

Purposes of the Advent: To Reveal the Father

Text: JOHN 14:1-24

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The drama we just saw helps us understand how difficult it is for human beings to rely on their own intellect to analyze and comprehend things that are spiritual in nature. While pastoring a church in Taiwan about 15 years ago I met a man who had been hired by the United States federal government to analyze and report back to the government what was taking place in some of the churches in Taiwan. The man seemed to be focusing his study on some unexplainable things that were taking place in the churches. Things like healing and prophesying and speaking in tongues were all on the man's list of things that he wanted to investigate. As I spoke with that man, I felt that he had been given a mission impossible, because I am personally convinced that it is not possible to use human intellect to analyze and scientifically explain things that are spiritual in nature.

Understanding of such things requires revelation from God and the work of the Holy Spirit to open a person's heart and mind so that person can embrace the revelation he has received from God.

Today we consider the third message on the general subject of the purposes of the Advent. We have already considered the fact that Jesus appeared to destroy the devil's work and the fact that Jesus appeared to take away our sins. We now turn to the very special purpose of revealing the Father. The thing that makes this purpose of the Advent so special is the fact that, without the revelation about God the Father given to us through Jesus Christ, it would be virtually impossible for any human being to even come close to comprehending a very important truth about God. There is no way that a certain person, relying on his own intellect, can possibly comprehend the thing about God that I intend to emphasize in this message. And without the comprehension, there is no way for the Holy Spirit to move the heart and mind of that person in such a way that he will embrace what he comprehends, and forevermore be driven by a vision of God that will transform his life. The Advent of Jesus Christ was absolutely necessary to reveal God in such a way that makes it possible for people to be born again.

So, what is the special thing about God that could not have been revealed if it had not been for the Advent of Jesus Christ? Had not God already revealed Himself in many ways for thousands of years before the

coming of Christ? Much of the time, God revealed Himself through prophets. HEBREWS 1:1 says, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways." Sometimes, God also used angels to reveal things about Himself. It was an angel who spoke to Mary and then to Joseph. God revealed things directly to prophets and angels who then passed the information on to other people. And the information was carefully recorded. For instance, it is recorded that, in the year King Uzziah died, the prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. The prophet Ezekiel recorded how he had seen God in fire and in wheels and in majesty and in glory.

In addition to using prophets and angels to reveal Himself to people, God frequently revealed things about Himself through His mighty works. I hardly need to give you a list of these works, because most of you are already very familiar with them. God's works of creation reveal His might. His dealings with the nations reveal his holiness. His special relationship with the nation of Israel reveals His power to save and to heal and to forgive.

From the time of Abraham up to the time when Jesus was born, people had been receiving a lot of revelation about God. The revelation was progressive so that Moses actually knew more about God than Abraham and Isaiah new more than Moses. And, it can be argued that the people who lived when Jesus was born knew more about God than even Isaiah and the other Old Testament prophets. In fact, with all the revelation about God recorded in the Old Testament, it is hard for me to think of any single attribute about God that had not been revealed prior to the appearance of Jesus Christ.

So, what truth about God did the appearing of Jesus Christ reveal that people did not already have? *It is a particular truth about God as Father.* It is a truth that takes us beyond specific facts about God. The prophets and angels and works of God had already revealed certain facts about God. They even revealed certain facts about the fatherhood nature of God. For instance, the people of Israel had learned that God poured out His tender care for them by providing for them just like a father provides for his children. They had learned that God is a God who disciplines His people just like a father disciplines his children. And,

they had learned that God forgives His people when they do wrong just like a father forgives his children. All these facts about God they had learned through past revelation.

But, there is one truth about fatherhood that was impossible for God to reveal through angels or prophets or any other means save that of God Himself taking on human flesh and becoming a man. The truth I am talking about is the most supreme and wonderful thing about fatherhood that can possibly be revealed. Above anything else, fatherhood means that if the child has wandered away, the father will suffer everything to save and bring the child home again. That particular truth about fatherhood could not be revealed in words passed on to us by angels and prophets to be understood with the mind only. The fatherhood nature of God in regard to this particular truth had to be demonstrated in flesh and blood. Only by actually happening, could this attribute about God grip the mind and the heart and the spirit of a person in such a way as to radically change that person.

