

This morning we officially entered the traditional Christmas season in the church with the lighting of the first of five candles on the Advent wreath. As was said, the word *Advent* means arrival or coming - and the word carries with it the sense of an arrival that has been eagerly awaited and now has come! The Church uses the word *Advent* to describe the four-week period prior to Christmas to celebrate coming of Jesus Christ into the world - the fulfillment of God’s promise to send fallen humanity a Savior - and the future promise of God that Jesus Christ will come a second time bringing human history to its ultimate and final conclusion, where He will put us in His presence for all eternity!

It is not known when the period of preparation for Christmas, that is now called Advent, first began. History tells us that Advent was certainly in existence from about 480 AD – and the innovation of Advent was introduced into medieval church by the Council of Tours of 567 AD when their monks were ordered to fast every day in the month of December until Christmas. Some have argued Advent goes back to the time of the Twelve Apostles or that it was simply founded by Peter – but we have no creditable Biblical or extra-biblical documentation or proof to support either claim. But what we do know is when *the need* for Advent began. The promise of God for a Savior had been first forecast many years before Jesus came into the world. In fact, God Himself began Advent at the introduction of the first sin into the world in the Garden of Eden. In pronouncing His judgment against Adam and Eve and the Devil (the serpent, the deceiver, the prince of all fallen angels) – Genesis 3:15 records God’s promise of a Savior in His reproach against satan: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”*

What God was stating here is that because the devil was the cause of Adam and Eve’s sin of rebellion against God – God would cause that same rebellion - an *“enmity”* (a hostility, a hatred) to continue between the devil and *“his offspring”* (all of his demons,) and Eve and *“her offspring”* (all of fallen humanity) - until the day one of Eve’s *“offspring”* (Jesus) would *“bruise”* the devil’s *“head”* when the devil *“bruises”* the *“heel”* of Eve’s *“offspring”* (Jesus). The Hebrew word for *“bruise”* here literally means *“to crush.”* Sin has crushed so many lives and souls throughout history. Yet God’s promise was at the very entrance of sin into the world that Jesus would someday come to restore us back to God by having his life crushed to death on the cross at Calvary, so that he could then crush the head of the devil - thereby defeating death by rising from the dead, so that we too could rise to a new life above sin and death when we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

In the mist of the cloud of their self-centered pride, when Adam and Eve stood before God with their heads hung low in shame, history become cloaked with darkness, as the reality of sin rolled in on the clouds of rebellion and disobedience. From a grieved and rejected heart, a holy God pronounced His judgment upon His creation. But by His steadfast love and grace God also proclaimed victory for those who would seek Him and Him alone above all else. God has a plan for those who would treasure love and love Him above all else. God made a promise and put that plan into place for all who would step down from their pedestals and bow before His sovereign, loving throne of mercy and grace.

God called the prophet Isaiah to preach and pass on His promise that He would send a Savior into a world that desperately needed the hope of God’s promise. Isaiah lived in a day much like ours - a time of affluence and comfort - where independence and entitlement reigned supreme. As people put their trust and hope in themselves and in things, they slowly but deceptively walked away from God. As their hearts became numb to God’s Spirit, their world became more angry, chaotic and violent. Morality collapsed under the weight of self-righteousness, justice was overcome by politics, and the religion of spirituality replaced a personal relationship with God Himself. The people of Isaiah’s day, like people today, were seeking rights and entitlements and health, wealth and prosperity - but their souls and hearts were becoming numbed by the

world they lived in. It was into that darkness that God called Isaiah to proclaim God's hope for them. In Isaiah 6:1-13 we read of God's call for Isaiah.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

Isaiah 6:1-13

Here we read that God came to Isaiah in a vision and spoke to him of Israel's rebellion and of the resultant punishment that would come because they rebelled and rejected God. Sin against a holy God demands a payment; there are consequences for insubordination against God's holy principles. In embracing the world and themselves instead of God - the heart of God's people had drifted far from God and the darkness of God's condemnation hung heavy over them all. The consequences of their spiritual adultery would be forthcoming. But in the midst of the darkness of their sin - God, in being not only holy and just - but also being, loving and merciful, sent Isaiah to cast the light of hope in *God's promise* into the lives God's people. "*The holy seed is its stump.*" The "*holy seed*" spoken of here is the "*holy seed*" of Eve's "*offspring*" - who God promised in the Garden of Eden would "*bruise*" (crush) the "*head*" of sin, death and the devil - so that fallen humanity could be forgiven, redeemed and restored back to God. We read of God's fulfillment of His promise in Isaiah 9:1-7.

