



Title: Christmas Love

Theme: The Love of God, Christ Given

Series: The Cast of Christmas

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”
(Luke 2:1-7)

Grasp Christmas joy

There is so much that comes at us especially this time of the year. Before we know it Christmas day is here and it seems that we just did not get prepared to celebrate it as we had hoped. The world's way of celebrating Christmas sometimes has a way of keeping us from enjoying the Lord Jesus' birthday in spirit and truth. One of the best ways to grasp Christmas joy is to consider the lives of those who are closely connected with the physical birth of Christ.

I would propose to you if you want to grasp true joy during the Christmas season it is imperative that you catch the significance in how God showed love by giving Christ. God gave His Son and Christ came willingly—true expressions of sacrificial love.

Just what is the significance in how God and Christ showed their love to us? John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. The Greek word for “believes” (*pisteuo*) means to put complete trust in, to have no doubt about or to be certain of. The application of this word as applied in John 3:16 is to have such a belief in Jesus Christ that how He lived and what He taught has a continued effect on how you live. (Practical Word Studies in the New Testament; The Complete Word Study of the New Testament; Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains; The Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament) Through this message, if you let Him, the Holy Spirit could help you find trust in the love of God and Christ and be certain about that love.

The conditions into which God sent His Son

The first truth that the Holy Spirit wants you to grasp from the written Word of God is the conditions into which God sent His Son, Jesus. The people who are the most blessed by the expression of love given by someone else are the people who understand the sacrifice made by the person showing that act of love.

Jesus' birth was the fulfillment of much Biblical prophecy, one incidence being what was spoken by Jacob. In Genesis 49:10 in the New American Standard Bible we read, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until Shiloh comes, and to Him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Jacob foresees and foretells. When he is dying God gives Jacob a look into the future and he gives support from his deathbed that not only is a blessing to his sons, but to all who become sons of God through adoption by faith in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem Israel was once again in need of a sign that the Great Deliverer, the child to be born according to what is written about Him had arrived. In keeping with the truth to be grasped today we must understand the spiritual condition of the people during the time when Christ was born. We must also understand the application it has for us today.

Judah was no longer ruled by one of its own kings. Judea was under the rule of a descendant of Esau, Herod the Great. The promised land was no longer in the hands of Israel; it was in the hands of a heathen power. The ruler was no longer God's perfect plan for a ruler, but rather a bad ruler appointed by men who held the Jews captive.

Even the Temple was no longer cared for by ministers of God who could grasp the will of God, rather servants who were governed by fear of Roman oppressors.

According to Who' Who in the Bible, Esau, represented that heart that is not serious about its relationship with God. He made frivolous decisions that had irreversible consequences. When Esau understood that it would be displeasing to his parents to marry girls from certain family lines he deliberately went off and found a girl that his parents would not like and added her to his wives. (Genesis 28:6-9) In Hebrews 12:16 we read that he was a godless man and the Bible says that Esau lived a purposely rebellious life and there was no place in his heart for repentance. (Hebrews 12:17)

Herod was like Esau a man who lived only for self and in rebellion to truth. He ordered the massacre of the innocent male children in Bethlehem and its vicinity all because he wanted to protect his throne from the One born to be King of the Jews and the Savior of the world.

Consider with me the written Word of God that says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind..." (Jeremiah 17:9, 10)

The truth that the Holy Spirit wants you to grasp in this portion of the message is that mankind left to himself will do whatever it takes to remain on the throne of his own heart. What is scary about that is this heart that is clearly against Christ being truly Lord and Savior makes the human mind think it is doing right, when in truth it is acting in full rebellion. This heart brings justification in its actions while it makes frivolous decisions and produces irreversible consequences. Only Jesus Christ can turn a heart around that is set against God, only He can intervene and put a stop to irreversible consequences of rebellion.

The great news is that in the middle of a sin sick world at the time of Jesus' birth there were people who sought God and were looking for the coming of the Messiah. God made sure that those seeking Him were made aware that the Savior of the world had arrived. Not only did the Lord make it known, He used those who responded to the good news to tell others.

