

05-09-Jn-Contrasts

Rev David Bostick

12/14/08

OUTLINE

To find our way in the darkest night

I. Let Your light shine on us

II. Let Your grace fall on us

III. Let Your love come over us

INTRODUCTION

The *NIV translation* Committee members were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word in written form. They believe that it contains the divine answer to the deepest needs of humanity, that it sheds unique **light** on our path in a dark world, and that it sets forth the way to our eternal well-being.

It seems that the translation committee's priority was to focus on God's attitude toward mankind which they felt was to meet the deepest needs of humanity. In spite of humanity's separation from God, God's attitude was to meet the deepest needs of humanity which can be described by three simple words; Light, Grace, and Love.

Have you ever been riding a bike on a long ride and you're having trouble keeping up the pace. You see a hill ahead and so you begin to peddle faster so you can get some momentum up to ascend the hill. Your legs are burning with the strain of peddling. Your heart is beating so fast it seems like it will leap from your chest and your lungs are laboring under great strain to get enough air into your blood so it is oxygenated enough to keep up with the flurry of activity. As you start up the bottom of the hill it is almost as if you have hit an invisible wall. Your bike begins to slow down but you peddle all the harder trying to keep the needed momentum to get up the hill. With your heart pounding and your legs and lungs burning like they're on fire you slow down so much that you begin to roll backwards. Before you can jump off or your bike it is coming back on top of you and before you know it you are laying on the asphalt with your bike on top of you. Your head is downhill so it is almost impossible to get up without rolling over which is impossible with a bike laying on top of you. It seems as though you are trapped. Suddenly your bike is lifted off of you and a man reaches down to grab your arm and lift you to your feet. Making sure you are not hurt he encourages you to continue your climb up the hill.

I want to propose to you this morning that all of us often find ourselves in this same situation. All of a sudden we find ourselves flat on our back on the side of a hill with all of life's stuff laying on top of us. Then a large hand reaches out to lift the load off of us. Helping us to our feet, our heavenly Father encourages us to continue up the hill

assuring us that in the end it will be worth it. God's attitude toward mankind is seen in three ways; first in His light to guide us, second in His grace to give us joy and pleasure, and third in His extravagant love for us.

Light

God's attitude is seen in His **Light** which shows us a clear pathway. This is a light for the whole world to see.

Matthew 2:1-6 (NIV)

[2:1] After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, **Magi** from the east came to Jerusalem [2] and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." (They were guided by light.)

[3] When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

[4] When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. [5] "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

[6] "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"

Remember our discussion last week about how fulfilled prophecy was the miraculous confirmation that the Scriptures were indeed the inspired words of God who wants to communicate His love to a lost and dying world. Here is another detailed fulfillment of one of those prophecies. This is an account of the Wise men, called Magi, who visited Jesus when he was about two years old. But what is a Magi?

Scholars have discovered that Magi is the name used for priests and wise men among the Medes, Persians and Babylonians. CWS-NT

In my study this week I discovered a strange relationship between the life of Daniel and this account of the visit of the Magi to the young Christ Child. Do you remember when Daniel was taken with the captives of Israel to Babylon? He was among several of the captives that were put in an educational program so that they could serve King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. They would serve him as wise men. We pick the account up at the end of their three year education.

Daniel 1:18-20 (NIV)

[18] At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. [19] The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. [20] In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

The magi that came to visit Jesus were comparable to the magicians and enchanters mentioned here in the first chapter of Daniel. It could even be possible that they were from Babylonia and were descendants of those who had witnessed the greatness of Daniel and his three friends in their days. I believe this is the testimony of the influence of the relationship Daniel and his three friends had with God. They were not afraid to remain faithful to God even in the face of lions in a den or a fiery furnace, and it changed an ungodly kingdom. Do you remember what happened the morning after the long night Daniel had spent in the lion's den? Let's read some of that account.

Daniel 6:16-23 (NIV)

[16] So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

[17] A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. [18] Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

[19] At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den.

[20] When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

[21] Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! [22] My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king."

[23] The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

Daniel 6:25-27 (NIV)

[25] Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: "May you prosper greatly!

[26] "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. [27] He rescues and he saves; **he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth.** He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

These are the words of King Nebuchadnezzar, "**he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth**". Could these words have been a prophecy about the star that would guide the Magi to the Christ Child centuries later? Now, more than 500 years later, these magi seek the Messiah that Daniel and his three friends had told them about. More than 250 years before the time of Daniel there was a prophet named

Isaiah. He told the people about a great light that would come to dispel the darkness of sin, the light of a Messiah. Matthew records the fulfillment of that prophesy which talks about the light that has come into the world.

