

Part 4: The Advent of Something that Changes Us

Tyler Velin | 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

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Today we want to conclude our Advent series by touching not only on the significance of Jesus' birth, but also the moment of pause we have before the New Year later this week.

As we've discussed before, the word advent simply comes from the Latin word which means coming. While it may sound like a distinctly theological word during the advent season, it's also a word often used when speaking of a new time period or age of innovation.

For instance I was reading a book which described how the world has changed since the advent of glass

Raw deposits of glass were initially found in the desert by Egyptians and were fitted for jewelry both for their beauty and their novelty.

In the 13th century a community of artisans in Italy mastered the creation and manipulation of glass in superheated furnaces and began using it for both artistic and domestic ends.

While the printing press popularized a new form of media, they small and obscure type fonts put stress on the reader's eyes, which led to the magnifying principles of glass being harnessed to create the first eyeglasses. As time went on, glass which was typically known for its fragility, was discovered to have immense strength when individual fibers were layered on top of each other. Since then our boats, cars, construction projects and consumer goods have been shaped by the incredible utility of fiber glass.

But even more relevant to our day is the principle where we are able to pull the finest threads of glass so thin that they are flexible, but so pure that they are able to transmit data at light speeds in our increasingly global network of fiberoptic data and communications. These cables bring us internet on our smart phones and computers powered by microchips made with the same materials discovered thousands of years ago amidst the desert sands.

Since the advent of glass the world has increasingly transformed itself with new and wonderful capabilities. But what of the advent of Jesus?

When we think not just of Christmas, but of the gospel events surrounding Jesus, do we actually think that he is able to provide an enduring change which grows with us and gives us the ability we need to discover new and wonderful realities in our daily lives?

Or is the advent of Jesus only some therapeutic nostalgia that provides little influence on our day to day lives?

Who could have imagined that the discovery of a cloudy new rock in the desert would have shaped the digital age of tomorrow? And if that's possible, then the advent of Jesus Christ and his saving gospel can shape our lives in ways we can't even imagine.

In a season where many of us are looking forward to the changes of a new year, we are going to spend some time in the book of 1 Corinthians where Paul is going to share with us the ways in which God changes us through Jesus Christ. These changes aren't rooted in your own strength, but in God's loving faithfulness towards you in Jesus.

What we are going to see today are three ways God's grace in Jesus changes us. First we are going to see that **Grace enriches us in the knowledge of Jesus**, then **Grace equips us to wait for the hope of Jesus**, and lastly, that **Grace faithfully calls us into fellowship with Jesus**.

Since our passage today is relatively short, I want to begin by reading our whole passage for us today and then we will circle back around to our first point: **1 Corinthians 1:4-9**.

Important to our context for this passage is that Paul is writing to a church that has a lot of issues, and yet he begins by telling this church how grateful he is for them. But what is he grateful for? He is grateful for the grace that God has given them in Jesus Christ.

To a church full of issues, to a body of broken people, Paul is optimistic on account of the wonderful grace of God given to this church. Hope for sinners starts with grace in Jesus Christ. But Paul wants us to know very clearly the source of this grace and the way in which this grace changes us now and in the future.

In verses 4-6 we see the first effect this divine grace has on the church, and this is our first point today: **Grace enriches us in the knowledge of Jesus Christ**.

Look with me again at **1 Corinthians 1:4-6**.

Have you ever been eating a bowl of cereal and read the side of the box? Have you ever noticed little tags that say: fortified with iron or calcium?

Or maybe you've eaten a product made with flour and noticed that the primary ingredient was enriched flour.

You see there are some foods that we eat that really have limited nutritional benefit in and of themselves. So what happens is that the manufacturers take those ingredients and infuse into them nutrients and vitamins so that they are beneficial for us.

Enriched flour exists because many of the ways we process flour removes the fats, proteins and vitamins that are in the natural grain. So when they enrich the flour they are adding back into the final product what was lost in the process. It adds value and restores nutrients.

And do you see Paul's repeated emphasis here? He says that in every way, in all speech, and in all knowledge you have been enriched in Jesus Christ.

What God offers us in Jesus is not junk food for the lazy soul, it is the very meat of life.

If sin and the world are consistent at doing one thing, it is reminding us what we lack and where we are broken. But here the grace of God enriches us. It takes the poor and fills them, takes the weak and fortifies them, takes the broken and solidifies them. Comprehensively, in all the places.

God's grace enriches us!

Now few of us would doubt that right? Even if you're mostly unfamiliar with Biblical Christianity you have the idea that God is supposed to provide a benefit to us: that God is love, that God is mercy, that God does all these things.

But do you actually understand where God has come to enrich us in such a profound and comprehensive way?

In other words do you know where God actually gives his grace to you? Do you know where God loves you?

