

The First Christmas

Matthew 4:16 (KJV) The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

Matthew 4:16 (MSG) People sitting out their lives in the dark saw a huge light; Sitting in that dark, dark country of death, they watched the sun come up.

- At this time of the year, it is the joy of many preachers to speak about the beauty of Christmas and the wonderful events that took place in Bethlehem. Even with the busyness and stresses of the holiday season, everything is basically bright and light and cheery and happy for most people. The Christmas cards that we receive present to us a world of fantasy, beauty, wonder and loveliness.
- But the very first Christmas was not like that at all. It was about a dark, cold night in a small non-descript village in Palestine where a lovely young woman gave birth to a baby in the most unsanitary wretched conditions imaginable, in the filth and manure of a stable. It was about the ugliness of a man named Herod who, because he feared the loss of his control and power, massacred all the babies in that region. It was about the people of Jerusalem who were totally indifferent to what God was doing, and the religious leaders who quickly grew to hate their own Messiah. Yes, the first Christmas was vastly different than this week's celebrations, to say the least.
- But there was something even darker about that first Christmas, a problem of gigantic proportions that even today lurks behind every beautiful Christmas card and every melodious Christmas carol.
- You see, when the Son of God arrived in this world, people were "sitting out their lives" in the darkness of sin. The heart of Christmas is that Christ came into the world to save sinners. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sin."
- The first Christmas was not about beautiful presents and happy holidays. The first Christmas was all about finding a cure for SIN. Sin that wrecks every human life, sin that damns every soul to hell, sin that pollutes the entire world. It is because of sin that there are tears and pain and war and fighting and anxiety and discord and unrest and fear and worry and sickness and death and famine and earthquakes and pollution. **All those things are the direct result of sin.** Sin disturbs and disrupts every human relationship, whether between man and man, man and creation, or man and God.
- Christ was not born so we could have a beautiful story to dig out with our decorations for a few brief days each year. Christ was born to deliver men from the darkness of sin. For a moment today, let's stop hiding behind the fantasy of Christmas cards and all the rest and talk about the real reason behind Christmas ... SIN!
- Sin is the evil from which no one escapes. And all who die in childbirth or from heart disease or cancer or war or murder or accidents or old age or whatever else, all are dying because of sin. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." Every person on the globe will die and the blame will lay at the feet of sin.
- **But the Bible says Jesus Christ came into the world to save us from sin. That's the reason for His coming.**
- When Leonardo da Vinci was preparing to paint his masterpiece which most of the world is aware of entitled "The Last Supper," he sought long and diligently for a model who could be for him the face of Jesus Christ. At last he located a chorister in one of the churches of Rome who was lovely in life and features, a young man by the name of Pietro Bandenelli. Years passed and the painting remained unfinished. And da Vinci was able to finish everything but the final character, who was Judas Iscariot. However, he could not find a face that represented to him the degradation of a Judas. So he looked long and hard to find a man whose face was hardened and distorted by sin. And at last on the streets of Rome he found a beggar with a face so villainous that he shuddered when he looked at him. He hired the man to sit as the model for Judas Iscariot and painted his face on the canvas. When he was about to dismiss the man he said, "By the way, I have not asked your name." To which the man replied, "My name is Pietro Bandenelli, I also sat for you as your model of Christ." The sinful life of many years had so disfigured the man's face that the fair beauty of youth now was debased.
- That's what sin does to everyone, the whole human race. It is the degenerative power in the human bloodstream that makes man susceptible to disease, disaster, illness, death and hell. And it is the reason for Christmas. Every broken marriage, every disrupted home, every shattered friendship, every argument, every disagreement, every evil thought, evil word and evil deed can be attributed to sin.
- That is why in Joshua 7:13 sin is called the accursed thing. It is compared in Scripture to the venom of snakes and the stench of a grave. And anything that is that sinister and that powerful and that totally debilitating for the whole human race must be dealt with if God who was infinitely holy is to bring man to Himself.