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:1-7

In these verses we read the very words of God, recorded by the Prophet Isaiah, regarding the vast sweeping power and glory of God's promise to send a Messiah, a Savior, the "*holy seed*" into the world to save his

rebellious, wandering covenant people – where God promises to transform darkness into light, anguish into joy, war into peace, and defeat into victory. We see the light, joy, peace and victory of God’s promises through His *“holy seed”* in the names God uses for Jesus in Isaiah 9:6: *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

“Wonderful Counselor” is the *“holy seed”* of God – which is the plan, the promise, the purpose of God to redeem and restore His people back unto Himself. *“Wonderful Counselor”* is two words in the original Hebrew. The Hebrew word translated as *“Wonderful”* means *“an act of God which causes a wonderful thing to happen.”* Basically, a *“wonder”* of God. This word was used by the Hebrew people to describe *the infinite wondrous power of God which rises up out of His love towards His people.* In Exodus 15:11 says: *“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”* The word *“wonders”* here is the same word *“Wonderful.”*

“Counselor” here does not mean one who gives guidance or advice. The Hebrew word translated as *“Counselor”* means *“a fulfillment of a purpose or plan.”* To the Jew, this was someone who made plans and then carried out those plans. And so - for the Jew in Isaiah’s day, in the Hebrew language, in the context of God’s promise to send a Savior into the world - *“Wonderful Counselor”* meant *an act of God’s will which caused a wondrous thing to happen because of God’s steadfast love for His people, which He carried out according to His sovereign plan and divine purpose.* The birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, was a wonderful act of God’s will, driven by God’s steadfast love for us - carried out powerfully and specifically and intimately according to God’s sovereign plan and divine purpose. God willed from the very beginning what His sovereign plan would be for all of us - and He carried out that divine purpose exactly how He ordained it to be. In Isaiah 46:9-11 God says:

“Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”

We are entering a season when we are to remember and celebrate the wondrous fulfillment of God’s plan and purpose for our lives. Jesus, the Son of God, emptied Himself of God, entered this world as a human being and lived as God among us. He hungered, he laughed, he cried, he slept, he ate, he got tired, he got hurt, he loved, and he was hated. He lived a common human existence in our midst. In being God among a people who see themselves as their own god, Jesus was beaten, whipped, crucified and murdered on a cross. Those who killed him buried him in a tomb, hoping to bury their own guilt and pride and egos with him. But much to their chagrin Jesus rose from the dead, walked this earth, then rose again into heaven glorifying the name and honor and power of the one and only God - who faithfully carried out the promise and purpose and plan He had made at the beginning of creation - all according to God’s will, God’s plan and God’s purpose. The birth of the Savior some 2000 years ago was *an act of God’s will which caused a wonderful thing to happen to us because of God’s steadfast love for us, which was carried out according to His sovereign plan and divine purpose.* Because it is so, we now have opportunity to be loved, to be forgiven, to be cleansed, to be restored, to live the life that God created us for. All according to God’s sovereign plan and divine purpose - Jesus was and is our *“Wonderful Counselor.”* God has a will, a sovereign plan and a divine purpose, for each one of us.

Are you and I - *are we* - truly living out *God’s will*? One of the most misunderstood concepts of our faith is the issue of God’s will for our lives. A story that’s told of a man who, in seeking to know God’s will for His life, randomly opened his Bible and put his finger on a verse, believing that he was being directed by the Holy Spirit. The first verse his finger pointed to was in Matthew 27 which said: *“Judas . . . went and hanged himself”* (Matthew 27:3, 5). Closing his Bible in frustration, he did the same all over again, and this time his finger pointed to Luke 10:37 which says: *“Go and do likewise.”* In Isaiah 55:8-9 God says: *“For*

my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Sadly, when discerning God’s will for our lives, we lean more on our own thoughts and ways than on God’s. A missionary tells of how in searching for God’s will for his future, his car ran out of gas right in front of the Philippine embassy. He took that to be a sign from God that He should go to the Philippines as a full time missionary. One wonders what he would have done if he had been single and got stuck in an elevator with a single young woman named Mary.