Listen carefully as I read about the proclamation of the birth of Christ in the midst of a world hostile to God and His people on that first Christmas eve, "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.' When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.' So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." (Luke 2:8-19)

God supernaturally made a way for those with ears who are hungry for the things of God to get the message of Christ being born in Bethlehem. He works supernaturally through the Holy Spirit of Christ to draw people with ears wanting to hear to consider Jesus Christ today.

Spiritually, Christians, by the power of the Holy Spirit are given supernatural revelations of Christ, God's will through the written Word and they are empowered to live out the will of God as they live in a world that is not a friend of Grace. Even in this day, the world as a whole stands against the work of God.

Law suits are brought against those who want to publicly express their faith in Christ during the Christmas season. Instead of "Merry Christmas" those in this world are wanting have people say "Happy Holiday." Christians in public service are more and more attacked by the media when they express their faith in Christ and prayer.

Even in the church the purity of the pulpit is threatened by those who serve in it and the church is embracing that which breaks the heart of God. In the midst of this offense, God still sends the Holy Spirit of Christ to those who love Him so they can have fellowship with the Lord.

Our natural response to someone who rejects any act of kindness or love we show to them is to shut them out of our lives and make it impossible for them to enjoy our presence. God out of sacrificial love gave His one and only Son and Jesus came willingly so that those with hard hearts may turn and accept the love of God. While natural man wants to cast out those who reject him, God now sends His Holy Spirit to bring revelation of the written Word so people who have hard hearts may be drawn to Christ.

God has always and still does express His love to people in this sin trodden world and the sending of His one and only Son is expression of true love

God has always and still does express His love to people in this sin trodden world and the sending of His one and only Son is expression of true love. 1 John 4:9-12 says, "This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us." (1 John 4:9-12)

Jesus being born in Bethlehem is the Shiloh who was to come. "Shiloh" (siyloh) means "the peaceful one." (The Complete Word Study; Trough the Bible)

In Christ there is reconciliation between God and those who truly have Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This peace comes to us not because we showed love to God, but because God loved us first. This is a truth that must be grasped this Christmas season if we are going to walk in a joyous Christmas spirit.

1 John 2:2 in the New American Standard Bible tells that Jesus "...is the propitiation of our sins, and not just ours, but also for those of the whole world." Propitiation is something God does to make it possible for men to be forgiven. God's Word is revelation and His holiness requires Him to uphold that law of God. He is also love and therefore He forgives sinners. He sent His Son to make a way for mankind to receive forgiveness of sin. God did this because He is love. We did not or can not do anything to cause Him to love us.

God did not give us His Son because we were attractive, or because we were good or because we make promises to do things for Him. He does not give us eternal life because He can gain something from us.

I was reading some material written by J.A. Clarks about a Jewish legend. As I consider the legend these thoughts came to my mind. Suppose at creation of mankind some angels were listening in as God and Christ talked about the creation of man. Suppose that there was angel of Justice. What would he say? He would say "Don't create man for he will do all kinds of wickedness against his fellow man, be hard, cruel, dishonest, and unrighteous." If there would be an angel of truth, would he not say, "Do not create man for he will be full of falsehood and deceitfulness." If there was angel of Holiness would he not say, "Do not create mankind he will be impure in heart and dishonor the name of God and Christ."

At the end of this deliberation considering the character of God being love, I could believe Him saying, "Let us create man in our image and when he sins and turns from the path of true righteousness, from truth and a hunger for holiness, I will gather him from out of the world and tenderly through love bring him back unto Myself." Romans 5:8 proclaims a powerful truth, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Anyone who has ever had children knows that sometimes an expression of love is what is needed even when the feeling of love is not present. Children at times make poor decisions when they are engaging in sin that hurt themselves, others, and the God who created them. These sins grieve the heart of a parent. It is at this time that the child needs to be shown an expression of love even though the feeling of love is not present. This expression can come as parents trust in Christ who paid the price for those sins.

