

# RESPONDING TO THE GOOD NEWS

Christmas Is A Time For Us To Think About The Good News  
And How We Will Respond To It.

## **I. Reflection (Luke 2:8-14)**

*Jesus Came To Offer Us A Restored Relationship With God. That Offer Requires A Response From Us.*

- A. The Good News
- B. The Response

## **II. Worship (John 3:16-17)**

*God Demonstrated His Love For Us By Sending Jesus. We Demonstrate Our Love For Him Through Worship.*

- A. The Good News
- B. The Response

## **III. Discipleship (John 14:5-11)**

*God Revealed Himself To Us In Jesus And The Bible. We Can Only Mature In Our Faith By Reading, Studying, And Obeying His Word.*

- A. The Good News
- B. He Response

## **IV. Fellowship (John 15:12-14)**

*Jesus Has Given Us The Church As A Means To Care For One Another. We Demonstrate Our Commitment To Jesus By Loving One Another.*

- A. The Good News
- B. The Response

# Responding to the Good News

A couple of years ago, we as a church took the 40-day journey through the *Purpose Driven Life*<sup>1</sup> during the Lenten and Easter Season. Ken suggested that we review the 5 purposes during the Christmas season. So I will be preaching on worship, discipleship, and fellowship this week. Calvin will preach on ministry and evangelism next week.

What is really nice is that when we originally went through the *Purpose Driven Life*, it fit perfectly into our season of Lent. Christmas is the perfect time to review it since all five purposes are responses to something God has done for us.

The Christmas message is all about the Good News that God has come to us in human form. I think that we all get carried away with the Christmas holiday. I know that I love the religious and secular Christmas celebrations, but sometimes we can go overboard.

One year when I was in the military, Headquarters sent down this message as a warning to us Chaplains:

*"To: all soldiers*

*From: Headquarters*

*Subject: Office conduct through the holiday season*

*Effective immediately, soldiers should keep in mind the following guidelines in compliance with FROLIC (the Federal Revelry Office and Leisure Inter-service Council).*

*Running aluminum foil through the paper shredder to make tinsel is discouraged.*

*Playing Jingle Bells on the push-button phone is forbidden (it runs up an incredible long distance bill).*

*Work assignments are not to be filed under 'Bah humbug.'*

*Military vehicles are not to be used to go over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house.*

*All fruitcake is to be eaten BEFORE July 25.*

*Eggnog will not be dispensed in the vending machines.*

*In spite of all these restrictions, all soldiers are encouraged to have a Happy Holiday.*

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If you're like me, then during the Christmas season, religiously we get all caught up in the Christmas story describing the birth of Jesus. Socially, we get all caught up in the buying of presents, visiting friends and family, and attending and hosting Christmas parties. All these things are good. In general, people tend to be more kind. But today, I'd like us to think about the birth of Jesus in a different way. The main idea of this morning's message is this. Christmas is a time for us to think about the good news and how we will respond to it. In other words, we often read the Bible passages concerning Christmas, but I don't think that we let them sink in to the fullest.

## I. Reflection (Luke 2:8-14)

### ***Jesus Came To Offer Us A Restored Relationship With God. That Offer Requires A Response From Us.***

For example, let's read and take a time of reflection in Luke 2:8-14 (NIV):

*<sup>8</sup>And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'*

*<sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.'"*

Let's reflect on this. Jesus came to offer us a restored relationship with God. That offer requires a response from us.

#### **A. The Good News**

Let's take a moment to reflect on the Good News. First of all, it was news that was so good, God's angels had to come and announce it. Secondly the News was so good, that the Angels had to sing it.

The titles the angels give to Jesus are Savior, Christ, and Lord. After Israel was conquered, destroyed, and taken away into captivity by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, they never seemed to fully recover, nor did they ever become a world power. For well over 500 years, they waited for the Promised Messiah. That is what the word "Christ" means. The Messiah was to be a specially anointed king, sent from God to set the Jewish nation free and to conquer and destroy all their enemies. The Jews had suffered continuously under the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. They were oppressed and they longed for this king, this anointed one from God to come and deliver them from the oppression of their enemies.

Jesus' name comes from the Hebrew name Joshua. It means "God saves." Again, Israel was focused on political salvation, but we have now come to understand that God sent Jesus to save us from sin and to repair the severed relationship we had with Him. Jesus came to save us from sin, from Satan, from death, from fear, from the world and from ourselves.

And the angels address Jesus as *Lord*. During His lifetime, Jesus proved that He is Lord over life and death, over the natural world and the supernatural world, and that He is the Lord of lords and King of kings.

