Title: Why Christmas?

Text: 1 John 3:5, 8

Date Preached: 12/1/2019 (MBC AM)

Good morning. Please turn with me in your bibles to 1 John chapter 3. 1 John chapter 3.

It is good to be with you this morning, to worship our Lord and King on this, the first Sunday of the Christmas season.

I’d like start this morning with a confession that might come as a shock to some of you. When it comes to the Christmas season, my natural inclination is to play the role of the Grinch. I know, it’s shocking. Especially for someone that loves doctrine so much, how could he possibly not like Christmas? Well I can tell you that I absolutely love celebrating the coming of our lord and the doctrine of Christ, but I can’t stand a lot of what Christmas has become in our culture.

Christmas is a season of singing and decorations and trees and presents and, strangely enough, explicitly anti-Christian stores are willing to broadcast Christian Christmas carols over their loudspeakers. Otherwise irreligious and pagan stations will play Christian-themed programming. It’s quite a strange phenomenon if you ask me. The season has been divorced from the reason for the season.

As I have considered this strange occurrence, and I have chewed on why otherwise anti-Christian entities will put on a pro-Christmas façade, I’ve concluded that they can do this because they leave out a central component of the Christmas message: and that component is the “Why of Christmas.” They affirm that Christmas time is a time of good tidings and great joy, that it is a time of good will toward all men and of peace, of silent nights and glad tidings, but they never stop long enough to consider “why?’.

Why is Christmas celebrated time of peace? Why is Christmas a time of great joy? Why do we even have Christmas at all? And this is a crucial question for us as well. Why Christmas? Do we treat Christmas, with all the trappings and nostalgia and traditions and presents and gatherings and everything else as the real reason for the season? Are those things really what we like about Christmas, what we look forward to?

To try and check our thinking about the “why of Christmas” I want us to look at some of the reasons why John tells us that Christ came. We’ll see that Christ came for specific reasons, and those reasons are not to create a season of merely traditions and nostalgia. Christ came to do something, to produce an effect, to bring about some change. Indeed, he came to wage war. Christmas can today be a season of peace because Christ first came and waged a war against the devil himself.

So let’s jump into our text. I will begin by reading 1 John 3:4-10:

1 John 3:4-10

**4**Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. **5**You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. **6**No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. **7**Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. **8**Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. **9**No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+3&version=ESV#fen-ESV-30572b)] seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. **10**By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

PRAYER

To begin to answer the “why” of the Christmas season, let’s look at verse 5 and see the **mission of Christmas. The mission of Christmas**.

John tells us in verse 5: You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. He says Christ appeared, which sounds a little strange to us, like Christ was a Christmas ghost that showed up one day and was gone the next. But that’s not what John’s driving at. Instead, I think the older translations get at the idea a little better when they say that he was “manifested.” We could even translate it as “he was revealed.” Something that was previously hidden was unveiled for all to see. Something was previously unclear, but has now been made clear by Christ’s coming.

And what is that thing that was hidden? What was that thing that was cloudy or unclear? We could say simply that what was unclear was the plan of God. The redemptive plan of God was unclear to humanity. Looking back now we can read the old testament in light of Christ’s coming and it makes much more sense to us. But previously, it was harder to see. People could read the Old Testament and hear of the promises of God, but it was not immediately clear how those promises would play out in God’s plan of redemption.

After Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God promised another son through Eve that would crush the head of the serpent Satan. But who would that son be? Would it be Able or Cain?

God promised that he would redeem for himself a people, a chosen nation of royal priests, but is that the Hebrews? They keep falling into sin.

God promised that he would make the nation of Israel his very own son, but Israel kept following after false Gods and pagan nations. Is this nation of Israel supposed to be the promised son of a Holy God?

God promised that he would sit a son of David on the throne forever. But David’s sons were terrible sinners, and were eventually responsible for splitting up the kingdom. Were one of these supposed to be on the throne forever?

God promised Israel that they would have a promised land flowing with milk and honey, but the Israelites were eventually deposed from the land, exiled into Babylon. How is this nation supposed to be God’s people if God can’t or won’t even keep them in their promised land?

God promised to the Israelites that he would make with them a new covenant, and he promised to give them a new heart that would obey his laws. But what about the old covenant, with its old laws, and the Israelites old sins? How would those be taken care of? Indeed, not even God could just wave a magic wand and make all the sins just go away. That would be unjust and unbefitting a holy God. There has to be atonement. There has to be payment.