You will not find a verse in the Bible that says the reason why Jesus appeared was to reveal the God as Father. But, in today's scripture reading, you will find a quote from Jesus that very clearly makes the point. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." This very important statement is made in the context of a series of questions directed toward Jesus by His disciples. The time had come for Jesus to depart the earth, and everyone knew it. Knowing that His disciples were upset over the fact that He was about to leave them, Jesus began to speak words of comfort. But the disciples had trouble finding comfort, because they could not comprehend what was taking place. They began to interrupt their Lord's words of comfort with questions. Peter asked the first question, "Lord where are you going?" While Jesus was still answering Peter, Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Then, while He was still dealing with the question Thomas asked, Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." And then, while answering Philip's question, Jude said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

Our Lord must have felt very lonely at that moment. He had spent three years with these men revealing all sorts of things about God to them. They had learned much, but they were still missing the main point. The words spoken by Philip vividly illustrate how the disciples had failed to understand the most important revelation of all. Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Philip was asking Jesus to do the same thing the prophets of old had done. He was asking Jesus to reveal to them certain

truths about the fatherhood of God. But he was missing the main point. The main point that Philip and the others were missing was the fact that Jesus was God in human flesh who was in the very process of sacrificing everything so that He could bring people who were lost in sin back to Himself. Jesus was in the very process of revealing the supreme truth about the fatherhood of God to His disciples, and they were failing to get the point.

Later on the disciples would get it and their lives would be forever changed as a result. But, before they could get it, they had to witness the climax of their Lord's sacrifice that took place on the cross. And then, with the help of the Holy Spirit poured out to them at Pentecost, the disciples were able to process all that they had seen and heard in such a way that it became clear as a bell. The supreme truth about the fatherhood of God that no words from prophets or angels could adequately describe gripped their minds and their hearts and their spirits in such a way that it changed them forever. They became born again. I think it is futile to spend time trying to pinpoint when each disciple became born again, but I do believe that this vision of the fatherhood of God was central to the born again experience of each disciple.

Over the years I have used numerous illustrations in messages I have preached in an attempt to explain how Jesus lived out the fatherhood ideal of complete sacrifice. In other words, I have tried to illustrate how Jesus, just like a father, sacrificed everything to rescue His children from sin and to bring them back home. It was a sacrifice that began the moment He left heaven to take on human flesh. And it was a sacrifice that had its climax on the cross. But, even though the illustrations have a way of capturing attention, no verbal illustration can adequately describe what took place. The pain and the suffering that took place are beyond description.

I will not spend time today trying to describe how the Advent of Jesus Christ revealed the supreme truth about fatherhood. I will not try to explain the suffering and sacrifice of our Lord. Instead, *I will attempt to explain in more detail the difference this supreme revelation about the fatherhood of God makes when it touches the life of an individual or the lives of many people living in a community.* You have already heard me use the Biblical words "born again" to describe the difference. Now, I will try to describe in more detail what it means to be born again.

In order to do this, I will first make an attempt at categorizing three general groups of people. The first category includes those people who are not interested at all in learning about God. Now you might think that there are a lot of people in this category, because

there are a lot of people who boast that they have no religion at all. But, really it is very hard to be in this category, because one has to go against their very nature to do so. So, when I hear people say that they are not religious, I have learned to take such a statement with a grain of salt. I have learned that what most people are saying when they boast that they do not have religion is that they do not subscribe to any particular religious tradition. It is not that they disbelieve in the supernatural, it is that they don't want to be associated with any particular religious organization.

The people who actually deny any existence of the supernatural are really not that many. However there still are some. And, they are characterized by a tendency to look down upon people who are religious as being superstitious or uneducated. This attitude comes across strong on university campuses, especially in Europe and in North America and in the developed countries of Asia. People in this category may not openly ridicule religious people. They may be polite and keep their feelings of pity or scorn inside so all that you see on the outside is a smile. But, their conviction to reject anything spiritual or anything supernatural will cause them to look down on people who believe in these things.

And so, we come to the second general category of people. I believe that most people living on this planet fall into this category. It is the category of people who are religious. This category takes in the majority of people who profess to follow the major world religions. It also takes in those whom we tend to label as heathens because they rely on good-luck charms for just about everything. This category really takes in everyone who recognizes that things taking place in the spiritual realm really do affect everyday life.

And then, there is a third category of people. They are like the people in the second category in that they are religious. But, there is also something very different about them. And the thing that is different is that all the longings of their spirit that caused them to become religious in the first place—all those deep cravings of the soul—have been fulfilled by God Himself. These people have a vision of God that can be summed up in one word, and that word is love. They somehow know that God has sacrificed everything to rescue them from evil, and now their soul desire is to live a life pleasing to the God. Love will be the driving force behind everything they think and do and say. This is the category of people that I would consider as having been born again.

Now, let me use an illustration from Africa to help you understand how being born again fulfills the deepest longings of the soul. In Africa are found men and

women whom we often categorize as being superstitious because the only form of religion they have is what we call fetish worship. People who boast that all religion is superstitious may categorize these people as belonging to the lowest intellectual scale possible. Fetishes are really nothing more than a charm—a little piece of leather or a little piece of stick—something that these people believe has some supernatural power attached to it. A man with a fetish will not think it possible to be fortunate in business or in pleasure or in home or in marriage or in anything else without his fetish. In Africa, if you are about to trade with one of these men after he has driven his cattle hundreds of miles, and he discovers that in his folly he has not brought his fetish with him, you will not be able to persuade him to trade with you. He will travel all the weary miles back again, and postpone his business for days or weeks or months, because he cannot trade unless the fetish is with him.

