

“What’s the Big Deal about Christmas?

Phil. 2:2-11

12-18-16

Well we are one week from Christmas and some people are chill mode since they’ve had their tree up since July 4 and finished all their shopping and wrapping. But the rest of us are in frenzy mode, with last minute shopping, wrapping, parties, baking happening this week. And I dare say that most of us are worn out from it all. So the title of the message is: “What’s the big deal about Christmas?” And the text is Philippians 2:5-11. So what is the big deal about Christmas? Is it about searching for a biggest, bad-est, most bodacious and beautiful Tree? (What’s that saying: Measure twice, cut once?). Is it about putting up thousands of Christmas lights? (May need some help with that) So that your house can be seen from outer space? Is the big deal about Christmas getting to go out play in the snow or maybe choosing the perfect gift? (Don’t forget the air holes in that box) Or is it about showing off your culinary skills in preparing a delicious dinner? Or is the big deal about Christmas spending time with family? Some of whom may get a little over excited... Others who are, let’s face it, a little embarrassing... Others who may not be around much longer if they keep doing what they’re doing....And others we can’t seem to get rid of...no matter how many hints we drop... So sometimes we get frustrated because the perfect Christmas is always beyond our reach. But is that all there is to Christmas? What is the big deal about Christmas, anyway?

I think Paul answers it here in Philippians 2:5-11. “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

So what is the big deal about Christmas? It is the centerpiece of human history. Even our calendar is dated from the reference point of Jesus Christ and his birth. People say we have a godless Constitution but they are wrong. It is signed “In the year of our Lord.” What is the reference? To Christmas. God split history and we speak of time as being either B.C. (before Christ) or A.D. (In the year of our Lord). And here in Philippians 2, Paul gives us one of the greatest explanations in the all Bible of who Jesus Christ is and what He came to do. This is the bedrock, the foundation of all that we believe. First of all notice...

I. THE RELEVANCE OF CHRISTMAS: GOD CAME TO EARTH

It was big news when man landed on the moon and walked there nearly 50 years ago. It is even bigger news that God landed and walked here on earth over 2,000 years ago. Jesus Christ is God Himself. It was God who came to the very earth he created. Look again at v 5-6a: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." Paul says here that Jesus was God, equal with God. That is a big deal. John was one of the original 12 and he tells us in his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with

God.³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” John 1:1-3. And then John says in v 14: “And the Word (Jesus) as made flesh and dwelt, tabernacle, pitched his tent among us.” Jesus was God. And God invaded earth. That is the relevance of Christmas. That’s why it is such a big deal.

There are people who question that... In fact some claim to be Christians. Several years ago the cover of U.S. News and World Report featured an article entitled "Who was Jesus?" And in the pages of that article, you read about a self-appointed team of theological revisionists called the Jesus Seminar, and they got together and pooled their collective ignorance, and presented to America the liberal progressive view of who Jesus is. They say that Jesus Christ was an illiterate peasant. He did not preach salvation from sin, and he certainly did not preach the Sermon on the Mount and some 80 to 90% of the words in red that are attributed to him in the Gospels. There were no miracles. He certainly was not conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, and therefore not God. He was executed as an insurrectionist by Rome and his body was eaten by wild dogs. There was no resurrection. Doesn't that Bless you? But this is the Jesus that many progressive professors in universities and even seminaries are presenting to students. Paul's statement in Roman's 1:22 comes to mind: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

Who is the real Jesus? We only need to consult the infallible, inerrant word of God and we find that He is more than a great teacher, more than a moral philosopher, more than a vagabond prophet, He is God! Now when Nicodemus came to speak with Jesus under the cover of darkness, for fear he would be discovered by his fellow members of the Sanhedrin, he said: "We know that you are a teacher come from God." (John 3:2) Nicodemus was only partly right. He was not just a teacher come from God, Jesus was God come to teach. He thought it not robbery to be equal with God says v 5. Jesus is co-equal, co-eternal, and co-regent with God himself.

We worship a triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Sometimes people make this mistake. They say: Well, there's God, then there's Jesus, then there's the Holy Spirit. But that's really not a good way to put it. The best way to speak of the Trinity is this: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Jehovah's witnesses, Muslims, and Jews accuse us of worshipping three gods, but we don't. We worship one God, indivisible in being and substance, and yet revealed in three persons. They say: No, that's $1+1+1 = 3$. No, I say, that's $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$.

