

# **Advent: The Tree of Christmas**

**Matthew 1:18-25**

**December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

**Prologue by Bro Ricky**

**Sermon by Bro Kory**

## ***Prologue***

### **Lighting of the Redemption Candle**

During the time of Advent we pause to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, but also anticipate His return for us. Last Sunday morning we lit the candle of prophesy. This week in our homes, we read the actual prophesies from the Old Testament that God gave to the children of Israel. These prophesies brought hope to them, as they looked forward to the birth of a Messiah. This morning we gather, not to only relight the candle of prophesy, but to light the candle of redemption. We light this candle reminding ourselves that during the 1<sup>st</sup> advent of Jesus to the earth, He came to redeem us from the penalty and the power of sin. Many of us are here this morning redeemed by the blood of Christ. Others of us here are still in need of the redeeming blood of Jesus to be applied to our heart and life. We also gather to anticipate the return of Jesus because we know when He returns, He will redeem us once and for all from the presence of sin. (Lighting of candle)

### **Scripture**

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he*

*considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

## **Origin of the Christmas Tree**

When Celisa and I married, she came from a Christmas tradition where they went to a store and bought an artificial tree. I came from a family where we actually went out into the field and spent hours looking for a tree. We always thought it would fit into the living room but it never would. We would have to chop it off again when we got it into the house. By the time we got married, I looked forward to that day when we could go to the store and just buy the artificial tree. But my wife wanted us to go search the fields and find a tree that would perfectly fit in a 14x70 mobile home.

You know there are a lot of legends about the origin of the Christmas tree. I am sure that you are familiar with many of those. In all actuality, the Christmas tree celebration started during the middle ages. It started in a time when there were not printed books, or Bibles, or pictures, or materials. The Church found that one of the best ways to teach Bible stories was through what was called mystery plays. One of the favorite mystery plays of the people in the early Church was a play called the Paradise Tree, which was done on December 24<sup>th</sup>. The Church would gather, and on stage would be a lone evergreen tree, normally a fir tree. In that mystery play, the tree would be decorated with apples. This pictures the story of Adam and Eve. The leaders of the Church would picture how sin came into the world through Adam and Eve being tempted. As the play

unfolded, that fir tree would then begin to be decorated with communion wafers as the Church taught the story of how God would redeem His creation, also through a tree, a tree called the old rugged cross. Therefore December the 24<sup>th</sup> became the day the Church celebrated the creation of Adam and Eve. But all good things must come to an end. As through time books began to be printed, and pictures began to be used by the Church to teach biblical stories, soon the mystery plays ceased. But the Church in Germany was so enthralled by the Paradise Tree that when the Church ceased to do the play publicly, the Germans brought that decorated tree into their house on December the 24<sup>th</sup>, and began to use it as a Christmas tree on December the 25<sup>th</sup>. Now if you know history, you know that the Germans also had a little pyramid shelf. They would light candles on each shelf of that pyramid in celebration of the birth of Jesus, and of Him being the light of the world. Over time those candles began to be moved off of those shelves onto the Christmas tree.

In most of our homes we enjoy the celebration of decorating the Christmas tree. Celisa and I started a tradition several years ago to remind us of the true Christmas tree. When she finishes decorating the tree, she hands me a spike. It is a spike that she found as she was walking on an abandoned railroad track one morning. She had a personal experience with the Lord that morning as she pondered the spikes that were driven into Jesus' hands. I take the spike and pull the branches back and put it way back into the tree. Only our family knows it is there, but it reminds us during the Christmas season of what the true Christmas tree is.

### **Overview of Today's Scripture (Bro Kory)**

Angels showed up to Joseph because he was surrounded with a situation that he did not want to find himself in. His wife-to-be was now pregnant. He, being a just man, decided to divorce her quietly to keep her reputation intact. But as he was contemplating these things, an angel showed up and revealed to Joseph that Mary had been telling him the truth. This baby was indeed from the Holy Spirit. The angel revealed to Joseph some things

about this baby growing in the womb of Mary. He shows that His identity is <sup>a</sup>*Immanuel* which means "God with us". The baby growing inside of Mary's womb, who would be born a man, is at the same time, fully God. Then the angel revealed to Joseph that His name was to be called <sup>b</sup>*Jesus*. Now if you research the name Jesus, it comes from the Old Testament name of <sup>c</sup>*Joshua*. It literally means, "Jehovah saves". So here you have Jesus, whose name will be God saves, or God is salvation, and then the angel gives the purpose of this baby's life. His mission, His whole purpose on planet earth is to save His people from their sins. You see during the Christmas season, often we focus on the birth of Jesus, and that is absolutely right, we should focus on His birth. But as you notice in this narrative, the birth of Jesus is all about the death of Jesus. The birth of Jesus leads to the death of Jesus, because the point of His birth is to save people from their sins. As we've read the gospel, we know how that takes place. Jesus Christ dies on a cross for us. Peter said in 1 Peter 2:24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree", the righteous for the unrighteous.

