

Infant Holy

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Date: 30 December 2018

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[0 : 00] So, we're doing this series at the evening service, which is actually reflecting on carols and reflecting on Bible passage with those carols.

So, I have to expound two things tonight. And when I got my assignment, I didn't really know this carol very well, so I've done some studying about it.

The carol is Infant Holy, Infant Lowly. And if you open up your bulletins, you can find the text for it there. But, is anybody here Polish?

Polish background? Or speaks Polish? No, no, it's speaking Polish. I have it on good faith that Polish is the most difficult language to learn for an English speaker.

Apparently, it's just very difficult. So, this hymn is a Polish hymn, a medieval Polish hymn. Infant Holy, Infant Lowly is very old.

[1 : 01] We don't know how old, and we don't know who wrote it. We know it was translated by a British woman just after World War II, 1921.

Her name was Edith Reed. She wrote a few books, the story lives of the great composers. You can look it up. And she translated this hymn. And it's been kicking around since then.

It's a simple hymn. The melody's simple, and there's only two verses. We're going to sing it afterwards. And just watch for how the melody goes.

There's two lines, a third line and a fourth line. And the third line lands on the fourth line. And so, the song is trying to emphasize the last two lines.

So, Christ the babe is Lord of all is the emphasis of the first verse. And Christ the babe was born for you. Now, if you put your thinking cap on, the Bible passage wasn't at all about an infant that's holy or lowly.

[2 : 14] It was about the cross of Christ. Christ, and if you start thinking, most of the Bible passages that have gone with the songs, this is a Christmas song about Jesus' birth.

The Bible passages have been about Jesus' birth somehow. So, what's the connection between the two? And so, the theme that I want to meditate on from the song, but mostly from the passage, is the theme that it's easy to miss the meaning of Christmas.

Christmas, that's the kind of theme. It's easy to miss the meaning of Christmas. In the song, there are three characters that observe Jesus. So, let's read, I'll just read through the verse so you can look at the verses of infant holy.

So, infant holy, infant lowly, for his bed, a cattle stall. Oxen lowing, little knowing. So, the oxen of the first characters, little knowing that Christ the babe is Lord of all.

Swift or winging, angels singing. Noel's ringing, tiding springing. So, angels are the second character. And then verse two, flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping.

[3 : 22] Vigil till the morning new. So, we have the oxen, the angels, and the shepherds. And there are three sort of observers of this little baby who looks like a little baby, but actually is God, is the holy one, the Lord of all.

And I think the point of the song is we could be like the ox and not really understand what's going on. Or we could be like the shepherds.

And we could understand and walk away with joy and walk away with wonder. And Jeremy Graham has made known to me a children's book by Sally Lloyd-Jones about Christmas.

And it starts with this line. The world was about to change forever, and it almost went by unnoticed. I think that's kind of the feel of this song. It's like if you blink, you could miss what's there with Jesus. Okay, so I'm going to focus in on one verse in our passage. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 18. As they said in the olden days, this is my text.

[4 : 33] I'll read it out. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God.

And this verse has really the same feel as the song, but about the cross rather than Jesus' birth. So I'm going to say three things about this verse.

Firstly, the word of the cross. What is the word of the cross? Three points. So the theme of this whole passage that Paul has given to us, and Harlan so wonderfully read, is the cross of Christ and the meaning of the cross of Christ.

And Paul is talking about an event that happened in the past. As Christians, we remember that Jesus was killed on a cross, and he rose again three days later. But he uses this interesting expression, the word of the cross.

This is the only time in scripture it's used. The word behind word is the Greek logos, which can mean a word, but it can also mean a message, a way, a concept, a content.

[5 : 45] It's quite a flexible word. So when we talk about psychology, that's a word about the psyche. Or when we talk about biology, it's a word about bios, a word about life.

It's not just a word, but it's a more wide thing than just a concept. And fundamentally, Paul is saying that the cross of Christ gives us a totally new way of looking at the world.