Now, we may find ourselves smiling at this kind of religion, but they have gotten something right in their thinking that many people miss. Their underlying consciousness tells them that they cannot be fortunate in business or home or marriage or pleasure unless they have a relationship with something supernatural that is more than they are. Before we mock the African who will not do business without his fetish, we had better realize that when we decide to do business without God, we are acting much more like a heathen than he is.

Now, when Christ appeared, His goal was not to contradict the underlying consciousness behind all religions; rather, He came to fulfill it. Jesus does not come to contradict the essential truth of Buddhism, but to fulfill it. And, the same can be said about every religion, including Christianity and Judaism. It is even true about Confucianism. Jesus does not come to rob the Asian of his respect for parents taught by Confucius, but He comes to fulfill that respect based upon a new vision of God. Wherever Jesus has come, wherever Jesus has revealed the supreme truth about the fatherhood of God, wherever people, regardless of how high or low they are on the intellectual scale, have seen God in Christ, the miracle of being born again repeats itself. As hearts and minds embrace a new vision of God, people drop their fetishes and do away with their idols and yield themselves to Him.

That is one way you can describe what it means to be born again. Another way to describe being born again is to observe the relationship between the intellectual knowledge people have about God and their moral behavior. It is natural to think that the more religious people are, the more well behaved they become. But nothing could be further from the truth. Increased knowledge about God and even increased knowledge

about the Bible may make us religious, but it will not make us good.

I marvel at the amount of information about God that exists today. Never before have people had more access to information about God than they do today. But, the morality of the people who live in the places where the information is the greatest seems to be telling me that despite an increase in knowledge about God there is a sharp decline in the morality of the people. This is especially illustrated in the churches of our country. Last week I heard the pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City being interviewed. All his knowledge about God has led that man to confuse the distinction between the sin and the sinner. You've heard it said that we should love the sinner but reject the sin. His philosophy seems to be that only way you can love the sinner is to accept his sin as being OK. Based on his study about God, he has come to this conclusion.

But, when Jesus reveals the supreme truth about the fatherhood of God, and when the Holy Spirit convicts a certain person to embrace that truth, it will always result in improved morality. Even in places where people are illiterate and have no opportunity to engage in intense Bible study, the moral condition of people who have embraced this vision will make steady improvement.

For the people who are only religious, there is no direct connection between religion and morality. But for people who are born again, religion is morality. It has everything to do with living a life free from sin and pleasing to God.

The appearing of Jesus Christ was absolutely necessary for the supreme truth about the fatherhood of God to be revealed. And it is only after receiving this supreme truth about the fatherhood of God that a person can have a born again experience such as I have described.

I am not trying to say that people who never received such revelation are sure to go to hell. To say such a thing would be to condemn to hell all the people who were born before Christ appeared plus millions upon

millions of people who were born after Christ appeared. For instance, an aborted fetus cannot experience being born again as I have described it, yet we cannot condemn an aborted fetus to hell. There are some questions that the Bible does not specifically answer. The Bible does not say that a person who has not been born again the way I have described it will go to hell. However, the Bible does teach that only the blood of Christ can save people from their sins. Everyone who ends up in heaven will have gotten there only because of the blood of Jesus Christ has washed away their sins. And that includes everyone, even people who were born before God appeared in human flesh. There was and still is no other way for people to experience salvation.

But, the pertinent question for all of us in this auditorium is not what will happen to those people who have never had a chance to receive the specific revelation about the fatherhood of God that I have been talking about in this message. The question that each one of us must answer is what we have done with the revelation that we have received. Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." He said that to Philip and to the other disciples. Those men had seen Jesus more than other men. But when they heard Jesus speak those words, the supreme revelation of God as Father had not yet taken hold of their hearts and minds and spirits. When Jesus made that statement, they had not been born again. They had seen the Father, but in their seeing, they had missed the supreme truth about the Father. Only later on would they get it.

How about you and me? Have we gotten it? All of us, to some extent, have been exposed to Jesus, but have we seen the Father in the way that we need to see Him? Has this supreme truth about the fatherhood of God captured our minds, resulting in a strong conviction that God loves us? Does this vision appeal to our hearts, causing us to love God in return? Does this vision demand the surrender of our wills, resulting in obedience? May God grant that we shall look into the face of Jesus and say, "My Lord and my God"! May God grant to all of us the experience of being born again so that our hearts will be satisfied and our lives will become holy.