### **The Tree of Christ: the cross**

This morning we are going to look at the Christmas tree, but as we think about the tree I do not want us to just think about the kind that we decorate our homes with. Instead, I want the Christmas tree to ultimately point us to the Christ tree, which is the cross. Last week we saw that the lights were to point us to Jesus, the Light of the world. This morning I want the Christmas tree to point us to the tree where Jesus bled for you and for me. You know when Bro Ricky shared the story about the Christmas tree, I have to be honest and confess that I had no clue that is where the Christmas tree came from. How many of you have heard of the Paradise Tree and knew that is where the Christmas tree came from? None of us right? Yet we all have the Christmas tree in our homes. If Crider were to ask me why we put up a Christmas tree, I would have to say..."hum, it is Christmas? That is what you do, that is what you put the presents under, I do not know?" It is just something we do because it is familiar with Christmas. My fear is that maybe, for some of us, the tree of Christ has

become the same way. I mean we know the cross right? We have it in the back of our stage, we have it in our homes, and we wear it around our necks. We know the cross, we cling to the cross, and it is so much a part of Christianity. But maybe some of us do not really understand what the cross really is about, and what really took place on the cross. Why did Jesus really have to die on the cross, and what did His death accomplish for us on the cross?

### **Prophecy of the death of Christ: Isaiah 53:1-12**

So in order for us to behold the tree of Christmas (the cross of Christ), I want us to do like Matthew did by going back to Isaiah. Now Matthew went back to Isaiah 7 and looked at the Prophecy concerning the birth of Jesus, showing that He would be born of a virgin. I do not want to go to the birth Prophecy this morning. I instead want to go to the Prophecy in Isaiah chapter 53 that deals with the death of Christ. We are going to walk through this chapter in it's entirely this morning as we look at the wonder of the cross.

Now this chapter of Scripture in the Old Testament is very significant. In fact, it is the most quoted passage in Old Testament Scripture of the New Testament writers. One commentator said that if you were to lose this whole chapter from out of the Old Testament, you could almost entirely replicate it from New Testament quotes. There is no doubt in the New Testament writer's minds that this Prophecy was about Jesus Christ. It was about the cross. In fact, when Peter said that He would bear our sins on a tree, the rest of that verse says "by His stripes we are healed", which is a direct quote from Isaiah 53:5. So for us, we know that this prophecy, written 700 years before the death of Christ, was all about the cross. What is amazing about this text is that it gives us so much depth into what really happened at the cross. It gives us so much commentary on what took place, and why it was necessary for Jesus to die on the cross. My prayer this morning is that we take the very familiar symbol of the cross and we

all look at it afresh. The cross is something that we should marvel after. It is something that is truly “oh the wondrous cross”.

### **Arm of the Lord: verse 1**

*“Who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”*

It seems as if Isaiah is so caught up in this Prophecy that he does not even know if he understands what God is revealing to him. Then he says that the “arm of the Lord” is being revealed. The arm of the Lord, according to the ESV study Bible, represents the power of God in action. Isaiah has already prophesied about the suffering servant (chapter 52), and here God is going to show His mighty act of salvation. He is going to send His powerful right hand. Now the Israelites might have thought a few different things were going to happen. Maybe God was going to part the sea, maybe He was going to send plagues. There were all kinds of ways that God had stretched out His mighty hand in the Old Testament. But I promise you that none of them would have guessed that God was going to extend His mighty hand of salvation in this way. The next verse has revealed to us the way God is going to save. His mighty hand is in a person, the suffering servant. We are going to see that He has very humble beginnings.