The cross of Christ gives us a way to interpret our reality that's different than any other way. This is why I got Harlan to read chapter 2 a little bit there.

So just look down at 2 verse 2. Paul says, For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

So Paul is not saying he forgot all of the facts that he knows, and he just knows this one story about Jesus. He is saying the story about Jesus and this cross is the central thing to him, and through this story, he interprets everything else in his life.

[6 : 59] The word of the cross is the way he knows. It's the lens through which he sees. It colors everything for him. One of my favorite illustrations about grace comes from a guy who worked at Harvard.

I may have given this illustration in the evening service before, but it's very good, so it's worth hearing it a second time. This guy's name is Andy Crouch. He worked as a campus pastor at Harvard, so a very prestigious university.

And while working at Harvard, he started meeting many, many students, and he observed that there was three kinds of students, and he started to give them categories.

So firstly, there was the students who were the strivers. So getting into Harvard is very difficult. It's very, very difficult. And there are some students that planned on getting into Harvard when they were in elementary school, and they worked their butts off all the way through grade one to grade 12, and they strove, and they were there because they had earned it.

And Crouch says you could see them. They had backpacks filled with books. They were always early in the class. They were always going to the professor's meetings. You know, they had this kind of anxiety that drove them to be good.

[8 : 26] The second kind of student were those who their parents had been to Harvard and were very wealthy. They are called the legacies. That's what the Harvard people call them. And they were characterized by sort of confidence, even dominance.

But Crouch says there was a third kind of students that were much less common. He says this, I realized that there was this third group. They had arrived at Harvard seeming delighted that a letter had come to them on a spring day saying they'd been accepted.

I met students that hadn't even thought to apply to Harvard until a high school counselor suggested it. They could have their moments of being assured in themselves during anxiety.

But what you remembered about these students is that they had a sense of fun being at Harvard, a sense of play. And I came to call these students the children of grace. They hadn't thought they would get there.

And it was like wonderful news to them that they could go. And as they went there, they had a great time. Get this. Of all the students who received summa cum laude, I didn't take Latin, the top marks for their thesis, nearly every single one was in that third group.

[9 : 41] Not a striver, not a legacy, but a quietly brilliant child of grace. Of the many students who grew in faith and their trust in God were also these students of grace.

These students who understand that they are there because of grace operate in this amazing way. They see their lives through this kind of gift lens.

And what I want to say is we are like these students at Harvard. The message of the cross is that we did not strive to get it so we don't need to be anxious, nor did we earn it so we can be confident. God has given to us an amazing gift, a relationship with him. And it cost Jesus everything and cost us nothing. And if we can see our lives through the word of the cross, we can operate with this kind of humility, wonder, and grace.

And Paul sees his whole life through this lens. The word of the cross and the Corinthians don't. And that's my second point. So the first point is the word of the cross.

[10:53] The second one is this. The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. How can this be? The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.

Paul is writing to a church, the church in Corinth. And this is a community that he planted. He preached the gospel in the city first. And there is a poison in the church killing it.

The community is crumbling from the inside. And the reason is there is pride. They come from a culture that's a very proud culture and values people celebrating their own gifts and abilities.

And all these parties have come up and there's divisions happening. It feels a little bit like high school cliques, like these people who are really into themselves and their own little group.

And the church is being ripped apart. And Paul responds to this pride by talking about the word of the cross. And he says, the fact that you have this pride shows that there's something missing in your understanding about the cross.

[12:06] You haven't understood. You're a student of grace. The word of the cross is for them. And the problem is, really, they think of the word of the cross as foolishness because they want to be proud.

We know the saying, pride goes before a fall. I've been learning all kinds of history this last year. And I learned about the Japanese-Russian War of 1904.

Not the most famous of wars. But basically, Japan kicked Russia's butt bad in this war. And about 50 years before, Japan was basically operating with a medieval army.

They had swords and soldiers. And they went through the fastest modernization any country's ever been through. Basically, medieval to up-to-date modern in a 30, 40-year period.

And the Russians and the whole of the Western countries thought, these Asian nations have no ability to fight us in a real war. And so Russia stood their ground in Japan.