You say, "I can't wrap my mind around that, I can't understand that." Well I'm glad you don't, and I'm glad I don't either. Why? Because I wouldn't have much confidence in a God I could fully comprehend – his thoughts are higher than my thoughts, Amen? (Isa. 55:8-9) Don't try to stuff all there is of God in the suitcase of your mind and then try to snip off everything that hangs out or you will lose something. You can't do it. Over and over the Bible repeats and Jesus proclaims that He is God.

Jesus didn't start at the stable. He's existed even before creation. Col. 1:15-16a: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” He is the exact likeness of the unseen God. Yes, I know, it is tough sometimes to relate to a vague personality in the heavens. But when I see God in the flesh, in Jesus Christ, I can relate to him. Jesus said in John 14:9 "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father."

Yet Jesus said in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I AM." (Cf. Exodus 3:14). Remember the prophecy from Isaiah 9:6, written some 700 years before Christ came? "Unto us a child is born"--that speaks of his humanity, "and unto us a Son is given"--that speaks of His deity. "And the government shall be upon his shoulders and His name shall be called: Wonderful, counselor, the mighty God!" The same little babe in Bethlehem's manger was the mighty God who created the universe in Genesis 1. And if Jesus really was God and God came to earth, then Christmas is the most relevant event in history. God came to earth. The Relevance of Christmas. Secondly consider...

II. THE REALITY OF CHRISTMAS: GOD BECAME A MAN

This is even more difficult to understand. If you were God and were going to come to earth, of all the ways you could choose to reveal yourself, would you come as a baby? As a helpless human being? But that is what he did. Look at v 7-8a "Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form..." Message version says: "When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process..."

Theologians call this emptying the kenosis from the Greek verb here. He emptied himself of the appearances of Deity and took on humanity. Somehow, he was still fully God, but now he was also fully man. Say how could God do that? Only a sovereign God could limit his own sovereignty. Think about it. God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. He knows everything, He is everywhere, and He is all-powerful. That's Jesus before Bethlehem. That's Jesus now. But from the time he entered the womb of Mary through the Holy Spirit to the time he ascended back to the right hand of the Father, he was not omniscient, he was not omnipresent, and he was no omnipotent. He wasn't omniscient...there were some things that took him by surprise (10 Lepers but only 1 Thanked – Luke 17:11-18) and some things he didn't know (timing of his Second Coming- Matt. 24:36). He wasn't omnipresent... He was limited to a location (Mary and Martha were upset he wasn't there to heal Lazarus – John 11). And he wasn't omnipotent... There were some things he couldn't do (Mark 6:5 tells He couldn't do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief). Yet he was fully God with self-limitations and he was fully man. As much man as though he were not God at all and as much God as though he were not man at all. It is a great mystery, but it is nonetheless true.

The reality of Christmas was that Jesus Christ who is God became a baby. A human being with flesh and blood, bones, and hair. That is what theologians call the incarnation. He was God in the flesh. He was a real person, not a myth, fable, a nice story. The reality is that God came to earth and God became a man. Why would he? He had to become human to be our substitute. And to be our substitute he had to be sinless. That is what is so vitally important about the fact that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, so that he might have a sinless nature and then he could live a sinless life so that He could be our substitute.

And God also became human in the person of Jesus so we could relate to him, because God is all about relationship. See if God had wanted to relate to dogs, He would have become a dog. If He wanted to relate to birds, He would have become a bird. But God

wanted to relate to people so He became a person. God came to earth but He came as a human being, a person, like us. How is Jesus like us?

1) He was born like us. Paul says “he made himself nothing...born in the likeness of men.” Paul wrote to the Galatians: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Gal. 4:4-5) He came into the world like billions of other babies. But the whole history of the world rested in that one fragile infant. That must have blown the minds of the angels! No flashy entrance to let the whole world know He's there. He just comes in the middle of the night in a stable in Bethlehem. Mary goes into labor and has this baby like any other. He was born like us.

2) He grew up like us. Luke 2:52 says: "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." He grew and developed and had growth spurts. Can you imagine what it would have been like to have gone to school with Jesus? You might notice that He was a little bit different but would you believe that He was God? He did not parade the fact that he was God. In fact, Mark 3 presents evidence that his mother and brothers thought he was crazy and came to get him in Capernaum. John 7 says his brothers didn't believe in him as the Messiah, as Son of God. He was a human being and grew like us. He looked every inch a Jew from Palestine. Not only the son of a carpenter (humanly speaking), but a carpenter himself. He had sore muscles from hard work, had calluses on his hands and splinters in his fingers. He was a real man. That's the reality of Christmas.

