

Are You Ready for Christmas?
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
December 22, 2024

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Purpose: The business of Christmas causes us to focus on the traditions surrounding Christmas instead of the reason for the season. May we be able to put Jesus Christ back into the center of our life and celebrate Him and His gift of salvation to mankind. *“You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”*

A man is visiting his adult children to celebrate Christmas. When he walks into the house, he sees a beautiful nativity set.



His granddaughter walks up to him, and he asks her if she knows what it is.

She replies, "Yes, it's breakable."¹

**Are You
Ready For
Christmas**

One of the questions that is often asked during this season of the year is: **“Are You Ready for Christmas?”**

During this time of the year people frequently say these words, which may constitute more of a greeting than a real question. The question is part of a larger conversation that perhaps has little to do with the true significance of Christmas.

“Are you ready for Christmas?”

When someone says “yes” it could mean, “I have decorated the tree, the house, and the yard.”



“Are you ready for Christmas?” Another “yes” answer may mean, “Yes, I have done all my shopping, wrapping presents, and mailing packages.”

“Are you ready for Christmas?” The answer may be, “Yes, I have addressed and mailed all of my Christmas cards.”

“Are you ready for Christmas?” The answer may be, “Yes, I have finished picking out nuts, cooking fruit cakes, and baking all the other goodies.”

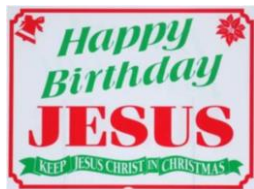
Are you ready for Christmas?” Another answer may be, “yes, I have spent all of my Christmas money and I have charged my credit cards to the max!”



So, I ask you again, **“Are you ready for Christmas?”**

Being ready may only mean that we have attended to many of these external and superficial things of Christmas. Today, “being ready” may mean that we are now prepared to lavish a good time on our children, grandchildren, family and friends, and ourselves. Why, one might think that it was OUR birthday which was being observed.

We may defensively say, “O, I know it's Jesus' birthday!” Yes we know that, but we just proceed as if we were assuming



that and then we put our energies and resources into providing for ourselves and our own. Think about that a little.

Just suppose it was the birthday of one of our children and we just ignored it in preparing for someone else's, and we took no time and made no effort for the child's birthday with a party or presents. Just suppose on our child's birthday we instead gave presents to ourselves and to the guests, but none to the child.

On one occasion a benefit performance was given in a large theater honoring a great actress who was down on her luck. It was a sellout. She came to the performance and tried to secure a seat, but all of the tickets had been sold. She was being turned away when she said, “But I am the actress the performance is honoring.” Upon learning this, the theater manager arranged for her to stand in the wings and watch the performance being given in her honor. And this is about the way many people observe the birth of Jesus. Their activities focus on themselves and the externals of Christmas and indulge themselves in self-entertainment, while the star of the show is left standing in the wings.

“Are you ready for Christmas?” The answer is dependent upon “how you are getting ready,” or “what you are doing.” Lights and decorations are exciting to us, but they mean nothing if Christ is not the center of our Christmas preparation. I have felt that some of the finest and largest Christmas displays have been at homes where Christ and the church have been largely ignored and the people living in those homes have little or nothing to do with Christ or the church.



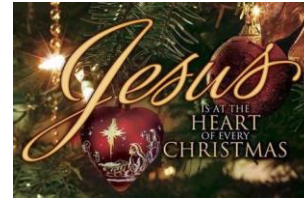
Think of our stores which are filled with beautiful decorations and where the music of Christmas is played. It may appear that by adding religious music to our shopping experience we have in some way sanctioned the commercialism of Christmas, as if there were something spiritually innate about Christmas shopping.



The Saturday Review included this article in one of its publications. “Last night John Elzy, watchman of the Grand Eagle Department store, making his rounds in the bargain

basement, found the body of a man lying under a counter. The man was in his middle thirties and poorly dressed. His pockets were empty and there were no marks of identification on his person. Store officials believed he was trampled in the Christmas rush and crawled under the counter for shelter. They were unable to identify or explain the nail prints in his hands. The police are still investigating.”

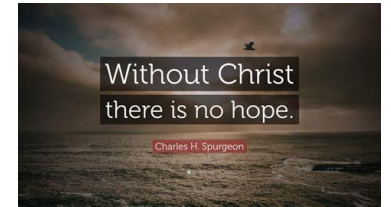
Indeed, Christ may be trampled underfoot in our commercial binge to celebrate Christmas, an exercise which may overlook the central fact and purpose of Christmas, which is Jesus Christ himself. We are so accustomed to this sort of thing that having done all of this (shopping, buying, decorating, gift sharing), we may miss out on Christmas altogether. I rather suspect there is a sort of hollow feeling within us about the coming of Christmas and its going. We may have missed something after we have gone through all of this exercise, if we miss out on the true spiritual significance.



