

Christmas Eve 2018

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

I love this service. I love getting to celebrate Christmas with you. I want you to know tonight that a homily is a 17-minute sermon, so you can plan accordingly.

I also want you to know this Christmas Eve homily is brought to you by Rudolph, not the red-nosed reindeer, but Rudolph, a big, soft-spoken, tender-hearted African-American man on our facilities team whom I greatly respect.

Rudolph came into my office this weekend while I was working on this message and said, You're probably making it too hard. It's Christmas. Just relax and keep it simple.

I said, like, Jesus loves me? He winked. Yeah, like that. He declined my offer to preach tonight, but that's what I want you to hear as we look at God's Word together.

[1 : 14] Here at Southwood, we've been talking this Christmas season about what Christmas means on a personal level. We've been seeing that through the eyes of those involved in the story of the first Christmas, those who were there.

We've noted each of them, while they have their own individual perspectives, each of them is focused on Jesus. Mary helped us see that Christmas means God's grace in Jesus reaching down to the most undeserving.

Joseph helped us see how Jesus interrupts our lives and, as He does so, meets our biggest need to save us from our sins.

Herod and the wise men helped us realize that the birth of Jesus means that the true King has invaded this world. And we must respond to that by either taking up our swords against Him or by laying our swords down before Him.

Then yesterday, the shepherds helped us see how the birth of Jesus is good news that must be celebrated and shared. See, for all of these people that we know so well from our nativity scenes and Advent stories, that the story of Christmas was more than just a warm, fuzzy feeling, a sentimental tradition.

[2 : 35] It was a life-changing reality. The birth of Jesus changed everything for them. And tonight, I want us very simply to see through the eyes of the baby in the manger Himself that Jesus wants the same for you this Christmas.

He wants you to realize that there's not just a warm feeling and tradition and sentiment, but that there's a life-changing gift for you. A gift He willingly gives you at great cost to Himself.

That's the essence of Christmas. I'm not talking about psychoanalyzing the God-man baby in the manger, what did the baby know or not know.

That's not what we're going to do tonight. But rather considering what Jesus, the Son of God, believed was going on in that first Christmas. Why He came and what that tells us about what we celebrate at Christmas.

Some of you have come a long way to be here tonight, not to hear me preach, but to be with family and friends for Christmas. Doesn't it mean so much when people give up so much in order to be with you?

[3 : 51] One Christmas when we were much younger and able to do this, Christy and I drove ten hours through the night just to be with her parents and surprise them for Christmas.

Why? Why would we do that? Because we love them. Isn't that what you feel when someone considers the cost of being with you and then willingly pays that cost?

Forfeits the time, sleep, money, comfort, even perhaps sanity, depending on the state of your house around Christmas.

And they consider that and they come to be with you. You realize, among other things, how valuable you are to them, how much they love you.

And tonight I simply want you to hear again what you or your children have sung many times before. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves you.

[4 : 53] He sacrifices more than we can understand to give us a gift whose value we can only begin to appreciate. The Bible talks a lot about the reasons Jesus comes to be born.

It certainly mentions that He came because the Father sent Him and He delights to do the Father's will. It mentions He came to live a perfect life, to reflect perfectly the glorious image of our Heavenly Father to us so we would know what He's like.

It mentions that He came to teach us about God. But the overwhelming emphasis of Jesus Himself and the rest of the Bible as it talks about Him is that what was on Jesus' heart in coming to be born in the manger was another piece of wood, a cross.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. And Jesus so loves you that He came willingly, eagerly, fully aware that He was coming to die in your place.

He says so Himself in Mark chapter 10. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

[6 : 16] He says again in Luke 19, the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. Jesus says things like these over and over.

He knows even more deeply what everyone else in the stable is learning, that He has given life to give His life. Consider these other passages printed in your bulletin tonight.

These are just a few of the ways the Bible tells us, before I ran out of space, what Christmas means to Jesus, what He's doing when He's born on Christmas. Matthew 1, Mary will bear a son and you shall call His name Jesus.

What's He going to do? For He will save His people from their sins. John 1, Who is this Jesus? Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

A sacrifice to cover sins. Galatians 4, When the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of woman, born under the law, born, why?

[7 : 23] To redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons of God. To pay the price is what that means.

To buy us back, to give us the gift of adoption as God's sons. Philippians 2, Jesus, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, something to be held on to.

But He emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death on a cross.

He had so much comfort, privilege, wealth. He had so much of it and He thought and considered, should I hang on to these things?

Should I grasp them? And He thought, no way. I'll give those up to come and be born and die for them.

[8 : 32] To give them life, righteousness, relationship that they couldn't deserve, that they could never earn. There's no greater love than that.

That's grace that Jesus counted the cost and then came for you. Is that starting to hit home for you? I know you've heard these things before. It's not new information, but that that's what happens at Christmas, that Jesus comes for you. Certainly the testimony of Scripture allows Paul confidently to say, this saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world.

Why? To save sinners of whom I am the foremost. He came to the manger to go to the cross.

Not to be surprised later by the betrayal of mankind, by the separation from His Father that He endured, by the suffering and pain of the cross.

