

## CHRIST FORETOLD AND FULFILLED

### 3. Jesus the Savior

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Scriptural references in this message

Genesis 1:1-10; Genesis 3:2-5; Genesis 4, 6-9, 11; Isaiah 7:14; 9:2-6, 53:2-6; Matthew 27:27-31; Luke 2:10-11; John 3:16, 17; Romans 5:8-10, Romans 5:12-21; Romans 7:21-25; 2 Timothy 1:8-10.

#### **In the beginning...**

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 1968, Apollo 8, the first manned mission to the Moon, entered lunar orbit. That evening, the 3 astronauts aboard, Commander Frank Borman, Command Module Pilot Jim Lovell, and Lunar Module Pilot William Anders did a live television broadcast from lunar orbit. In that broadcast they showed pictures of the Earth and Moon seen from Apollo 8. Lovell said, "The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring and it makes you realize just what you have back there on Earth." They ended the broadcast with the crew taking turns reading from the book of Genesis. They weren't concerned about political correctness. They weren't worried about possibly offending anyone. Even though they were literally in the midst of one of the greatest technological achievements in history, they we're not embarrassed.

William Anders began with these words: "For all the people on Earth the crew of Apollo 8 has a message we would like to send you." Then he began reading from Genesis 1. *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."* Jim Lovell then continued. *"And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day."* Finally, Frank Borman finished the reading: *"And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear': and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good."* From outer space, the planet earth looks like a lavish Christmas tree ornament suspended without string in a vast indigo field. Stunning, and beyond comparison with any of the planets in our solar system!

#### **From the beginning...**

But the Astronauts of Apollo 8 eventually had to come back to earth. And when they did they re-entered the earth's dense and fetid atmosphere. From the very beginning, when the first human beings first began to measure it, they noticed something about this planet. It wasn't just a few people who noticed it. Everybody noticed it. When they learned how to write, they tried to picture it in their poetry. They described it in their narratives. It was the essential element in their storytelling. Even the atheistic underpinnings, if not polemics of *The Golden Compass* contain it. It is considered the essential element in great storytelling. What is it?

The next 10 chapters of the book of Genesis describe it. We hear about it first on the personal, and then as much later described in Romans 5:12-21 on the *mega-personal* level. Genesis 3 provides its quintessential plot: *The woman said to the serpent*, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' " "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil, (Genesis 3:2-5).

We still fall for that temptation...to become like God. And it has wreaked havoc on the earth. From the personal level to the interpersonal level. From brother to brother, as in the story of Cain and Able in Genesis 4, to the whole human family "doing only what is right in their own eyes," in the story of Noah, to the place where the very structures man creates, as symbolized by the Tower of Babel in Genesis 10, are somehow, but inexorably imbued with what the Bible will eventually call it. It's called *sin!*

### **What is sin?**

Now people usually think of sin in its many manifestations. And we all have our own favorites to point out and condemn. Our favorites tend to be those we imagine are the sins of *other* people! Sin does have many manifestations, and the Bible refers to them throughout the Old and New Testament. But sin at its core is one thing. And the very word "sin" helps us remember what that one thing is. Let's identify what that one thing is.

### **Sin is...**

To do that, please take out that sermon notes page. You'll need to do that for the rest of this message. In the blank space, please write the word SIN using all capital letters...and I suggest you put some space between the three letters. Now that you've written that word, take a look at it. The word "sin" has become almost a caricature of itself. People use it with a sly little wink or even a smirk. But it's actually not funny. And it's not just a religious construct. No "Magisterium" created this word sin as a pretext for establishing its religious control. Of all the things revealed in the Bible the concept of sin is *not* something we needed to have revealed to us. We know about it naturally. We feel it personally. We see it experientially. What is it?

### **Sin is...You, You, You!**

Take a look at that three letter word on our paper. And now let's do something with our pencils. It will not tell us the whole story of sin. But it will tell us its essential plot. Take your pencil and circle the middle letter of the word Sin. What is that letter? ("I") At the center of every one of sin's manifestations is the letter I. "A big 'I,'" *the* "big 'I,'" "You shall be as god's" is the temptation for which *all* we Adams and Eves have fallen. "You shall be your own god," says the serpent. "You will be the center," responds our own heart. "It will be all about you. You will know more than anyone. You will be able to declare that God is dead, and in His place reign yourself." As the Ames Brothers sang in the 1950s, it will be "You, you, you, there's no one like you, you, you!"

### **Sin is serious stuff**

It's made for quite a world hasn't it? All bad? Thoroughly evil? No, of course not. I think of modern medicine, without which Bob Burns and Alecia Larson would not be re-joining us after their recent trips to the hospital. I think of Andrew Carnegie and the hosts of philanthropists like the Rockefellers, Bill and Melinda Gates, Chuck Feeney and so many of you who are giving to this church because you want to make this community and the lives of people better through knowing Christ. But the stubbornness of this middle letter in the word sin doesn't go away that easily, even with what seems to be the most altruistic and sincere gesture. It creeps back into our hearts and shows itself as pride, sometimes very subtle, but pride nonetheless. It shows its gargoyle-like face in gossip, social exclusion, and when our guards are down or we have run out of patience, it shows itself in astonishingly hurtful ways. *Sin is serious stuff!* Realizing that sin is serious stuff shouldn't be and usually isn't that difficult. *Admitting* it is much more difficult. It's relatively easy to sing with Bob Dylan, "When will they ever learn?" It's another thing, and much more difficult to sing, "When will *I* ever learn?"