How then can it be said that “we are ready” for Christmas? We can only be ready for Christmas when we are properly related to the Christ of Christmas.

Just try to imagine the world before and without Christ. Try for a moment to forget about all that we now have and know, or the way it would be if Jesus had not come.

Our world would be a place of dismal ignorance, sadness, and suffering, because most of the impetus for instituting and maintaining schools, colleges, child care institutions, and medical facilities came from Christian origins. It would be a world without hope.



It would be a world of needs without any possibility of meeting them. It would be a world of dim expectations. But there was in the ancient

world a glimmer of hope that someone would come, a Messiah, who could change life and the world. We read those promises in Isaiah 7:14 and Micah 5:2. We know now that the Christ has indeed come. We know of the incarnation. A babe has been born in whom dwelt the fullness of God. His name is “*Immanuel*,” or “*God with us*.” (John 1:14)

We need to be aware, however, that most anyone can warm up to a baby's smile. People are physically and emotionally attracted to Jesus as a babe. But Jesus is not a babe

anymore, and we cannot spend the rest of our lives adoring him as a baby. Jesus grew up, lived, and died as our Savior. Some of those who adored him as a babe soon clamored with the others in the crowd that he should be killed as a man. And many people who may tolerate the Christ child of Christmas may become bitter enemies of the Christ of the cross. There is quite a difference in taking a trip to give a gift once to a baby laying in the manger to yielding to Jesus Christ daily, taking up the challenge of daily cross bearing, and following Him. It is quite a difference between sweetly smiling at the baby of Bethlehem and the challenge of us also bearing the cross daily and following Him, giving ourselves and our lives to Him.

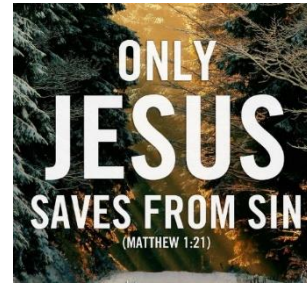
Jesus is to be worshiped and served in the fullness of our lives.

Are you ready for Christmas?

I. WE ARE NOT READY UNTIL WE ALLOW CHRIST TO DO WITH US WHAT HE CAME TO DO.



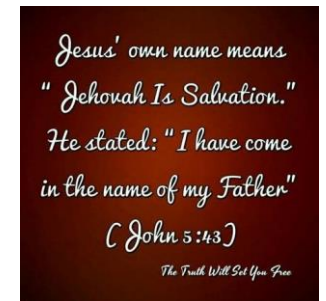
There is some confusion among Christians even about what Jesus came to accomplish, but the Bible is clear about what Jesus came to do. Jesus said, *“The Son of man is come to seek and save the lost.”* The angels said, *“You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”* He came to *“save us ‘from’ our sins,”* not to save us *“in”* our sins.



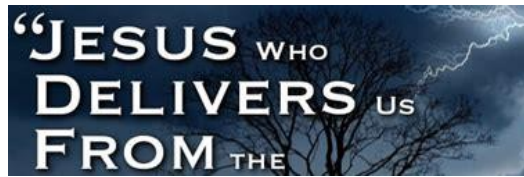
The name “Jesus” is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Joshua.” Just as Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land, Jesus as the “captain of our salvation” can lead all people into the kingdom of God. (Hebrews 2:10) The

high priest Joshua associated with Zerubbabel assisted in bringing back the Hebrews from captivity, giving meaning to the name “Jesus,” who became the high priest to deliver His people from captivity. In these two usages, Jesus is seen as deliverer and high priest. Therefore, the name “Jesus” means “salvation,” “deliverance,” “and that which springs from Jehovah.”

Jesus means, “Jehovah is salvation.” Jesus means “Savior.” We are not ready for Christmas until we have let Christ save us from our sins. The phrase, “for he shall save,” is an emphatic one in which the pronoun “He” emphasizes that Jesus, and no one but Jesus can and will save people from their sins. The idea conveyed in the word “saved,” needs special attention. The word (future indicative active third person singular verb of the Greek word, *sōzō*) means “to save,” “to rescue,” “to preserve safe and unharmed.” It is coupled with the word, “sins,” (*hamartia*), which means “missing the mark.” The Savior is one who comes to reclaim a life which has missed the mark, or which has strayed from the path or direction which God meant it to go. He shall save them *“from their sins,”* both from the consequences and the dominion of sin.