### **Humble Beginnings: Verse 2-3**

*“For he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hid their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.”*

He says this servant grew up like a young plant. Now in all of the commentaries where I have enquired, says this word <sup>d</sup> *plant* means “a sucker”. A gardener knows about sucker bushes that come up. They are things that you do not want, you want to trim them, or you want to get rid of them. Isaiah is saying this suffering servant comes up (a very unwanted

plant) in a very dry and arid place. He is not going to be wanted. Think about the birth of Jesus, and His humble beginnings as this sucker that pops up in the middle of nowhere, that no one pays attention to. I mean Jesus, the Son of God, was born to a poor family. He was born in a stable, a place where you feed animals! He was born in Bethlehem, and grew up in Nazareth! In case you do not know anything about Nazareth, it is sort of like Hardin. It is in the middle of nowhere, it is not a metropolitan place where a lot of prestigious people come from. They might have had 2 restaurants and an abandoned gas station, sort of like we do in Hardin! So this guy is going to grow up (in the world's eye) to be a nobody.

Isaiah says that His outward appearance will not be anything that will draw us to Him just by looking at Him. He has no outward beauty. In other words, you could not pick Jesus out of a crowd. Now I know that is hard for us to imagine because every time we see Jesus on the big screen of a movie, you can always pick Him out. He is always different, he is always a little taller, He is really good-looking, He has long flowing hair, a perfectly manicured beard, and He is always wearing all white. You can say, "There is Jesus"! Isaiah is saying that is not how Jesus is going to show up. He is not going to show up like King Saul where everyone says, "There is the king, let us follow him". No, He does not have anything on the outside that is going to draw us to Him.

Isaiah says He is going to be a man of very humble origins, and He will also be a man of sorrow. He is going to be acquainted with grief. In other words, He went through the same stuff we have gone through. He has lived a real life on planet earth, He has suffered, He has cried, He has fought temptation, and He has really suffered like us. All of the while we esteemed Him not. We despised Him. That word <sup>e</sup> *despised* means to "count Him worthless, to pay no attention to" this man. As you read through the gospel, you find that this takes place. All of the religious leaders who should have known who Jesus was, who should have counted Him worthy to follow, despised Him. They rejected Him and they counted

Him worthless, as some little sucker plant that should be snipped, and that we should not worry about.

### **For Our Transgressions: Verse 4-5**

In the next verses we see the work of the humble Savior. This is really the heart or the meat of the passage. It is the meat of the cross, and it is the meat of the gospel.

*“Surely (this means truly) he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.”*

If you notice the pronouns, it is almost shocking that you have this servant who is suffering, not for His own illness, or transgressions, or sins, but for ours. Here we see the substitutionary nature of the atonement. Jesus Christ, on the cross, died in our place. As He died on the cross, “we esteemed Him stricken by God”. So if we had been looking at Jesus hanging on the cross, we would have said, “That guy must have done something bad. Look at Him, He is hanging, He is cursed, He is judged by God! He is a Jewish man hanging on a cross, (which would have been scandalous) He must have really done something bad before a Holy God”. As we see Jesus and consider that He is smitten, stricken by God, the reality is that it was not for Him, it was for us. We were the ones that He was hanging there to die for. It was our sorrows, our griefs that He was bearing.

Then it says that He was wounded, or pierced for our transgressions. That word *transgression* means “to willingly disobey”. Think about the sign **Do Not Trespass**. It is hunting season, and some of us hunters go onto a piece of property that we see a big buck on, and there is this big sign. It says there is no trespassing. The sign tells us that we cannot go there. But there is a big buck that we are chasing, so we cross the line, we step onto that property. When the game warden shows up and begins to arrest us, we cannot appeal to “I did not know, I had no idea that this was not where

I was supposed to be". The game warden would say, "The sign was on the tree that your dear stand is on"! This text is saying that Jesus is being pierced; He is being wounded for all of the times that you and I have willingly broken the commandments of God. We knew it was wrong, but we did it anyway. Because of that, we deserve judgment and wrath. But Jesus is the Christ and He was pierced for our transgression. He was crushed for our iniquities.

<sup>g</sup> *Iniquity* means "sin" in general. He was being crushed for our sinful nature, our love for sin, and the way we always constantly do what is wrong, even if we do not really think about it much. He was dying on the cross for our transgressions, and our iniquities. These 2 words, <sup>h</sup> *wounded* and <sup>i</sup> *pierced* are the strongest words in the Hebrew language. It means "a brutal death, excruciating pain". Of course we understand that, because we know the cross. We see that it is a substitutionary nature. It was Jesus dying, not for His sins, or His transgressions, but He was dying for our sins, and our transgressions. He was innocently hanging on the cross for us, the guilty. So Jesus took our place on the cross. We deserve the wrath of God but Jesus stood in and absorbed it for us.