Think of it this way. If I were to tell you that Sarah loves me, it should be reasonable that I could give you some examples of how I know she loves me. I've had a number of female friends in my life, but I've only been certain than one really loved me. What separates Sarah from these other women? I could certainly point to specific things she does to make me feel loved, but there is ultimately one place which I know I can always look to as a sign of her love for me: our marriage.

Sarah has not only told me that she loves me, but in marriage she has pledged to love me till death do us part.

When it comes to understanding where God enriches you by his grace you can certainly point to things that are generally true, maybe you've been blessed with good health, a good church community, and a healthy family. And those are certainly gifts from God, but where does God ultimately show his love for you? In covenanting himself, confirming himself to you through Jesus Christ.

Look again at **1 Corinthians 1:5-6**. How were these Corinthian believers enriched in every way? By the testimony of Jesus Christ being confirmed and believed among them.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God. And that testimony of our brokenness and Jesus' love for us on the cross is the speech and the knowledge that enriches us in every way.

For the Christian, the more we hear the gospel in speech, the more we understand the gospel in knowledge, the more we are enriched in every way, and therefore the more we are changed.

This is why we want to encourage you to read your Bible this New Year. Christians don't read the Bible because we've never read it. Christians read the Bible because the Bible reveals to us more and more of the gospel of Jesus every time we encounter it, and those encounters change us.

There's this wonderful scene that C.S. Lewis paints in his Narnia book, Prince Caspian.

In the book it's been a long while since little Lucy has been to Narnia to see Aslan, but when she finally sees him, she realizes that Aslan has grown.

She says, "Aslan, you're bigger." Aslan says to her, "That's because you're older, little one."

Lucy is confused because we would expect him to say that he is older, which is why he's bigger. So Lucy says, "Not because you are older?"

And Aslan says, "I am not. But every year you grow you will find me bigger."

You see it's often said that breakthroughs in technology or discovery make our world smaller as the mystery is better understood. But here the more we understand about the gospel, the bigger our Lord gets. The more enriched we are in every way as we learn not only about what God has done to save us, but how he has come to change us.

Before we move on in this text we must understand the immense value and power which is ours in this gospel of Jesus Christ. If we fail to understand what God has given us here, we will be shorthanded in everything which follows.

Just this past month one NBA superstar signed what is called a supermax contract, making him the highest paid basketball player in history. He will make \$200 a second while on the court.

Now, maybe you're like me when you hear this number. You start dreaming about what you would do if that were you? How would you spend \$200 a second for the next five years? It captivates our imagination doesn't it?

But in Ephesians 1:7 look at the assessment of riches we have in the gospel: **Ephesians 1:7-8**. In the gospel God lavishes us in his riches.

God has given us enrichment in the gospel which should cause us to scheme how we spend our days. This is where Paul goes next in 1 Corinthians.

Look again at **1 Corinthians 1:4-7**.

Why has God given us the enriching grace in Jesus Christ? So that we would not lack in any gift as you eagerly await the second advent of Jesus, that is when Jesus comes a second time to save and to judge.

This is our second point today: **Grace equips us to wait for the hope of Jesus**.

Have you ever gone someplace where you know you are going to end up waiting? Maybe it was the voting lines this past November or the DMV to get your license renewed.

And maybe if you know you have a wait ahead of you, you equip yourself to wait well. Maybe you bring a book, or some work, or download a podcast to listen to while you wait.

But for the most part we are trying to pass the time and entertain ourselves until the wait is over.

The provision of God's enriching grace is so powerful and transformative that it gives us the gifts we need to wait well. However the gifts we need are not just gifts of entertainment, but of endurance.

No one packs for the DMV as if they are preparing for war, but for the Christian this waiting period between the two advents of Jesus is war.

Look at what Peter says in **1 Peter 5:8-9**.

As we hold fast to the grace delivered in the testimony of Jesus, there are forces in this world which seek to make us poor where grace has made us strong.

Look at how Jesus explains these threats to our grace in the parable of the sower: **Matthew 13:18-23**.

You see this world possess tribulation which seeks to tear you from grace, but perhaps the more dangerous threat is the threat which doesn't seem like a threat at all: the cares of the world, the pleasures of the flesh, the entertainment of life.

It's been said that when the Roman Empire was becoming increasingly hostile towards its citizens that the officials satisfied their people not by changing the big problem, but by giving them bread and circuses. Meaning they gave superficial satisfactions which entertained while the greater problem remained unaddressed.

Our world wants us to get distracted in our waiting and to give our lives the bread and circus of this world. It wants to occupy your hands and your time, it wants to replace your gospel ambition based in the riches of Jesus work and provide for you a consuming want driven by things which cannot satisfy.

But here God gives us gifts which help us keep our dreams not on the hopes of man, but on the hope that of Jesus Christ and his second coming.

But this is where we must understand what Paul is saying here. He is not saying that you as an individual are not lacking in any gift.

Now you might say, that's exactly what he's saying, it says "so that you are not lacking in any gift."