- *Jesus delivers those who will let Him, **from the penalty of sin** through forgiveness and regeneration.*



- *Jesus delivers those who will let Him, **from the power of sin** through consecration to him and the power of his word, his Holy Spirit, worship, service, and fellowship with his people.*
- *Jesus delivers those who will let Him, **from the presence of sin** by taking his disciples to be with Him in heaven where there will be no sin.*

Jesus came to save us “from” our sins. And he cannot save us without saving us. Let me state it another way, God cannot save us externally without saving us internally. God cannot save us eternally without saving us presently. God cannot cleanse us for heaven without cleansing us for living now.



Let me illustrate the point. Suppose a person has some illness and goes to a physician seeking to be made well. He or she wants to have good health, and so the doctor prescribes a course of treatment which he believes can best assure that. He may suggest an antibiotic to counter an infection or surgery to correct a problem, and recommend a continuing pattern of eating and exercising which can provide better health in the future. But then the patient indicates that he doesn't want to change his way of eating and lifestyle; all he wants is some miracle cure which will

remove the illness while permitting him to continue to do the things which made him sick in the first place. Some people want to be saved like that. They want God to leave them alone to do whatever they want but then they want God to save them from the danger without changing their lives. They want God to assure them a place in heaven without wanting to live the life of a heaven-bound person now.

There is no way that we could be “ready for Christmas,” if we have not individually and sincerely received the Christ of Christmas, and permitted him to do in and through us what He came to do.

Are you ready for Christmas?

II. WE ARE NOT READY UNLESS WE ARE IDENTIFIED BEFORE THE WORLD AS A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST.



Our pattern of living at Christmas and throughout the year will reflect that we are ready for Christmas if we live in a way that people will know that we belong to Christ. This discipleship will be seen in us in several ways.

A. OUR KINSHIP TO CHRIST WILL BE SEEN IN OUR PROFESSION.

We are not truly disciples of Christ until we are willing to confess him publicly. If we are ashamed to confess Him as our Savior, He will not claim us as His disciples.



B. OUR KINSHIP TO CHRIST WILL BE SEEN IN OUR SEPARATION.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians (II Corinthians 6:17-18) to say, *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”*

Christian disciples need to draw near to Christ and His people, while seeking to separate themselves from the ways of the world. Jesus has left us in the world, but we are expected to be unfettered by the world and different from the world. One charge against Christianity has often been not to discredit us because we are Christians, but because we are not Christian enough. Christians need to know the difference and people need to be able to see the difference.

We are watched by Christians and non-Christians. We should think about the influence of our lives before others. Are we holding someone back because they do not see any difference in our lives?

Are we helping someone to turn to Christ because they see in us the reality and the influence of discipleship? Do people want what they see in our lives?

C. OUR KINSHIP TO CHRIST WILL BE SEEN IN OUR GROWING.

A disciple is a learner, who is growing day by day as a Christian. Is there openness to Christ's leadership in our lives so that we are attentive to His leadership in our lives?

D. OUR KINSHIP TO CHRIST WILL BE SEEN IN OUR WITNESSING.

If we belong to Christ, we will share the Good News we have heard of God's love and redemption with others. We can do it through our words and our deeds.

E. OUR KINSHIP TO CHRIST WILL BE SEEN IN OUR SERVING.

The Christian life is more than talking. It requires doing for others in the name of Christ. The Christian will see those needs and will find a way to share Christ through ministering to people in need.

“Are you ready for Christmas?” It is possible that we may complete all of those things which people have come to do and still fail to be ready for Christmas in a true sense. We can, however, be ready by allowing Christ to do in and through us what he came to do and by our everyday identification as His disciple.



Let me close this morning with a poem written by Alice Mortenson, in her poem, “Ready for Christmas:”

“Ready for Christmas” she said with a sigh
As she gave a last touch to the gifts piled high,
Then wearily sat for a moment and read
Till soon, very soon, she was nodding her head.

Then quietly spoke a voice in her dream:
“Ready for Christmas! What do you mean?
Ready for Christmas when only last week
You wouldn't acknowledge your friend on the street.

“Ready for Christmas, while holding a grudge
Perhaps you had better let God be the judge.
Why, how can the Christ-child come and abide
In a heart that is selfish and filled with pride?

“Ready for Christmas, when only today
A beggar lad came and you turned him away
Without even a smile to show you cared.
The little he asked could have been spared.

Ready for Christmas, you've worked, 'tis true,
But doing the things you wanted to do.
Ready for Christmas! Your circle's too small.
Why, you are not ready for Christmas at all.”

She awoke with a start, and a cry of despair,
“There's so little time, and I've still to prepare.
Oh Father, forgive me, I see what you mean;
To be ready for Christmas means more than
a house swept clean.

Yes, more than the giving of gifts and a tree,
It's the heart swept clean that He wants to see,
A heart that is free from bitterness and sin
Ready for Christmas, and ready for Him.”

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹Micky's Funnies, A Creche Funny, Dec. 16, 2024