

A Christmas Decision (Christmas Eve)

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[0 : 00] Well, Christmas Eve. Merry Christmas. It's good to be here with you this evening. My name is BK. I have the pleasure of serving as one of the pastors here and it is coming upon me to bring to you the Christmas message from Matthew 1.

I think there's one thing that we all admit is we like Christmas, right? We like Christmas, right? I got a few honest kids here. I think some of the adults like it as well, right?

We have the holiday cheer. We've got the love expressed through gift giving. We've got the fellowship with friends and family that we enjoy. Some of you may even enjoy the time of singing that we've just had. And for others, it simply may be time off.

A way to escape the busyness of life or for some, it's an escape from the reality of life.

See, what's kind of interesting about Christmas is Christmas does not exist because the world was doing fine. Christmas does not exist because humanity is particularly good at being decent, kind, and loving.

[1 : 27] Christmas exists because something terribly went wrong. Christmas exists because something like that.

followed. The truth of the matter now is we live in a world where death reigns. But there's something that we should know, that there is no amount of self or personal good effort or religion which can fix what is wrong with the world. But here's the thing about Christmas.

If I could use one word to define Christmas, it would be the word hope. Christmas provides us with hope. Hope that man can be at peace with God. Hope that God can take away our guilt and shame. Hope that God can make all things good once again as they were intended to be at the moment of creation. Why do we have hope at Christmas? And make no mistake, Christmas is not about a mood. Christmas is the method that God uses to make things right with him again. You see, Christmas is God stepping into human history, into our reality. And he does so not to admire us or to admire what we've created. But he does so to rescue us. That's why the passage that was read to us just a few minutes ago by Pastor Corrente, it doesn't begin with a cozy sentimental scene.

It begins with a man who's found out that the woman he is to marry is pregnant. It begins with tension. It begins with scandal. It begins with fear, dare I say chaos. It begins with a young man named Joseph whose life has just fallen apart. And I don't think it would be wrong for me to say that he probably feels like his heart has been ripped out. But tonight we're not here just to remember a birth. We're here to confront the reason that Jesus's birth was necessary. If you're with us this past Sunday, we came to understand that the Christmas story only makes sense when you understand the problem it came to resolve. So this evening, let me just share with you briefly four points about the Christmas story from the life of this man, Joseph. We begin in verse 18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place on in this way. It's kind of a plain beginning. But immediately there's tension. Mary is pregnant. Joseph knows the child is not his.

And what's interesting is Matthew, the author, kind of leaves it hanging there. doesn't give us any excuses or any background of what's going on. He just says it. And what we see here is that Christmas doesn't begin with a spirit of serenity, but Christmas begins with this disruption.

[5 : 45] Note, it describes Joseph as a just man, a righteous man, a man who wants to do the right thing. And yet even in his righteousness, his righteousness cannot solve his problem.

So what does he do? He decides to end the engagement quietly. No public shame, just distance. His instinct is deeply human. I think we've all been there. When something breaks, we want to manage it. Handle it discreetly. But if you're familiar with the book of Romans, the apostle Paul tells us something sobering about Christmas. It tells us that sin cannot be managed.

That sin must be dealt with. Paul tells us why Christmas was necessary. It says, while we were still weak at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

That word weak matters. It doesn't mean he was confused. It does not mean that he was guided. It means he was powerless. Joseph, as we see here, is both righteous, yet powerless.

That is the human condition. We are not basically good people who occasionally mess up. We are sinners who cannot fix ourselves.

[7 : 29] Paul says it even more bluntly in Romans 5, 10. It says, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son.

It tells us that we were enemies. We weren't neutral. We weren't spiritually undecided. And I believe this is why Christmas begins with tension instead of triumph.

Because God does not enter the world when everything is under control. He enters the world when things are beyond control.

And unless we feel the weight of this, the birth of Jesus becomes nothing more than a seasonal story. But when we understand the depth of the problem, Christmas becomes an astonishing story.

Because God did not wait for the situation to improve. He stepped into our chaos.

[8 : 41] Matthew 1, 20 says, Joseph, but he, Joseph, considered these things. Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.

Here we see that into Joseph's confusion. God speaks. But he doesn't do so with a lecture. He does not do so with a condemnation.

But he does so with revelation. The phrase that matters here is, as he considered these things. Here is a man trying to do the right thing.

He is thoughtful. He is moral. He is careful. And yet we know he is wrong. And this becomes an important moment for us.

Because Christmas does not begin with people who don't care. Christmas begins with people who deeply care, yet still do not understand.

[9 : 41] The angel's first words are simple. Joseph, son of David, do not fear.

Notice that fear isn't denied, but it isn't the final word when God draws near. Then the angel gives Joseph an explanation that Joseph could never come up with, no matter how hard he tried.

It says, For that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. What we're reading here is divine intervention.

God is not repairing a situation. God is initiating salvation. And then notice, the angel names the child.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. In case you did not know, that sentence is one of the most precise theological statements we have in all of Scripture.

[11 : 00] He will save. Not from discomfort, not from hardship, not from political oppression. It's he will save his people from their sins.

Paul echoes this later in Romans 5.9. He says, Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

You see, Christmas is God beginning the payment for our redemption. The child is born with a mission.

