

The Glory of Christmas John 1 and John 17

Can you believe it, in two weeks it will be Christmas. How time flies when you have joy. This past year in our worship services we really tried to listen for the voice of God and discover the will of God for our lives through the book of Exodus. And last week we ended up in the last chapter, chapter 40. In the book of Exodus we read one of the first and most passionate advent prayers of the OT. in Ex 32 & 33. Moses prayed and pleaded that God would come down and dwell with his people and go with his people, and be Immanuel – God with us. And in chapter 40 God answers that prayer. God in all his glory comes down into a tabernacle built according to God's instructions with human hands. God's glory and God's Spirit and God's life giving power comes down and fills the tabernacle. But as we discovered last week Exodus leaves us with the great problem of Christmas. What good is Christmas, what good is a tent full of God's glory, and God's spirit, and God's blessings if we can't get at to them and experience them? What good is a tent full of Christmas if we are left out in the dark. In Exodus 40 we see the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, full of God's glory, full of the cloud and fire of God but not even Moses could come into the tabernacle and enjoy the peace and the joy and the love that radiates from the presence of God with us.

And again as I mentioned last week, to solve the problem of Christmas, to solve the problem of our accessibility to God, the problem of us receiving God's grace and truth and knowing God and experiencing him, to solve that problem we need to know what it takes to move from verse 35 to verse 36 in Exodus 40. The missing piece or the key that opens the door between a tent full of Glory and us coming in and receiving Immanuel is found in the book of Leviticus. Leviticus fits in between verses 35 and 36. Leviticus reveals to us how the Glory of Christmas and the peace and the love and the joy of Christmas can become real, can be fleshed out; can be received into our lives and enlighten us.

Now some of you wonder about us exploring the book Leviticus, some of you wondered if our council really approves this plan for next year? Let me say a word to relieve your wondering about this. It's true, this may seem like a heavy yoke for us, it may seem like it could be burdensome and make us weary reading through all those laws, but as Jesus says in Matthew 11 coming to me, and taking my yoke upon you and learning about me is rather easy. This Leviticus project will be gentle and down earth, and the prayer is that we will find rest and joy for our souls. This seeing Christ in Leviticus is an exercise in living into the life of Christ, of entering into the glory of God and knowing God and receiving the life of God. And as Jesus says this challenge of getting close to the heart of the father is rather easy, this burden is light and brings great joy.

One of the things we will do next year that will be enjoyable and gentle is observing and learning about the seven Jewish feasts God legislated in the book of Leviticus. How through the celebration of these feasts the door to the glory of God, the Immanuel God

opens and the people can come into the tent of meeting and receive and experience the grace and the truth and the life and light of God as a powerful presence in their lives. Isn't that our advent prayer too? Isn't that our hope? To experience God with us?

Of course Leviticus will not be our focus. Our focus will be on Jesus especially as revealed in the gospel of John. John in his gospel keeps on posting signs, seven of them, that point to the fulfillment, the end, the goal of the Leviticus project. In the gospel of John, and that is where we will start today, we have another great advent prayer. Our plan is to have that prayer be the theme of 2011. That advent prayer Jesus prayed is even more comprehensive and more grand and more God ordained and more passionate, more practical than the prayer Moses prayed in the OT. And how God answered that prayer is even more mysterious and profound. God's answer to Jesus prayer solves the problem of Christmas once and for all and for good and forever and for everyone.

In John chapter 17 Jesus prays that the glory of God that existed in the beginning, the glory that came down the mountain and revealed the ten commandments, that glory that came down to tabernacle with the OT people in that tent of meeting, the glory that inspired the prophets and that glorious light that attracts all people and all nations, Jesus prayed that that glory, that peace that love that joy would be released like a gushing river into the world and that God's Immanuel presence would become touchable and accessible and drinkable and eatable for all the people in the world.

You see John tells us the mystery of Christmas in chapter one, in his introduction. Jesus, John tells us, is the glory of God, the Creating Word, the Logos, the life, the light of God made flesh, in human form, in that tent made with human hands. This glorious Word that existed in God and with God and from God pouring forth life and life sustaining light came to tabernacle among us. Jesus is the tent of meeting. He is the door into the Glory of God. And when we look at Jesus, when we eat and drink and touch and love and follow him we are seeing and touching and taking in the Glory of God. We are receiving the inaccessible Glory of Exodus 40. In looking to Jesus, in worshiping Jesus, studying Jesus, in coming to Jesus, in letting the spirit of Jesus mold and shape us we are entering into the holy of holies at the heart of God in touch with pure love, pure joy, pure peace, divine grace and truth. And from his fullness, from the Presence of Jesus and his spirit we all receive grace upon grace, seventy times seven times grace.

The Christmas that came in answer to the advent prayer of Moses was awesome, but the Christmas that came in answer to the advent prayer of Jesus was out of this world. Spectacular, brilliant, glorious and beyond understanding. The God of Leviticus law and punishment, and sacrifice, and purity, and anointed ritual, in other words the back side, the shadow side of God was made know in Moses, but the fullness of God, and the grace of God and the love of God and heart of God the very essences and face of God was made known in Jesus Christ, was made accessible in Jesus.

John says in verse 18 “no one has ever seen God but God Son, the Logos, the word made flesh, God’s grace and truth with skin on it has made God and the Glory of God known. Jesus, who lived at the heart of God, made God known. This is the mystery of Christmas. This is the problem of Christmas solved.

Today on this third Sunday of Advent we lit the candle of Joy. At the heart of Christmas is the hope and the longing for true joy, pure joy. Today in our world and our experience there is much pain, much misery, much depression, much loneliness, much devastation, much brokenness, much fear, much sadness, much hopelessness. Many people have lost their jobs and their homes, their life savings. Many have lost their health and their dignity. Many have lost their marriages and their families and their sense of well being, many have lost a loved one or even their ability of take care of themselves. Many live refugee camps at the edges of war, many live in tents at the edges of the rubble of earthquakes, hurricanes and floods. Many live with violence, and hunger, and poverty on the edges of drug war, and turf wars, and nuclear arms wars. Many peoples, and nations, and communities and families live in darkness, deep darkness. Inescapable darkness. And maybe some of us here this morning know what I’m talking about living in darkness.

But John reminds that the light of God, the logos, the word the life and glory of God shines in the darkness, and throughout the ages the darkness has not been able to overcome the light and the power of God. That light that enlightens everyone came down and became flesh and tabernacle among us and turns our darkness into light. In Jesus great advent prayer Jesus says I came down, I was born as a human baby, so that 17:13 the people living in darkness may have the full measure of joy, God’s joy, Gods inexpressible and glorious joy within them.

In Chapter 16:20 Jesus tells his followers: “ right now you may be weeping, you may be grieving, you may be suffering the dark night of the soul, but your grief will turn to joy. Because of the miracle of Christmas you will rejoice, and no one and nothing in all the world will be able to take away your joy. When the door to the glory of God is opened, Jesus says, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. But because the Word became flesh and tabernacle among us and has made God known we can come into the every presence of God and ask for anything. And Christmas promise is you will receive whatever you ask in my name, in the name of Jesus, and your joy will be complete. And so through the power of Christmas God will wipe away all tears and fears. Lets pray.