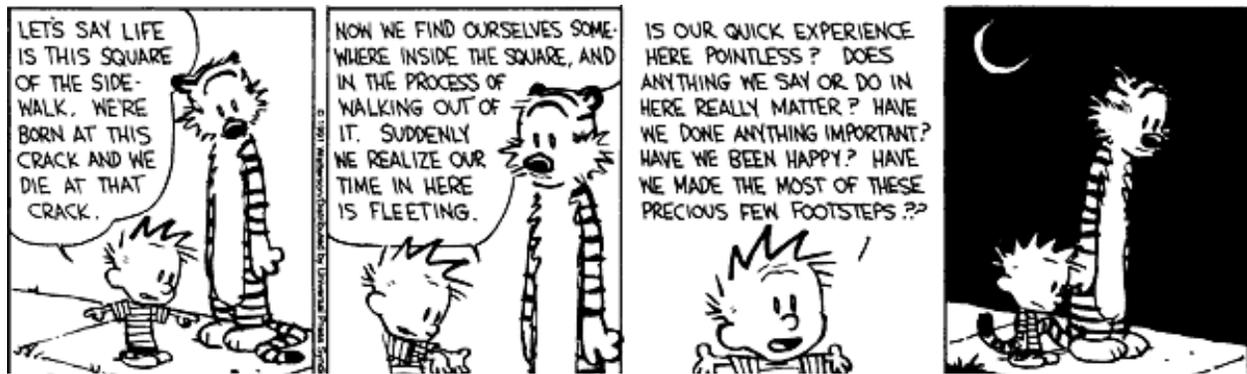


LIGHT FOR ALL NATIONS, ACTS 13:13-52

The Light Before Christmas #3



◆**Intro:** (Show cartoon here:) I invite you to ponder the meaning of your existence. Is it really just a nebulous web of existential freedom? Are we accidents of colliding molecules? Philosophical naturalism says so. But what are the consequences of believing we are evolutionary accidents? What's curious is that so many people believe it, but cannot live consistently with such a belief. For example, an atheist, if she or he is consistent, has no basis for caring about moral goodness or fairness, yet still wants it.

◆(Philosopher Norman Geisler tells this story. A student wrote a research paper arguing that there is no God, and consequently then no objective or absolute moral principles. It was well-written and argued but the professor gave him an F and wrote, "I don't like this blue folder." The student was of course incensed at such injustice and confronted the professor who asked, "Was this the paper which argued on the basis of the godless universe in which we live that there are no objective moral principles such as fairness and justice? Did you not also argue that everything is a matter of

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ones' subjective likes and dislikes?" (Ie. Your truth is your truth and my truth is mine.) The student's face abruptly changed as he realized that in fact he DID believe in objective moral principles such as fairness and justice to which all people, including his professor, ought to comply.)



◆ Can you know why you are here? What's right? What's wrong? Who says? When you sit down to write your annual Christmas Letter, trying to summarize any significant elements of the last twelve months you've lived on this planet, do you ever wonder where this is all going? Paul's speech in our text is kind of a Christmas letter summarizing all of human history up to that point and he answers those questions. One of the things he includes is that...

◆ **1. Each of us has meaning and purpose that is determined for us by God our Maker.** This is actually good news and soothing news. Your task in life is not to "find yourself", so much as it is to find your Creator. It means every individual, including you, was placed here at a specific time, for specific reasons, with specific roles to be filled that only you can

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fill! You are not an accident! You have a calling. But there is something even higher than that...

◆Remember, a calling does not originate in oneself. A calling is a vocal assignment from someone else, namely God. The Christian worldview is that the God of Heaven controls and determines the purpose of every human individual. Let me show it to you in Paul's speech, and then in other ancient writings.

◆V22 reminds us that God had a job description for David.

◆V25 reveals that John the Baptist had a purpose too, and he was very much aware of it. He was not the Messiah, but a forerunner.

◆V29. Here we observe that even Pilate and the unbelieving Jews were used according to God's set purpose, though they didn't want to be and fought it.

◆V36 makes it bluntly clear; the great king David lived only as long as God had ordained his purpose for living and then promptly died.

◆V47 Paul reminds his fellow Jews what the prophet Isaiah said about the purpose of their very nation; to bring the light of God to all the other peoples of the world. (Gentiles = *ethnay*, or "ethnic folks". We will come back to this in a minute because it is so significant.)

◆On top of that we have v48. Note that it does not say that "*as many as believed were appointed to eternal life.*" but "*as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.*" In fact

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just the opposite of what many of us would assume! God has an appointed family, across the globe, throughout time and history. Don't you wonder if God is calling you?

◆As other texts tell us, all our days are ordained for us by God (Ps139). "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). If I am created on purpose, it follows that my sense of fulfillment, my joy, my hope in life and after life is connected to my Creator. He is the fuel I was made to run on. That makes interacting with my Creator pretty important, and that gives Christmas it's significance, for the Creator joined his creation in the man Jesus Christ so we could have a direct interaction! We have the possibility of knowing why we are here!

◆Well, some will say, "I don't believe in a Creator." Oh?

◆Do you ever wonder what would give you a sense of fulfillment? Do you enjoy your job well enough but fail to find that it fills up your soul? A 2013 report from Yale College Council found that *more than half* of undergraduates sought mental health care from the university during their time of enrollment. Further, the most popular course ever offered at Yale is one in which professor Laurie Santos tries to help them lead a happier, more satisfying life. Can you relate to the obvious presence of emptiness that so many people feel today? Paul's counsel is that you will not find your answer apart from the person of Christ. Wise men still

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seek him. Make room in your day for God. This church is here to help you do that.