3) He was tempted like us. Hebrews 4:15 says: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Jesus experienced the same pressures that you and I do to sin, the same temptations, desires, drives. The same temptations to lie, to cheat, to steal. He was tempted in every respect but He never gave into the temptations. He never sinned. 1 Peter 2:21 says: “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.” This is vitally important because he had to be sinless to be an acceptable sacrifice. But it is also important because He can relate to you when you're struggling with temptation and we can relate to him in his victory over it. He overcame the same way as we are – using the Word of God to defeat the Devil. Tempted like us...but also...

4) He suffered like us. He felt pain, disappointment. He got tired, fatigued. He felt lonely at times. He grieved, He cried, He was human. At the tomb of his friend, the Bible says: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). In Gethsemane He said, "The sorrow is so great it almost crushes Me." (Matthew 26:38) He knew what it was like to feel pain. He can relate to your pain, problems, pressures. He became a man so that we could relate to God. But most important of all he had to become a human so he could be our substitute, and he had to be God so that He could be our Savior. Jesus was born of a virgin that we could be born again. He came to earth that we might go to heaven. He became the Son of Man that we might become sons and daughters of God. That is the reality of Christmas. The Relevance of Christmas: God came to earth. The reality of Christmas: God became a man... Thirdly...

III. THE REASON FOR CHRISTMAS: JESUS CAME TO DIE

v. 8b "...He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. See Jesus didn't stay in the manger. That's where the world would like to keep him. That's why the world celebrates Christmas but they don't want any more of Jesus than that little baby in the manger. But He didn't stay in a crib. He went to a cross and voluntarily laid down His life for us. He humbled himself... This is the attitude Paul says we are to have. He's saying that Jesus Christ is the supreme example of putting others first to the point of sacrifice.

What a life the Lord Jesus lived! A life of humility before God. He was incarnate wisdom, yet the world thought him a fool. He was the truth, yet the world called him a liar and a heretic. He had such power that He could still the raging storm, and yet little children came and sat on his lap. He spoke with authority, and yet on the day of His judgment, He said nothing. He was the Lion of Judah, and yet as a lamb led to the slaughter, he opened not his mouth. He was the King of Kings, yet he wore a crown of thorns. He poured out the rivers and the oceans from the crystal chalice of eternity at the creation. He Himself was the living water, yet on the cross He said: "I thirst."

Paul says: "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Talk about humility. He was mocked, spat upon, insulted, beaten, and then crucified. Why? He didn't have to. He was God. He could have called legions of angelic warriors and put a stop to it at any point. He did not have to go to the cross. Nobody put Him there without His permission. Why did He allow Himself to go to the cross? Other than obedience to God, which is obvious in this text, the Bible says He did it for two other reasons:

A. To demonstrate God's Love: Romans 5:8 "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." His motivation was love. Message version says: "But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him." If you want to know how much God loves you, look at the cross. The Bible says, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13). A lot of people may give their life for their friend or family or children. But the Bible says that God gave His life for us when we were hostile toward Him, rejecting Him, before we even knew Him, before we were even born. He gave His life for us. That's love. That is the reason for Christmas -- to demonstrate His love for you and me. "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son..."

B. To Pay for Our Sins: When you break a law you've got to pay a penalty. When you break man's laws you pay man's penalties. When you break God's laws you pay God's penalties. The Bible says in Rom. 6:23: "The wages of sin is death." Sin must be paid for. God never has, God never will, God never can overlook sin. All sin will be pardoned through Christ or punished in hell, but no sin will be overlooked. But rest of Rom. 6:23 says: "... the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." He made it possible for us to escape God's wrath on sin by taking our place and our punishment.

1 Peter 2:24 says: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree (the cross), that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." 2 Cor. 5:21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." What Jesus did 2,000 years ago can make a difference in my life right now. I can be completely forgiven for everything I've ever done wrong or will ever do. That's the reason for Christmas.

