

The Christmas Promise

Mindful of a coming sunrise, the Almighty entered His exotic Eden and began taking inventory. He was short two humans and one apple. Though God's morning walk didn't include a cup of coffee, it did conclude with talk of another cup, a distant cup. It would be the tallest cup among three on a shelf called Golgotha.

Also missing from Eden was the atmosphere of uninhibited communion between God and His creation. The once-pure air now seemed overcome by silence and shame. But thankfully for the two missing humans, redemption was brewing.

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Gen. 3:15, NKJV). This promise, this call to war, was about God's pregnancy, not just Mary's. This odd baby announcement was God's way of saying that Eden was no longer enough by itself. Eden needed Bethlehem.

In other words, Adam's mismanagement would find a cure in a manger. Heaven pressed against hay. The straw and stable would frame the portrait and promise talked of back in the garden. God would become no bigger than a cell cluster in a woman's womb.

We love the thoughts of the Christmas baby but forget why the baby needed to come. Without that understanding, Christmas has the limited impact of a beautiful fable. Christmas becomes the soft and adorable side of Christianity-a much more palpable aspect for some than the messy idea of the crucifixion or the theologically dividing idea of the Resurrection.

Babies disarm. Babies warm and inspire the heart. Babies give hope. God's baby, however, came to do what all other lovable babies could not do. He came to close the gap.

We have to understand that the heart and purpose of Christmas was not to put a baby on parade. Christ was born because of how we were born. No longer in Eden, but outside of Eden. Separated and clothed in temporary acts of hope.

Christ came out of our need, not for the holiday, but for the closure of the gap between God and us-a gap that was first created by God's morning walking partner. To understand the beauty of Christ, you first have to understand the beauty of Eden and God's sense of loss when Adam fell.

With His dearest friends through the unfathomable beauty that was Eden, the Creator of all looked forward to starting each day walking with Adam and his bride, Eve, as He had done countless times before. But something was amiss. The utter tranquility of daybreak, the triumphant celebration of the rising of the sun was muted. An invisible cloud of heaviness had settled across all of creation.

The weight bent creation to the point of bowing in mourning. The normally joyful, vibrant flowers hung their magnificent blooms in perplexing sadness. Adam, their voice and soul, had fallen. There was an unfamiliar scent in the air, a fragrance that was completely foreign to the rest of creation. It was the odor of death and hiding.

Northeast of Jerusalem there is a stretch of wasteland not far from the location of ancient Babylon. Historians tell us it's where the Garden of Eden once flourished. They tell us it was destroyed during the perils of Noah, that Eden was God's perfect mix of man, mammal and mystery. Clothed in beauties only heaven could envision, the garden was intended to be a work of art, an unparalleled paradise of unified habitations.

As the great rivers Euphrates and Tigris watered the lush landscape of Eden and gave life to its first family, everything appeared set. But change came quickly; God's masterpiece became a makeshift hideout for two naked

fugitives. The tree of God and the heart of man had lost their coexistence.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the property line separating heaven and earth-never to be crossed. Yet Adam and Eve, patrons of free will, chose to hop the fence and pluck the forbidden fruit. One indulgence later, and all mankind was cursed with the sinful aftertaste.

God quickly called into account those responsible for the mess and awarded them their appropriate penalty. The man got sweat. The woman got contractions. The snake-well, because he was the instigator, his sentence would come in three stages. First he would lose his legs. Next he would lose his keys. Then finally he would lose it all.

It would unfold precisely as the Almighty predicted. But for the present, the stinger of the sting of death lodged itself deeply into human flesh.

The Almighty felt hollow. Something of great importance was missing. A sobering conclusion surfaced in God's mind. His step quickened, His look became more determined. "Adam! Adam!" the great I Am called out anxiously. "Where are you, Adam? Where did you go?"

As the majestic God looked inward to His heart, He saw that the relationship He cherished so deeply had been viciously ripped out by the roots. When He looked throughout His kingdom for His friend, all He saw was a massive chasm. An abyss of utter darkness. A darkness that the righteous God Himself could not see beyond or penetrate through.

The King of Glory cried out for Adam again with a sense of loss and abandonment, not because Adam had physically hidden from Him but because Adam through his actions had created an unspeakable chasm that tore apart the intimate relationship he had with his Creator-the relationship the loving God so desperately desired.

I was foolish to imagine something so crazy! the passionate God thought to Himself. To create something I could have intimate relationship with, commune with, walk together with as friends. Now it is too late.

I love this creation more than I could ever imagine. I cannot forget the joy being with him brought to Me and now, now it is destroyed. What can I do? I must do something! I must find a way to connect, to commune with them again, but how?

The Bridge

The only possible bridging material that could cross this chasm of darkness and death would not be another. It would be God Himself. He would become both bridge and blood.

Like the single signature on a check large enough to pay both past debts and future purchases, God's own Son would become a signature-spilling blood both pure and innocent so the beauty of relationship, not a garden, could be restored.

