

Jesus is the Heart of Christmas

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 December 2023

Preacher: Pastor Bart Leger

[0 : 0 0] You know, Jesus is the reason for the season. The time has finally come. It's Christmas Eve. I know sometimes I was, we were talking this morning, I was a little confused yesterday, not thinking that yesterday was Saturday. Yesterday was Christmas Eve Eve. And today, as we've gathered together, we join a long line of Christ followers who have remembered this time when Jesus Christ came to earth and lived among us, died on the cross. We remember the arrival of God, and we recognize that through the birth of His Son. And we can all benefit from being reminded for the reason why Jesus did it, the wonder, the hope, the joy that this profound truth ushers into our hectic and into our busy lives. We had to do some last minute grocery shopping yesterday, and we braved the crowds, and we survived. But you know, it's not all about the hustle and the bustle and all the preparation. And as you, we are looking forward to family being together during this time and the exchanging of gifts that are representative of the greatest gift that we have ever received in Jesus

Christ. But it's a time for us to realize that Jesus is the heart of Christmas. It's not Santa. It's not the tinsel and the bells. It's not the garland. And it's not all of... Jesus is the heart of the season. Jesus is the heart of Christmas. It's all about Him. It's all for Him. And as we fully, in order to fully embrace Christmas time, we turn our attention toward Jesus Christ. And one of the greatest things I love about Christmas is when all a family comes together. But for some, Christmas time and gathering together is not the same for everyone. For many, home is a place to belong. home is a place to belong. That no matter where you are, no matter what you bring with you, you know that you are loved. Home is a safe place where you are loved. But for some, maybe in this room this morning, you didn't have that kind of Christmas experience. Maybe for you, being home for Christmas was not something that was accompanied by warm feelings. Not something that was accompanied by by you sensing love. And for so many, that's a tragedy, but for so many, they do not experience that type of love that maybe you and I have experienced growing up. Maybe the idea of Christmas and coming together as a family brings, maybe brings with it a lot of pain and a lot of anxiety.

And I believe as we remember the heart of Christmas, understand and realize that both experiences are valid because it's the experience that you had. But I think thinking and remembering the heart of Christmas can teach us something about who we are, about who God is, and about why He came to the earth. So what does this time reveal to us? Well, I believe the first thing that this time of year reveals to us is that it reveals the heart of God, or God's heart is revealed to us through the arrival of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 1 3] The fact is, we are all longing to feel like we belong. The whole human race wants to belong to something.

If it's not family, belonging to a group, belonging to something that is greater than themselves, longing for a feeling like everything's as it should be. But we realize the reality of the world that we live in, all around us is brokenness. All around us is despair. We look at society, society, and society is not getting better. Society is becoming more and more fragmented. There is less and less hope to be found. And there's a reason why you and I just don't feel like we quite fit in, that maybe there seems like there is a void within us, is because this world is not our home.

We really don't belong here. This world is not our home. God's heart is for us to awaken to this fact. The Christmas story appears in the four, appears in the Gospels, and each one of the Gospels has a different focus, has a different bent. But in the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew is very intent on revealing the long-awaited fulfillment of the coming of Jesus, the long-awaited fulfillment of God's heart and His desire for creation. Turn with me, if you will, in the book of Matthew, chapter number one.

Matthew chapter one, verses 18 through 25. Verse 18 says, Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

[6 : 35] But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. So all this was done, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which is translated, God with us.

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took to him his wife, and did not know her until she had brought forth her firstborn son, and he called His name Jesus. It took an angel appearing to Joseph to convince him that what had happened to Mary was something from God. That what was going on was a profound event that would change the trajectory of the entire human race. That God would come down to be with us. Now, in Joseph's day, this was unheard of. God with us. The author tells us two pieces of information here that I believe reveals to us the heart of God in sending Jesus to earth. The first thing that we see here is in verse number 21. Verse number 21, we see the Lord appearing to him, and it was saying that he would save us from our sins. Jesus, and she will bring forth a son, and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. You know, the world makes Christmas about so many different things. The world makes Christmas about the tinsel and the garland. The world makes Christmas about the the buying of gifts and the giving of gifts. Do you realize that the practice of giving gifts is something that started a long time after Jesus came? Now, I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, as long as we remember what those gifts represent. But the heart of Christmas, the heart of God reveals to us that Jesus came to earth for one reason. Jesus didn't come to earth to overthrow the Roman government.

