

December 17, 2017

Christmas in Context

"...you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Genesis 2:17

"...when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law." Galatians 4:4-5

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement..." Romans 3:23-24

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man, to be a sin offering..." Romans 8:1-3

Christmas is upon us once again with all that goes with this yearly celebration of the birth of Jesus more than twenty centuries ago. I don't know how each of you feels about this holiday, but I really enjoy almost all of it. Many of my favorite childhood and family memories are centered in this time of year.

I do believe, however, that many of us, and certainly many of those who celebrate Christmas, do not understand just what we are, in fact, celebrating. To fully appreciate the true meaning of Christmas, I am convinced, we must understand the purpose behind the birth of that tiny child all those years ago. As we have so often discussed, God, in creating man, made him to be like his Creator. We are like God in that we were created to be eternal and we have the capacity to make behavioral choices based on our understanding of right and wrong. From the beginning God's has, as we discussed a couple of weeks ago, desired for us to live in a close, personal relationship with him where we heed his direction and obey his commands. He desires this, as he has from the very beginning, because he loves us so much.

From the beginning we have lived under an absolute law which Paul, writing to the Roman believers, calls "***...the law of sin and death...***" When God gave the first man the first commandment he established this law; "***...you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.***"

Because, from that time to this, "***All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...***" all have earned and deserve death. But, God in his great love for us determined to rescue us from the "***...law of sin and death...***"; not by setting it aside, but by satisfying its requirement of death.

As the Apostle Paul makes clear, "***...when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law...***" and "***God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement...***" So, in every way, Jesus is the promised child who was born to die as an atoning sacrifice for our sins in order that you and I might experience the fullness of God's grace.

As we celebrate that magical birth that took place all those years ago, it would be good for us, I think, to keep in mind what made that birth necessary. By all means, celebrate that wonderful Christmas story, and by all means, never, ever forget what that story really means. Announced by angels, adored by shepherds, honored by wisemen, Jesus is God's holy child born into the world to

die for the sins of that very same world. May we never forget that the favor of God which rested on men that night was the favor of grace in Jesus Christ.



"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."