In fact, it is woven into the heart of the Christmas story. The angels proclaimed: "For unto you this day is born a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11). Joseph received a dream in which he was told by the angelic messenger to name the baby boy to be born "Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1:20-21) What does it mean to be a Savior? Someone who saves you from disaster, death, and destruction. Jesus came to be the Savior of the world. He came to be your Savior. He came on a rescue mission. In the awful floods in Louisiana people had to be rescued from drowning. In the horrible fires of East Tennessee, people had to be rescued from burning. We are all in need of a Savior because we cannot save ourselves. We can't be good enough or great enough. Only Jesus could do it and he loved us so much that he did. Jesus volunteered. He stepped forward. He poured out his life in death on that cross. Thank God He humbled himself and suffered and died for you and me – to show us God's love and to pay for our sins – to save us. That is the ultimate reason for Christmas.

The relevance of Christmas is that God came to earth and it split history into BC and AD. But the reality of Christmas is that He came as a man. You can look at Him and know what God is like. But He became human not only so we could relate to him but so that he could be the sinless substitute God requires. That's the reality. And the reason is He came was ultimately not to stay in a crib but go to a cross. He came to show how much God loves you and to pay for your sin and mine by dying on the cross and offer us salvation. Salvation is freedom -- freedom from sin, guilt, worry, fear, purposelessness in life, to know that your eternity is settled, freedom to live the way God meant for you to live. That's the reason for Christmas.

IV. THE RESULT OF CHRISTMAS: JESUS IS LORD

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Just as the crib was not the end for Jesus, neither was the cross. Romans 1:4 says: Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power... by the resurrection of the dead! He did not just die and that was the end. He lives! You know, there are many founders of world religions but they are dead. Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed...to name a few. But Confucius died and he is dead. Buddha died and he is dead. Mohammed died and he is dead. But Jesus died and yet He lives!

That's one reason why He has a name that is above every name. They put his body in a tomb, and Pilate said make it as sure as you know how. So they rolled a massive stone over it, they put a Roman seal upon it, and posted a group of Romans guards in front of it. Rome made it as sure as she could. Unbelief made it as sure as it could, because the Pharisees and Sadducees mocked the idea that he would come forth from the grave. Death made it as sure as he could, because Jesus body lay cold and still, bound by the iron shackles of death. But on Sunday up from the grave He arose! With a mighty triumph o'er his foes! Hallelujah! He's alive! That's what Easter is all about.

A. God's Response to Jesus: There are two things Paul talks about here. Because Jesus humbled Himself and obediently died on the cross, God has done two things for Jesus:

1) **God Exalted Him:** He has given Jesus the place of top honor in the universe. He's honored above all else -- the highest place. Now seated at the right hand of God the Father.

2) **God Named Him:** The name "Jesus" in New Testament times was a very common name. It wasn't unusual, basically like John or Jim today. "Jesus" in Hebrew (Yeshua) means "salvation is of the Lord." The Greek word is Joshua. That is why they had to distinguish which Jesus it was they were talking about -- Jesus of Nazareth, etc. Even when He was born He was given many names: Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. But Jesus is the sweetest to these ears. Fears are calmed and the weak made strong at the name of Jesus. Storms are stilled and the dead are raised at the name of Jesus. Demons tremble and Satan flees at the name of Jesus. Just speak his name, the name above all names, and the Holy Spirit will quicken you if you are a believer. Jesus...

What is the title He has been given as a result of going to the cross for us? Jesus is LORD. Jesus is Lord. The word is misused, misunderstood, used flippantly by many people, even Christians. They don't understand the meaning of LORD. Lord in Greek is the word that means "master, ruler, the one in control, total sovereign, king." It can even mean absolute dictator, despot and in the end that's true. He is a loving and benevolent dictator. Over 600 times in the New Testament the Bible calls Jesus, Lord.

Lord in New Testament times was a word used for Caesar. It was used in the Roman Empire because the Emperor was treated as god. They worshipped the Caesar as god. Citizens would walk up to the altar, burn a pinch of incense to the genius of Rome and say "Caesar is Lord". It became a test of loyalty in the Roman Empire. When Christians were forced to the altar, many threw their incense to the ground in defiance and proclaimed "Christos Kyrios" or "Jesu Kyrios" -- "Christ is Lord, Jesus is Lord." So they were put to death -- nailed to a cross, thrown to the lions, made to fight gladiators, burned at the stake... Many of them lost their lives simply by uttering one phrase -- "Jesus is Lord."