Jesus didn't come to earth to set up a human government. Jesus didn't come to earth to make us feel better. And Jesus didn't come to earth to be an example. There are those today that were saying, you know, Jesus came and lived a good life, and he lived as an example to us. And we should just be better people. The heart of God is revealed to us in verse number 21. You'll call his name Jesus.

And what will he do? He will save people from their sins. The meaning of Christmas, the meaning of the birth of Jesus Christ falls squarely on God's dealing with our greatest limiting factor. It, that is sin.

Now, sin is any way that we miss the intention that God had for his world when he created it. God created a perfect world. And sin is anything that we do that is not according to God's intention.

[11 : 02] That is anything contrary to God's very nature. Greed, gossip, unfaithfulness, hatred, pride, which, by the way, God says is an abomination. The person whose heart is filled with pride, he says, is an abomination to him. All of these things are against the very nature of God. All of us fall short of God's standard of perfection. People will tell you, well, all I need to do is live a good life. I'm good. I give to the poor, and I attend church, and I, you've heard this, I follow the Ten Commandments.

The crazy thing is, Jesus gave a whole new interpretation of the Ten Commandments, did he not? He said, did you think it in your mind? You're guilty of the act. So that really puts a whole different color on keeping the Ten Commandments. Reality is, not a single one of us can fully, wholly, and completely follow the law of God. So all have fallen short of God's standard of perfection. All have fallen short of the glory of God. All of us have been subject to sin's evil influence in our life, and we've all felt the effect of sin's rule and reign in our life.

Some of the decisions that we made that were made out of the flesh, or made out of jealousy, or made out of pride, or decisions that were made out of fear, and we suffered the consequences of those decisions. And we know that sin's influence, even after we come to know Jesus Christ as our Savior. We still have an old nature that's capable of disobeying God. So we know sin's influence is horrible. But God's heart of compassion moved him to send Jesus to earth as a way to rescue you and me. So the arrival of Jesus was to save people from their sins. And the second thing we see is in verse number 23. In verse number 23, behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel. Now for us as English speakers, for us as Gentiles, it's just a

name. But for Joseph, and for everyone that was living in Joseph's time that was a Jew who understood the language, who understood the language, and for us it was made clear that this name, when translated, means God with us. This was a revolutionary thought in Joseph's day. Every society around believed in a God that was angry and punished and corrected their subject from afar. And even for God's very own people, even for the Jews, God's own people, God was not looked upon as a father. God was looked upon as a God to fear.

But when Jesus came, and when he descended from heaven, became a human being, and lived on this earth, walked on this earth for some 33 and a half years, Jesus revealed the heart of God in that he wanted to be with us.

He wasn't a God that moved us like chess pieces on the board and was a God or a deity who wound up the world and set it into motion just like a wind-up toy and just watched it perform. That's not the God that you and I serve today.

[15 : 34] It's a God who sent himself in the form of Jesus Christ so he could be with us. And Jesus said, you want to see God? Where do you look to see God? What did Jesus say? He said, just look to me.

He said, you've seen me? You've seen the Father. And there's a newsflash. When the world today wants to see God, where do they look?

They look to you and me. Because we have God's Holy Spirit within us. We are his ambassadors to a lost and a broken world.

And as you and I walk this earth, we are his representatives. He said we are light.

He says we are his witnesses. And how will the world know that we are his? By our love for one another.

[16 : 38] So when we show grace like Jesus did, when we show love, not only for one another who are like us, but when we show love to those who are not like us, just like Jesus did when he came to earth, and he spent time with sinners, and he offered himself and what he offered them new life, we too can show people.

We too can reveal God through our very own lives. He became one of us. He became flesh so he could mourn when we mourned. He came so he could feel pain when we feel pain.

So we don't have a high priest in heaven that is not familiar with your pain, your grief.