[13:14] And Japan whooped them. Absolutely whooped them. And the issue was the Russian pride. When we are proud, we are blind somehow to what is happening around us.

And the Corinthians are blind somehow to the truth of Christ. They are practicing oxen spirituality. They are like the ox in the song. They are looking at Jesus. And they don't really get what is going on. I'd like to say a lot about why.

I don't really have time. I'll just mention very briefly verse 22. Paul mentions, I'll just read out verse 22. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.

Paul is saying that there are these other cultural stories, cultural values that are at work. Jewish people seeking power through signs and Greeks seeking wisdom through thinking.

[14:20] And he develops a whole theology of culture, which is very interesting. And I'd love to talk to you about it another time. But the fundamental point is, if you are operating in another way, if you have a different lens, then the way of the cross looks like foolishness.

And there's a lesson for us here tonight. And it's a little bit of a frightening lesson. Turn over to chapter 3, verse 3. And Paul says these words to the Corinthian church.

They're quite scary. Chapter 3, verse 3. Paul says, For you are still of the flesh. Paul is talking to Christians.

Paul is talking to Christians who have spiritual gifts. Paul is talking to Christians who heard the Apostle Paul preach, had miracles done amongst them, and had been taught by one of the greatest teachers of Christian history.

Paul is talking to Christians who have spiritual gifts. And he says, Much of the letter is about how the Spirit is at work amongst them. And yet, he says, You are still of the flesh. It is possible to be a Christian and not understand the word of the cross in a way that grips my heart in a deep way.

[15:37] It's easy, it's possible to miss the word of the cross and be blinded by other things. So what I want to say is, if you find yourself with pride in your heart, acting in a superior way, it means

there's something inside your heart which isn't the cross.

If you find yourself looking down on people, if you're thinking you are superior somehow to people, it means there's something else in your heart other than the cross. And it's a dangerous place to be in because it's not the place of Christianity.

So the word of the cross is foolishness to some, but finally, the word of the cross is the power of God. Again, verse 18. The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

Fundamentally, a Christian person is somebody who has grasped the truth of Christ and Jesus is the key to power and truth in the world.

A Christian person desires the truth of Jesus, his incarnation and his cross and death and resurrection more than anything else in the world.

[16:58] It's really interesting to notice this. I think most Christians are very comfortable talking about the idea of salvation in the past tense. So I got saved or that person has been saved.

And scripture does talk about that. But Paul says something different here in verse 18. Paul says, to those who are being saved, it is the power of God.

So in scripture, we actually have three tenses of salvation. The past, what this kind of punctiliar event, I got saved. But there's also this ongoing, I am being saved.

So what's the idea there? I think that the main idea is that God's not done working on me. I need to be more saved.

And so do you. The salvation of God is a reality taking over my life more and more and more and more and more. And the spirit has to do his work.

[18:03] My favorite verse in scripture is 2 Corinthians 3.18. For we with unveiled faces behold his glory and are being transformed into his image from one degree of glory to another.

It's an amazing verse. And the point is, as we look at Jesus Christ, God transforms us into his image. And it's from one degree of glory to another.

So as I live my life, if I'm in the spirit, I'm gonna, God's power is on me and I'm becoming more and more like him.

More and more like Christ. There is an active power of God in the world for Christians saving us as we sit here in church and saving us as we go do our studies and our work.

And it is for us and it is helping us. I just want to close by saying an indicator that God's work is on my life and I'm following a shepherd spirituality, looking and having joy, is that my heart is set on Jesus.

[19:15] This is what Paul says in verse 31. As it is written, let the one who is boast, boast in the Lord. It's very possible for me to have my heart so enamored with Jesus Christ that it's natural for me to say to other people, I'm so excited about Jesus.

That's what the shepherds did, right? They saw Jesus and they were so excited about him that they boasted about him. If we know we are children of grace, that this reality is there for us, it will be natural for us to make the thing that comes out of my life a boast about Jesus Christ.

Amen.