

Devotion 1

The story of the incarnation, which we celebrate on Christmas day, is a miraculous and life-altering story. All of life hinges on the events which began with the birth of the Messiah. However, for us to understand the enormity of this event, we need to start at the beginning. And the beginning is not with the angel's visit to Mary, nor is it with the prophecies of Isaiah. The beginning is at the creation of the world; when God made man.

Consider this simple question: how could the salvation of all God's people be the result of one man's death and resurrection? We know that this is true. But what makes it so? Why could the blood of bulls and goats not accomplish our salvation? Why can't we earn our place before the Lord? There are many religions in our world that teach that such things are possible. But the Apostle Paul corrects all such erroneous ideas when he writes: "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him". Salvation is "of the Lord"! And this is true, at least in part, because of who we were created to be.

Man's identity is unique. The record of the creation week makes that clear. Each day of creation has a familiar rhythm to it. But when we come to the creation of man, the record slows down so as to focus in greater detail on the exalted creation of man. Unlike all other creatures, and contrary to the teaching of evolution, God made man "after his own image". That is worth reflecting on.

Man wasn't created to be only God's servant or merely another creature; we were made to be in a relationship with God; we were made to be his children. And therein we are unique. There are no other creatures in all the world so wonderfully blessed as we were created to be "in the beginning". That is key to understanding Christmas.

The identity of man who fell into sin helps us understand the necessity of the incarnation. After all, if it were only a mere creature who disobeyed God, then possibly a mere creature could pay the price for that disobedience. Then the blood of bulls and goats might be adequate for their salvation. But it was not a mere creature who sinned; it was God's child, his image-bearer, who disobeyed. No mere creature can take the place of a child of God before the face of God. Only a fellow image-bearer, a second Adam, can stand before God in the place of the first Adam. Simply put, man sinned, therefore man must pay for his sin. The birth of our Saviour on Christmas day is not simply miraculous, it is the only possible way we can be saved.

But there's more.

Have you ever thought that you would have done better in the Garden of Eden than our first parents did? People wonder: How could they have fallen into sin so easily? This question becomes all the more pressing in light of the consequence of their sin. Every cemetery is the result of their rebellion. Every tear of sorrow shed is shed because of their sin. Every sin we struggle with is because they ate the fruit. And that can seem unfair at times. Why should we suffer for their sin? Shouldn't we be given a chance to prove our worth? If we fail, that's on us. But if we succeed, then we deserve the promised blessing. That's fair, isn't it?

But, what about salvation then? If it's unfair for Adam to be our covenantal representative (that means not only that he stood in our place at the beginning, it means also that we sinned in him), then it's also unfair for Jesus to be our covenantal representative. That means that we must

then pay the debt for our sins all by ourselves. Then no one else can do it for us. Once you think that through, you realize that the idea of a covenantal representative does not seem so unfair after all!

At Christmas we don't just celebrate the birth of a child; we celebrate the birth of a child who came to take our place – to fulfill the demands of God's covenant on our behalf. In Adam's sin, we all sinned! The wonder of the gospel is that in Jesus' obedience all who believe in him are made right before God.

It seems like such a simple thing, doesn't it? Man ate a fruit. How could that be the cause of all the grief and sorrow of our world? When viewed in isolation, it hardly seems right. But we must see the sin of man in its context. That means seeing man's sin in relation to the Lord. Our God had created a beautiful paradise for man to live in, provided him with every good thing, and entered into a loving relationship with his image-bearer. God had even warned man about the consequences of eating that simple piece of fruit. But man, by eating that fruit, rejected God's provisions, he rejected God's fellowship; yes, man rejected the Lord's sovereignty in his life. And all for the empty promise given by a snake! Man's sin, you see, was an assault on the majesty and glory of God. That's what sin is. And that is a big deal.

Sadly, we do not always see our sin in that way. We forget that how we see our sin impacts how we see our Saviour. We forget that the smaller we **see** our sin to be, the smaller our Saviour **needs** to be. But when we see our sin for what it is, we soon realize that the baby born on Christmas morning is the only hope we have. If we would join with the Angelic host in celebrating the birth of the Messiah, we must first humbly acknowledge that our sins, even the ones we think are no big deal, are a very big deal in the eyes of our God.