The innocent blood of spotless animals saved the lives of His chosen people from the angel of death. But the merciful God didn't want His people to cling to the blood out of fear. He wanted them to run to redemption out of love, out of a desire for the reconciliation and relationship they once had.

God planned to enter earth by entering the heart. Thus the miracle of Christmas. He sent His Son as a gift, all the while knowing that a score from Eden was about to be settled.

To disarm the arguments and confound the wisdom of kings and religion, God sent forth His Son, Jesus Christ, born of a virgin named Mary. This innocence of infancy was by design. God's Son, Jesus, had come the right way.

"This is not enough! I long for more. I must restore the bond and heal the chasm. The birth of the Christ child, no matter how gloriously celebrated by wise men and choirs, was not the

purpose of the first Christmas."

As God the Father sat on His most high throne, visibly perplexed and eons away in time and space, a familiar voice called softly yet confidently to the God of heaven and earth. "I can do it, Father." No longer the cries of a baby, but the cries of a Son whose mission to die was the real gift.

Just imagine the breadth of conversation and passion exchanged between Father and Son as the journey from Eden through Bethlehem reached a climax at Calvary. The familiar voice caused God to pull abruptly from His concentration; He turned to see what He expected to be the shimmering glory that was His only Son. Instead His baby was coming too close to the cup.

When His eyes landed on the source of the voice, He was perplexed to see a small, spotless lamb kneeling before Him. "Son, is that you?"

"Yes, Father."

"You want to do this?" God asked His Son in surprise.

"Yes, Father, I do."

"Why?"

"I love them, too, Father. I long to commune with them, to teach them of Your grace and mercy and majesty."

"Why? You have seen them from Eden until now; throughout time they have turned from Me time and time again. I delivered them, and they soon forgot the grace. What if they forget You, My Son? They worship Me out of fear and rules to follow."

"I know, Father, but it is because they don't know You. Let Me show them who You really are. I know they have broken Your heart, Father, but it is because they cannot see. Let Me open their eyes."

“Father, I want to give them even more, a gift from Myself.”

“What else do You wish to do for them?”

“I want to be able to make provision for life more abundantly. I want to provide healing for their bodies and their wounded souls.”

“Know this, My Son, death will not keep You. You shall take the keys from death as Your trophies.”

Before the Son lay the symbols of what He must give up for the redemption of man. He stared at the bread and wine as if looking into a mirror. Jesus’ eyes turned downward toward the cup that sat before Him. This is what the Father meant back in Eden-His heel striking the enemy’s head.

He slowly leaned forward and with great intention, grabbed the cup with both hands. Immediately He felt a coldness He had never before experienced, and darkness fell over His spirit. Immediately He had an overwhelming feeling of abandonment.

The Son of Man saw the soldiers nail His flesh to a tree. He saw His blood flowing down His broken body. But the pain was minimal compared with the abandonment His spirit felt.

“My God, where are You?” Jesus cried with an urgency that echoed from centuries earlier as His father searched for His beloved creation, His friend, Adam. “Why?” Jesus gasped.

He turned away from the vision and found Himself grasping the cup. He handed the symbol of the most costly gift in all of history to His disciples and spoke the words, “This is My blood that was shed for you.”

The ceremony was finished, and Jesus needed to find a familiar place of tranquility, a place to share His turmoil with His Father. Gethsemane! As He rushed to the garden, He realized how alone and desolate it felt this time. No longer a child, the Savior of mankind cried out to His Father: “I am vexed by

what I see, by what I feel. An emptiness so unfamiliar I cannot name it."

Jesus fell face first to the earth in tormented agony. He cried out: "Father, please comfort Me, I am fearful of what I saw as I took the cup. Father, I cannot be apart from You, I can't feel that feeling again. This feels like Eden all over again. Please, God, take the cup from Me, please!"

Jesus thought again of the haunting vision of being in a place where God was not. "Father, I cannot bear this cup." The vision vexed Him so that He began to feel huge beads of sweat tracing down His forehead, around His eyes and down His weathered cheeks. His hand rose to wipe His brow.

He noticed in the moonlight dark stains on His hand. He took the edge of His sleeve, wiped His face again and held it in the faint light, noticing that the sweat had turned to blood. As He stared at it, the cold, hard truth of what must be done came back to the forefront of His mind.

"This is what the atonement must cost. My blood must be shed." The tears for Himself ceased to flow.

He saw His broken body healing the countless multitudes. He saw the communion again with mankind and then, glowing radiantly through the farthest reaches of space, He saw his snow-white bride. With that Jesus gathered Himself up and stood to His feet with a determination that rocketed throughout the core of time itself. The true gift of Christmas had never been closer.

Emmanuel, prophesied into the fabric of history and time, spoke clearly, "Not My will, but Yours, Father." The gates of hell shook; the pathway of redemption was established; it was finished!

We began to unwrap Christmas in Eden, we opened the box in Bethlehem; the gift becomes true and eternally ours at

Calvary. This Christmas take time to both remember and share the entirety of this gift called Jesus.

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