

#182 “Making the Most of Christmas”

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Christmas can be a controversial topic. We all know about how our politically correct world would prefer that we speak of “the holidays” rather than Christmas, but there is more to preserving the spirit of the season than merely saving the name. Though such efforts to stand for Christmas are certainly noble and worthwhile, we must not think that just because we have preserved our right to call Christmas “Christmas” that we have remembered what Christmas is all about.

Is Christmas first and foremost about the tree, the mistletoe, the holly, the bells, the candles, and the gifts? The answer, of course, should be “no.” While it is true that pagans have worshipped trees or rung bells to scare away evil spirits, Christians can ring a bell unto the Lord or enjoy the lighting of a candle. After all, God created trees, sound, light, etc, all of which point to His glory. The issue is that we must not worship the creation rather than the Creator. Other add-on elements of Christmas such as the Candy Cane, the Advent Calendar, the giving of gifts, etc., can at least arguably be traced to Christian origins. However, this does not make them right or wrong inherently. As long as these traditions do not steal the preeminence of Christ in our hearts and instead point us to Him, they are fine and good. It is when get carried away with selfish consumerism and a preoccupation with fictional tales about reindeer on the roof that we need to watch ourselves. Christmas is about the greatest gift God ever gave to man, and it is our chance to acknowledge that gift and seek to give great gifts to others as well.

Making the most of Christmas involves, first, remembrance, second, worship, and third, obedience. The whole point of Christmas is Jesus Christ, God’s Son being born in a filthy, humble manger to become the Savior for our sin. It is this we must take time to remember, and it is He we should pause to worship. Now some will quibble over the exact date of Christ’s birth, but the fact is that we don’t even know for sure what year He was born. The mere fact that we don’t know the date means that it is not essential for us. What God gives us in His Word concerning the Savior’s birth is essential, and we should remember, worship, and obey Him at all times, so why not also on December 25? After all, it is not too often that our culture is impacted with any remnant of Christian belief. At least at Christmas, some will venture through a church door to hear a gospel presentation. Some will be open to reconciliation and repentance. The lyrics of Christmas carols that proclaim the gospel will be played even in stores that are run by those who despise Jesus. These are good things because God’s Word never goes forth void. Someday, even this opportunity might go by the wayside, so we should enjoy it for what it is now and take advantage of it in terms of evangelism and exalting in our Savior having come to earth.

It must never grow old to us that God loved us so much that He sent His own Son into the world to save us from our sin. Jesus left riches, power, and glory in heaven, knowing full well that He would have to experience pain, rejection, and heartache, even the cross. Yet He came. He didn’t come as an adult, but as a baby, conceived of the Holy Spirit of God

in the womb of the virgin Mary. He wasn't beamed down from heaven to preach from a mountain top so that He wouldn't get impacted by the filth in the world. Rather, He entered as a vulnerable little child, fully identifying with our life, our state, and our world. He was placed in an animal feeding trough, and it was there that He was worshipped by the magi and the shepherds. The event, though miraculous, was not well-attended. Those who were looking for Him found Him, and those who were humble enough to respond to the angels' witness came to Him. This miraculous birth of the King of the World in our midst is the greatest and most wonderful event in the history of the world. The only rival event could be His resurrection. It is that wonderful, that powerful, and that special. God, the One Who made everything, came to us in His Son to save us, to love us, to identify with us, and to give us hope.

Christmas represents Christ drawing near to man so that we could draw near to God. It represents a sacrificial love so powerful and so pure that it never ceases to amaze those who really want to see it and know it. As fun and special as it is to decorate the family Christmas tree and open up presents on Christmas morning, the true Christmas miracle of Jesus is so much better, so much more profound, and so much more satisfying. Each family can choose before God what they deem appropriate for the season and what special traditions they as a family will celebrate. But everything we do should all be grounded in truth and not anything that would steal the glory and righteousness that belongs to Christ. Christmas is not sacred or special because of Santa Claus, and we must be careful that he, a figment of man's imagination, does not become the centerpiece of the season or a replacement hope for Christ in the hearts of our children.

Jesus is indeed the reason for the season, and, as we recall the story of His birth and hear it read from God's Word, it should move us to remembrance, worship, and ready obedience. Let us not forget those in need during this time, and let us be vocal about the Savior Whom we love.