◆**2. The term “Light to the nations” tells me God has family in every part of the planet, and in every time in history.**

But they don’t all know it yet. Ie: Christmas is for

everybody. Now, in our text Paul is in a church service, a Jewish church service, in Turkey, a foreign land. And he has the gall to stand up and tell them that they need to believe in a man in Jerusalem that was murdered and then stood up and walked away after three days! Wait a minute? What about respect for another’s religion? What about equal rights for Muslims, and atheists, and Hindus? And haven’t Christian organizations been standing up and objecting to China’s current enslavement and genocide of the Uighur Muslims? Yes indeed because every human is an image bearer of God.

◆But many Western Christians have made a category leap into thinking that this means that every human being’s beliefs are also legitimate and for this reason we ought not to speak of the Christ of Christmas. *But the real Christmas story is the whole world’s story! We need to say so.*

◆**A. Christianity is unpopular today for the very fact that from the beginning it has always proclaimed that it alone is the truth that every nation needs.** It’s not just for Jews, or American’s or Frenchmen. It’s not one of many possible ways to God. Jesus

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said no one comes to the Father except through him. But every kind of person can come back to God their Father through him.

◆**B. And it's the believers job to shine God's light on all kinds of people, in all kinds of places.** You see? Jesus said "I am the light of the world." But don't forget he also said to his followers, "You are the light of the world." God has appointed his family. They are out there. Some have come home but others don't even now they have a Dad who loves them! They need to be shown the light and gathered in by their brothers and sisters!

◆So then, if we do not concretely somehow connect the joy of this celebrative season to the truth that Jesus Christ is the source of fulfillment and salvation, we have done our community a disservice. If we give gifts, but never mention that we do it to illustrate how much God loves the person we're gifting, we've left out the best part. Don't bow to PC neutrality and risk nothing more than "happy holidays" to the cashier! Tell him/her that the Christ of Christmas is the best present of all. Find a way to "declare among the nations."

◆**B. Showing the whole world the reality of God's salvation is the ancient purpose of God's family.** Just look way back to Abraham's choosing in Genesis 12 where God tells him his family is to eventually be a blessing to all nations of the earth.

◆*Genesis 12:2-3. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a*

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blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you

◆1) Now think it over. In the patriarchal society of Abraham (2000 BC), the father's job was to take care of all of the family. When the Dad died, the oldest brother got twice the inheritance of any of the others. (Try doing that on Christmas! Oldest son gets boxes and boxes of presents. All the rest get a candy cane.). The reason was that the oldest son was now responsible to make sure all the family were provided for. He was called the Goel/redeemer. If sister got hurt, he took care of her. If brother got kidnapped, the Goel went after him. He was responsible to keep the family intact and bring back any who strayed, or fell into misfortune.

◆Now who was God's first born according to the OT? Israel. Israel was Big Brother. Their job is to redeem God's family, bring them back to the fathers house.

◆~~Exodus 4:22-23. Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me."~~

◆Israel, Abraham's family, was not chosen by God because they were better or more special than any other nation. And you are not a part of his family because you have it more together than anyone else in town. Remember, your place in God's family is his gracious appointment. And like Israel you are chosen to be the big brother and go after all the rest of

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God's kids and bring them home. This is central to your existence.

◆ Isaiah 60:3 "Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.

◆ *Isaiah 42:6-7 And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness...*

◆ 2) Just read Psalm 96 like we did at the beginning our our worship time. Christ and Christmas is everybody's answer.

◆ **B.** Now Israel didn't do that very well, but God sent another Firstborn through that family, his only begotten son Jesus to complete the goal.

◆ As a follower of Christ, no matter who I am or my specific calling in life, or the skills and interests God has giving me, my over-arching purpose is to help bring his family home to him.

Understand this, Christian person. God has kids on your block, at your work place, in the Walmart you shop in on vacation, in another state, across the oceans. You may be an engineer but your calling is to be the Light of the World and help bring God's kids home. You may be an implement sales rep, but your highest assignment on this planet is get the love of Jesus out there so his kids can come home. You may plant corn or you may build Outbacks on the line at Subaru, but if you have been forgiven of

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your sin through the Christ of Christmas, you are a little Christ, a Christ-ian, meant to glow and love people home to God.

◆**D.** How about if you are a skeptical about all this, or you are just beginning to explore the teachings of Christianity, or if you doubt there is a God at all? Let me ask you this: If there is no God, and we are not purposed beings with intrinsic value, and when we die and go into everlasting nothingness, then why does it bother us? Why do we all yearn to be significant, to be loved? Is it not because we were made for that? God made you so he could love you. Jesus did not come to make you feel bad about yourself. (We all feel that all by ourselves. It's called guilt and sin.) Jesus came to pay for your guilt, and bring you home, so you could live this life in light of God's love and survive into another life after death here.

◆**Conclusion:** How do we find peace, meaning, significance?

There are varying views... (show cartoon 2)



◆Let me tie it up. This week we have our third use of the image of Light in the Bible. It's caught in the term *light to the nations*.

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And it means that there IS a way to be at peace in the world. Jesus is the answer everyone in any time or place needs. Its the central truth of all of human history. All you need is to accept his forgiveness and leadership. For those who have, it means we are on his team to declare to all nations...

✦ *John 3:16-21 (NIV 1984) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."*