

LOVE CAME DOWN

December 4, 2011

Next Steps

Grace Came Down

[Titus 2.11-14](#) :: [Listen to Sermon](#)

“The gospel is bigger than the cross.” I know that’s a provocative statement. In the religious tradition I grew up in, that statement would result in a cry to arms. No pastor would ever say such a thing for everything was about the cross. I can almost hear the rustling up of theological arms now and it might just be possible that one of my old Sunday School teachers just fainted from the shocking nature of the statement. Not only is the statement provocative, but it is one that seems a bit misplaced this time of year. We are entering the Christmas season. Shouldn’t we be talking about things like angels and shepherds, a virgin and a baby placed in a manger? Why are we talking about the gospel? Isn’t that something we talk about on Easter? I suppose in many of our minds this makes sense. Christmas is about a birth but Easter is about a sacrifice, a sacrifice that makes way for new life. But are the two really that different? Is the gospel only found in the cross or can the gospel also be found in the manger?

What if the gospel wasn’t about a single event but a movement, a series of events meant to move people to an intended end? That seems to be Paul’s point in his letter to Titus. For Paul, the gospel wasn’t wrapped up in a single event like the cross. For him, the gospel was found in the entire movement of God to bring redemption to people. That means there is just as much gospel in the manger as there is in the cross. When we view the gospel in this way we discover that the gospel is much richer and more full of hope than we could ever imagine. When we reduce the gospel to the cross, the gospel becomes a message about how to go to Heaven when we die. It becomes a message about how to be right with God so that He lets us through the Pearly Gates. I am all for going to Heaven when I die, but what about now? Is there any hope for right now? Does the gospel offer hope for my neighbor who has cancer or do I just have to tell her that she has to wait to die? Does the gospel offer any hope for my friends that are unemployed or do I have to tell them to gut it out until they die? What about my friends who are depressed, discouraged, and struggling with everything from relationships to drugs? Is there any hope for them other than when they die?

I don’t mean to press the issue but hopefully you get the point. I certainly hope the gospel is bigger than the cross because that gospel offers little hope outside of death. But, if the gospel is bigger than the cross. . .if the gospel is actually found in the manger, then the gospel has meaning and hope for life today. If the gospel is found in the manger, then the gospel speaks to life, for the manger is about life. A manger-centered gospel is a gospel about new beginnings, fresh starts and the promise of new life. A manger-centered gospel is one that moves to the cross, but in between it offers healing, restoration and intimacy. It is a manger-centered gospel that offers hope that life can be different and new today and

not just when we die. So perhaps, especially at this time of year, our focus should be on the gospel, a manger-centered gospel. It is this gospel that gives hope, not just for the future but for today.

A fellow traveler,
Blake
Spiritual Formation Pastor

My Next Step

We encourage you to consider doing the following as a way of handing off faith to your family. . .

- **Use the manger to teach the gospel:** The gospel is about God's movement to bring redemption, a redemption that leads people to live rightly today and not just to live in the future. This holiday season consider using the manger to communicate this to your family. You might use a nativity set to teach this. Using your nativity set, go through aspects of the Christmas story. Have each family member choose a piece of the set and tell the portion of the story that goes with that piece. It might be fun to have your family members tell the Christmas story from the perspective of their piece of the nativity set. Reserve the manger for yourself or your spouse and go last. When it is time to discuss the manger, tell the story of Jesus' birth as found in Matthew 1 and Luke 2. You might consider emphasizing the angel's words in Matthew 1.21. Jesus was born to save people from their sins. This includes the effects of sin in our present life as well as the eternal effect of sin which is separation from God. Talk with your family about how Jesus offers hope for life today. Share with them that in the life of Jesus we learn how to live in a way that pleases God, a way of life that helps save us from the effects of sin.

We encourage you to consider taking the following next step on your faith journey. . .

- **Memorize and meditate on Titus 2.11-14:** This week memorize and meditate on Titus 2.11-14. Allow God to speak through these verses, teaching you the richness and fullness of the gospel that teaches us how to live and not just that we will live when we die.