#### **B. The Response**

And that brings us to our response. Savior deserves our gratitude. Messiah deserves our loyalty. Lord deserves our obedience and service. We all know from the Christmas story that the shepherds ran immediately to the town of Bethlehem, saw the baby Jesus, and left praising God and telling everybody that Jesus, the Savior, Messiah, and Lord had come to earth, taken on human flesh, and was now living among His people.

The Christmas story is just the beginning of the Good News. Throughout His life, Jesus made it clear that His primary mission was to come and bridge the gap between God and humanity. Jesus said that He came to give us life and to give it to us in abundance.

The shepherds went to investigate this miracle birth. They found it to be true. They left changed men. My hope for those of us who have not yet given our lives to Jesus in faith, that this morning may be the morning in which you come to investigate who Jesus is, and that you may find the same

joy and excitement as did those shepherds.

For those of us who are already Christians, my hope is that we not only reflect on the Good News itself, but what kind of response is required of us who do believe in it. The Angels made it clear when they said,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Jesus came to offer us a restored relationship with God. That offer requires a response from us.

## **II. Worship (John 3:16-17)**

### ***God Demonstrated His Love For Us By Sending Jesus. We Demonstrate Our Love For Him Through Worship.***

The first response to the Good News I would like for us to reflect on is worship. John 3:16-17 (NIV) says,

*“<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

In other words, God demonstrated his love for us by sending Jesus. We demonstrate our love for him through worship. Remember, Jesus came to save us and to bring peace to us. You see, to understand how good the Good News is, we must first understand the bad news. Israel was looking for the Messiah to come and save them from the Romans and to bring peace to the world by conquering it in the same way the other empires did; by military force. However, the bad news is not that evil people, evil governments, and evil politicians rule the world: the bad news is that all human beings are born with a natural bent towards evil and rebellion against God. And when we are old enough, we all willfully choose to follow those evil bents.

Since God is pure, perfect and holy, He cannot be in a relationship with anyone or anything that is less than pure, perfect, and holy. Because of our natural bent towards sin, and because of our actual rebellion against God, we all find ourselves separated from God since we are nowhere near pure, perfect, and holy. In fact, in our natural state, we are not friends of God: we are enemies of God. We are not only separated from Him in this life, we are separated from Him for an eternity. The worse news is that we can never be good enough or do enough good or religious things to make things right.

#### **A. The Good News**

The Good News is that because God loves us so much, Jesus came to earth to save us and bring us peace with God by dying for us. The better news is that Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves. Jesus repaired the broken relationship between God and us.

The only proper response is worship. Worship is just a fancy religious term that means loving God. First of all, we demonstrate our love for God by accepting His offer of salvation and a restored relationship. We do this by acknowledging that we do believe that we have offended God and that we accept Jesus’ death on our behalf.

#### **B. The Response**

We demonstrate our love for Jesus our Lord by obeying His commands. We demonstrate our love for Jesus the Messiah, Savior, and Lord by dedicating our lives to Him in service. Jesus made it simple. Once we confess our sins, ask for His forgiveness, and dedicate our lives to Him, our lives should be driven by loving God with all our hearts, souls, mind and strength; and we are to love one another in the same manner Jesus loved us.

Keep this in mind. Worship is just a fancy word that means loving God. God demonstrated his love for us by sending Jesus. We demonstrate our love for Him through worship.

### **III. Discipleship (John 14:5-11)**

#### ***God Revealed Himself To Us In Jesus And The Bible. We Can Only Mature In Our Faith By Reading, Studying, And Obeying His Word.***

Our next response to the Good News is Discipleship. John 14:5-11 (NIV) says,

<sup>5</sup> *Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"*

<sup>6</sup> *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."*

<sup>8</sup> *Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."*

<sup>9</sup> *Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup> Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. <sup>11</sup> Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."*

The point of this response is this. God revealed himself to us in Jesus and the Bible. We can only mature in our faith by reading, studying and obeying His word. Again, discipleship is one of those religious words. It means to grow and mature as a Christian.

#### **A. The Good News**

The Good News is that we don't have to guess and wonder what God is like. Jesus is God in the flesh. If we want to know what God likes or doesn't like, what kind of being God is, or what He expects of us, all we need to do is look at Jesus. Jesus tells Thomas that if he has seen Him, then he has seen God. If he knows Jesus, then he knows God. God has inspired prophets and apostles throughout all of human history to record His thoughts, His plans, and His desires for us. Today, we are lucky to have them all gathered together in the Bible.

#### **B. The Response**

What is our response to be? It isn't enough to be born again. We must grow up and mature in our faith. We do that by reading the Bible, studying the Bible, memorizing it, and obeying it.

Further, this growth process called discipleship is portrayed in the Bible as more mature Christians guiding less mature believers to maturity. In other words, a healthy community of Christians has everybody being disciplined. One of the characteristics of a very mature Christian is that they are constantly looking for people to disciple them. They in turn graciously agree to disciple those less mature than they are.