All of these unanswered questions, questions about how God was going to keep all his promises and keep his own holiness and justice preserved, all these questions are answered in the unveiling, in the manifestation of Jesus as the Christ. That’s what is loaded into this verse in 1 John 3.

Christ is revealed to be the promised son of Eve that would crush the head of the serpent. Christ is the true royal priest that never fell into sin. Christ is the Faithful son that never fell into pagan idolatry. Christ is the Promised son of David that will never be deposed from the throne of His kingdom. Christ is the one that will inherit and reign over a promised land, an entire new Heavens and New Earth, which will forever be flowing with milk and honey, and will forever be secure from outside threats. Christ is the one that through his faithfulness has merited the promised new hearts of the new covenant.

Christ is one that enabled God to both keep his promises to Israel, and also retain his holy standard for justice. And why could he do this? Because, 1 John 3 tells us, Christ has been manifested In order to take away sins. In order to take away sins.

That’s what was revealed on the cross. Christ was able to take away sins, not merely by pronouncing them absolved, but because he bore the punishment for our sins in our place. Christ died in the stead of his people.

Christmas is only good news because of Calvary. The incarnation, Christ taking on flesh, is good news because Christ died in the flesh. Christ laying in the manger is only good news because he has also been laid in the tomb. The glad tidings of joy and peace are only a reality because he experienced terrible tidings of pain and punishment in our place.

Do you understand what Christ has done on the cross? And have you experienced the great joy and peace that can come from trusting in him? He offers to you this very day a chance to come and have your sins removed. He came to die in the place of sinners, to take your wrath and your sentence of death, and to instead give you a promise of life and peace. If you haven’t come to Christ, see him revealed in scripture, see him described as the servant of God that removed the sentence of death that hung over his people, and turn from your sins into his loving arms. That’s the best present that we could receive this Christmas.

Why is it that we celebrate Christmas? Because Christ has been revealed in order to take away sins.

Next, a second reason for the “why” of Christmas is because of the **Person of Christmas**. The **Person of Christmas**. This given in the end of 1 John 3:5: You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, **and in him there is no sin**.

It wasn’t enough for Christ to come and be born in the flesh, though he certainly was. It wasn’t enough for that person to fully human, though he was. Christ had to be sinless, if he was to be successful in his mission.

You see, a sinful person can’t take away sin. Darkness can’t cast out darkness. A tainted bath can’t cleanse. Perfection is needed in order for God’s standard to be met. If he merely had died in the place for our sins, if he merely took our punishment for sin away, then we are just back in Adam’s situation. We’re still left with earning our own way into heaven by our own performance, our own keeping of the law.

But that is not what Christ has done for us. We can celebrate Christmas with full hearts because Christ has gifted to us his very own righteousness.

Galatians 4:4 tells us that when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son [that’s Christmas], born of woman [i.e., fully human], born under the law. Born under the law. That means he had the law as his standard, the law as his benchmark. And not merely outward obedience. It is true that he never killed anyone, but he also never once was sinfully angry in his heart. It is true that he never stole from anyone, but he also never once was greedy or covetous in his heart. It is true that he never broke the sabbath, but he also perfectly rested his whole soul on God himself. It is true that he never worshipped pagan idols, but he also never once was doing anything other than fully trusting in his heavenly father.

Theologians will say that his full active obedience to the law, his full credit for perfect righteousness, is imputed to us, is reckoned to our account, is credited to all of those that have come to Christ in faith.

When we believe in Christ as the righteous son of the father, when we repent of our sins and devote ourselves to following our savior, then we have the perfect righteousness of Christ given to us. We’re adopted into the heavenly household by our heavenly father, and we are seen, no longer as sinful and dirty, no longer a polluted and worthless, no longer as impure and defiled. We’re seen as robed in the very perfection of Christ himself. We’re counted as pure and undefiled, washed and beloved.

Why do we celebrate Christmas? We can celebrate Christmas, not merely because Christ has come and taken away our punishment, but also because Christ has earned for us an inheritance into the household of God, he has earned for us eternal blessedness in paradise with him, he has earned for us what each of us was incapable of earning on our own, heaven itself.

That’s good news of Great joy. That Christ has done what we could never do.