See, Jesus grieved even over the death of a friend, Lazarus. So he knows what grief and loss is all about. God identifies with us so that we are given the opportunity to identify with him.

We needed Jesus, and we need Jesus. Someone once said it this way, if our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator.

[18 : 02] If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.

But our greatest need was forgiveness. So God sent a Savior. We need a Savior.

You need a Savior. A Savior is one who eliminates that barrier between us and God. A Savior welcomes us into a safe place alongside a God who loves us.

Jesus said, I'm leaving this earth, and I'm going to prepare a place for you that where I am, you may come and you may be with me.

And the glory, you know, for the believer, for the one who knows Christ as their Savior, death is a wonderful thing. For us as human beings who are left here, it's painful.

[19 : 10] It hurts. But for the one who knows Jesus, for the one who has been redeemed, and the one who knows that this world is not our home, we're just a passing through, as the song says, that Jesus is waiting for us in heaven, and one day we'll see the face of Him.

Just like Paul said, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. So for the child of God, death is a wonderful thing. It's a reunion.

It's like, it's like when you are camping, when you're hiking, and on that last day of the hike, you pick up your tent stakes, and you fold your tent, and you put it up, and you know that when you put up that tent, you're going home.

The Bible even talks about our bodies like being the tent that we live in while we're on earth, because it's a temporary home. And when we shed this tent, this tabernacle, this fleshly body, we're going home.

We're going home to be with Him. That's what a Savior provides for us. Now the love of God is spoken in a bit of an unconventional Christmas passage, but I want you to turn with me to John chapter 3, and verse number 16.

[20 : 42] John chapter 3, verse number 16. And what John does is John gives us a new perspective on what took place in Bethlehem on that eventful morning, or that eventful evening when Jesus Christ was born.

John chapter 3, verse number 16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Because of God's great love for us, He sent Jesus. And people often forget God sent Jesus, but Jesus agreed to come.

When Jesus came, He lived with a clear, unwavering commitment to His purpose. His purpose was to die on the cross.

His followers came to Him and said, Jesus, why don't you set up your kingdom here? Why don't we enjoy freedom from this Roman occupation?

[21 : 54] Jesus said, time hasn't come for that. That's not my purpose. I'm not here to feed the world. I'm not here to make the world comfortable.

I'm not here to right all the world's ills. I'm here to save people from their sin.

That's why He came. Not only did Jesus come to save us from our sins, but Jesus left His home to show us our way home.

Jesus gave up the splendors of heaven to walk on the brokenness of earth. Jesus laid aside His divinity and put on humanity for us. He did it all for one reason, to show us the way home.

Have you ever been lost? Have you ever been somewhere you've never been before? And you just couldn't figure out how to get to where you wanted to be and you came upon someone and they showed you the way how to get where you needed to go?

[23 : 07] Well, Jesus not only showed us the way, Jesus made the way. He made the way. One of the things that, you know, hospitals are one of the most difficult buildings to find your way around, right?

I know we have to go every once in a while to Houston Methodist. We've been to MD Anderson a few times and, you know, I have gotten lost, believe me. And one of the things that I love about MD Anderson, one of the things I love about Houston Methodist is you find someone that's got a name badge on them and they can tell the people that are lost.

I mean, it's just like, we have these flashers. I don't know where I am. I don't know how to get to where I want to be. And they go, what are you looking for? And more than once, we've had one of them say, let me take you there.

Have you all had that experience? I know you guys have. They didn't just say where to go. They said, follow me.

I know they were going somewhere on purpose. I know they had a place to be. But they took their time, sometimes five or more minutes, to go up elevators, walk down half a mile of hallway, and say, go right through that door and they will take care of you.

[24 : 40] Isn't that what Jesus did for us? He didn't just shout it from the sky. He came down and then he said, I'm making a way for you.

And Jesus made the way. See, far too many are living their lives without direction, without a sense of purpose, making decisions that are keeping them far from God.

This time of year, remembering the birth of Jesus Christ is God's way of pointing us back to Him by having sent Jesus Christ and helping us to know where we belong.

