

EVANGEL

The Good News of Jesus Christ



The Command

Well here we are in the season of Advent. The focus of the Christian Church is on remembering the coming of the Son of God in the flesh. What are your thoughts focused on? Are you thinking about the coming of Jesus in the flesh, he who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary? Are you thinking about Christmas gifts? I want in this Advent message to tie into your giving. I have titled the message “The command to give.”

Will a man rob God?

One of the books of the Bible long associated with Advent is the book of Malachi. In this book, chapter 3:8 the LORD asks, “*Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.*” It might seem odd that on the eve of Christmas I want to address the sin of robbery, the sin of robbing God. But, dear readers, let us never forget that for the Christian there is no such thing as only a day of giving or even a season of giving, there is a life of giving. Now I am not suggesting that it is wrong to have a season of giving, but it is necessary to keep our perspective. A season of giving between family and friends must never replace a life of giving to the one and only God who in his love for this world gave his one and only Son. Indeed, there must be in your lives proof of that text so often quoted at this time of year. 2 Corinthians 9:15, “*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*”

What is one way to express thanks to God for his indescribable gift? By obeying his command to give as it comes in Malachi 3. The

passage in focus actually begins in verse 6, “*I the LORD do not change.*” In that living relationship of love God establishes with his people, He promises to his people, yes also to you today, that He does not change. He is in his very person incapable of change, that is, breaking his promise. He has confirmed that promise to you in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ who himself is the same yesterday, today and forever. Of course, the Lord stands in great contrast to his people in this regard. The people of God in the days of Malachi were faithless. They were changing all the time. They were not abiding by the demands of their relationship with the Lord. The Lord recognizes this and so sends out a general call of repentance. Verse seven “*Return to me, and I will return to you,*” says the LORD Almighty.” However, God’s people don’t get it and so they ask, *how are we to return?* This is what brings about the particular call to obey the Lord’s command of giving.

Yes, by failing to give.

Verse eight, “*Will a man rob God? Yet, you rob me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ In tithes and offerings.*” The word *man* and the word *God* bring to mind Genesis 1:26 where it says, *Then God said, “Let us make man in our image.”* The point then is this: *man* and note this is not even restricted to Israel but is more inclusive than that, *man* as created last by God cannot lay claim to anything God has made. Everything was created before *man* was even on the scene. There is a very telling order to the creation work of God.

Man by definition is the steward or caretaker of all that is God’s and therefore he cannot ever be the owner. It is this knowledge of man in relation to God as found already in Genesis 1 that lies behind the

question *will a man rob God?* The idea, dear readers, is absolutely and utterly preposterous. Of course you cannot rob God, God owns everything and you are only the caretaker. It is a rhetorical question. It needs no answer since the answer is abundantly obvious.

It is somewhat surprising then to read the Lord’s charge, “*yet you rob me.*” Israel is engaged in the unthinkable. As a people, they are robbing God. The pride of Israel surfaces and they arrogantly ask, “*How do we rob you?*” Israel is rather astonished at the Lord’s charge.

God’s answer is clear and to the point: *In your tithes and offerings.* Israel was failing in bringing her tithes before the Lord. In Israel there were various tithes required of the Israelites. The most prominent and the most costly was the giving of a tenth of the land as commanded in Leviticus 27:30-32. Now why a tenth? The purpose of this general tithe was to support the Levites who did not have an inheritance in the land. The LORD gave to the Levites every tithe in Israel in return for their service. (Numbers 18:21).

This tithe Israel was failing to bring in the days of Malachi. You can read more about this in Nehemiah 13 where things are so bad that the Levites have to leave their priestly work to go and support themselves. Some people did not bother with the tithe, while others brought only a partial tithe. Israel was robbing God by not bringing Him the tenth of their land. The excuses were probably plentiful. The crop was bad and so there was nothing to give to the Lord. The taxes to Persia were high and so there was not much to give to the Lord. Lord, I don’t have time in my busy schedule to make the trip to Jerusalem to bring my tithe.

What is the Lord’s response? Verse nine “*You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because*

to Give



you are robbing me.” The way for Israel to move out from under curse to the place of blessing is outlined by the Lord. “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. . . and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”

Are you robbing God?

