



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“THE TREASURE THAT IS OURS”

John Galbreath
Bible Study Series

Text: II Corinthians 4: 1-7
Date: December 21, 1969

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This lesson is one taken from a sermon preached by John Galbreath at Westminster Presbyterian Church on December 21, 1969.

To complete the lesson, we suggest that you begin by reading the designated Bible passage (II Corinthians 4:1-7).

Next, review the outline of the sermon. Reflect on the chosen scripture and how you would "fill in" the remainder of the message from the chosen passage.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

The hymns that week were "O Come, All Ye Faithful," "The First Noel," and "Joy to the World." And the anthem was "For Unto Us a Child is Born" from Handel's Messiah.

There is a handwritten note in the bulletin to remember to welcome home the college kids. The bulletin also noted that the fall boutique had raised \$8,641 for the Iona School in Ocho Rios, Jamaica.

There was also a note saying "American Prisoners of War have been held without communication with their families. We have been encouraged by the American Red Cross to send letters to the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam urging them to publish the lists of prisoners and to permit communication with their families and inspection of war camps by representatives of the International Red Cross. Address -- Office of the President, Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, Hanoi, North Viet Nam. The postage is 25 cents.

The annual church budget that year was \$274,300.

On the mission front, the bulletin noted: Westminster Church creates milkstool industry for Buckhorn Child Welfare Agency. The agency is now producing attractive, hand-finished stool and patio or game room coffee tables with the tools and equipment donated by members of Westminster Church. The production of this furniture will not only provide a source of income for the Agency but is instrumental in teaching a valuable trade. These beautifully finished stools must be seen to be appreciated and are on display in the reception area. They are equal to those being sold for \$39.95 and will be for sale for \$14.00 (plus \$1.00 freight). To place an order call the church office, 835-6630 or leave your name with the receptionist.

I. Introduction

A. This hour gives us opportunity to catch our breath -- away from the press of shoppers, the problems of parking, the business of writing and receiving the holiday greetings.

1. We return to the scene and ask what it is all about.
2. What spectacular event was it that today draws the homage of a thousand million people?

B. The event -- the birth of a baby, under the earthiest of circumstances.

1. Yet in this homely scene, God entered into our mortality, that you and I -- and all mankind -- might share Him immortally.

C. Let us fix our thoughts upon the human scene, and upon the gift that came to man in Christ.

II. The Human Situation -- a spectrum of human motivation and circumstance

A. A young father and his peasant girl

1. A girl who accepted her role as Mother of this strange child, at the risk of losing the man to whom she was engaged -- but also at the risk of death by stoning.
2. The carpenter, whose faith in both the girl and his God is so deep that he accepted as his own this child which he had not fathered.

B. The shepherds.

1. With the dust of the field upon them, they came to do honor.
2. A vocation that was scorned -- for often these were crude, illiterate, irreligious men who lived away from the towns, away from schools and synagogues.

a) Strange that the first Christmas choir should have chosen such a congregation -- and not those gathered in the synagogue.

C. The Magii -- Oriental astrologers, astronomers who were prepared to follow the star of truth wherever it might lead them.

1. That star drew them to him who one day would say, "I am the way, the Truth, the life."
2. God's concern for the searcher was to reach out to those at Jesus' birth, and to another searcher -- even Thomas, at his death.

D. Beyond the view are those who said, "There is no room."

1. Had they not noticed? It was a rushed occasion.
2. Had they not cared? But if they had given up their room, where would they have gone?

E. Herod, too, was a part of the scene.

1. Scripture in its stark realism was not going to let the drama bog down in sentimentality.
2. He serves to keep us mindful of a part of the human scene that we must recognize, though we would prefer to forget.

F. The power of Rome was much in evidence.

1. It was Caesar's edict that had brought them to this place.
2. The rasp of chariot wheels and the curse of the centurion was common in the streets.
3. And there were the soldiers, many lonely young conscripts, who would carry out the bloody order of the governor in his senile madness.

G. The child.

1. He who was to draw together this most unlikely cast.
2. His importance lay not in any difference -- but in his sameness to any other child.
3. He who was to be the Savior had a healthy set of lungs, and a demanding digestive tract.
4. No halo, save in the eyes of the beholders.
5. His uniqueness lay not in what He was, but in what he would become.

H. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels."

1. Not alone the earthiness of man -- but of the Christ-child himself.
2. How remarkable that God should enter the human stream.

III. The Human Scene Today

A. The humble believer -- the shepherd, the carpenter, the mother-peasant.

1. Humanly speaking, in this simple faith lies the hope of the Christian community.
2. It was they who kept faith alive despite the machinations and the intrigues of the papacy through the dark ages.
3. Theological fad-ism comes and goes, but we must lean upon those who come "in simple trust like those who heard beside the Syrian Sea."

B. This year those who follow the stars have a special place in the cast of Christmas.

1. They have brought the world a deeper sense of reverence than a thousand gothic cathedrals.
2. Their reading of Genesis reached more hearts than ten thousand pulpits.
3. Surely today's Magi have brought their gift.

C. One cannot appraise the human scene without an awareness of the naked force of evil.

1. The slaughter of the innocents has a terrible reality about it this year that America has never known before.
2. And we have a tragic understanding of what must have been going on in the heart of those Roman conscripts whose swords ended the lives of Judah's infant sons.

D. But within this earthen vessel that is humanity, we again search out that treasure that is Jesus Christ.

1. In Him, we have, not only the model of what God intended man should be, but the power to become what God would have us to become.
2. Dr. Harker, quoting Henry VanDyke:

"Are we willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world, stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death, and that the blessed life that began in Bethlehem 1900 years ago is the image and brightness of Eternal Love? Then you can keep Christmas. And if you keep it a day, why not always?"

Study Questions -- Part I

Bible Reading: II Corinthians 4: 1-7

II Corinthians 4:1 and 2 says: ¹Therefore since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception nor do we distort the words of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

- Are there moments when you feel as if you might lose heart in serving God? What do you do to move past those moments?
- How do you "set forth the truth plainly" when you share your faith with others?

II Corinthians 4:3 and 4 say: ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- In what aspects of life do you think unbelievers are blinded to the gospel?

II Corinthians 4:5 through 7 say: ⁵For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. ⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

- How can you let God's light shine today?

Study Questions -- Part II

Sermon :

I.C. What human aspects of the Christmas story are the most touching to you?

II. Why do you think there wasn't a wider range of people who came to see Jesus? What groups in today's world do you think would have been called there?

II.D. There is a handwritten note: the nameless ones

II.F.2. -- "The rasp of chariot wheels" was originally "the sound of boots."

III. What can we do to help reinforce the human scale of Jesus when we share our faith with others?

III.B. The My Lai massacre occurred in 1968 and became public in 1969.

III.D. What do you do to keep Christmas all year through?