God's way of leading us by His grace, it's His way of leading us by His grace to our eternal home.

See, we don't have to live our lives broken and lost because God's great love made a way.

What does John say is the way? Verse 16 says, For God so loved the world that He gave.

[25 : 48] He gave His only Son, His unique Son, not another one like Him, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish.

So what is the way? It's by faith. We are saved by grace through faith. Faith in Christ. He didn't say that you could not perish by doing good deeds.

He didn't say you could not perish by getting baptized. He didn't say that you wouldn't have to be lost in your sin by following the Ten Commandments. No, He said, God came, or God loved us.

He gave His unique Son, Jesus Christ, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, excuse me, but have everlasting life.

That word in verse 16, pisteo, believe, to be persuaded by someone, to have confidence in someone, to have faith in someone.

[27 : 00] See, a belief in Jesus is just an intellectual exercise. There are a lot of people that believe Jesus. But it's a step of faith that says, not only do I believe He existed, not only do I believe He's the Son of God, but I'm trusting Him completely in that what He did on the cross of Calvary is the full payment for my sin.

And when Jesus said on the cross, it is finished, that I didn't have to do another thing, but trust Him. It's like getting on that airplane, buckling your seatbelt, and saying, get me there.

Nothing you can do. You can pick one foot off the floor to think that you're going to put less weight on the airplane. You can even flap your wings. It helps not in the least.

Because the pilot is the one who takes you there. Jesus is the one who makes us right with God. So faith in Jesus Christ. Belief in Christ is to be so persuaded, so confident that our lives are transformed and our words and our actions and our thoughts are dictated by our faith, by hope in Jesus Christ, excuse me, and trust in Him.

[28 : 26] See, this is something that is accomplished through the work of God's Holy Spirit. It's something we cannot do on our own. You know, people claim to be self-made men.

People claim to have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and say, you know what? I did it. I did it. And so I did it my way. Well, Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

There are many who say, I think this way is good enough. I think that way is good enough. Jesus said, there's only one way. It's through me. So Jesus did the work.

All we do is submit to Him and trust Him. So now what will make the difference not only in eternity but in the here and now?

Belief in Jesus Christ allows us to live today as well as eternity. I know we said this morning that eternal life doesn't begin in the far away time after we die.

[29 : 31] Eternal life begins today. At the heart of Christmas is Jesus' invitation to join Him and experience a full life that's only available through Him.

Every day we live from faith to faith. We trust Him for today. We trust Him tomorrow for tomorrow. We trust Him every day and we should be trusting Him in every decision that we make.

See this mission that God began through Jesus Christ began a couple thousand years ago in a small Bethlehem town but it begins or it continues today.

Of all the gifts that you could possibly receive this Christmas Christmas. The gift that Jesus Christ came to provide for us is the greatest gift by far.

It's the most valuable because it can save your soul. One author writes this about the rescue plan that was unleashed at Christmas. He uses military language and he captures the scene as well.

[30 : 48] He says, In my mind's eye on Christmas Eve I see a single commando tumbling out of a Bombay doors of a B-52 at 30,000 feet. He falls silently in the midnight darkness into enemy territory.

Satan sleeps not knowing that he, Jesus, will organize a rebellion. The empire of sin will fall not from without but from within. Like a commando severely heard as he landed far from above who has no apparent capacity to mount an effective action or for that matter any action at all the powerless infant turns his face to ours and makes what in that obscure stable seems like an impossible demand.

Join me. And that's what Jesus did before he went to the cross. He said, Join me in this mission that God began.

because when I leave, you are going to continue carrying on this mission. And that's the call for you and that's the call for me today.

Will we work with Jesus in his rescue mission? Rescuing the world who's lost in sin. See, Jesus said he came to seek and to save the lost.

[32 : 08] That was his purpose. So will we double our efforts to get the gospel out to a broken and a hurting world in the most effective way possible?

Are we willing to do what it takes to love everyone unconditionally like Jesus did? Share the gospel of Jesus with them. Just like tapping someone on the shoulder and saying, Hey, I've got good news for you.

There's a way for you to have hope. There's a way for you to have peace. There's a way for you to be fulfilled. There's a way for you to be right with God, your creator.