The LORD shows his people that they can return to Him by righting the wrong of robbing Him. But where does this leave you? The LORD does not change. The same God requires of you a financial offering in support of the ministry of the gospel. The question often asked is, ‘What amount does He require of me today?’ Is it still a tenth? The question is misleading. It is misleading for this passage makes very clear that everything you have

belongs to the LORD. See also Psalm 24:1. God has called each Christian via the apostle Paul in Romans 12 to give his or her whole life to Him in sacrificial service. With that in mind I will answer the question of “how much?” by saying with the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:7 *“Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver”* At the very same time keep in mind what Paul says one verse earlier: *“The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”*

Dear readers, do not come up with excuses to relieve yourself of bringing your financial sacrifice to the Lord. “I cannot afford to give because I have a young family and kids are expensive.” Or, “I cannot afford to give because I am in debt.”

And further, “I cannot afford to give because I have to save for a down payment or my retirement.” All of these kinds of excuses are statements that fail to understand that everything is the Lord’s. They ring so hollow when credit card debt is rung up so that you can participate in this season of giving.

Giving is just the beginning.

However, do not get the impression that having given your financial gift to the Lord you have done all that He requires of you. Just as in the days of Malachi, so also today your financial sacrifice is not the climax or the sum total of stewardship. It is only the beginning of stewardship. It is, however, an accurate indicator of the degree of the rest of our commitment as Christian stewards. The Lord begins with an obvious point of failure. Yet, where does He begin with you if not here? Also ask yourself, are there other areas of my life in which I am robbing God?

The Lord’s blessing will continue to overflow to his people today. This is not the health and wealth gospel, but the gospel of Jesus Christ who though He was rich, He became poor for your sake, so that you through his poverty might become rich. Rich in spiritual blessings, but also rich in material blessings. But remember, all that you have is yours by the grace of God yet it remains his. Consequently, there remains for you that command to give to Him in order that the gospel might progress and the needs of all the saints might continue to be met. This month you will celebrate Christmas. You will give thanks to God for his indescribable gift. Do not stop at one day but let each day of your life be a life of generous thanksgiving for what you have received in Jesus Christ.

Doug Vandeburgt

Jesus Christ

Jesus once asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” After nearly two thousand years there is still continued uncertainty on this point. Many consider Jesus a great moral teacher, while others regard Him as a political activist who became the symbol of martyrdom and the aspirations of man. Most likely you, too, have an opinion about Him.

Jesus claimed to be God

Jesus Himself believed He was God. The Bible is very clear on this point. Someone once said, “For anyone to read the New Testament and not conclude that Jesus claimed to be divine, he would have to be as blind as a man standing outdoors on a clear day and saying he can’t see the sun.”

What then, does the Bible tell us about Jesus claiming to be God? Let me give you three examples.

First of all, Jesus once healed a man on the Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest. The Jewish leaders regarded this as a violation of that day and were greatly upset about it. Jesus, however, said to them, “My Father is working still, and I am working” (John 5:17). This upset them so much that they even wanted to kill Him.

Why such a drastic reaction? The reason is that Jesus had made a claim which the leaders could not misinterpret. He had made himself *equal* with God! He had put God the Father and himself on the same level and hence they said, “. . . He not only broke the sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:18).

In the second place, Jesus not only claimed equality with God, but

He also asserted that He was *one* with the Father. One day Jesus was approached by some Jewish leaders who asked Him if He was the Christ. Jesus ended his conversation with them by saying, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

Again the Jewish leaders were greatly upset. Again they wanted to kill Him. Again it had to do with Jesus claiming to be God. Just listen to the explanation of the Jewish leaders themselves, “It is not for a good work that we stone you, but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God” (John 10:33).

Finally, at Jesus’ trial the chief justice asked whether He was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus answered, “*I am*; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power; and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62).

Again, there was no misunderstanding of Jesus’ claim to be God. The chief justice tore his clothes – something he was required to do to express his horror of any blasphemy uttered in his presence – and the court condemned Jesus to death.

Three alternatives

These distinct claims of Jesus to be God eliminate the possibility of regarding Jesus as just a good moral man or a prophet who said a lot of profound things.

C.S. Lewis, who was a professor at Cambridge University, understood this issue clearly. He wrote, “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him (=Jesus): ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would



not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.”

What Lewis means is that ultimately the choice is not between Jesus the wise man or God, but between Jesus the lunatic or God!

Actually, the choice is slightly wider – it is really between *liar*, *lunatic* or *Lord*. For if Jesus’ claim to be God was false, then He either knew it was false and was a liar, or He did not know it was false and was a lunatic. On the other hand, if Jesus’ claims were true, then He is Lord, and we must either accept or reject His lordship.

