

“Kurisumasu”? or “Christmas”? **Matthew 1:21**

*Note to English speakers about the title: In Japanese, the word “Christmas” is “Kurisumasu”, and does not have the word “Christ” (that is, “Kirisuto”) in it. Literally, the “Christ” has been taken out of the word ‘Christmas’ in Japanese.” That is the point in the message title, and it does not translate into English very well.

Merry Christmas!

Last week on the Shinkansen bullet train, I asked the young lady sitting next to me if she knew what the “Merry” in “Merry Christmas” meant. I often talk to people next to me on trains. They are often shocked at first, but she warmed up, and we had a nice chat. She had no idea that the “Merry” in Merry Christmas means “Joyful.”

Bible Reading

Matthew 1:21

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

We want to focus in this short Christmas message on Matt. 1:21 in the passage we just read. It tells the main reason why Christmas is “Merry” Christmas. It tells the big, central reason (purpose) for why Jesus Christ was born. It is good news, joyful news.

The angel tells Joseph that Mary “will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

We need this good news, this “Merry” joyful news of Christmas.

Several weeks ago, I had a fight with my wife, Carol.

I suddenly had to go to Sendai to preach for a church to take the place of another pastor. On Saturday I was very focused working on the sermon. Carol tried to talk to me several times and I hardly listened to her. I was even a bit cold to her for several hours Saturday night as I focused on my work and responsibility.

Sunday morning I got up very early. I read my Bible briefly and prayed to God, before turning to preparation for that sermon. I had to leave the house by 7am to go to Sendai.

About 6:30am, Carol asked me a question and tried to talk to me. I was busy. I was doing my duty. My answer to her was short and cold. I was busy doing God's work. I needed to finish this sermon for the people of Sendai about **the great love of Christ**.

Finally she spoke to me in kind of strong words. “You had no time to talk to me last night or this morning even for a minute!”

That turned into a little argument between us. There was tension. As we talked, I watched the time, and thought of the Shinkansen schedule.

Finally I said “OK, I’m sorry, please forgive me”, but it was a superficial apology. I headed out the door and ran to the station.

On the shinkansen, I sat down and continued to prepare for the message in Sendai.

One of the Names for Jesus in the Matthew 1 passage we read is Immanuel. It means "God is with us." I am a Christian. God was with me on that train. As I tried to work on that sermon, God made me think about the tension in the relationship with Carol as I left the house. The Holy Spirit showed me my sin. He showed me that, "once we leave Ueno, and come out of the tunnel, I need to call Carol and confess my sin, and truly ask her from my heart for forgiveness."

I moved to the space between the cars. I wanted to call Carol and ask forgiveness, and have reconciliation in our marriage.

But there was also a strong, sinful temptation in me to say "please forgive me," but also to defend myself. I thought, "I will say 'Please forgive me. I was wrong. But, you know, you also do the same thing when you are busy. When you are pressed getting ready to teach a class, or getting ready for guests coming to our house for dinner, you also can be cold to me.'" I wanted to justify myself by telling her about her sin.

What do you think? A real gospel apology saturated in the full truth of Christmas? No!

Matthew 1:21 tells us that Jesus was born to save his people from their sins. What was my sin? My tendency is to compare myself to others, and say "My sin was small. I am better than most husbands. I am not an idolater. I did not commit adultery. I did not hit her." Well, actually, I did hurt her. I was not being a faithful, loving husband. And there was an idol in my heart that was the root of my sin. Was I working so hard on that sermon for God's glory? Well, that was part of the reason. Was it for the people of Sendai? Well, Yes.

But a big part of my heart motive that pushed me to be cold to Carol was my pride. There was a sin behind my outward sin. My heart idol of wanting others to think well of me was the root. Wanting those in Sendai to say "Thanks for suddenly coming to Sendai to help us, and preaching a good sermon."

I have many other sins. Many big sins! I am 69. I have broken all the 10 commandments, many times. Pride. Lying. Sexual sin. Anger. I haven't loved God with all my heart. I haven't loved others by listening well to them. I have gossiped.

God is holy, and I deserve his holy wrath for my sin.

But the good news, the Merry News of Christmas is that a Savior has come to SAVE His people from their sin. We think other problems are our biggest problem, but SIN is our biggest problem. Our world's biggest problem.

You shall call him "Jesus" the Angel said.

The Name "Jesus" comes from the word in Hebrew that means "to Save".

There are two parts of this "saving". Both parts helped me on that shinkansen between the cars as I prepared to call Carol on the way to Sendai.

Matthew 1:21

"... you shall call his name Jesus, for he will
save his people **from their sins.**"

"Salvation" through Jesus Christ

Saves us from the PENALTY of sin

Saves us from the POWER of sin

The Savior Jesus saves us from both the **penalty and judgment of sin** that we deserve, and also saves us from **the power and dominion** of sin.