We should have a constant cycle of those being disciplined and those who are discipling. The best-case scenario is if everyone is both being disciplined and discipling someone else. Here at Devon Church, we have all sorts of opportunities to grow and mature in Christ. In our small group ministry, we have one to one ministries and small group ministries available. Please ask about the opportunities.

We are also extremely dedicated to nurture and raise our children here and in this neighborhood in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has provided us with a book and some very good

teachers. He takes great pleasure when we grow up and become mature Christians. It's just like when we parents sacrifice and save money to send our children to good schools and good universities. We take a great deal of pleasure when they graduate and find themselves good jobs and become good people.

God revealed himself to us in Jesus and the Bible. We can only mature in our faith by reading, studying, and obeying His word.

## **IV. Fellowship (John 15:12-14)**

### ***Jesus Has Given Us The Church As A Means To Care For One Another. We Demonstrate Our Commitment To Jesus By Loving One Another.***

Our third response to the Good News is fellowship. In John 15:12-14 (NIV) Jesus says,

*<sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command.*

Jesus' message comes through loud and clear. Jesus has given us the church as a means to care for one another. We demonstrate our commitment to Jesus by loving one another.

#### **A. The Good News**

The Good News is that Jesus left us with a family. We have said this many times, but it's worth repeating. The word *church* does not refer to a building or an organization. Based on the Hebrew and Greek words, the church is a body of believers, called out of the world and gathered together in a worldwide community of believers with Jesus as the Head. The church is a living and growing organism. The Lord Jesus gave the disciples to one another as gifts. He washed their feet and commanded them to do the same for each other. He gave us to one another as very special gifts. When we become a believer in Jesus, He gives us a very special gift. In addition to this spiritual gift, God has given us talents, abilities, and all sorts of financial resources. In fact, all that we are, all that we have achieved, and all that we have, has been given to us as a gift from God.

#### **B. The Response**

The response is clear. Jesus has commanded us to love one another in the same manner as He loved us. Jesus used all of His human resources to demonstrate His love for us. Jesus gave up his life so we could be reconciled to God and reconciled to one another. He calls us to put to death our selfish ambitions, our self-centeredness, and our self-absorption. He calls us to use our gifts, talents, abilities, and resources to help one another.

The world is divided by race, by culture, by ethnicity, by gender, by social status, and by financial status. The church should not be like this. Unfortunately, that is not the case. It really is a scandal that many "so-called" Christians are prejudiced. It is a scandal that people continually desire to remain segregated on Sunday morning.

Thank God, our local church here is not like that. I have seen how you have continued to accept and help one another. Please keep up the good work. It makes God happy as all of you continue to fulfill the command of Jesus that we should love one another. I feel privileged to serve as your pastor. If you have ever been in my office, you would see Martin Luther King Junior's speech "I had a dream" posted on the wall in front of my desk. Truly his heart would be glad to see that his dream has become a reality here in our little church. But even more importantly, Jesus is no doubt pleased that we have responded to His gift of community in the way He has commanded. Jesus has given us the church as a means to care for one another. We demonstrate our commitment to Jesus by loving one another.

Christmas is the time of giving and receiving gifts. God has given us many gifts. However, the

greatest gift He has given us is Jesus our Messiah, Savior, and Lord. It truly is Good News that God has taken on human flesh and chosen to live with us. Christmas is a time for us to think about the good news and how we will respond to it.

During this time of gift giving, let us remember that God gave Jesus to us as a gift. Jesus has given us as gifts to one another. In his book called *New Seeds of Contemplation*<sup>2</sup>, Thomas Merton describes How God has given us as gifts to one another.

*"Love comes out of God and gathers us to God in order to pour itself back into God through all of us and bring us all back to Him on the tide of His own infinite mercy.*

*So we all become doors and windows through which God shines back into His own house.*

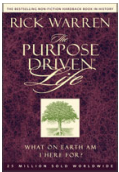
*When the love of God is in me, God is able to love you through me and you are able to love God through me. If my soul were closed to that love, God's love for you and your love for God and God's love for Himself in you and in me, would be denied the particular expression which it finds through me and through no other.*

*Because God's love is in me, it can come to you from a different and special direction that would be closed if He did not live in me, and because His love is in you, it can come to me from a quarter from which it would not otherwise come. And because it is in both of us, God has greater glory. His love is expressed in two more ways in which it would not otherwise be expressed; that is, in two more joys that could not exist without Him."*

God has given us Jesus Christ, and he has given each one of us each other as a very special gift.

**Merry Christmas.**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Purpose Driven Life*, by Rick Warren, Zondervan, 2002, ISBN-13: 9780310205715



<sup>2</sup> *New Seeds of Contemplation*, by Thomas Merton. New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1974, ISBN-13: 9780811200998