

Pointing To Christ

John 1:19-28

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

How many of you have great and lofty expectations for this coming Christmas season?

How many will gather in their churches this morning, for the last Sunday in Advent and be disappointed? Yes, I said disappointed. You see, there are many who will want Christmas Eve this morning – so they only have to go to church once, so that they don't have to come back for Christmas Eve service this EVENing. Silly, isn't it – Christmas *EVE* in the morning? Doesn't make any sense, but that is how the world thinks.

In our text, John give a very picturesque comparison between himself and Jesus, the One coming after him. In doing so, he shows how utterly different from mere human expectations is God's mode of operating. Is this not a perfect and appropriate message for our age?

Man's expectations of God have always been diametrically opposite to God's way of acting. Is it any wonder that depression runs rampant during this festive season? Is it possible that we expect too much from Christmas... Or too little? I would suggest to you today, that the hopes and expectations we attach to the secular celebration of Christmas as we have come to know it, are not worthy to untie the straps of our coming Saviors sandal!

I got a Christmas card from someone the other day which, I believe, will make that point. In it, was handwritten these words: "What a terrible year it has been. The world seems to be falling apart, but perhaps that will wait till after Christmas."

Yes, the world is falling apart. It has been falling apart ever since the fall of Adam and Eve. But it is because of what began that first Christmas, the birth of God's Christ, that there is hope in the world, hope for a life without sin and death.

How many people will find that the things under the tree this year will be a little light? Has economic uncertainty tightened a few purse-strings. How many people will have their expectations dashed after all the wrapping paper is thrown away and they don't have what they were hoping to receive as a gift?

Yet God the Son gave up His heavenly wealth to be born of a Virgin as God's Christmas gift to mankind. He came to forgive our selfish lusts to the things of this world and give us the confidence an eternal place in His kingdom.

Then there are the broken relationships between certain family members, but you know you have to get together with them. You do so hoping that things can go smoothly this year, just this once.

While Christ was born to bring peace from God to mankind, that forgiveness He purchased and gives to us is also the balm of healing by which we are able to forgive others. Christmas does point to Christ, the only healing for broken relationships.

We are often caught up in worldly expectations, even at Christmas. There were some expectations about John the Baptizer that were bound up in worldly thinking. Our text points out that some must have expected him to be God's Christ, the one long expected. Some wanted him to be Elijah returned. Because of their worldly desires, they thought that either of these would herald another great period of history in the life of the nation of Israel. They wanted a return to the splendor of Israel as they had under David reign. They had great expectations of earthly glory and might.

They expected with the coming of the Holy One of Israel, God's Christ, a new age of earthly, Jewish glory would be ushered in.

The Jewish leaders came to John wanting him to be something he was not. When John claimed he was not what they expected, then they wanted to know why he was doing what he was doing. If you are not, then why do you do what you do?

If not for you, not for your glory John, why do you do what you do?

John declares that he does not come for himself, but to point to Christ. He claims that he is even unworthy to *UNTIE* Jesus' sandals. To understand this, we must know a bit about the culture of the day. When the master came home or when a guest came to visit, it was the task of the lowliest servant in the home to untie and remove the sandals, and then wash the feet.

John is proclaiming in no uncertain terms that he is lowly compared to the one coming. John is pointing to Christ... John is pointing to the One who is greater than He is.

That is the purpose of every Christian pastor, he is always pointing us out away from the world. He is always pointing us to the joy of Christmas. Yes, there is a gift that will be wrapped that day - the gift of salvation. It will be unwrapped when He is stripped and nailed to the cross. In His suffering death He will purchase our forgiveness and salvation. The gift of Christmas will be opened with the stone rolled away on Easter morning, our own resurrection and eternal life proclaimed to all.

Tomorrow, on Christmas morning, many will wonder why we have a Gospel reading that seems to focus on John the Baptist. Because we need to remember that even the birth of this Holy Child is not about the *CHILD* Jesus. It is about the work of God that will be accomplished in the God-man hidden in a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. John has told us in this text that it is not about him, but about the one coming after him. The day after the day in our text, John points at Jesus and says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Dearly beloved of God, everything in Scripture, everything John does, everything a pastor does, everything about Christianity is pointing to Christ.

Baptism is pointing to Christ! Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, we are new creatures in Him. That is our hope on the last day, that as Christ has died - and risen again - so we too will rise. This life, this world, the things that seem so topsy-turvy, are fading away. What is real, what is eternal, what lasts forever is the life we have with Christ while everything else is passing away.

Christmas is pointing to Christ, "Peace on earth goodwill toward men!" God's wrath against our sinful preoccupation with this world, the desiring of earthly things, is appeased in the Babe born, to redeem us from this world - to redeem us from sin and death.

Faith is always pointing to Christ! Faith clings not to my works, or your works, but to Christ's work for us. God took on human flesh in the womb of Mary and lived a life free from the desires of this world. That life was sacrificed upon the cross, so that it might be delivered to you and me, given as a gift of God's gracious mercy to us.

Christ is the Word. He is the Word pointing to His own work to purchase and deliver forgiveness of sins. The absolution is pointing to Christ. The preached Word is pointing to Christ. In fact, that Word is Christ, and delivers Christ's work to you. You are forgiven. You are built up in the true faith unto life everlasting.

On the altar before us, is a meal pointing us to Christ. Christ is the food we receive today which gives us new hope and life in this topsy, turvy, turmoiled world. It points us again to Christ's life, death, and resurrection. It delivers that Christ to us to life everlasting.

Christ is the greatest gift we receive. Christ is the healing needed for our every broken relationship. He is our

eternal hope of a kingdom of great joy which shall never end with wealth and riches beyond compare.

Dear friends, I am always pointing to Christ, for in Christ you have all that you need for this life and for eternity. Amen.