

## THE STORY - ADVENT WEEK 2

Christ the Promise

December 4, 2022

### 1. Introduction

- a. Welcome - Guests - Thank you
  - i. Bread of Life gave out 98 Thanksgiving Bags and 125 hot meals 2 weeks ago that went to Davidson, Cornelius, Huntersville, west Charlotte and Lincolnton.
  - ii. Reducing food insecurity is part of our plan going forward.
- b. This week/Next week:
  - i. Elder nominations in Dec
  - ii. Surviving the Holidays this Tuesday
  - iii. Christmas Under the Lights - invite a friend
- c. Advent Series
  - i. Theme: The Story (of Jesus, of the Gospel)
  - ii. Last Week:
    - 1. Christ the Creator (Hope)
    - 2. We can have hope this Christmas because the one who was born is the creator of everything.
  - iii. Today: Christ the Promise (Love)
    - 1. This promise should affect our expectations at Christmas.
    - 2. I want to frame the point today through a story. It's based on a true story, though some of the details have been changed to bring it into our context.

### 2. Simon & Saul

- a. Two friends who grew up in the same area.
  - i. Simon came to faith first, Saul a few years later.
  - ii. Saul had a dramatic conversion from a past of being hostile to Jesus. When he became a Christian he was all in. Very serious about his faith. He immersed himself in it, studied and prayed a lot on his own, and was really

bold in sharing his faith with others.

- iii. He also sought out Christian mentors, including his friend Simon, who had been invited to join the staff of a growing church in their hometown.
- iv. A few years after he became a Christian, Saul left his job to plant a church and moved away from the city where he and Simon lived. That neighborhood was in a pretty conservative Christian area, and most of their friends were from Christian families. But where Saul moved was not. It was a really secular culture, and he was the only Christian he knew, which kind of made him excited. He liked the challenge.
- v. It was hard where Saul went, but God used him to open people's spiritual eyes. He started to see people coming to faith and a new Christian community began to form. He was able to develop some leaders, more and more people were coming to faith, and things were going pretty well.
- vi. Meanwhile Simon became one of the senior leaders at what had grown to probably the largest, most established church in their hometown. The two friends kept up long distance, but several years went by before they saw each other.
- vii. Then Saul started having some issues in his church that wouldn't go away. Eventually they got so bad that he started to question himself and whether things were ever really as good as he thought. So he took a trip to see Simon and get his advice.
- viii. He explained how his church is mostly people who come from totally secular, unchurched backgrounds who believe in Jesus and their lives are changing, but they see the world differently than people from their hometown who grew up in a much more Christian-influenced culture like their hometown. That much is fine. The problem is that some people started attending Saul's church who came from some of these traditionally Christian areas and starting making a big deal that people in Saul's church don't look like Christians or talk like Christians, and they spent a lot of time hanging out in places Christians shouldn't go.
  - 1. One issue among many was that a bunch of them liked to hang out at a popular local sports pub that would pack out when a big game was on. Saul had actually met a lot of his congregants there

because that's where he could connect with people in the community. So he was as regular as anybody there from the early days of planting his church.

2. This didn't go over well with these new folks, and they became openly critical of people in the church and of Saul, saying they were compromisers.
  3. Saul and his leadership team felt strongly about connecting with and welcoming all people regardless of their background, so they didn't change their practices, but the increasing scrutiny caused them to doubt whether they were doing the right thing. Maybe they had been compromising all along. They didn't think so, but weren't sure anymore.
- ix. Simon and the other senior leaders were excited to hear Saul's stories of people coming to faith and how their lives were changing, and they reassured Saul that he and his team weren't compromising at all. Even though some things were different than the culture of their hometown, they agreed with Saul's conviction that Jesus came to reach anyone and everyone, and they affirmed Saul's desire to be among the people of the community and to focus on the inward transforming work of the Holy Spirit rather than secondary matters of cultural preference.
- x. Simon was really glad to reconnect with Saul, and a little while later he made a trip to visit Saul, see his church, community, etc. When he did, Saul was excited to introduce Simon to a bunch of people in the congregation, show him the church, the community, and even that local sports pub.
- xi. Simon loved it. He was excited to see what God was doing in the people's lives, and enjoyed hearing their stories of how they first met someone from Saul's church, how they came to faith, what the new church meant to them, etc.
1. And Simon jumped right in. He was hanging out in the church, in their homes, and in that sports pub with his new friends like he'd been a regular for years.
  2. In fact, Simon happened to visit in December and went to a big community Christmas party with Saul and a group of people from the church. Of course they were enjoying the things most people

enjoy at parties (even Jesus brought good wine to parties) and also some Christmas trivia.

