

# Advent 2019: Christmas Eve

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening. Welcome again. We know that there's many things going on in this time of year, and you've chosen to spend your Christmas Eve with us, so thank you. That's an honor to us and a privilege.

My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and if you are my age or older, you may remember a store by the name of Blockbuster. Now, earlier this year, I heard a report that there is only one Blockbuster left in the world, and I don't remember. It may have closed this year, but at some point in 2019, there was one that was left standing, and when I was a kid, we would go, and we would check out various movies at times, and of course, these movies were VHS, so you'd have to play them on a VCR, and one of the things that you would do if you were a good renter from Blockbuster is you would make sure you would rewind the video before you gave it back.

Of course, the worst was when you checked out a video and someone else had not rewinded it, because instead of having to watch it, right, you would have to go back, and so there came a point in our family where we made a huge upgrade. We got our own dedicated VCR rewinder, which means that we did not have to put it into a standard VHS, VCR, and rewind it the slow way. We could rewind it the fast way, so if you wanted to watch a movie again, you wouldn't have to wait forever for it to rewind all the way back to the beginning, and of course, this is foreign to you if you're younger than me, and it's foreign to all of us now, because we're at a point where we can just skip, right, to whatever scene we want to, and maybe you like to skip to certain scenes in your favorite movie.

[ 1 : 40 ] If you wanted to do that back in the VHS days, you had to fast forward and watch everyone move at double speed to the scene that you wanted, and if you wanted to watch it again, you had to watch everyone move backwards, right, and rewind.

We don't have to suffer through that anymore. Welcome to the 21st century. But I mention all that to make one point, which is that if we jump to the story of Christmas in the Bible, that is like going to your favorite movie and skipping the first hour and a half.

Now, that's fine if you've already seen the movie before, right? So some people are watch a movie over and over again kind of people. Some people are returned to a specific scene over and over. Of course, now we have YouTube, which came out when I was a kid. And you can just watch your favorite scene that's shown as a clip. But it wouldn't make sense, right, to watch a clip over and over again if you haven't seen the whole movie.

And in fact, part of the reason that you love that clip most likely is because of everything that's come before and everything that has come after. That's most likely why it's your favorite scene.

[ 2 : 46 ] And so tonight, instead of just focusing on the Christmas story, we have watched some of the scenes that come before. And I would suggest that if you look at the Christmas story just by itself, it's not going to be as glorious taken away from the entire story.

And so we looked tonight. I told you at the beginning, I warned you, that this is going to be a story. We were going to look at certain sections. And it's a story with a couple things that we've seen even before we get to Jesus.

It's a story with a problem. And it's also a story with a promise. It's a story with a problem. And it's also a story with a promise. I'm going to invite you to turn back with me in your worship guide. If you thought you were using this just to sing, you were incorrect. Our first reading that Ashley read for us was from Genesis 3. And this is where the problem is introduced. We meet a character named Eve, and she's deceived by Satan.

And so in this moment, she rebels against God, and sin is brought into the world. And this is the reason. This is the problem here. It's this introduction of sin. It's the reason that we face death in this life.

[ 3 : 52 ] It's also the reason that we are spiritually dead. We have a broken relationship with God. We've been separated from him. And it's the reason why in this world we experience injustice and poverty.

It's the reason why for many of us, Christmas is not just a time of joy, but a time of incredible pain. Because we experience that brokenness in some of our closest relationships.

We experience, even now, the problem that we read about in Genesis 3. But thankfully, it's not just a problem that we encounter. We also have a promise.

And you might be wondering why we chose these specific verses from Genesis. Of course, we could have read all of chapter 3. But these verses are the ones that include the very first promise in the whole Bible. And you'll see it on verse 15.

That's on page 4 of your worship guide at the very top. It says this, 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.

[ 4 : 51 ] This is the first promise of the gospel in the entire Bible. And so it's the promise that goes along with the problem. Now I'm going to invite you to look quickly at Isaiah chapter 9, which Sarah Joan read for us.

The promise continues. Verse 1, people who walk in darkness are going to turn to light. Verse 5, war is going to end.

And the instruments that have been used in war are going to be burned up. Then in verse 7 and verse 6. Verse 6, we're going to have this ruler. He's going to be a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an everlasting father, and a prince of peace.

And he's going to bring about worldwide peace. Verse 7, 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.

And so the promise here is a solution to the problem. If you're familiar with how stories work, this is how any good story works, right? We have something that's introduced that needs to be solved.

[ 5 : 58 ] And so we follow the arc to understand and know. And we're looking forward to see how it's all going to be resolved. And so Christmas, when we get an hour and a half into the story, an hour and a half into the movie, Christmas is our solution to the problem.

And so that's what we saw in our next reading in Matthew 1, verse 21. This is page 5. It says this, She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

For what? He will save his people from their sins. Jesus comes not just as the Christmas story, but he comes as the solution to the problem that we've seen from the very beginning of the Bible.

He is the one that's been looked forward to all the way since Genesis 3, verse 15, and all the way from Isaiah 9, verses 2 through 7. Then we find out in verse 23, again, this is still on page 5, they're going to call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Eve, because of her sin, and Adam, because of his sin, separated humanity from God. And so God was no longer with them in a certain sense. But God is going to come and be with them again.