The reason He stood in our place is because He took the penalty for our sin. You see, the verse says He was chastised. This punishment brought us peace. In order to really understand the cross, we have to understand who God is. We have to understand the nature of God. He is Holy, Holy, Holy, as Isaiah 6 tells us. Because He is Holy, Holy, Holy, it means He is perfectly good. He can have nothing to do with sin. His eyes are too pure to look upon sin with favor at all. He created us (in Adam) holy and good, and having a relationship with Him. Then He gave us the law in order to rule over all of creation. His 1<sup>st</sup> law was, do not eat from the tree or you will die. We all broke the law, because Adam broke the law. Because of His Holiness, we now all deserve death. So once we sin, we must die.

Israel was very familiar with this because they had the sacrificial system. In the sacrificial system, when an Israelite would sin against God, they would

come to the temple with a lamb and place it on the altar to be killed. That Israelite knew that by doing this he was saying he had sinned against God and deserved death. He understood that the lamb was dying in his place. He knew that he deserved what this lamb got, but God was allowing this lamb to stand in his place so that he could keep his fellowship with Him. So God's fellowship in the Old Testament with the people was through the blood of this animal. But there was a problem. An animal could not truly take away the sins of people. There had to be a human sacrifice for human sin. That is why Jesus Christ died on the cross. As the perfect human being, who lived a perfect sinless life, Jesus could be the perfect sacrifice who stood in our place. We all can see that we have broken God's law and deserve death. But Jesus said He would stand in our place, pay our penalty, and absorb our condemnation and the wrath of God. He was the propitiation for our sins, that wrath absorbing sacrifice, so that God's justice is still intact. He did not break His word. When we sinned, the penalty (death) has been paid by Jesus. On the cross as Jesus died, He paid to God what we owe, and He paid it in full.

At the same time, when we put our trust in Him, He gives to us the gift of His very righteousness, His perfect life. That is the work of the cross. That is what we should marvel at this morning, that it should have been us under the wrath of God, because we deserve that. Instead, Jesus took our place, hung on a cross that He did not deserve, and faced the wrath of God for us, so that God could look at Him and give us peace. God could look at Him and make us reconciled back to Himself through the blood of Jesus Christ. That is why the cross was necessary, so that Jesus could redeem us from our sins.

### **The Need of the Savior: Verse 6**

What was the need, why did He have to do that?

*“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*

You see the reason why we needed a Savior is because like sheep, (who are not very smart animals) we wandered away from our Good Shepherd. As sheep we should have loved and obeyed our Shepherd because He cares for us. Instead, we rejected God and decided to try to become God. We wandered away in rebellion and in that act, God took the sin of the sheep and laid it on the Shepherd, and He died for the sheep. That is the wonder and beauty of the cross. We all have gone astray, and have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

### **The Willingness of the Savior: verses 7-9**

He willingly laid down His life for us.

*“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgressions of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”*

It says that by oppression and judgment He was taken away. If you study the trial of Jesus, you see that the whole thing was unjust. What the Pharisees did to Him concerning the trial was completely illegal. It was done without the right amount of people, it was done too hastily, and there were not enough witnesses called. Jesus, at any time, could have said, “You are not taking me through the right steps to count me guilty”! But what did Jesus do? He opened not His mouth, knowing the whole time that He was being tried unfairly for crimes He did not commit. He willingly went through it because He knew His purpose. His purpose was to save His people from their sins. It was to die on a cross, being cut off of the land of the living.

They made His grave with the wicked, and He was buried in a rich man’s grave. It is amazing how this Prophecy was completely fulfilled in Jesus. As they took Jesus down from the cross, He looked like He was a wicked,

sinful man who had done a lot of things wrong, so they put Him in a grave with all of the other wicked people. Yet in His grave, He was put in the grave of a rich man. No person brought down from a cross as a criminal would have been laid in a rich man's tomb. But it was to perfectly fulfill what Isaiah had said, "even though there was no deceit in his mouth". In other words, there was no violence, He was perfectly innocent. He willingly gave His life over to death for us, so that we can be made righteous.

### **Submissive of the Savior: verses 10-11**

Not only was He willing to die for us, but He was submissive to the Father's will in dying for us.

*"Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand."*

Here we see that Jesus did not die as a martyr, He did not die as an accident, but He died under the very will of God. It was God's will, before the foundation of the world, that we would be made right through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Jesus was perfectly submissive and willing to die for us. Jesus wanted to die for us, and God orchestrated His death!