God’s will for our lives is clear; we don’t need to seek it, it’s already written out in the Word of God: *“Seek first the Kingdom of God . . . Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus . . . Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength; love your neighbor as yourself . . . Love one another . . . Forgive others as God has forgiven you . . . Submit to one another . . . Obey your leaders . . . Give joyfully . . . Serve with gladness . . . Humble yourselves under the Mighty Hand of God . . . Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.”*

Are you and I – *are we* - living out *God’s sovereign plan*? Just like with God’s will, God’s sovereign plan is the same for all of us. God’s sovereign plan began at the first onset of sin in the Garden of Eden, was fulfilled at Calvary and is to be lived out every moment of our lives - while we walk this earth. God’s sovereign plan for our lives is that we would fully and joyfully and passionately live our lives totally for Jesus. In Galatians 2:20 the apostle Paul writes: *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* In 1 Peter 1:8-9 the apostle Peter tells us how we can fully, joyfully, passionately and totally live for Jesus: *“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”* God’s sovereign plan for our lives is that we are to joyfully live out the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Are you and I – *are we* - living out *God’s divine purpose*? God’s divine purpose is also the same for all of us. The Bible tells us God created us for the sole purpose of glorifying God; in Isaiah 43:7 He declares: *“Everyone who is called by my name . . . whom I formed and made . . . I created for my glory.”* God’s purpose in creating us is that we would glorify Him. What does it mean to glorify God? The word *“glory”* in the original language is rooted in the idea of “weight, heaviness, or worthiness” giving a sense of infinite importance. Thus, to have glory is to be the worthiness of God over and above anyone or anything in the universe. oneself or to others. This is what God is and this is what God does. The glory of God can be said to be the worthiness of the beauty and excellence of His majestic perfection; the magnificence and purity of His holiness; the overflowing fullness of His infinite goodness; the perfect harmony of all His attributes gathered into one infinitely beautiful, intimate, omnipotent, joy-filled, personal being. And because He is God we could continue to say these kinds of things forever and forever without repetition. In putting all these together, we could say that *the glory of God could be described as the reflection and revelation of worthiness of the character and attributes of God.* In this, the Bible tells us that the glory of God is three things:

- 1) God’s glory is a reflection and revelation of *His presence*. Exodus 40:34 says: *“Then the cloud (of God) covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”*
- 2) God’s glory is a reflection and revelation of *His power*. In Psalm 19:1 we read: *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”*
- 3) God’s glory is a reflection and revelation of *His preeminence* (that which is supreme, superior, or dominant about Him). Again, In Isaiah 55:8-9 God proclaimed: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways . . . for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

When God says that He created us for His glory in Isaiah 43:7, He is telling us that - *He created us to live out our lives in a way that reflects God's presence, power and His preeminence so He might be known and seen and praised through us throughout the whole world.* The purpose of God is that we would tune our hearts to be in harmony with His heart so that our attitudes and actions would reflect His presence, power, and preeminence. It is God's desire that our greatest passion in life would be to love Him and live for Him and glorify Him in all that we think, say and do – as in the words of 1 Corinthians 10:31: *“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.”*

We glorify God when we love Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We glorify God when we love God's holiness and hate our sin. We glorify God when we love one another and others unconditionally. We glorify God when we forgive and forgive and forgive. We glorify God when we have patience and when we have patience and when we have patience. We glorify God when we give of the grace that that we have received from God. We glorify God when we humbly and faithfully serve Him. We glorify God when we enjoy Him. We glorify God when we share Jesus with others.

We glorify God when we treasure Jesus Christ above everything and everyone else in this world. In the words of King David: *“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”* (Psalms 34:8). Oh, how we need a *“refuge”*! We are a people just like those in the days of Isaiah. We all still possess a fallen sinful nature deep within our hearts – we too embrace the world and ourselves more than God. Our hearts do drift away from God. We do wander off into the darkness of spiritual adultery away in our walk with God. But in the midst of that darkness, God casts the light of hope in *God's promise* into the lives God's people. Jesus is our *“Wonderful Counselor”*! Jesus is the act of God's will which caused a wonderful thing to happen to us because of God's steadfast love for us which He carried out according to His sovereign plan and divine purpose!