[ 7 : 08 ] And so the story is going to continue to be resolved. And then we find out, turn with me to page 6, Luke 2, chapter 11. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

It's not just the story of a baby boy being born in a manger, but it's a story of the solution to the problem of the entire world. And it comes after a long story with a big problem, in fact, the biggest problem.

And so when we come and we celebrate at Christmas, Jesus' birth, we are coming into one part of a much larger and bigger story. And we give gifts because God has given us a gift.

That's why we give gifts at Christmas, reminding us of the solution that God gave us to the problem of sin in this world. It's a small token and a small reminder of what God did for us. But God's gift is not just a token of friendship.

It's not just a token of affection like we might give gifts to one another. Remember, God's gift only works if we agree with the problem. Remember I mentioned earlier there's a problem and a promise.

[ 8 : 26 ] The only way to accept God's gift is to see it as the solution to the problem. A man named Tim Keller says this in his book Hidden Christmas. Christmas is about receiving presents.

But consider how challenging it is to receive certain kinds of gifts. Some gifts, by their very nature, make you swallow your pride. Imagine opening a present on Christmas morning from a friend. And it's a dieting book. Then you take off another ribbon and wrapper and you find it is another book from another friend called Overcoming Selfishness. If you say to them, thank you so much, you are in a sense admitting, for indeed, I am fat and obnoxious.

In other words, some gifts are hard to receive because to do so is to admit you have flaws and weaknesses and you need help. Perhaps on some occasion you had a friend who figured out you were in financial trouble and came to you and offered a large sum of money to get you out of your predicament.

If that has ever happened to you, you probably found that to receive the gift meant swallowing your pride. If we're going to receive God's gift, the gift of his son, we have to agree with him about the problem.

[ 9 : 46 ] Otherwise, we cannot receive the solution. And the problem is this, that our sin has separated us from God. That we have a broken relationship with God and apart from him coming to bridge that gap, we have nothing to face but his judgment and his wrath.

And so the good news of Christmas is that if we come confessing and repenting that God offers us his greatest gift, which is also his solution to our greatest problem, which is his son who became a human so that he could die on our behalf, taking the punishment that we deserve and so that we could take the life that he lived that we should have so that we could be reconciled and restored to God.

God offers us a great gift, the greatest gift, and that gift is a solution. We can only accept that solution if we agree with him about the problem, that without Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf, we are without hope in this world.

But if we agree with him about the problem, then it is the greatest solution and the greatest gift that we can receive. And so that's a gift that we receive by faith.

This is only a scene that's worth watching and re-watching if it's actually true. And if it's not true, it's just a silly story or a fable.

[ 11 : 16 ] But what's glorious about Christmas is that it's not a scene in a movie, but it's a real moment in real history when God came to save his people and bring them back to himself.

And so for everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ, that gift is for them. There's a man named Charles Spurgeon who tells us that faith is three things. First, it's knowledge. It's understanding what I've just explained to you, that we have a great problem and there is only one solution, and that solution is Jesus Christ.

But it's not just knowledge. You might know that, but not believe it. It's also belief. It's believing that that is true. And the way that we know that it's true and show that we believe it is by trusting it.

So it's knowledge and belief and trust. And that trust is lived out in a life that shows that we believe that we have no hope outside of Jesus. Finally, it's a story with a future ending.

I mentioned at the beginning that coming to Christmas on its own is just like jumping in an hour and a half into the movie. It is not going to the very end of the movie.

[ 12 : 30 ] At Christmas, we celebrate Jesus' first coming. And we also look forward to and long for his second coming. Because we have seen the promise fulfilled and the solution, and we have not seen it in full.

There's part that we read from Isaiah chapter 9 that paints us a picture of things that have still not come completely. But we look forward to the day when they will be complete.

And so for those who have faith and trust in Jesus Christ, we can celebrate his first coming. And we can also look forward to his second coming with the words of Isaiah chapter 9.

This is on pages 4 and 5. 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 that. We come and we celebrate together at Christmas because we're celebrating that Jesus has come.

[ 13 : 46 ] And we look forward to the time when he will come again. And he will bring that government of peace that will have no end. And so that's what we look forward to tonight.

That's what we celebrate tomorrow. And that is our hope as people who have faith in Jesus. Please pray with me. Father in heaven, we thank you that you offer a solution.

You offer forgiveness through your son, Jesus Christ, to anyone and everyone who repents of their sins and puts their faith in him. For those of us who do have faith in Jesus Christ, we thank you for this gift.

We ask that you would help us today and tomorrow and in all of the year to celebrate that and to have the joy that comes from knowing that we've been reconciled to you. For those of us who do not have faith in Christ, we ask that you would send your Holy Spirit now to move their hearts, to see and understand, first of all, their need for the gospel, their need for repentance, and secondly, the grace that you offer to everyone who repents because of Jesus, because he came as a baby and because he died as a man.

We ask these things not because we have deserved them or earned them, but we ask them because Jesus has earned them for us. So we ask them in his name. Amen.