But remember Paul is here not writing to an individual, he's writing to a church. And in chapter 12 of this same book he says to the church that there are some members who lack certain gifts.

Now this is where we begin to make sense of our life and where we also see the beautiful practicality of God's gifts of grace.

Realizing that none of us are comprehensively equipped with all the gifts of God's grace makes sense of our lives. Don't we often feel like following Jesus is difficult? Even though we know that sin is always a liar, don't we still sometimes choose it?

Even though we affirm that Jesus is coming back, don't our lives show that we like to hedge that hope in the satisfactions of this world?

But look at what Paul says later in this letter: **1 Corinthians 12:21-31a**.

We on our own will wrestle with the war of waiting, but God has given us the body of believers, the church, where all of our gifts make up for all of our lack.

The grace given to us in Jesus reminds us that we don't have to wait alone, but that we have an army of people next to us to help us wait faithfully and patiently.

This year what does it look like for you to use your gifts of grace to help those around you eagerly endure life in this world?

My family visited an Escape Room last night and we brought with us my eight year old son. We had a certain amount of time to solve the puzzle and get out of the room and as time went on, we worked faster and faster to get out and we did. But at the end I asked my son how he liked it and he said, "I feel like I couldn't really help, I didn't know what to do."

As a father, it hurt my heart a little to hear of his experience, but here don't we see how much better our heavenly father is? To have been a Christian for a moment or for a decade is to receive wonderful gifts which God has given you that you can use to help others.

Consider this year Peter's challenge in **1 Peter 4:10-11**. Just as God has given us the gospel in speech and knowledge, how will you this year use your gifts in speech and service to help those around you follow Jesus.

Grace enriches us, grace equips us, but here we see lastly the wonderful hope that God himself will faithfully do all of this in us.

This is our last point today: **Grace faithfully calls us into fellowship with Jesus.**

Read with me **1 Corinthians 4:7-9**.

Here we see the wonderful reality of how grace in Jesus changes things.

Jesus himself will sustain us in our faith to the end, guiltlessly. Isn't that a wonderful promise? How many of you received a present this past weekend that was far better than the present you yourself gave? Or how many of you saw other people giving presents that were of a far greater value than what you gave?

When you saw those things, did you feel a bit guilty? A bit ashamed?

Brothers and sisters, when we stand before God almighty and King Jesus is revealed to us in all of his glory we will encounter a gift that makes all of our best actions look like dirty socks.

But here is the wonderful promise that for those who have the testimony of Jesus Christ, for those who are given gifts to endure while they wait, that this reception in heaven will at the same time acknowledge how futile your works were to save you, and yet at the same time you will not feel guilty at all because Jesus gave himself for your sins.

He suffered the penalty for your lack. He bore the shame of your sinful heart.

And this is a promise. A promise that is not just rooted in the work of Jesus the Son, but also in the faithfulness of God the Father. Look at Paul's double affirmation in **1 Corinthians 1:9**.

God is faithful. Why is he faithful? Because he is faithful to all who he calls into fellowship with Jesus his son. In other words the only reason we would ever stand guiltless before God, the only reason in which

we will be sustained to the end, the only reason we will be enriched in every way is because God has called us to a relationship with his son.

But here is the interesting thing about this letter to the church in Corinth. This church is an absolute disaster. This church has sin abounding in it. This church is not living guiltlessly. Paul is going to call this church to repentance and to change.

So how is it that Paul is thanking God for all he has done in this church? Because Paul knows that if this church believes in the gospel, then this fellowship they have with Jesus, this grace of faith, of gifts, and of endurance, will ultimately call them out of sin and make them more like Jesus.

Did you notice how at every level of this passage Paul roots their hope for this guiltless confirmation in Jesus Christ: vs. 4 the grace given you in Jesus Christ, vs. 6 the testimony of Christ confirmed in you, vs. 7 waiting for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, vs. 8. Christ will sustain you until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, vs. 9. God is faithful because he has called them into fellowship with Jesus Christ.

At every level Christ is held up for the church because at every level Christ is the hope for every Christian. To be saved by Jesus is to be given the hope of being changed by our relationships to Jesus.

Look at this hope that Paul gives us in **Romans 8:28-29**.

What is our hope that God works all things for our good? Our hope is that in all things we will be conformed more and more into the image of Jesus. Meaning our lives will look less like who we were and more like who we now are in Christ.

This is hard work is it not? For many of us don't we often wonder if this verse is true? Sure, we see places where it is easy to put off sin and to live like Jesus, but what about the places where it is hard?

Look at Paul's comfort again in **Philippians 1:6, 9-11**.

The promise of grace is that it might be slow, it will be hard, and it will be costly, but because we have been called into saving relationship with Jesus we also have the hope of progressing to be more like Jesus and one day, one beautiful day God will do just that.

Since the advent of Jesus we have a hope that changes us as it calls us more and more into a relationship with him. We have not only the potential for change in Jesus, we actually have the promise of it.