And that mission is to rescue us. Which tells us that Christmas is not primarily about comfort, good cheer, and happy feelings. It's about deliverance.

God sends his presence not to affirm us in our condition, but to save us out of our condition.

[12 : 12] And this is good news. Because it tells us that there is still hope. Verse 22, he says, At this, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

It's almost like that Matthew is pausing this story, this engaging story. And as if, it's like he's turning to us as the readers, the listeners, and says, I don't want you to miss what this means.

Matthew is telling us that this Christmas is not accidental. This Christmas is not spontaneous. He is telling us that Christmas is the literal fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

In fact, he reaches back several hundred years to the words of Isaiah, which says, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

And then Matthew translates the name for us, which means God with us. If there was a heart to Christmas, this is it.

[13 : 38] It's not God near us. It's not God aware of us. But it says, God with us.

And if we're honest, that's a little bit unsettling, right? And it's far more hopeful than it actually sounds. Because God with us does not mean God overlooking sin.

It means God entering the very world sin has broken. And Paul helps us feel the weight of this. He says, God showed his love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God does not wait for us to clean ourselves up or to develop a greater form of religion or to reach some type of heightened enlightenment.

It says he draws near while we were still sinners. In fact, Emmanuel means God steps into human brokenness, weakness, and guilt.

[14 : 50] There's a quote I came across. It says, Jesus is named Jesus because he saves. Jesus is called Emmanuel because he stays.

And he does not save us from afar. He saves us by coming near. And this tells us why Christmas matters so much.

Christmas declares God is holy and near. While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, says Romans 5.10.

Enemies. Yet God comes close. Emmanuel. God with us. And if you can understand this, Christmas will never be reduced to a mood or feelings again.

We know from the songs that we've seen and in other parts of scripture, we read this passage where it says, where the angels sing peace on earth.

[16 : 09] We note that they're not announcing a political calm or an end of conflict. It's not inner calm.

It's not seasonal comfort. But it's the end of hostility between God and sinners. It's what we understand. Romans 5.1 tells us, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that word peace matters because to have peace, it means you have to be at war. And if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that you are, in fact, an enemy of God and are at war with God.

The most probable war is your independence and your desire to rule yourself rather than to surrender to God. See, scripture is clear.

We're not neutral. We're not spiritually undecided. We're enemies. And that means Christmas is not God ignoring sin. It is God resolving sin.

[17 : 23] The only way to resolve it is it requires a sacrifice. This child, born in Bethlehem, did not come merely to show us what God is like.

He actually came to do what we could never do. He shed His blood. He paid the cost.

And He made the payment for us. That's why Romans 5, 9 tells us we have now been justified by His blood. See, Christmas is the beginning of a road that leads to the cross.

This is why Christmas is such good news for weary people because peace with God does not depend on our performance. It does not depend on how consistent we are.

It does not depend on whether we've been good enough or spiritual enough. It simply depends on what God has done. We don't stand on our record.

[18 : 25] We stand on God's record. And because peace has been secured, not by you, but for you, guilt no longer has the final word in your life.

Shame does not get to define you. And fear, forget about it. Death has no sting.

This is what Christmas gives. And this is why Christmas still matters. Because Christmas brings hope.

So tonight, I hope this message of Christmas is clear. It's not a complicated message. It's not a sentimental or a vague message.

It's simply, God has come near. Not because we were searching for Him, but simply because we could not save ourselves.

[19 : 30] Christmas declares that God did not leave us here. He sent His Son. He gave Him a name.

And He sent Him with a purpose. You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. Which brings us to the most important question of this evening.

Is God with you? Or is He just a far off idea? Something that you have positive thoughts about.

But can you honestly say that God is with you? Not culturally. Not emotionally. But I'm talking about being at peace with the Creator of the universe.

Romans 5 tells us how this happens. It says we are justified. We are made right by faith. Faith. Faith, which is to trust.

[20 : 42] It's to receive Christmas. What God has done for us. See, Christmas is not God meeting us halfway and we have to work up the religious power to go the second half of the journey.

No, no, no. Christmas is about God coming all the way. And if you are honest enough to say, I can't fix what's wrong with me.

Christmas simply says you don't have to. God has come. Peace has been secured. Grace is offered.

Emmanuel. God with us. And by faith, God with you. Let's pray. Dear most holy heavenly Father, we thank you for this Christmas story.

It's not a clear-cut story as much as we put so emotionalism around this time of year. You first appear to this broken man in a broken country and a people that are literally slaves to the Roman Empire.

[21 : 57] They had no means. They had no power. They were powerless. And this man even more so.

Heart crushed. Confused. The knowledge that he is just and yet still his decision is seen as wrong.

God intervenes. I think right now some people need to pray that God would intervene in their life. Because the fact of the matter is God usually shows up in the chaos.

When we admit the chaos that we've caused and that we cannot control. It is those moments that God reaches in not only to bring redemption and peace with God but a knowledge and understanding of his will for us.

A knowledge and understanding of what does it mean to live as a child of God. How do we form a purpose for ourselves here today? Father, I pray that you would definitely use this message as you have for centuries about this king who comes to rule over death.

[23 : 32] May you hear our cries and our prayers, O Father. In your name we pray. Amen.