Series: Do You See What I See?

December 24, 2017

**I See the Difference**

Ephesians 2:14-16

**Intro:** This Christmas Season we’ve been thinking about the line from a Christmas Carol - “Do You See What I See?”

God wants us to see that He came to know us and He wants us to know Him!

God wants us to see that He is offering us Freedom!

God wants us to see that He has a purpose for our lives!

(ILL) - It’s A Wonderful Life -

* George Bailey - always wanted to get out of town …
* Got married and was planning to travel - but the great depression hit -
* He kept his father’s Savings & Loan open to save the town
* He kept staying in town to meet other people’s needs, while his friends lived out his dreams - travelled the world - His brother became a WWII hero - George just stayed in Bedford Falls -
* He thought he was living a mundane life -
* Married had kids - routine - routine - routine -
* One day his uncle lost $5000 of the company’s money -
* This was a huge sum - George thought he had lost it all
* He had a Life Insurance policy that was worth more than he was -
* He thought the best thing to do would be to throw himself off a bridge and die - so his wife could get the money and his family would survive.
* “I’m worth more dead than alive.” - ever felt that way?
* But just at the point he was getting ready to jump - his guardian angel swooped in - changed everything - showed George what things would be like if he had never been born.
* He would have never saved his brother’s life, so his brother would not have saved the lives of many on a war ship.
* He would have never discovered a mistake by the pharmacist which would have cause someone to die and the pharmacist to lose everything.
* He would have never married - never had children - would have never saved the Savings and Loan - many people would have never been able to have a house of their own …

In the story, George Bailey’s life made a huge difference -

***Clip from It’s A Wonderful Life***

There’s another life that made an even greater difference - This life we celebrate at Christmas -

Do You See What I See?

**Big Idea: I see the difference Jesus made and wants to make.**

One Solitary Life - adapted from a sermon by Dr James Allan Francis:

*Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher.*

*He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself...*

*While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth – His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.*

*Twenty long centuries have come and gone, and today He is a centerpiece of the human race and leader of the column of progress.*

*I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.*

**> Jesus coming made a difference.**

Ephesians 2:14-16 - For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

This world has seen hatred, separation and death since the first parents had two boys and one of them killed the other.

God called Abraham - promised to give him many descendants - a great nation would come - and through that nation, through Abraham’s descendants, God would bless the world -

Jewish people thought it was just for them … God wanted to bless the entire world.

This season is founded upon Jesus coming to this world! He has made a difference in the world.

Jews and Gentiles were separate - they hated one another just like any other group hates any other group today.

This was racial division - Jesus came to heal racial division!

Since the earliest of time there has been hatred, separation and slavery. The Jewish people were enslaved by the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians - and when the Jewish people had the opportunity, they enslaved people when they had the chance. This has happened in every culture. Whoever had the upper hand, whoever had more power, they would require protection money to keep from war, if the lesser culture couldn’t pay, it was war and slavery - this is the history of mankind!

The struggle within our own nation is not new. The hatred, division and separation is not new. But Jesus came to end the separation, reconcile people and bring groups together!

In Jesus there are no races! In Jesus, every human being is a valued and valuable creation of God.

Every human being, every person, every race and every culture has sinned. Jesus came to offer forgiveness to every human being by going to the cross on our behalf.

The purpose of Christ’s coming was not in His birth, but in His death.

He came to die that we might live!

Isaiah 53:3-6 - He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.

Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins!

But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.

1st Corinthians 15:3-4 - I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.

Jesus bridged the gap between the Jews and the Gentiles -

Jesus can bridge the gap between anyone that is separated -

* Races
* Spouses
* Parents & children
* Brothers and sisters

We must be a loving and forgiving people -

Jesus has grace on us so we must have grace on others.

2nd Corinthians 5:15 - He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

Christmas is a time to forgive - love - forget - let the past go - receive the reconciliation that He wants to bring -

The greatest reconciliation is that between us and God.

Every human being is separated from God - only He could fix that.

**> Jesus broke the power of death.**

2nd Timothy 1:10 - And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News.

This is how He broke the power of sin! This is how we can have real life - the life He intended for us to have! In order for Christmas to be real - in order for Christmas to be powerful - it has to go far beyond the baby in the cradle -

He lived - He grew - He died - and He rose again!

Luke 2:19 - but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.

Simeon -

Luke 2:25-35 - At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, “Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby’s mother, “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”

He was pointing to the cross… Mary pondered -

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

One of America’s most famous poets, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow - lost his wife, whom he loved dearly, in a tragic fire accident at their home. She died of her burns. The holidays were almost too difficult to bear without her.

His oldest son enlisted in the Civil War and suffered a debilitating gunshot wound.

Christmas got harder. Life is hard. Our world is a mess - we see hatred - people are hurting - homes and relationships are broken - but on Christmas Day 1864, Longfellow began to hear the church bells ring - something happened to him, and he wrote these words -

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day*

*Their old familiar carols play*

*And wild and sweet the words repeat*

*Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*I thought how, as the day had come,*

*The belfries of all Christendom*

*Had rolled along the unbroken song*

*Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*And in despair I bowed my head:*

*“There is no peace on earth,” I said,*

*“For hate is strong and mocks the song*

*Of peace on earth, good will to men.”*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:*

*“God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;*

*The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,*

*With peace on earth, good will to men.”*

*Till ringing, singing on its way*

*The world revolved from night to day*

*A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,*

*Of peace on earth, good will to men!*

Come back to (ILL) - It’s A Wonderful Life - Watching the movie, we see the difference George Bailey’s life made.

I See the Difference Jesus’ life has made.

I See the Difference you can make as you follow Him.

***Read Luke 2 at some point at the end of the message - preparing for communion?***