[9 : 42] No. He came with His eyes wide open to the enormous cost that He would pay. He came for you. He became flesh.

He was born to die. The great pastor of the last century, James Montgomery Boyce, said it this way of Christmas.

The story is treated quite simply in Scripture and the emphasis is always on the fact that Jesus came to die. The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, took a human body in order that He might die for our salvation.

As He came into the world, our Lord had His mind on His great purpose to provide salvation for the race. But not only did He have the purpose in mind, He also was aware that He was perfectly suited by virtue of who He was.

Unlike anybody else who has ever been born, He was not only man, He was God as well.

Therefore, while as a man He could die upon the cross, as God He died in order to pay the infinite price necessary for salvation.

[10:56] In other words, Jesus knew human flesh had to be divinely perfect. And He knew that the wages of sin, death, had to be paid at an infinite level.

And He loved you so much and knew you couldn't do it. So He moved heaven and earth to come and be born and live and die for you.

For the joy set before Him, the joy of being with you in glorious praise of the Father's costly, sacrificial grace forever.

With that joy before Him, He endured the cross. Oh, how He loves you. One Christmas Eve a few years ago was Barbie Jeep night for me.

You may have had a Christmas Eve like this. We were really worked up about it. First, because we knew our girls were going to be so excited to get this gift the next morning. And also because several of you had told us that it took you quite a while to put a Barbie Jeep together.

[12:10] We knew if it took you quite a while, it would take me a long, long while to put it together. So, knowing that, I gave up a peaceful cup of cocoa by the fire with my wife, which I really would have enjoyed, and rushed after this service to the shed of my next-door neighbor and got the box out and spent the next several hours on the cold, hard floor of the garage trying to put together a Barbie Jeep, following careful instructions step by step.

It wasn't cheap. It took a fair amount of time and effort to keep it secret, but the late-night construction was by far the most costly part for me.

I was running on adrenaline, however, to get this perfect special gift put together for our beloved girls we were so excited to share it with. By the end of the process, I was sore and tired.

Christy had to stick on all the decals because my arms were shaking, my eyes were blurry, I couldn't even put a sticker on the plastic. She did all of that. We hardly slept that night, and some of you may have that to look forward to tonight.

But it was so worth it because of their excitement on Christmas morning. I tell you about the Barbie Jeep simply to say this.

[13:40] You know what that feels like. Willingly, eagerly, excitedly to plan and pay and sacrifice to give your kids or someone else a special gift.

And Jesus says this, If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to you?

If you have any joy watching a child open a present tomorrow morning, remember that God Himself delights even more in giving His Son, giving that gift, His righteousness, eternal life to you.

when you give or receive a costly gift tomorrow, remember Christmas delights God because He willingly, eagerly gives His Son, who willingly, eagerly gives His life for you that you may know Him, you may be with Him forever.

Jesus loves you. The angels sang it. The incarnation shouts it.

[15:02] And this table that we come to together tonight repeats it for you so that you will remember it because Jesus doesn't want you to forget. Paul records how He said it to His disciples.

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and He broke it, gave it to His disciples. As I ministering in His name, give this bread to you.

He said, take, eat, this is My body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me. In the same way, after supper, He took the cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is given for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Drink from it, all of you. See, Jesus showed us His love to its fullest extent when He gave His life for us.

It's why Christmas happened. It's why at Christmas we celebrate the giving of costly, valuable gifts. If you've received that gift, the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus, come and celebrate that together with us.

[16:16] This is His table, not ours, not the Presbyterian churches. You come and celebrate Him with us. If you're here tonight and Jesus is not someone that makes you excited about the gift that

He's given you, you really maybe are just considering Him, just wondering about Christmas, maybe you don't even know why a gift like this would be of such infinite value to you.

If that's where you are tonight, listen, we're so glad you're here. We're delighted. Maybe you came because someone else wanted you to come. Thank you for coming. We want you to know that you are welcome to come forward as we do this in just a minute.

We would love the chance to pray with you if you would like or you can stay right where you are if you'd prefer. But don't come and take bread and juice that represents something that you don't believe in, that's not real for you.

We wouldn't want to ask you to do that. But if you're considering Jesus, if you're wondering about someone who would love you so much that He would come to be born so that He could die for you, we'd love to talk to you about Him.

I'll stay. I mean, I don't even have a Barbie Jeep to put together tonight. I'd love to stay and talk with you about that. Let me pray and then we'll celebrate together how much Jesus loves us.

[17 : 35] Jesus, thank You for this gift, a gift beyond any that anyone will give us tomorrow. Your very self, Your body and blood poured out for us.

Would You use these very common elements to remind us how much You love us that You would do that for us? Would You remind us that You didn't want to be apart from us ever and so You secured our eternity by coming and moving in with us and giving Your life for us.

Thank You. Be with us as we celebrate this now in Jesus' name. Amen. I encourage all of you as we consider this sacrament together, as we listen to this music, perhaps to contemplate one of the verses printed in your bulletin there, maybe one that particularly to you communicates how much Jesus loves you personally and contemplate that as we celebrate this sacrament.

Our host team members will usher you to tables forward and back and we will celebrate that Jesus loves us. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

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