

“A Christmas Eve Meditation”

This morning the United States Senate passed President Obama’s health care legislation 60-39.

To those senators who desired to see this bill pass it was not accidental that they took their vote today on Christmas Eve. From their perspective it was a Christmas present for the American people, so-called affordable health insurance for everyone.

For those who were opposed to universal healthcare bill it was not a Christmas present, but rather a cruel hoax played by the Grinch himself.

One side will claim that what happened today is the greatest thing since sliced bread.

The other will say that the world is coming to an end.

One of the most powerful things that Luke does in his telling of the Christmas story is he sets up the struggle between the two main competing powers in the lives of people. The Kingdom of God- represented by the coming God’s Son, Jesus, into the world, and the Kingdom of the World- which is represented by Caesar Augustus and the Roman Empire.

These two kingdoms constantly wage war against one another for Lordship in our lives.

One (Jesus) comes to us in all the fragility of a helpless little baby who was born to two young teenage parents under conspicuous circumstances (human speaking). This child’s mission in life was to die on a cross for sinners.

The other comes to us as a mighty political empire whose main goal is to establish *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace) throughout the world by the use of brute force and taxation of its people.

One will **win** by losing- Jesus.

The other will **lose** by winning-Rome.

This is the story Luke unfolds for us by the time he gets to Calvary at the end of the gospel.

Rome (the world) loses by winning. They snuff out Jesus. He is crucified. But Jesus wins by losing. Without a fight he takes the fall. Jesus willingly lays down his life for the world (sinners, all of us) through his death on the cross.

So here in the birth story Luke sets up these two main competing loyalties in our lives in order to remind us of what we are up against and to call us to put our trust in **one** and not the other.

This is a good message for us to hear tonight, regardless of whether or not we know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

To the Christian and non-Christian tonight: Rome will not save you. The new health insurance plan will not save you and if the bill had been defeated that would not save you either.

That is not to say that the issue is not important or that people's health does not matter, or that the bill did not put before us pressing moral questions. It is important. People's health does matter. And the bill did pose serious moral dilemmas. But still our salvation is not found in Rome. Caesar can not save. Nor can his agenda, pass or fail.

Rome has no answer for our greatest problem-death, both physical and spiritual.

The best that good health care can do is extend and improve the quality of one's life, but it can not prevent the inevitable-death. Nor can it make a man right with God.

Only Jesus can do this.

In the Apostles Creed Christians confess their belief in "the forgiveness of sins" and "the resurrection of the body."

These two core non-negotiable doctrines are rooted in the Bible and they take us to the very heart of the gospel, Christmas, and the cross- before, during, and after the cross.

Jesus came into this world for the purpose of the cross even **before** he died on the cross.

This is what Peter preached in his first sermon after Pentecost:

- Men of Israel listen to this: This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. (Acts 2:23)

Now once Jesus was up on that cross he accomplished God's work of redemption and salvation for sinners. This would be the **during** event- which is what actually took place when he died.

That was no criminal hanging on the cross like the thousands of others who had been executed by Rome. Nor was it just some ordinary man, though Jesus was fully human.

No, this man was **innocent** and he was fully **God in the flesh**, and through his death on the cross the curtain of the temple that separated God from man was torn in two and man now had reconciliation and direct access to God through the shed blood of Christ. In that "during event" Jesus stepped in for us and paid the price that we sinners owed for our sin and he accomplished our salvation!

After Jesus' death on the cross his work of salvation that was accomplished on that cross was vindicated (proven to be right and true) by his resurrection from the grave. Death's sting was forever crushed and its curse was forever reversed by God through Christ's bodily resurrection from the grave. Because Jesus lives-body and soul- we too will live if we will but give our lives to him.

The scriptures teach these wonderful doctrines because God loves us the sinner and the Father desires to redeem us, body and soul.

The world can not give you this solution, only Jesus can.

You and I will die one day. It is the consequence of Adam's sin and no man escapes its sting.

- Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all have sinned. (Rom. 5:12)

What have you chosen as your solution to this great dilemma? Have you given it much thought?

The solution, which is Jesus, is easy for us to miss. We learn this from the text.

We think that politics will save us, so we put our trust in Caesar Augustus.

People have always thought that. Israel thought it when she first demanded a King back in OT times. She thought it later when her nation fell apart and she was overrun by a succession of foreign powers- Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

In fact, when Jesus was born the Jews were awaiting a Messiah who would come and crush the Roman Empire. That is why Jesus disappointed them so much. He came to solve man's greatest dilemma- his spiritual deadness, not the temporal problems of politics.

We think that economics will save us. If we have enough money, if we can just get the economy rolling again then we will be ok, we will be happy.

Perhaps this was the problem that the innkeeper had. Maybe he was so busy making a buck and seeing to it that his current guests were satisfied that he did not have time to attend to the Savior.

In the midst of all the hustle and bustle the innkeeper failed to make room for God in the inn.

Jesus said "no one can serve two masters. You can not love both God and money." (Matt. 6:24)

Or maybe it's our status. That will save us. If we look good, smell good, do good, and say all the right things then we will be ok. But the text tells us that the shepherds were the only ones who got it when the Savior was born.

- Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. (v.15)

Shepherds did not look good. They were dirty and mangy from working with sheep. They did not smell good. Their job was lowly, not esteemed.

Perhaps God is telling us through the shepherd's acceptance of Jesus that it takes humility on our part in order to be made right with God. We have to be humble enough to admit to God that our

status and good deeds will not save us, and that we are also sinners who have broken fellowship with God and who need the redemption that is offered to us through the shed blood of the lamb.

Friends, life is in the blood and there can be no forgiveness of sins or life with God apart from the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross. (Heb. 9:22)

- Tonight I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Tonight in the town of David a Savior has been born to you: He is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11)

The best thing that could happen to you tonight is to ponder these things that God has said to you from His Holy Word, just as Mary did.

Christmas will mean nothing if you do not answer the call of the Savior.

Tonight I invite you to believe on Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and life with God.

Tonight I invite to recommit yourselves anew to Jesus if you already know him as Lord and Savior.

And tonight I invite you to partake in the Christian life- to a life of devotion, study, prayer and service to the Lord Jesus Christ in the church, and in the life of this church if you do not have a church home.

May God's blessings be upon you and Merry Christmas to all.

Amen.