We are full of joy when a baby is born. Our 33rd grand baby was born to my daughter Hannah this week, her first. What joy!

Saves from the PENALTY of sin

Matthew 1:21

"... he will **save his people from their sins.**"

So, all my sins of my 69 years, thousands of sins of my words, thoughts, my motives, my eyes, my actions; doing wrong things. And, not doing the things I should have done. On that cross, Jesus took the righteous judgment of God that I deserve. He saves from the PENALTY, from the JUDGMENT of sin.

We gospel-believing Christians often talk about this first part of the gospel, of Jesus saving us from the penalty of sin. But maybe we don't talk enough about the 2nd part of this good news.

Saves us from the POWER of sin

Jesus Christ was born also to save His people from the POWER and domination of sin. When we truly believe in Jesus, he not only saves us from the penalty of all our sin, past, present, future. "Justification." He also saves us from the power and dominion of sin. "Sanctification."

The Messiah's name is also Immanuel, God with us. By the Holy Spirit, Immanuel works in us to show us our sin, like God did for me on the train as I was traveling to Sendai.

God helps His people grow.

Saves us from the PENALTY of sin
Saves us from the POWER of sin

"Justification"
"Sanctification"

"Justification" happens at a point in time, but this Sanctification is a process of growing in overcoming the power of sin in our lives. Like a child growing, we grow slowly. But Jesus works in us, and helps His true children to grow more and more into holy children of God. It is a life long process, with many ups and downs, like my fight with Carol that Sunday morning after being married 45 years. But Jesus Christ came to save me from the power and dominion of sin also on that bullet train.

The Chapter before Matthew 1 is the last Chapter of the Old Testament, Malachi 4. The main point of the Old Testament is that the Messiah, the "Christ" (in Greek) is coming.

Malachi 4:2

But for you who fear my name,
the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.
You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

In Malachi 4:2 it says that the "Sun of righteousness shall rise bringing healing..."

Jesus is the Light of the world. He is this Sun of righteousness as this OT prophesy promises, born to bring healing.

That "healing" includes the healing of my relationship with my wife needed that Sunday morning on the Shinkansen as I was getting ready to call her.

Malachi 4: 2 & 6

4:2 ... the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

2:6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children
and the hearts of children to their fathers...

Malachi 4:6, the last verse of the OT, promises to save us from the power that breaks relationships.

In the gospel that the Messiah (Christ) brings, there will be healing for relationships. "The hearts of fathers will be turned towards their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers." Family relationships will be healed by this Sun of righteousness, by Jesus Christ the Messiah. He will save His people from the power and dominion of sin that breaks relationships.

On the Shinkansen that Sunday morning I knew that I needed to call Carol and seek reconciliation. I began thinking about this Christmas gospel of Jesus Christ that I was going to be preaching that morning in Sendai.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I was going to be preaching on Romans 5:1-2 that we are justified by faith, that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. JESUS has justified me by His grace. Through His cross, by His blood, He has forgiven me of all my past, present and future sin. In the perfect righteousness of Christ given to me, God declares me "justified". He calls me his child. Though actually I was very unrighteous that Sunday morning, I am justified in Christ before the true and living Holy God.

On the shinkansen, as I called Carol to say those hardest 4 words in English... "I was wrong...HONEY!" Please forgive me." I was also tempted to defend myself and shift blame say to her. I was tempted to say, "But remember, Carol, you do the same thing when you are busy."

Immanuel. God with us. God worked in my heart. He showed me that because Jesus has saved me and justified me, I do not need to justify myself before Carol. My identity is in Jesus Christ, who was born to save His people from their sins.

What good news this is!

Matt 1:21

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins."

This Christmas, may we all know the Christ of Christmas. May we know Immanuel, Jesus who was born to save His people from the penalty of their sin, and also from the power of sin increasingly as we grow in His grace.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that Jesus was born to save His people from their sin. We are such sinners. Please save us, Jesus, from our sin. From its penalty and judgment. From its power and rule in our lives. Immanuel. Be with us. Help us to grow in holiness, to love you more, to love others. We have many addictions. Help us to know your forgiveness of all our sin when we come to you. And, help us to overcome bit by bit the domination of sin in our lives that hurts us, and hurts others.

Use the fellowship of our church, our worship, small groups, to help us grow as you give us gospel power, and as we encourage and help each other.

Help our family and other relationships. Our relationships desperately need this healing and saving that the Sun of righteousness comes to bring.

Oh Lord, Japan needs this saving by the Christ of Christmas. Probably 98% of the people around us have no understanding about the true meaning of Christ mas. Lord, work in us, and through us, and use us to bring the true meaning of Christ mas to Japan.

In the Name of Jesus who came to Save,
Amen