So far we have seen the mission of Christmas and the person of Christmas. But next, let’s look at the **victory of Christmas. The victory of Christmas.** Look down with me to verse 8 of 1 John 3:

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

Now, before we get to the victory of Christmas, it is worth us reflecting for a moment on a principle that John is applying here in verse 8. He says that “whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil,” which the Greek makes clear is ongoing, continuous action. Someone that is resolute, consistent, devoted to sinning, is of the devil. The principle he is applying is simple: we imitate our father. We imitate our father.

You’ve seen this in your parenting, as terrifying as it is, but your children act like you. And young people, we warned: You will, in some way, shape, or form, act like your parents. I know. That can be terrifying. The principle is true in earthly households, and it is true in spiritual households.

And we’re all born this way. We’re born with Adam’s sin counted to us and Adam’s sinful nature inside of us. We’re inclined toward evil, the bible says, from the very beginning. And if you’re a parent you’ve seen this too. You don’t have to teach your child to be impatient or demanding. You don’t have to teach them to be ungrateful or jealous. These bubble up from within them. And we are all born that way because we’re born, in John’s terms, as sons of the devil.

Jesus spoke this way about the Pharisees in John 8:44. They were doing evil works and Jesus reveals to them why that is. He says: “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” He condemns the Pharisees for lying and acting like their father, and we too, outside of Christ stand condemned of acting like our father.

John too tells us that the devil has been this way from the beginning. His very nature is to sin. He tricked and deceived Eve. He antagonized and tortured Job. Peter describes him as a roaring lion, prowling around seeking whom he can devour. He tempted Jesus himself to sin in the desert three times. He was a motivating temptation for Judas to commit his act of betrayal. And he is so associated with sinful antagonism for the people of God, that Paul can describe his thorn in the flesh as a “Messenger from Satan” in 2 Corinthians 12:7. Satan’s disposition is against God, his posture is anti-Christ, and therefore he is against anything made in his image, which is us.

But lest we think we’re not anything like him, let’s think for a minute some of the ways that we’re tempted to act like the father of lies himself. We’re naturally inclined to defend ourselves and throw others under the bus if necessary. We want to advance our own image, our own careers, our own station. We’re self-centered, self-concerned, and self-interested in every area of our lives, rather than being God-centered, God-concerned, and God-interested in all things.

Even when we think we’re pretty good people during this season of good will toward all men, how many of us get annoyed by busy stores and rude cashiers? How many of us get impatient with traffic, or how many of us are disappointed when we don’t get the present we want, rather than grateful for the present that we have been given? We’re acting like our father is the devil when we act these ways.

But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus has given us a new father, a heavenly father. A father of holiness and righteousness and light. A father that we can and will imitate in this life. All believers have the very spirit of this holy father put within us when we’re given new hearts. We’re promised that he will cause us to walk in his statutes and laws. We’re not only called to imitate our father, but our father will be the one guiding us to do it through is very spirit.

We no longer have to follow after the sinful father of lies, but we can follow our heavenly father of all truth. We no longer have to follow the accuser, but we can speak words of affirmation and encouragement. We no longer have to imitate our father of murder, but we can begin to speak and act in ways that promote life itself. Indeed, we’re even commissioned to proclaim God’s message of life to a lost and dying world. We become messengers of life as we imitate our heavenly father in his mission of bringing home those deceived by the father of lies.

Don’t imitate the father of lies, don’t be like the devil who is always and ever an enemy of God. Instead, imitate your heavenly father, and in doing so, point back to him, bring honor and glory to him as the one that is ever worthy of imitation.

And why is it that we are able to do that? John tells us in verse 8 that we can imitate our heavenly father because: The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

Here again we see the same language from verse 5: The son of God appeared, he was made manifest, he was revealed. And why does he tell us this again? To emphasize another aspect of Christ’s mission: to wage war. He came, John tells us, to destroy the works of the devil.

The devil is the enemy of Christmas because he is the enemy of God. John tells us that he has been sinning from the beginning. It’s in his very nature. He hates God, and everything he does is motivated by that hatred. He’s called the devil, *diabolos*, in Greek, which means the accuser. He takes God’s righteous law and he uses it as a weapon for his diabolical plots. He wants to use God’s law to accuse of sin, and thereby secure our condemnation.