Some years ago an elderly man made an unusual discovery as he leafed through an old family Bible. Years before, his aunt had died and left her Bible to him in her will. In her passing, she also left him with a great debt to pay off along with her funeral expenses. He never was able to recover financially, and lived the next 30 years in poverty, deeply angry and bitter over his lot in life. Then one day in his old age he was cleaning out his attic to move into his son's home as his own house was being sold to pay off debts – and he once again found his aunts Bible in the family trunk,. As he angrily thought of her the old man paged through the Bible and what he found amazed him. Within the pages his aunt's old Bible were countless bank notes and cash which ultimately added up to thousands of dollars.

All of this man's life, within his very reach, were riches which he could have been enjoying all along. How many of us in this world have missed the riches that God has willed and planned and purposed for us because we are so focused on living for ourselves rather than for God. The treasures that God has willed and planned and purposed for us in His Word are not the treasures of comfort and cash – but the treasures of Jesus, the Word who became flesh and lived among us, who is our *“Wonderful Counselor.”* Jesus sacrificed his life on a cross at Calvary so we might be restored back to God and come to know true life on earth and eternal life in heaven - by an act of God's will which caused a wonderful thing to happen to us because of God's steadfast love for us which He carried out according to His sovereign plan and divine purpose! In Jeremiah 29 God Himself declares:

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:11-13

Brothers and sisters, we are all part of a great and divine plan that began at the Garden of Eden and will someday end in eternal glory. Our call in life is to humbly follow that plan, being faithful to His purpose and His will for our lives. As we enter the season of the birth of Christ, we have cause to be grateful, to

celebrate, to give God praise and glory and honor for Jesus, our “*Wonderful Counselor*.” One of my favorite movies is a film called “A River Runs Through It,” based on the novel by the same title. The movie and novel is a story of the Maclean family, who lived in the wonderful Rocky Mountains of Montana in the early 20th century. The father of the family was a Presbyterian minister, who was stern but loving. His wife was supportive and nurturing and they had two sons, the oldest was Norman and the youngest was Paul. In the movie, the oldest son Norman tells the story of their lives, of growing up and living in an area where a great river runs through it. The river becomes the focus of much of their lives; of death-defying rides down rapids, of learning the expertise of fly fishing, of family picnics along the bank, of long walks with loves lost and longer walks of solitude. The boys grew up with the river and they returned to it often even after they left home.

Throughout their lives the Maclean family knew a great deal of both failure and success, of laughter and tragedy, of cheer and disappointment. But always the river was there. It was *thee* defining force in their individual lives and the center of their family life. Montana would simply have been a wilderness, their home just four walls and a roof, their personal lives just sound and fury – *if it were not for the great river which ran through it*. In numerous ways, one could say the same for the rivers and the lakes and the mountains – and even the ocean - that surrounds wonderful Vancouver Island.

Brothers and sisters, there is a great river of God that runs through our lives; and that river is called Jesus. The Word of God calls Jesus the “*living water*” (John 4:10) who is “*a spring of water welling up to eternal life*” (John 4:15). He is our “*Wonderful Counselor*” – he is the will and the purpose and plan of God. Though we will always be faced with the constant and continuous challenge to live above and beyond our sinful nature - we can take heart that the river of God, Jesus, still runs through our hearts and lives. Though many of us have gone or are going or will go through times of struggle or pain; regardless of what happened or is happening or what will happen, around us and in us – the river of God, Jesus, “*the holy seed*” the long-promised Savior has come – and he is still with us and working through us – his will, his purpose and his plan still sure, still strong, still powerful, still true. The apostle Paul speaks of this in Philippians 2:12-13 when he says, “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*”

Whatever has occurred in our past, whatever our present circumstances may be, whatever the future might hold – God’s will, God’s purpose, God’s plan will still be a work through us in Jesus Christ. His promises are sure, His will is strong, His plans are eternal, His purposes are glorious! What God has ordained is not dependent on us. His plan and His purpose *will* come to pass; His will *will* be done. Jesus was, Jesus is, and Jesus will always be an act of God’s will which caused a wonderful thing to happen to us because of God’s steadfast love for us - which He powerfully and specifically and intimately carried out according to His sovereign plan and divine purpose – for His glory! “*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*” Amen.

2 December 2018

Pastor Leland Botzet

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