Christians slip into sins that grieve the heart of the Lord and yet while that act of sin is bringing about its consequences, Christ will make sure that we enjoy His love as we turn to Him for forgiveness and direction.

The last truth to grasp in this message is the unusual place where the King of the Jews was born and the significance that has to us

God's love is available to Christians only because God is love. He has shown that love by giving us His one and only son. The last truth to grasp in this message is the unusual place where the King of the Jews was born and the significance that has to us. Our text says, "While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a Son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in the manger..." (Luke 2:6-7)

The irony of the most important event in history taking place in a stable should not be lost. There are some significances worth noting because it reveals how God resides in the lowliest of hearts and rejects the proud and mighty things of this world.

The Magi very likely went to Jerusalem to find the newborn King of the Jews because they thought that would be the likely place to find him. While there they received a new fresh vision, a spiritual one birthed from God's Word on where to find him. The Pharisees and Sadducees had absolutely no clue of what was going on the night Christ was born because they were no longer hungry for that which was spiritual. Don't miss the significance of the humility of Christ.

Being the King of the Jews, Jesus was worthy of being born in a palace with the best that could be offered in His day for the delivery of a baby. Being the last and final High Priest, the priests who were only about six miles away in Jerusalem surely could have found at least one home in Bethlehem that would open their doors for Mary to give birth to God's Messiah. If someone rich or influential had been supporting Mary and Joseph a place would have been made for them.

Christ lowered Himself to be born a man, taking on human flesh and by age 33 taking on the sins of the world. He showed His humility by being born in a lowly stable. Symbolically, a stable can be a representation of a place of sin. Sin is an unpleasing aroma to God and all stables have an unpleasant aroma. The Savior of the world was born into a place of uncleanness so He can someday make a way for those under the curse of sin to be made clean by accepting Him as personal Savior and Lord.

Just as Christ was born in a stinky stable, the Holy Spirit of Christ is born in the man or woman who, in repentance, turns to Christ for forgiveness. The heart of man is often chasing after self-will and the things of this world as he amazingly listens to the lies of the devil. All this is an unpleasing aroma to the Lord, The Lord, however, remains within the heart of the believer to do His spiritual work. The love of God is expressed as He sends the Holy Spirit of Christ into the spiritual heart of Christians.

In Romans 8:9 the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Christ. In John 14:17 and He is called the "Spirit of truth." The Bible says Christians will know Him and that He lives in them. (John 14:17) God's amazing love is always demonstrated by action. It is never complacent but continually working in Christians. The Spirit of Christ dwelling within the spiritual heart of Christians cleans them up and makes new people out of them. Romans 8:9-11 says, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the [Holy] Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ... And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you."

The true mark of a born-again believer and a genuine Christian is that he has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The child of God who knows the love of God, sent into their lives by Christ says as the Apostle Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

If you are not conscious of the presence of the Spirit of God in your life and there is not a heartfelt desire to exercise your Spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities for the glory of God, then grasp Christ this Christmas and receive Him as personal Savior and Lord.

In Closing: *There are three truths in today's message that must be grasped if you are going to walk in Christmas joy.* 1.) Just as Christ was born in conditions that were hostile to the work of God, Christ can be revealed in the spiritual heart that wants to rebel against God. 2.) God sending Christ into the sin trodden world and Jesus being revealed to you are expressions of God's love. 3.) To respond to God's love means to have accepted Christ as personal Savior and Lord and to have the Holy Spirit of Christ indwelling you.

This Christmas season the Holy Spirit calls your attention to the exhortation of the Apostle Paul, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

The true believer who has accepted God's love, Christ given, is a new creation. Do you love the Lord Jesus? Do you serve Him? Are the things of the Lord constantly on your mind and heart? These three truths must be settled in your mind and heart before you partake in communion this Christmas Eve day. Let us pray!