

December 23, 2007

Awesome!

Well, here we are at the end of our Advent journey; a journey that began with the focus on Christ the King, who reigns on high. From there we focused on His return at Judgment Day. This was followed with the sermon that looked at the message of John the Baptist where John said, "repent the kingdom of heaven is near." Then last week we looked at John's biography, we looked at his disciples and we looked at Christ's words to them to go and tell John what you hear and see. It was a rebuke and a command to stand up and speak their faith. This week is the last Sunday in Advent and as I shared with the children, we know anticipate what is to come within the next 48 hours. I'm excited, I look forward to our candle light service tomorrow night, I can hardly wait to celebrate communion on Christmas morning but the anticipation that I really look forward to has its' roots in a passage that I have been quoting for the last several weeks. A passage you probably weren't even aware of yet, a passage that has had a profound impact on me personally.

It all began at the end of August, I told the youth we would start a new study on the book of Acts and Tommy asked if we could do Daniel instead. Nine weeks later as I prepared our Bible study for Daniel chapter 9, I came upon Daniel's prayer. It is a prayer that is filled with emotion, a prayer I have personally used many times since, a prayer that begins, and this will probably sound familiar, "O Lord the great and awesome God who keeps His covenant of love". Daniel knew that God had promised to deliver the people of Israel out of the hands of the Babylonians. It is a prayer of faith knowing, really knowing, that God would follow through. It is a prayer of brutally honest repentance. He knew that God's people deserved to be under God's judgment for they had sinned and turned from God. When I read that prayer I was struck by the simplicity yet the majesty and the hopeful eloquence of Daniel when he prayed he acknowledged that the Lord is number one, the Great God. Notice that's singular, Daniel doesn't leave any room for any other God and he continues with number two the Awesome God; again singular. Now we have to ask the question, why is God great and awesome and that's the third part. He is the keeper of the covenant of love. God promised, "I will be your God", and when He did this He was promising and saying I will provide you a way of salvation He would

do this out of His love for His creation. Which leads to one of the most simple yet, most difficult doctrines, mysteries to explain. As I embark on this I literally tremble with fear and I pray and I have prayed that God would give me the words to speak because I dare not mess this up. This is it; this is what it is all about this is the fulfillment of the covenant of love.

Almighty, and I ask you to think of what that really means, almighty God, the great god, the awesome God fulfilled His promise. He humbled himself, gave us His son, Jesus, he who has the name above all names, he who was present at creation and as John said, "through Him all things were made". He who will judge the earth left His position of unimaginable splendor and might, he was stripped of all of it and confined to the body of a little baby and placed in a manger, why? So that he could live the perfect life of love and suffer shame, agonizing pain and death on our behalf. When we see pictures of the nativity they usually seem so quiet, so peaceful, so serene, it couldn't be more different, it is unbelievable, ironic, shameful and it is violent. Unbelievable that almighty God would humble himself to the point of being a baby. Ironic he who created the world lowers himself to become a part of it so that he can be killed by it. Shameful it is our sin that has caused this and whenever we choose to sin we are choosing to drive the nails into His hands and feet. Violent? Yes, Jesus literally was born to die and so we hear in our gospel this morning God setting the stage.

The angel of the Lord tells Joseph to call the baby Jesus. Oh how we use that word, how we throw that name around, do we ever really think of what the name means? God tells us what it means right there in Matthew. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua and the name literally means, "He will save his people from their sins". This could only be accomplished if Jesus really is the second name that the angel mentions. The angel continued talking to Joseph and said, "They (that is God's people) will call him Immanuel which means 'God with us'". Daniel was right God literally is the keeper of the covenant of love because he came Immanuel, God with us. He did this because He is God who is for us.

Oh may we be like Daniel, this Christmas and every day thereafter that He blesses us with life and breath. May we use that life and breath to proclaim our God is the great God, the awesome God, and the keeper of the covenant of love, Immanuel. Now that is awesome!

In our Savior's name, Amen.