- God's definition of sin is found in 1 John 3:4 – "Sin is the transgression of the law." Sin is any violation of God's law.
- **Sin is disobedient.** It is living as if there were no God and no law, no authority, no standard, just like people live today and have always wanted to live. It denies the reality of God's law. It says God is not in charge and cannot put on me a binding rule. There is no sane reason to violate God's law other than the fact that men desire to run their own lives. All of God's law is for man's good. But man is like horse who has a beautiful pasture to graze in, but leaps the fence only to land in the mud.
- **Sin is defiling.** It is a pollution of our very souls. It is what rust is to metal, what scars are to a lovely face, what stain is to silk cloth, what smog is to a clear sky. It makes the soul red with guilt and black with evil. In 1 Kings 8:38 the sin of man's heart is compared to oozing sores of a deadly plague. In Zechariah 3:3, it is compared to filthy garments. According to Zechariah 11:8, it makes God loathe the sinner. And according to Ezekiel 20:43, when the sinner sees his own sin, it makes him loathe himself.
- **Sin is defiant.** It is clenching your fist and striking a blow in the face of Jesus Christ. No matter what homage you may want to pay to Him at Christmas, sin strikes a blow in His face. Sin drives a nail in His hand. Sin crushes a crown of thorns on His head. Sin jams a spear into His side. Sin spits on Him. Sin mocks Him. Sin says "I will do what I want, I don't care what Your claims are or who You are."
- **Sin is ungrateful.** Acts 17:28 says, "In Him we live and move and have our very being." Without God we wouldn't be here. Sin is such gross ingratitude because it seeks to dethrone and destroy the one who gave us all we have. We would like pretend that we are really good at heart, to deny that we live in such pathetic darkness, but when we live our lives ignoring God we tell on ourselves!
- **Sin is incurable.** Jeremiah 13:23 asks, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" The answer to that rhetorical question is NO! And then the prophet says, "Then may you also do good that are accustomed to do evil." There's nothing human beings can do for themselves that can change the effects of sin – not all the resolution in the world, not all the self-effort, not all the religion. Sin is humanly incurable. Sin is the incurable leprosy of the soul. It can't be legislated out. It can't be wished out. It can't be pushed out by self-effort. Sin is a disease cured only by one thing, and that is the blood of the divine physician Himself.
- **Sin is hard work.** All sin causes is pain and yet people go through pain to do it. It's a strange compulsion our nature gives to us. Jeremiah 9:5 says, "They weary themselves committing iniquity." That is the essence of sin. It is so perverse that, ignoring the pain and the consequences, men go after evil and weary themselves in the process. People go to hell sweating.
- **Sin is bondage.** Sin brings us under the dominance of Satan. People think that they're free, really free to do whatever they want. But the only free person is one who has had his sin covered and is free to do what is RIGHT. A sinner is not free. He is under the total domination of sin and the control of Satan. But John 8:36 says, If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.
- **Sin is empty.** Paul says the sin of Adam has subjected the creature to vanity, subjected the creature to emptiness, to uselessness. There is something missing. There's great dissatisfaction. Solomon said, "Vanity of vanities, emptiness of emptiness, all is nothing, all is nothing." Sin has torn man down from the place of honor. He has lost his dignity. He knows no lasting joy, no hope, no peace, no meaning.
- **Sin is hated by God.** Sin is the only thing that God has eternal hatred against. God does not resist a man because he's poor or ignorant or crippled or ill or despised by the world or limited in ability or because they seem to have little to offer. There's only one thing that alienates a person from God eternally and that is sin.
- **There is nothing in most of our contemporary Christmas celebrations that can deal with sin!** You can sing all the carols, attend all the masses, and give all the gifts you want ... you can pretend everything is bright, but the truth is that people everywhere are still "sitting out their lives in the dark." But on that first Christmas, those that were looking for a Savior "saw a huge light!" They were "sitting in that dark, dark country of death" but "they watched the sun come up!" The question today is, "Are you willing to let the light of Christmas enter the darkness of your life?" Are you willing to receive the gift of eternal life by giving God the gift of yourself?
- **John 3:19-21 (MSG)** This is the crisis we're in: God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness. They went for the darkness because they were not really interested in pleasing God. Everyone who makes a practice of doing evil, addicted to denial and illusion, hates God-light and won't come near it, fearing a painful exposure. But anyone working and living in truth and reality welcomes God-light so the work can be seen for the God-work it is.