It is through Jesus Christ. Our job is to be as effective as we can reaching as many as we can with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus is waiting today to come back, as he said, until all those who would believe. So it's our responsibility to get the gospel out.

[33 : 12] Our responsibility is to do the footwork, the legwork. Our responsibility is to do whatever we can to get that message out to the people who need to hear it. It's the Holy Spirit's job, as he says, to bring the increase.

It's the Holy Spirit's job to work in the mind and in the heart of people. But how will they hear unless, the Bible says, unless they have a preacher, unless they have someone to proclaim the word of God to them?

Now that's our job as followers of Jesus. But then my next question is as we close, what if you have never yet trusted Jesus as your Savior? What if, and I know that this is not necessarily everyone has to be able to point to the moment and the hour when you trust Christ, Christ?

But if you are sitting here, if you are watching or listening to this, and you cannot point specifically to a time or a period of time when you totally surrendered your life to Jesus, realized that you were a sinner, realized that on your own you were lost and apart from God.

And even as the Bible says, the wages of sin is death, eternal separation from God. So, if you're not sure this morning or whatever time you're listening to this, if you're just simply not sure, and you would say, you know, I don't know.

[34 : 52] I don't know if I'm right with God. I've got just a feeling within me that there's something just not right. And I would say to you right now, will you trust Him unapologetically with your life and your eternity?

Believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Believe that He died on the cross in your place. and believe that He paid your debt of sin for you.

And when He said, it is finished, there is nothing else you can add to that. And God is willing, waiting, and ready to receive you as His own to buy you back out of the slave market of sin so that sin would no longer have power over you and to adopt you into His family.

You know, I know we make jokes sometimes about someone who is wealthy and we say, hey, would you adopt me? we come to God who owns the world and we can, in fact, say, God, would you adopt me?

He says, sure. I already paid the debt and I've already given you the gift. All you've got to do is receive it in Jesus Christ.

[36 : 32] what began in an unassuming cradle led tragically to a Roman cross but it ended victoriously in an empty tomb.

Whatever you had about, every eye closed this morning, for those of you who know Christ as your Savior, you know. You know that you know that you know that you trusted Jesus. This morning, as you continue to worship Him, thank Him.

Thank Him for sending His Son. Thank you. Be grateful for the greatest gift ever given. Thank Him this morning for life.

Life in the here and now, a full life and life eternal. And then, live out that thank you life.

A life that's worthy of who we're called. We're called by His name. If you're not sure and you would say, I'm just not sure if I'm right with God, then, I invite you to talk to God now.

[38 : 02] There's no, there's no magic in a prayer and it's not words, but it's what we tell Him out of our heart that matters.

You know, you could tell Him something like, Lord Jesus, for too long, I've wandered in my life. I know that I'm a sinner and I know I can't save myself.

And I don't want to ignore your invitation any longer. By faith, this morning, I gratefully receive your gift of salvation.

And right now, I'm trusting Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Thank you, Jesus, for coming to earth. I believe you're the Son of God.

I believe you died on the cross in my place. Died for my sins and you rose again from the dead to prove that God was satisfied with that payment. So, Lord, thank you.

[39 : 04] Thank you for bearing my sin on the cross. And I thank you right now for giving me the gift of eternal life. I believe that your words are true.

And, Lord Jesus, I trust you to forgive my sin and I trust you for my salvation. And if that's what you prayed, that's what you have meant in your heart and are trusting him completely on the basis of the truth of the word of God, I welcome you as a brother or sister in Christ.

Father, I thank you for anyone who has made things right with you, for those who have trusted Christ as their Savior for the first time and know for sure that they're forgiven and they're right with you.

So, Father, we thank you for what you are going to do. We thank you for the work that you have done in us and we ask, Heavenly Father, that you could do a great and a mighty work through us as we go out and reach out to this world with the gospel of Jesus and make disciples of all people. We thank you, we praise you, for it's in Jesus' precious and holy name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[41 : 15] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[46 : 15] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[51 : 15] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[56 : 15] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[60 : 16] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[64 : 15] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.