The Gift of Transformation

Last in the series: Gifts of Grace

# Scriptures: Luke 5:32; Matt. 23:23; John 10:10

# Key thought: Jesus came to earth to transform our lives.

# Intro:

James W. Moore in the book All I Want for Christmas relays a true story.

A tutor was assigned to help a boy in a large city hospital who had been seriously burned in an accident and his condition was quite serious. The boy needed to remain in the hospital for some time, so a tutor was assigned. His regular teacher told the tutor that his class was studying irregular verbs and dangling participles, and she was very concerned that without help during his extended hospital stay, he would fall too far behind his class. So, the visiting tutor went to the hospital to work with the child. When she got there, she was horrified to discover that the boy was in the critical care unit. He had been burned so badly all over his body that he could hardly talk. Nevertheless, dedicated teacher that she was, she tried her best to work with him on this week’s lesson-- irregular verbs and dangling participles. When the teacher left, she felt a bit distraught and honestly didn't know whether she had helped him or not. But the next morning, when the tutor came back, the head nurse was all smiles. She said, "You worked a miracle yesterday! We have been so worried about him. He had been depressed and so unresponsive. He had given up. He wasn't trying to get well. He was just lying there waiting to die. But ever since you came, his attitude has changed. He is talking; he is working with us. He is fighting back, and he's beginning to respond to treatment. We believe he is going to make it. He is going to live after all!"

The teacher was pleased, but dumbfounded. She had no idea what she had done at all. Some weeks later, after the boy had been released from the hospital, he explained why the teacher’s visit had made such a difference. It was the simple realization that had come to him that night after the teacher had left. He said, "They told me I would live, but I didn't believe them. I thought they were just humoring me. I thought they were just saying that I would live. But then when you came, it made all the difference. I realized that they wouldn't send a teacher to work with the dying boy on irregular verbs and dangling participles!"

**There are many people in our world today whose lives are in a critical state. Many of them have been told that they can have a changed life, but they don’t believe it. If only there was a way that they could know that it was true. But there is! It is part of the message of Christmas. The coming of Jesus tells us how much God cares and how much he wants to help us. Jesus is the messenger who came to help us understand that our lives can be transformed by his powerful presence.**

Former, President George H. W. Bush (41) who recently passed away was a sincere Christian.

When he was in the White House, President Bush (41), a devout Episcopalian, prepared a beautiful reflection on the hope of Advent.

"At Christmas, we celebrate the promise of salvation that God gave to mankind almost 2,000 years ago. The birth of Christ changed the course of history, and His life changed the soul of man," he wrote. (from article in Good News by Steve Beard)

We are continuing explore the question, “Why did Jesus come?” One good short answer to that question is this: “He came to change us!” As we worship Him and follow him we become better men and women. Let’s explore that idea together.

# Jesus calls us to a changed life.

The most obvious area that comes to mind where Jesus came to change us is in our behavior. I often relate the meaning of the OT Biblical word “transgression.” Think about when a parent says, “Don’t do that!” but the child intentionally does it and looks up to see what the parent is going to do about the transgression. That’s the meaning of the word transgression. All morally healthy people are conscious of their own transgressions, the times when they have known something was not right, but they have done it anyway. If we repeatedly ignore that little voice of conscience, we become hardened and able to live without twinges of conscience, which is not a good thing. And none of us wants to deal with or live near people who no longer have a conscience about something.

Then there is the weight of guilt that we carry when we transgress, and we can’t ignore it. How do we get rid of that inner load and begin again? Jesus brought the answer to those dilemmas if we will hear him. In describing the reason that he came to earth, he said;

“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”
Luke 5:32

Repentance means to have a change of heart, a change of mind, a change of action. To repent is to turn around, to go in the other direction. To repent is to stop doing what we know is not right and to start doing the right thing. It is the Holy Spirit that enables us to do that. It is the forgiveness that Jesus offers to us that helps us to begin again without our guilt burden.

Jesus came to make possible a moral revolution at the center of our being. How does this work? It works first because the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins and prompts us to change. It works because we decide to walk in the new way, as Paul put it,

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. Rom 6:11-14

In this way, people are released from evil habits and thought patterns; from subtle sins like swearing or white lies or gossip or hidden prejudice and from destructive traps like pornography or gambling, or drugs, or abuse of alcohol; from using words that hurt and from fits of rage and a million other human short-comings. Because of the Christ of Christmas, we can be released to begin again. As Paul put it,

“The old has gone, the new has come!

# Jesus calls us to a faith that has integrity.

Another of the not-so-stellar talents of human beings is that of acting hypocritically. Of course, we don’t call it that. We always have a rationalization for saying we believe one thing and then doing something else. But people looking at us can clearly see the inconsistency, the lack of integrity. This was something that truly bothered Jesus concerning the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders. And it bothers him when that trait shows up in us too. They claimed to be teachers of the Jewish faith and in some ways, they exemplified it. But in matters of the heart, Jesus pointedly out repeatedly that they were hypocrites. One passage in the Gospel of Matthew comes to mind in which Jesus rebukes them for a lack of integrity.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.” Matt. 23:23

Jesus had much higher expectations of his own followers. He spoke to his disciples about having their teaching and their practice of faith agree and he used the Pharisees as a counterpoint.

I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. Matt 5:20

Jesus did not want us to be legalistic like the Pharisees, but he wanted our profession of faith and our behaviors to match. So, Jesus came in order that our practice of faith might have integrity, that there might be a consistency about us. He wants our words and our actions to agree. We honor the Christ of Christmas, when our lives have integrity. Our standards for integrity need to be way higher than the world around us.

Jesus wanted us to know as James Moore put it that “Christianity is not just a way of believing; it is also a way of behaving.” (p 101)

This is another way that Jesus came to transform us.

# Jesus offers to transform our everyday existence into abundant life.

But Jesus did not come just to fix the negatives about us. He came to add so much that is positive and amazing. Many people today are living without hope and meaning. Week after week one can see obituaries in the paper of young people barely in midlife whose time has been tragically cut short by drug abuse or suicide. Many others struggle with lack of purpose or depression.

But Jesus came to bring good news!—VERY GOOD NEWS!

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. John 10:10

Jesus wants us to live our lives with happiness and blessing. He came to bring hope and healing amid the brokenness that fills our world. He came to be the source of joy and peace and kindness in a world that reaches for those pristine virtues but seems to always fall short of them on its own. Jesus came to give us life abundantly.

All of us are touched when we see a story of a rescued pet – found on the streets, neglected and in sore need of veterinary attention. We rejoice together to learn that the animal has received a new home. The contrast between the scraggly pet on the street and the happy, well-fed and loved pet after adoption into a good home is a parable for us of our lives before and after we come under the care of good Shepherd of our souls. We may or may not look scraggly on the outside, but there is not doubt that after we come to Jesus, there is a wholesomeness in our souls, an abundance to our spiritual lives that we knew nothing about before. As the Bible says,

Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord. Ps 40:4