Let’s examine these three alternatives.

- Who is He?



Was Jesus a liar?

If, when Jesus made His claims, He knew that He was not God, then He was lying and deliberately deceiving His followers.

But this raises quite a few questions. For instance, did Jesus not insist on honesty during his ministry? If He did not practice this in His own life, would He then not be a hypocrite?

Moreover, did Jesus not claim to save people from their sins? If He could not back up his claims and He knew it, would He then not be unspeakably evil? Finally, was it not Jesus' claim to be God that led to his crucifixion? Wouldn't that make Jesus a fool? What normal person would be willing to die for a lie? On this very point a well-known historian was led to remark,

The hypothesis of imposture is

so revolting to moral as well as common sense, that its mere statement is its condemnation. It was invented by the Jews, who crucified the Lord to cover their crime, but has never been seriously carried out, and no scholar of any decency and self-respect would now dare profess it openly.

And he adds,

How, in the name of logic, common sense, and experience, could an imposter – that is a deceitful, selfish, depraved man – have invented, and consistently maintained from the beginning to end, the purest and noblest character known in history with the most perfect air of truth and reality? How could he have conceived and successfully carried out a plan of unparalleled beneficence, moral magnitude, and sublimity, and sacrificed his own life for it, in the face of the strongest prejudices of his people and age?

Our conclusion must be that it is illogical and ridiculous to label Jesus a liar!

What Jesus a lunatic?

If it is inconceivable for Jesus to be a liar, could He not mistakenly have thought himself to be God? Could not Jesus have been deluded and self-deceived? In short, was Jesus a lunatic? One look in the Bible will soon convince you that it is absurd to imagine that Jesus was mentally disturbed. For here you find a man who spoke some of the most profound sayings ever recorded. Think, for example, of the well-known Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt 5:3-7). Notice how the people reacted to Jesus: they were

"astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes (Matt 7:28-29).

Nowhere in the Bible do we find any indication that Jesus was a lunatic.

Someone summed this up quite well when he wrote, "Was He deluded about His greatness, a paranoid, an unintentional deceiver, a schizophrenic? Again, the skill and depth of His teachings support the case only for his total mental soundness. If only we were as sane as He!"

Our conclusion must be that it is preposterous to consider Jesus a lunatic!

Is Jesus Lord?

If it is illogical and ridiculous to label Jesus a liar and preposterous to consider Him a lunatic, then the only other alternative is that He is the Christ, the Son of God, as He claimed. For all the evidence is clearly in favour of Jesus as *Lord* and *God*! If you consider Jesus only a good moral teacher or a prophet, you are in fact calling Him a liar. If you think He lived in a world of fantasy and illusions, you are in fact calling Him a lunatic. Therefore, you do not have a choice between, liar, lunatic and Lord. For only "Lord" fits all the facts and answers all the questions.

And now you have a choice. You can rebel against this Lord, but the consequence of that is *death*, or you can bow before His lordship and receive *life*. For the apostle John wrote, "But these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31). Do you want this life, this eternal life? Then go down on your knees, confess your sins, and acknowledge Jesus Christ as your *Saviour* and *Lord*!"

Dick Moes

Jesus came to give us real rest

Bible Story Based on Matthew 12: 9 - 14; Mark 3: 1 - 6; Luke 6: 6 - 11

It seemed like a regular Sabbath day. On Sabbath days the whole land rested. All the people took a break. They did not have to work. They had the whole day off, so they had time to worship their Lord in heaven. The Sabbath day was meant to give people joy in worshiping God.

“You must rest on the Sabbath day”, God had said. It was a simple rule. But over the years the leaders of the Jews had made this simple rule into an unpleasant chore. The leaders gave the people many extra rules. The Sabbath day became a day of burden instead of a day of rest. The people were not even allowed to have a leisure walk through the fields.

Still, the Sabbath was a good day for the Jews who trusted the Lord. With God's people they went to the synagogue. In the synagogue they listened to the teacher who read God's Word. It was good to have a day for worship.

This Sabbath day seemed like such a day of rest and rules. But it was not. As the people entered the synagogue, they immediately noticed the special guest: Jesus! There He was, the man from Nazareth, who went around from town to town, preaching and healing. He told the people to feel sorry for their sins and to lead a God-fearing life. He also showed them God's mercy by making sick people better. This Jesus was now in their synagogue!