From the very beginning this was so. In the garden he took the word of God and tricked, deceived, twisted God’s word into a weapon. Then, when his trap was sprung, he wants to make sure that the sentence of death for violating God’s law is fulfilled. He has been holding sinners captive ever since using the fear of condemnation and the fear of death itself as a way to drive men and women away from God.

But Christ has been revealed to destroy the works of the devil. He has destroyed the devil’s use of the law, because Christ himself has perfectly met the standard of the law, and he gives his very perfection to all that believe in him. Accusing us of being sinful, of falling below the standard, of being dirty and rotten sinners is no longer effective for those that have been washed and redeemed by Christ.

Furthermore, the fear of death has been removed because Christ has taken upon himself the death that we had earned, and he has earned for us eternal life. Death has become but the handmaiden of glory, the ferrymen into the eternal city. The sting has been removed, to use a Pauline analogy, and, although we can grieve and mourn death in this life, we do not have to grieve as those without hope. For we know that death is not forever, and that our king has defeated it.

Why can we celebrate Christmas? Because Christ has defeated the works of the devil, freed us from his accusations, and freed us from fear of condemnation and death.

Christmas is only good news because it is followed by Easter. The manger is good news because of the cross and the empty tomb, and the incarnation is good news only in light of the resurrection. Christ’s coming is good news because he was successful in his mission to die in the place of his people, thereby destroying the works of the devil.

Listen to some of the ways that the bible describes the work of Christ:

He has come to ransom his people, who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. He has canceled the record of debt that was owed and nailed it to the cross. He was our propitiatory sacrifice, which means the wrath-absorbing sacrifice for us, freeing us from the judgement of God’s infinite displeasure. He has born our sins in his body on the tree. He has once and for all made the perfect sacrifice of atonement, making us one with God and tearing down the veil of separation that was hung between us and God due to our sins.

He has reconciled us to God through his work in our place. We’re no longer estranged from our heavenly father and from each other. He has redeemed us from the poverty of our hopeless and sinful situation. He has adopted us into his household, even though we had freely chosen to orphan ourselves through our sin. He has made us dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ. God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.

All of this is why we can celebrate this Christmas. We’re no longer without hope, but we have a great hope in the work of our great savior. We’re able to celebrate good tidings of great joy because we have a message of reconciliation and redemption, we have a message that Christ has not only come, but he has destroyed the works of the devil. He’s not only been born, but he has lived and died in the place of sinners like me and you.

If you’ve tasted of that victory in Christ, if you’ve tasted of his liberating work, then rejoice in that this Christmas. Don’t let your celebrations end on merely the birth of Christ, let them extend through the entire mission and victory of Christ over sin and the devil. Fill your hearts with gladness by reflecting early and often on the forgiveness that we receive through his work of taking away our sins.

And if you haven’t yet come to Christ, then I urge you this very day to submit yourself to him. Hear of his great work, see of his great love and sacrifice, see of his faithfulness in scripture. Hear of his marvelous grace and have your heart warmed by his tender mercy. For if you do not, be warned that he will come again to finish his great work. He has dealt the fatal blow to Satan and sin, but he has not dealt his final blow. He is coming back, and this time it will not be to a manger. He will return, scripture says, with power and might, riding on a white horse and with a sword of judgment.

His offer of grace will not last forever, so turn this very day from your sins and into Christ. He waits ready to receive any that will come to him.

For those that have to come to him, we have before us this morning another reminder that the manger was not the culmination of his mission. The cross and the tomb were the culmination of his life’s work. And here we see again his body and blood, separated, reminding us of his shed blood and broken body in our place.

If you have come to Christ by faith and are walking in repentance then we ask you to join us at the table of Christ. If you’re life looks like the lives of the saints in Acts 2, not perfect, but seeking to honor the word of Christ in scripture, to fellowship, to break bread together, and to pray, then we invite you to come.

If you haven’t yet come to Christ, or if you are separated from him or his church by some pattern of sin and unrepentance, then we ask you to be reconciled to him first, and then come join us at the table.

I’ll pray, and then our table servants will come.

PRAYER

Isaiah 53

PRAYER

Closing Hymn

474- All the Way My Savior Leads Me-

Benediction

Now may the Son who ransoms captive Israel,

The spirit who renews sinful Israel,

And the Father who adopts an orphaned Israel,

Guard you and keep you with the knowledge that he has taken away sin, and destroyed the works of the devil. Amen