Matthew 4:13-16 (NIV)

[13] Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— [14] to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

[15] “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— [16] the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

Isaiah is the prophet that made this proclamation.

Isaiah 9:1-2 (NIV)

[1] Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—

[2] The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

Now the Magi, who have been looking for the fulfillment of this prophesy since the days of Daniel, have come to see the light that has come to dispel the darkness of the shadow of death and following it they find the Christ Child.

(The night before I preached this sermon the first time, Vonda and I watched a documentary called *The Star of Bethlehem*. In it the author talked about this same idea of the Magi coming from Babylon, following the star to seek the Messiah. I had never heard this idea before. It was a surprising confirmation to the work of the Holy Spirit in my life each week as I prepare my sermons.)

We did not get to finish last week. We said that God's attitude toward mankind is seen in three ways; first in His **light** to guide us, second in His **grace** to give us joy and pleasure, and third in His extravagant **love** for us. We talked about light but did not have time to talk about His grace and love for us.

GRACE

God's attitude is seen in His **Grace**, which gives us pleasure and Joy.

Grace *means* to rejoice. Grace, particularly that which causes joy, pleasure, gratification, favor, acceptance, for a kindness granted or desired, a benefit, thanks, gratitude. *Grace is* a favor done without expectation of return; the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor. CWS-NT

The source for any grace in our world comes from Jesus Christ.

John 1:14-17 (NIV)

[14] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of **grace** and truth.

[15] John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"

[16] From the fullness of his **grace** we have all received one blessing after another.

[17] For the law was given through Moses; **grace** and truth came through Jesus Christ.

The possibility for grace: You mean to tell me that we are supposed to have pleasure and joy in our lives? (Yes but the world has convinced us to go about seeking pleasure and joy in a wrong way.)

Love

God's attitude is seen in His **Love** for mankind. We could say that **Love** shows the divine attitude.

Matthew 1:21 (NIV)

[21] She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

In the announcement to Mary the mother of Jesus, the Angel proclaimed that this baby that Mary would have, would save people from their sins. Little did Mary know what that really meant, for some 33 years later Mary would witness the deepest pain of her heart, and the greatest expression of Divine love, when she would witness the torture and death of her baby boy, Jesus. Does God have an attitude of love toward sinful mankind? Oh yes He does, for He paid the ultimate price. He gave up His divinity, became a common man, was despised and rejected by all of mankind, was tortured and died on a cross, and was buried in a grave. But He went through this painful expression of His love for us so that we could be free from the penalty and grip of sin in our lives. You see after being in the grave for three days, He came out of that grave and ascended into heaven.

God did that, not to condemn or judge us, but to show His incredible love for us. He loves us and calls us, not into some conformity to rules and regulations, but into a loving relationship where He guides us through life. We need only to believe in Him and enter into relationship with Him. To understand this relationship we need only look at the actions of the life of Jesus here on earth. Look at how He treated others; look at how He bids us to treat others. That's the relationship He wants.

Conclusion

I love the Christmas season. I am the first in my neighborhood to get my decoration up and I make sure they are up before Thanksgiving so that there is a reminder of the greatest thing we have to be thankful for is represented in my front yard. You see the greatest thing we have to be thankful for is the Incarnation. I spend hours decorating my house each year and I make sure that those decorations show those who see my house, that this is not just some holiday; this is a celebration of the incarnation of Almighty God. This is the season to celebrate the possibilities of what God can do in our personal lives, in our families, and in our world if we will let Him. The Christmas season is always special because it shows us God's attitude toward mankind. God's attitude toward you and I is seen in His Light to guide us, in His Grace to give us pleasure and joy in life, and in His incredible Love for us.

Listen carefully to the words of the song our quartet is going to sing for us now.

SHINE ON US

Lord, let Your light, light of Your face shine on us.

That we may be saved, that we may have life;

To find our way in the darkest night,

Let Your light shine on us.

Lord, let Your grace, grace from Your hand fall on us.

That we may be saved, that we may have life;

To find our way in the darkest night,

Let Your grace fall on us.

Lord, let Your love, love with no end come over us.

That we may be saved, that we may have life;

To find our way in the darkest night,

Let Your love come over us.