The people were not the only ones who were curious about what Jesus would do and say. The leaders were very curious as well, be it for a different reason. The leaders did not like Jesus, because Jesus had told them what they did wrong. Jesus had said that they were bad leaders, because they looked more after themselves than after the people. The leaders hated Jesus for that, because in their hearts they knew He was right. They plotted together to find a way to get rid of Jesus. That is why the leaders had come to the synagogue



where Jesus was. They wanted to see if they could find something wrong with what Jesus did or said.

Jesus, the Son of God, knew all this. He knew that the leaders were there to set up a trap for Him. It made him both angry and sad. But Jesus was not afraid of them.

Among those who entered the synagogue was also a man with a paralyzed hand. His hand had no strength. It was limp. His fingers were not able to tie his belt. He could not use a hammer or a shovel. He was dependent on others.

All eyes were on Jesus as He started to teach. Everyone listened attentively. Some loved Jesus for how He spoke. Others hated Him the more for what He said. But no-one was untouched by the Word.

Suddenly Jesus stopped teaching. He looked directly at the man with the weak hand. Everyone in the building followed Jesus' look. There was the man with the sick hand. Would Jesus heal the man? On a Sabbath day even? Would that be allowed?

“Come to the front,” Jesus called out. The man was startled. Did Jesus want him to come to the front? Had Jesus seen his paralyzed hand? Would Jesus have in mind to make him better? But before the man was

finished asking himself all these questions, he had already obeyed the Word of Jesus. He went to the front to stand beside Jesus.

Jesus knew that the leaders were watching Him with hawk's eyes. They wanted to catch Him at a mistake. If He would heal on the Sabbath, they would immediately come forward to say that He had disobeyed the Sabbath commandment. They would point out that healing was work, which was forbidden on the Sabbath day.

Knowing these evil thoughts in their hearts, Jesus turned toward the leaders. “I ask you, is it allowed to do good on the Sabbath, or is the Sabbath kept by doing bad?” The leaders were silent. What could they say? They had no answer. They could not blame Jesus for doing good on the Sabbath. They could not accuse Him of sinning against their Sabbath laws.

Then Jesus turned to the man again. “Stretch out your hand!” he spoke authoritatively. Again the man obeyed. He stretched out his hand. And it was strong! It was healed! How wonderful! He did not depend on others anymore to live and to make a living. But with joy in his heart he realized that he depended on Jesus, not to make a living, but to receive everlasting life.

The leaders were becoming very angry. Away with this Jesus! He did not keep their Sabbath rules. He made it even sound like He was right and they were wrong. In their anger they left the synagogue. Of one thing they were sure: Jesus must be stopped.

They did not understand that Jesus cannot be stopped. Jesus came into this world to save his people. It is through Jesus that God's people can enter the eternal rest, where evil will have no power and goodness will prevail.

This eternal rest is ready for those who worship Jesus, the Son of God.

By Jane

Activity Page

Our Day of Rest

Every week has one day of rest. This is a rule which God has made from the beginning. When the Lord had created the world in six days, He rested on the seventh day.

We celebrate this rest on the Sunday. It is very important to keep this day of rest. It gives the people a break from their work. But that is not all. This day of rest is given to people for worshiping God and for experiencing his goodness. That way it is a foretaste of things to come. On the new earth the believers will have eternal rest. That does not mean that there will be nothing to do, but that the believers will serve and worship God without interruptions.

On the back of this magazine is an address of a Church. On Sundays this Church will have worship services. Maybe there is a phone number of this Church as well. Make an effort to contact this Church and worship the Lord with his people on the Days of Rest.

Which prophet said that Jesus would be God?

Which prophet announced that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem?

Which prophet foretold that Jesus would be a ruler?

Which prophet reassured us that nothing is impossible with God?

Which prophet knew already that Jesus' mother would be a virgin?

What does Immanuel mean?

Jesus is born in Bethlehem

At Christmas time we remember that the Lord Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem. In the birth of Jesus God showed that He loved his people. Jesus is the Saviour of the world. The people who believe that Jesus is the Son of God will be saved from sin. For those people, the Lord has prepared the eternal rest.

Before Jesus was born, God's people knew that He was coming. The prophets had announced his birth.

