the works of the devil.

To make a list of the devil's works, I begin with our scripture reading. 1 JOHN 3:8 describes the devil as one who "has been sinning from the beginning." Earlier we read that "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." So, my first entry on the list is breaking the law. Then, by turning to other passages in the Bible I add to the list. JOHN 8:44 quotes Jesus as saying that the devil is a murderer and a liar. It is not the killing of physical life that is top priority for the devil. It is the killing of spiritual life that causes people to become alienated from God. In the same way the devil's work of killing results in alienation from God, his work of lying results in ignorance where the minds of people become darkened to the truth.

So, there are three things on the list, but let me add a fourth. One of the devil's most accomplished works is the work of betrayal. This is illustrated in the life of Judas Iscariot. JOHN 13:2 tells us that "the devil prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus." Betrayal has to be one of the cruelest works of the devil. What can be more hurtful than the discovery that the one who used to be your friend is now trying to harm you? What kind of emotion drives a person to betray his friend? Is it jealousy? Is it hate? Is it greed? Whatever it is, Satan is the one who puts it in the mind of the betrayer.

Breaking the law, killing, lying, and betrayal—these are the works of the devil. How did Jesus, Himself, destroy the work of the devil? For Jesus, destroying the works of the devil was a process. It was a process of struggle that began soon after He took on human flesh, climaxed at the cross, and will have its final conclusion at the end of the world.

When I look at Jesus destroying the work of the devil before He went to the cross, I am looking at a true reformer. In the presence of ignorance, He could not remain silent. He brought light to the people who sat in darkness and taught them the truth. In the presence of lawlessness, he reestablished order. He cast out the demons and replaced the chaos with tranquility. He offered life to people who were alienated from God. And when He was betrayed, He loved in return. Jesus dipped a piece of bread in a cup and handed it to Judas. That was an act of love.

Jesus did not try to use politics or violence or religion to bring about reform and to correct the wrong. Those

methods never work against the devil. Instead, He used truth and life and love to fight the devil. That's what He did before He went to the cross. It is documented in the gospels, and it is not hard to see.

What Jesus will do at the end of the world to destroy the work of the devil is also not hard to understand. It will be very different from what He did before He went to the cross. At that time Jesus will destroy the devil in such a way that there will be total separation between evil and good. The world as we know it now will come to an end, and there will be a New World completely free from the influence of the devil. We can read about it in the Book of Revelation. Although it is hard to imagine, the fact that it will happen is clear.

The thing that is cannot be understood completely is how Jesus destroyed the work of the devil on the cross. There is mystery at the cross that cannot be explained in a clear way. But it was there, at the cross, that Jesus made it possible to continue what He started alone. At the cross, something happened to allow thousands upon thousands of people like you and me to be used by Jesus to destroy the work of the devil. Through the mystery of the cross, power was released. It is the power to proclaim truth and the power to obey and the power to love. It is the same kind of power Jesus had Himself before He went to the cross.

But, we must remember that there is only one way to tap into this power. We must [look] to the cross. And, the only way to the cross is the way of intense struggle. The very process that our Lord went through to destroy the work of the devil on His own must be paralleled in our own lives. Even before He went to the cross, Jesus struggled with the devil. In order to go to the cross, we must experience struggle as well. We must allow the struggle to drive us to the cross. Any other reason for coming to the cross is illegitimate.

The person who is the furthest from the cross and experiencing salvation is the person who feels no struggle and has mastered the ability to tolerate everything and everyone around him. Today our world puts such a person on a pedestal. He is the model citizen. Tolerance has become a great virtue. Living in harmony with one's environment without getting upset about anything is the new definition of what it means to be a well-adjusted person.

Of course, there is a sense in which we should be tolerant. When traditions and teachings and behavior do not violate truth, we should be tolerant even if those traditions and teachings and behaviors differ from our own. But when a violation of truth does occur, it should upset us. The conscience that God has given to us, the spirit He breathed into us when

He created us should be disturbed. There must be struggle. And our struggle must cause us to cry out for help as we realize our weakness to destroy the work of the devil. That is how we come to the cross.

And, once we have come, Jesus destroys the work of the devil in our very lives by giving us a new heart. He places His law in our hearts so that obeying becomes our greatest joy. He removes the ignorance so we can see. And He gives us the power to love even those who hate us.

Then, by and by, Jesus will give us a new body and allow us to live in a new environment that is completely free from the devil's influence.

"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." The extent that we are able to appreciate the process that Jesus went through to destroy the devil's work and the process that we must go through to be used by Jesus to destroy the devil's work—the extent that we appreciate these things—is the extent that we will be able to experience true celebration during this Advent season.

Please do not try to avoid struggling with the evil around you and in you. Do not envy people who deny God and seem to be carefree. Those people are not to be envied. They are to be pitied, because they will not be able to experience the true joy of the season unless they open their eyes up to the evil around them and become disturbed like a normal person should be. Allow yourself to be disturbed, but make sure your feelings of despair take you to the cross.

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play
And mild and sweet the words repeat,
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

I thought how as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had roll'd along th' unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bow'd my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men."

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men."

'Til ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,

Of peace on earth, good will to men!

We cannot experience the true joy of Christmas without first experiencing despair. Jesus came to destroy the devil's work. He labors alone to destroy the devil's work through a process that will finally

conclude at the end of the world. But, He also destroys the devil's work through the lives of thousands upon thousands of people who go through a similar process of struggle that leads to the cross and eventually to glory.