Why did He crush Jesus, why did He bruise Him on the cross? It was so that in His death, Jesus would see His offspring, and He would prolong His days. Now how can a dead man see? How can a dead man have His days prolonged? This is Prophecy about the resurrection of Jesus. Not only would He die for our sins, but He would be raised from the dead, God would prolong His days, and live into eternity. Not only that, but in eternity He would see His offspring. His offspring are you and I. It is the faith family, it is those who believe and trust in Him. Through His death and resurrection, we become the family of God. He makes many to be brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters of the King. God willed it, and Jesus willingly did it, because He knew it would bring us into the family. "What great love is this? How can it be, that thou my God would die for me", as

the hymn says. He would do all of this so that we could be welcomed into the family of God!

### **God's Wrath Satisfied: verse 11**

And we see that the death of Jesus really satisfied the wrath of God.

*“Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”*

We see that God is going to look on Jesus, and satisfy His wrath towards our sin. Remember God is Holy, He must punish sin; it cannot go unpunished. It will either be punished in hell, or it will be punished in Jesus. When God saw Jesus, the propitiation, it satisfied His wrath. His justice is satisfied so that He can look on us with love and still be perfectly holy, perfectly righteous, because our sin has been satisfied.

Do you know what that means for us? God really is not angry with our sin anymore. The cross really did satisfy His anger. We can stop dwelling on what we have done in the past, or what we are struggling with right now, and we can look and behold the cross. We can know that God is satisfied in Jesus, with our sin. We can get over it and start living for righteousness now. We can stop trying to do a bunch of things to try to erase all of those things we have done in our past. It has been erased! It has been satisfied on the cross. It has been completely done away with. And the “many”...we have been accounted as righteous through the knowledge of Jesus on the cross! It is not our righteousness, it is not something you have done to earn; it is the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed to you. Christ has given you His righteousness. This is the amazing thing about the gospel. Jesus takes your sin and pays it, and then gives you His perfect righteousness! Can you see how the gospel is all of grace? It is nothing of you, it is all of Jesus! As we live, we should always give glory to God because it is completely of Him. Jesus did it all on the cross.

### **Victory of the Savior: verse 12**

The last thing we see in this Prophecy is the victory of the Savior.

*“Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”*

It says that God is going to divide with Him a portion. He is going to take that portion, and the spoils, and divide it with the strong. This imagery is of a king who has conquered a great land in a great battle, and now he has all of these great spoils. The king would take it back to his land and divide the spoils with all of his friends and allies. I think this is saying that Jesus, on the cross, through His victory against sin, death, and Satan, really did achieve the victory over those. Now He divides with us, the spoils of His victory. Just think of some the spoils of the victory of the cross! We now have eternal life. We now have a new heart and a new spirit, and a new nature. We now have peace with God, and we now have a new family of believers to fellowship with. We now have hope beyond the grave! Those are just some of the spoils that Jesus gives to us from His victory on the cross. As we close, I want to point out 2 things about this Prophecy.

First, I want us to notice that every single one of us share in the sufferings of Christ. We all own that. It was for our sins, not His sins. It was for our transgressions, not His transgressions. So we are all sharing in His sufferings because it was our sin that did that to Jesus. The second thing to notice is that we do not all share in the victory of the cross. You see in order to share in the victory of the cross you have to believe the gospel. What we just covered: that Jesus Christ on the cross, soaked up your wrath, died on your behalf, and died for your sins so that you could be accounted righteous, you have to believe that. You have to lay hold of Jesus as your Savior in order to experience the spoils of the cross. That new life, that freedom, that reconciliation to God comes by faith in Jesus.

My question for you is, are you sharing in the spoils of the cross? Are you sharing in all of the benefits that come from the cross? Have you truly put

your faith and trust in Jesus Christ? Have you truly believed what took place on the cross, or has the cross for you become like the Christmas tree? You know it is there, it is part of your relationship with God, but you do not really know what it means. It is not really central, not the focus for you. This morning I pray, as we have seen Isaiah 53, that we would be reminded of what the cross is. It stands as the instrument of death, where God's wrath was satisfied for us. Jesus Christ stood in our place, for our sins, so that we could have eternal life. This Christmas season, as we see the Christmas trees all over the place, I pray that you are reminded of Jesus. He died in your place, and took your penalty, and saved you from your sins. Because He saved you from your sins, it means you do not have to live in them anymore. We are free. We do not have to live in our sin because Jesus set us free on the cross. Let us behold and wonder at the Tree of Christmas, the Christ tree, and what it means for all of us.