12-15-19

John 1:1-18

In this advent season, we are considering the advents, or comings, of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Last week, we looked at His second and future advent by considering some Scripture from the book of Revelation. Today, in these verses by the apostle John, we have some things to consider about the advent which has already taken place; Jesus’ birth as a child of Mary. John takes us back to ‘before the beginning’, to consider who this is that has come into the world, and has caused considerable consternation in the two millennia since.

John begins his account of the Gospel very much the same way that the book of Genesis begins: Genesis 1:1 starts out “In the beginning God”, John starts with “In the beginning was the Word.” Just from putting these two verses together, we can see that God and the Word were both there at the beginning of creation and that God and the Word are the same person. John goes on in this verse and the next to make this completely clear.

I think we all know what John eventually tells us along with the rest of the Bible, that the Word is Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. In these verses, John makes it abundantly clear that Jesus has been around since eternity past; He did not have a beginning. Additionally, Jesus and God are one. This is a very difficult concept for us and we must be very careful with it. A pillar of Christianity is that we believe in one God. Another pillar is that God is three distinct personalities or persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

There is a heresy called “modalism” that we must be careful we don’t fall into. It is an attempt to explain the three persons of God in a way that we can understand it. Modalism says that there is one God and He acts as whichever person He needs to at the time. In other words, He is the Father sometimes, He is the Son when He needs to be, and He is the Holy Spirit when He needs to be. God operates in whichever “mode” He needs to. This is absolutely false. Although each acts in accordance with the other, all three members of the Trinity have different personalities and they all work at the same time for our salvation and for their own glory.

Yes, this is difficult, in fact, impossible for us to understand, but there is our comfort; God is far above us, if we understood Him entirely, He would be the same as us. Our lives and eternity are in the hands of one who is truly God. He is not subject to the failures that we are. He is perfect and all powerful and He loves us. We can rest comfortably and peacefully in His care.

John goes on the tell us that everything came into being through the Word. Again, we go back to Genesis and see how God’s creation took place. In each creative act, “God said”. God used words to create; it was the Word of God that made everything. By this, we again see that Jesus was there with God at the beginning of creation and that it was through Jesus Christ that everything was made. When God spoke, living creatures came into being, so in Jesus was life. As Jesus told us in John 14:6 “I am the way and the truth and the life”.

Also, in Genesis we read that God said “Let there be light”. Through Jesus, light shone in the darkness at the beginning of creation. Now, in the beginning of John’s Gospel, light and darkness become metaphors. Darkness, in the form of evil and sin, had become, and still is, rampant on the earth. The evil is so prevalent that we are unable to see that we live in sin; in our natural state, we are enemies of God.

But God again sent light into the world in the form of His Son, Jesus. This light enables us to see that we are hopelessly lost when it comes to God; and we can also see now the way back to God so that we can be acceptable to Him. This is a wonderful thing that God has done for us. We chose to turn from Him, to try to rule our own lives. Some of the angels did this and they are eternally condemned. But God has given us a chance to be redeemed, to be made right again, through Jesus Christ.

Verses 10 and 11 are terribly sad; this world was made through Jesus Christ, by the Word of God; yet, the people didn’t know Him. Specifically, He came to His own people, the people of Israel. They also rejected Him. These are the people whom God specifically chose to be His people. God gave them the law and sent prophets to them so that they know who He is. God told them that Jesus would be coming to save them from sin and make them right with Himself. But they refused. They closed their eyes, they stopped their ears, and they hardened their hearts; they would not accept Jesus even though it was perfectly clear who He was.

This shows how deep the darkness was, how powerful the hold of satan was. It is the same today; the darkness is deep, satan’s hold on the earth is ever more powerful. Back in verse 5, we are told something about the relationship between the darkness and the Light. Depending on your translation, it may say something like “the darkness did not comprehend or understand it” or it may say something like “the darkness did not overcome it”. Either one works and it actually means both.

When we read the Gospel accounts, we often see where the people didn’t understand what Jesus was talking about or what He was doing. Their hearts were dark and they didn’t understand. This led to them trying to destroy Jesus in the crucifixion. But as we know, Jesus rose from the dead and actually overcame the darkness instead. So, when we read that the world did not know Him and His own did not receive Him, we see that the salvation God so lovingly sent to us was rejected because men loved the darkness.

But the fact that the light was effective and overcame the darkness is shown to us in the next two verses. “But as many as received Him”. Some did understand who He was and submitted themselves to God, humbled themselves to admit their sinfulness and admit that Jesus was the only way to salvation. As we read through the Old Testament, we see that God always has His remnant. He always has those who remain faithful to Him, in spite of what the rest of the world is doing. This remnant receives immeasurable blessings from God.

When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we receive the right to become children of God. Not only the right, but that is exactly what happens. God adopts us as His children and His love will never be taken away from us. It is important to observe that Jesus “gave” us the right; it is a gift; we do not deserve it. Our salvation is an entirely free gift that we receive by faith; even the faith is given to us so that we have no claim on earning our salvation.

This right is given “to those who believe in His name”. Name here, is more than just the way of identifying Jesus from other people. His name refers to everything He is; it describes all His inner being and character. We who are Christians believe everything the Bible tells us about Jesus. Remember that the demons also believe in Jesus, but it does them no good. We believe that Jesus has all the characteristics of God because He is God; we accept Him as the only way to the Father.