The prophet Micah foretold that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are only a small village in Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past." (Micah 5.2)

The prophet Isaiah had announced that Jesus would be born from a virgin, and that He would be the Son of God: God with us.

"The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel, which means 'God with us' " (Isaiah 7.14)

From the prophet Jeremiah we know that nothing is too difficult for the Lord. God can make people who are polluted with sin clean again through Jesus the Saviour.

"O sovereign LORD! You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power. Nothing is too difficult for you!" (Jeremiah 32.17)

A Song for Jesus, the King

The church has voiced its gladness about the birth of Jesus in many songs. If you sing these songs, you sing in tune with the multitude of all believers through the ages.

A Great and Mighty Wonder

*A great and mighty wonder
Upon the earth was done
When Mary, virgin mother
Gave birth to God's own Son.
Repeat the song again:
"To God on high the glory,
And peace on earth to men!"*

*Since he came us to ransom,
Let Him now be adored,
The King, once born in Bethlehem,
Our Saviour and our Lord.
Repeat the song again:
"To God on high the glory,
And peace on earth to men!"*

Dawn

Not Home for Christmas

1 Samuel 26:20, "do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of Yahweh."

For David, home was Israel. Few were as zealous about this as him. He needed to live here though 'home' was less than perfect. He was still a fugitive in the land with a price on his head. Anyone who would bring David in, dead or alive, would receive great rewards from King Saul. Yet, this was home. David needed to live here. Here the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was worshiped, and here the tabernacle was found. David writes in a Psalm,

Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in
the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

The thought of living away from God and his dwelling place, was intolerable to David.

And yet, he was being forced to this very thing. Saul's army was pinning David down, and once again, David was very close to being captured. But in a daring nighttime raid on Saul's camp, David found himself standing over Saul's sleeping form, and for the second time in his life, his soldiers were urging him to kill Saul. Instead, he took Saul's weapon and water jug, and escaped. He would not harm the king.

As the sun rose on the horizon, David called out to Abner, Saul's captain, from a hill opposite the camp, "Aren't you going to answer me, Abner?" When Abner awoke and answered, David continued, "Why didn't you guard your lord the king? As surely as Yahweh lives, you and your men deserve to die, because you did not guard your master, Yahweh's anointed. Look around you. Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head?"

David held up the spear and water jug, and then spoke to the King. He begged Saul to stop pursuing him, as though to say, Please, *O King, do not push me away from the land! Don't make me throw my lot in with the pagan*

nations, lest I should die there far from the presence of Yahweh.

But David realized soon afterward, that despite Saul's assurance that he would never chase David again, he could not stay. Saul would forget his promise and chase David again. Perhaps the next time, David would not be able to resist the urge to kill the King. Or perhaps next time Saul would kill him. The horrible conclusion is being forced on David: He must leave the land God had given to his people, and become an exile far from the presence of Yahweh. Perhaps he would never return.

What a bitter moment for David!

But the story of Christmas tells this very thing about God's Son. The warm and happy feelings that we associate with the Christmas event, are more the product of human tradition than of the Bible. There is joy at Christmas, but there is much sadness too. Matthew tells of the spiritual bankruptcy of the religious leaders in Jerusalem because they sent the Magi off to Bethlehem without giving the news they brought, a second thought. The only one interested was King Herod. He wanted to kill the newborn king, and not knowing which boy in Bethlehem was the royal child, he ordered the massacre of all the infant boys of the village. The only way Jesus could escape, was to, like David,

flee the land, far from the dwelling of his heavenly Father.

But the central event of Christmas, the sending of the eternal Son to the earth by the Father, the taking up of human flesh by the Son and the laying aside his divine glory, is worse. He left the Father's side, and the intimate fellowship with the Holy Spirit. He had to leave his eternal home. He never stopped grieving this all his life long. Later on in his life, in a prayer He showed how much He longed to return home: "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

Christmas celebrates the beginning of salvation, a great leap ahead for our salvation, but it begins with the Son far, far away from his eternal home. What David feared did happen to Jesus: While away from his Father, he was killed. The worst fears that we might conceive of, happened to Jesus Christ, in order that He might become our Saviour.

But after saving us, he ascended back home to his Father and He reigns there still. His desire is to come back to bring us with Him to our eternal home. Perhaps you won't make it home for Christmas, but one thing is sure: because of Christmas, those who put their faith in Jesus Christ will make it home and find a warmth and happiness that are beyond comprehension.

Paul Aasman

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