- a. Like, what is the most popular Christmas song of all time?
  - i. For a long time it was White Christmas by a long way, but recently it appears digital downloads have tipped the scales to another song you almost certainly know.
  - ii. All I Want for Christmas is You, by Mariah Carey. 1994.
- xii. Simon loved hanging with Saul's church members and their community until a few people from HIS church showed up. They had heard about Saul's church and came to town to see it too. These were some pretty conservative folks, and Simon got worried they would judge him. So he quit hanging out with people from Saul's congregation unless it was at the church.
- xiii. When he did that, some other people from Saul's church noticed and followed Simon's lead. He was a well-respected pastor from a big, well-known church, so they figured he must be right.
- xiv. When Saul saw this, he was upset. As much as he respected Simon, he saw him acting in a way that undermined the gospel they had both been preaching and was leading people astray.
  1. Namely, Jesus came to fulfill a promise God had made to Abraham that people from all nations and cultures would be blessed - would become God's children - simply by believing in him. Not by any set of laws or behaviors or cultural expectations. Simply by faith in God's promise.
  2. The way Jesus fulfilled that promise was by dying on a cross to pay for people's sins and giving the Holy Spirit to live within anyone who believes in him. The Spirit then transforms a person from the inside out, not the outside in.
  3. This was the good news Saul had been preaching for over a decade. It was also the good news Simon and the big church leaders agreed with. But when it came down to it, Simon was afraid to fully embrace that good news in the presence of Christians who were more concerned with the outside of a person

than the inside.

- xv. So Saul confronted Simon in front of everyone. It was pretty courageous and pretty tense. It was a rough day for Simon.
- xvi. In addition to being an issue between friends, this was a setback for the people of Saul's church. It was confusing, and it seemed to confirm what some of the newer members of the church had been saying. So Saul took them back to the beginning, to the book of Genesis where we read about God's promise to Abraham.
  - 1. He pointed them to the passage in Genesis 12 that we read a few minutes ago.
    - a. *The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.*  
  
*"I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.  
I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."*  
  
*The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.*
  - 2. Then Saul explained the fulfillment of that promise using the language from Galatians 3 we read a few minutes ago.
    - a. *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.*

- xvii. By contrasting the law with the promise, Saul was making the point that if people had to clean up their outside by behaving a certain way - carrying out a certain set of laws - in order to receive the promise of being God's child, then it wasn't a promise at all.
- xviii. He reminded them that Abraham himself received God's promise because of his faith. In response to God's promise, Genesis 15:6 says, "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness."
- xix. He reminded them that their lives had already begun to change from the inside out through the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were growing in love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, self-control, and faith. If suddenly that wasn't good enough. If they now suddenly had to follow some set of expectations imposed on them from others, then Jesus' death loses meaning for them. Now they're relying on their actions in order to be acceptable to God, not on Jesus' sacrifice and promise.
- xx. He also reminded them that their freedom from expectations isn't a license to do things that are sinful - things like immorality, bickering, jealousy, anger, divisiveness, etc. Instead they are to use their freedom to serve one another in love just as Christ loves them and gave his life for them.
- xxi. It seems Simon was humble enough to hear and receive Saul's rebuke, and the two remained friends, though Simon did find ways to get his digs in from time to time after that.
- xxii. In fact, through this event and many other challenges, both friends' churches continued to grow and impact not only their communities, but the world. Their ministries far outlasted their lifetimes, and in case you hadn't picked up on it yet, we know these men as Simon Peter and the Apostle Paul. And this story - in essence - is the New Testament book of Galatians.

### 3. Christ the Promise

- a. The heart of Paul's message in writing Galatians is the point I want us to get today as we anticipate the birth of Jesus. He is Christ the Promise. In his coming he fulfilled God's promise to bless people from all nations through Abraham's offspring. People who would believe this good news like Abraham did.

b. Our response

i. **Believe in Jesus and receive the promise.**

1. Believe the good news that you can be a child of God, not by living up to some expectations that people have for you or you have for yourself, but by turning to Jesus who promises to give you his Spirit to transform you from the inside out.

ii. **Adjust your expectations of yourself and others.**

1. We're all being changed from the inside out. That means we can't see what God is doing in somebody's life, and often in our own lives. So give lots of grace to your friends and family and yourself, and give lots of space for Christ to fulfill his promise.

iii. **Love and serve people.**

1. **Galatians 2:20b.** The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
2. **Galatians 5:13.** For you were called to freedom. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

4. **Communion**