B. Our Response to Jesus: What does it mean to say "Jesus is Lord"?

1) I acknowledge that He really is God. He's more than a man or a prophet. He really is God. He is the Lord. It is a test of my commitment to Him.

2) I believe that He has everything under control. Since Jesus is God then God has everything under control, Jesus has everything under control. To say Jesus is Lord is a statement of comfort and encouragement. Although everything looks bleak, Jesus is Lord and I know He's got everything under control. I may not see it, the pattern and what is happening, but Jesus is Lord and I recognize the fact that He has everything under control. Nothing escapes His care or concern. Because He is Lord. To say Jesus is Lord is to say I don't know what the New Year holds but I know who holds the future, because Jesus is Lord.

3) I surrender all of my life to Him. He is Lord and I submit to His Lordship. He calls the shots because He is God, has come to earth, died for me and rose again. Because He has done those things He has the right to determine by path, direct my decision making, my purchases, my media consumption, everything. So don't use the word Lord lightly. It has great significance! "If you confess with your mouth, 'JESUS IS LORD', and believe

in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9. What does it mean to be a Christian, to be a believer, to be saved? It means to say, Jesus is my Lord. I acknowledge the fact that He is God, I believe that He has everything under control, I surrender everything I have to His leadership

It may look like the forces of darkness are advancing and the other side is winning, but Jesus is Lord. You may think you cannot cope any more, there is too much pressure, but Jesus is Lord. You may think your problems are too great and you can't handle them, but Jesus is Lord. Circumstances may pile up against you and people may frustrate you and fight you, but Jesus is Lord.

Say that phrase when you're discouraged -- Jesus is Lord. When you're tired or sick, when you're worried and afraid -- Jesus is Lord. Say it when you don't think you can go on another day or take another step—Jesus is Lord. Say it when you're grieving and you don't know why somebody has died -- Jesus is Lord. Say it when you're lonely and feeling helpless—Jesus is Lord. And say it at Christmas—Jesus is Lord. Because Christmas begins and ends with Christ.

C. Creation's Response to Jesus: Phil. 2:9-11 says one day every knee will bow, every tongue will confess what God has known for the ages, the truth of all truth -- Jesus is Lord. A lot of people get wrapped up in a baby in a manger. They think that's cute and quaint and so it is. But when He comes again, things will be radically different. When He came the first time, He came to a feeding trough, when he comes again, He's coming to a fabulous throne. When He came the first time, He stood before Pilate to be judged. When He comes again, Pilate will stand before Him to be judged. When He came the first time, He came to a crucifixion, but when He comes again, it will be to a coronation. When He came the first time, he came in shame, but when He comes again, he will come in splendor! When He came the first time, He came to redeem, when He comes again, He's coming to reign!

It will happen. One day He will be given His due honor. All of the arrogance in this world that puts itself up against Christ and all of the denial and pseudo-scientific and philosophical arguments that are put up will fall by the wayside, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. On the Judgement Day. Everyone will stand there before the Lord and then they will all kneel. From all the ages of time, everyone will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. Every race, tribe, kingdom and nation, every age group, every male, every female, every member of every religion and no religion at all will say "Jesus is Lord." Everyone will admit it and confess it.

So the issue is not if but when. We can either admit it now in love and honor and respect and surrender or we will admit it on the Day of Judgment and it will be too late. That is why God is patient, not willing that any should perish but all come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). He is waiting... But one day, every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. That is the result of Christmas.

And there is a word of application for believers. The greatest need for Christians in America is to do what Paul said here: Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus... 1) We need to empty ourselves of self and humble ourselves before God as Jesus did. 2) We need to obey God to the point of sacrifice on behalf of others as Jesus did. And 3) We need to proclaim this truth of all truths: JESUS IS LORD! To Everyone, Everywhere! All hail the power of Jesus' name, let angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him Lord of all! That's the big deal about Christmas!

Bow with me: Jesus is Lord. Surrender and submission to him is what it means to be a believer and a follower of Christ. If you have never acknowledged him as God, and believed that He is in control, and surrendered your all to Him, I invite you to do that now. One day everybody will have to do it, but it will be too late. But you can do it now willingly and voluntarily but wholeheartedly and joyfully. And if you will, Christmas will take on a whole different and wonderful meaning for you. It is simple. The Bible says: "If you confess with your mouth, `JESUS IS LORD', and believe in your heart hat God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved."

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