### **Which is why Jesus came as a baby**

Which is why when Jesus came from heaven on Christmas Eve as the Savior; when the angel said to the shepherds in Luke 2:10 *"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord, the angel also said, 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."* You will find...a baby! As Dave mentioned in his message last Sunday, there were many people claiming to be the messiah during Jesus' time. But a baby? The Messiah, the King, the Savior of the world? A baby? *This* baby in the manger? Who would have thunk it?

### **Christ the Savior foretold**

As the song puts it however, "Isaiah was foretold it..." Thus we can read, and the people could have read 600 years before Jesus was born, these words in Isaiah 7:14: *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.* They would have heard this description in Isaiah 9:6 *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* How the Savior, this child, would actually save was and still is beyond imagination. Isaiah 53 describes it: *"Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

### **Christ the Savior fulfilled**

This foretelling of Isaiah the prophet, was fulfilled in the most literal sense of the word. Each of the four gospel writers describes it. Here's how Matthew describes it in chapter 27:27-31: *27Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. 28They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. 30They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.*

A few years after these things took place John tells us in his gospel. John 3:17, *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world. And in Romans 5:8-9 we read, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! In 2 Timothy 1:8-10 we find these words about Jesus, "So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

### **Jesus the Savior**

Jesus, the Savior. It's tempting to think of Jesus the Savior from 30,000 feet, or even from outer space. As an idea it satisfies the highest aspirations of the mind. As a necessity, it meets the most apparent need of the world. But seeing Jesus as Savior from 30,000 feet is not what God intended. And it won't have much or any affect on you, or through you to this broken world, until you, like the shepherds, come and adore on bended knee.

Because you see, in God's plan, Jesus is saving the world one person at a time. Don't look for mass movements. Don't look for mega trends. The place to look is first at the big I in the center of that word sin. And say, if I'm ever going to be saved from the effects of the stubborn, persistent "I", always tripping me up in the center of my life, I'm going to need a Savior, who will save me from that "I". I need a Savior who will save me from my preoccupation from myself. I need a Savior who won't just issue more orders for me to follow. I need a Savior who by his presence and power within me, can little by little, as I allow Him, overcome that "I" in the middle of that word.

Receiving Jesus as your Savior is essentially taking two steps: Step #1 is admitting the persistent I in the center of my life. Step #2 is inviting Jesus to replace that "I" with the "O"—the SON. You do that by faith in a simple but profound and life-transforming prayer, like the words of the Christmas Carol, "O come to my heart, Lord Jesus. There is room in my heart for You!"

### **Jesus, *my* Savior**

Now if you wrote that three letter word SIN down on your sermon notes page. And if you circled that middle letter I. Please take another look at what you have. What you should have is the word "S O N." The circle you used to surround the middle letter "I" now stands for something. First of all it stands for Zero. Zero is a symbol of my ego moving toward nothing. That circle around the "I" also stands for the letter O. With that letter "O" you now have the word "SON." It is the Son of God that overcomes the "I" in the center of what the Bible calls Sin. That's what it means to know Jesus as my Savior. The "I" is being replaced by the "O."

Now finally, take another look at what you have on the page. You've got the word SIN. You circled the middle letter "I." It now looks like there's both an "I" and an "O" in the middle of this word. Take a look at this. It's looks like a battle between the "I" and the "O." Which one will it be for me? What I want to say about this battle is, "Welcome to the Christian life!" The Christian life is a life-long journey that begins with inviting Jesus into your life as Savior, and then wrestling with the "I" and the "O," until the "O" begins to win!

### **Good News and Bad News**

In light of this, I have some good news and I have some bad news. First the bad news. That "I" is very stubborn. That "I" can be very obnoxious, not only to you, but to others. That "I" is too powerful, too good at being "I." You won't overcome that "I" on your own! That "I" is like a classmate I had in my first year in seminary. We played ping pong almost every evening after dinner. I thought I was pretty good, and I was. But he was better. Much better! Several times I came close to winning, even playing to deuce. But in over 500 games, I never beat him. Not once! That's the way it is with that "I." You may come close, but it's so good, so advanced, so persistent you won't beat it on your own. Which is why that "O" is so necessary. The apostle Paul expresses this relationship in his own life between the "I" and the "O" in Romans 7:21-25, "*So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* 25*Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

Jesus. He's the Messiah. He's the King. Most importantly of all, and most personally of all, He's the Savior this world needs. He's the Savior you need! He's the Savior *my own* "I" needs. And, thank God, *praise* God, He's the Savior we can receive. *For God so loved the world, that He gave is only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life,* (John 3:16).