In order to be a child, we have to be born. In order to be a child of God, we have to be born of God. This looks ahead to Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus when He told him “you must be born again”. Of course, Nicodemus was confused and Jesus had to explain it to him. Being born of God is a spiritual rebirth.

We consider that when a human-being dies, his spirit departs from him. Thus, death is a separation of the physical person from his spirit. When we sin, our spirit is separated from God; in this separation, we see spiritual death. Because of sin, all human-beings, in their natural state, are spiritually dead. We see this in the Garden of Eden. God had warned Adam and Eve that if they ate of the forbidden fruit, they would die. Yet we know that they lived for centuries after they disobeyed God. The answer to this is that as soon as they sinned, their spirits were separated from God and they were spiritually dead.

This is a miracle of Jesus Christ, that when we believe on His name, our spirits receive the life that Jesus is. Our spirits, our very essence, is reborn of God and we become His children. This shows us how much God wants to have fellowship with us; He created us in the first place to have fellowship with Him. How can we resist such love? Consider what all God has done to bring us back to Him; the darkness of this world has nothing to offer us that can compare.

Verse 14 gives us some idea of the lengths God has gone to, to bring us back. The Word became flesh. This is where John testifies that Jesus, who is entirely God, also became entirely a man; One hundred percent God, one hundred percent man. Again, we are faced with the power of God that we can’t comprehend.

This verse, and other places in the Bible tell us that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. This has led some to say that Jesus didn’t always exist, which contradicts what John started with. How do we solve this? Jesus, as God, has always existed. He is part of the eternal God. Jesus, the man, did have a beginning. His beginning was when He was conceived in the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit.

John testifies that Jesus was flesh, that He was a real human-being. Jesus actually lived a life, specifically among the disciples and generally among people; He “dwelt among us”. But John also testifies that he and the other disciple saw the glory of Jesus; in other words, His deity. His teaching always had wisdom far above anything taught by mankind. They saw His miracles; creation of food and drink, healings, supremacy over the elements, reversing death, and that demons were subject to Him. Everything about Him was truth; and His coming to earth was strictly an act of grace. We did not deserve to have a second chance.

John the Baptist also testified that Jesus existed before he did, even though, humanly speaking, he was six months older than Jesus. A truth is established on two or three witnesses and we have these here in John the apostle and John the Baptist. Certainly, we know that there were many more.

Jesus is full and complete, lacking in nothing. During His ministry on earth, He was full of the Holy Spirit. He had the full knowledge of God the Father. He had the blessings of God. And all of these things He shares with us. Because we are children of God, we have become fellow heirs with Christ and we have received the good things from God; now, we don’t have them all in hand yet, but they are ours.

Grace is so important. Recall that grace is unmerited favor. The salvation we receive when we accept Jesus is something we don’t deserve. Additionally, when we accept Christ, we receive so much more; so many benefits that we don’t deserve. Yet God is pleased to give them.

Grace upon grace; what does this mean? Partly, it is what John tells us in verse 17: For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. We tend to think of the Law as something that was harsh and demanding. First off though, it was truth. The Law is the word of God and it explains Him and His justice. Secondly, giving the Law was an act of grace. The nation God entrusted the Law to was just as miserable as any other nation. They didn’t deserve any special treatment. But God was faithful to the promise He made to Abraham and kept the Jews as His special people.

In receiving the Law, the Jews knew what they had to do to please God; also, the sacrificial system gave them the opportunity to atone for their sins. So God gave them what He gave to no other nation; and it was all by grace. Additionally, this Law and sacrificial system pointed the way to Jesus Christ. If not for the darkness, the Israelites would have seen this when Jesus came.

The grace was there in the giving of the Law, but it came in fullness through Jesus Christ. We no longer have to obey all the laws and offer sacrifices according to the Old Testament. Our salvation is a gift; all we need to do is accept it.

Now, we must be careful here; this is not a blank check to do whatever we want. For one thing, if we continue to live in sin, we become a slave to that sin. We have turned away from the light and back to the darkness. Also, Jesus told us that if we love Him, we will obey His commands. That is the thing about being a Christian; we don’t follow a bunch of rules because we have to, we obey Christ because we want to and it is a joy for us to do so. A third thing about being a Christian is that we are called to sacrifice our very lives to Christ as a living sacrifice. We are to live our lives with the intent of bringing glory to God and serving other people.

Jesus came to show the Father. When we know Jesus, we know the Father. God’s word, the Bible, tells us who God is. God’s Word incarnate, Jesus, shows us who God is. God wants us to know Him so that we can turn to Him and have eternal fellowship with Him.

When Solomon dedicated the temple he had built for God, he asked the question, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth?” We know that the answer is “Yes”. God the Son came here in His first advent to save us from sin. Accept Him, that we may be safe when He comes back.

Prayer

Lord God, we are amazed at Your love for us and Your mercy. That Jesus would leave the glory He had with You for all of eternity and become one of us; to deal with all the things of this life as we do. Even to be rejected by the ones He came to save and to suffer Your holy wrath on our behalf. What can we do but bow before Your majesty?

Your grace was shown in the giving of the Law, but realized in the coming of Jesus. Grace upon grace You have for us. And even in this life, You continue to give us more grace to deal with whatever comes upon us. Always, Your grace is sufficient.

Lord Jesus, You came from Your heavenly throne and dwelt among us. And now, You continue to dwell with those who believe in Your name. We thank You for living in us and we look forward to that time when we dwell with You face to face throughout eternity.

We praise You Lord in Your most holy name

Amen