

December er 27th 2020

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES CHRISTMAS MAKE? John 3:16 (LB)

Friday, it seemed the whole world shut down. The highways were empty. Most stores and restaurants were closed and the whole world focused on a single event.

Why is Christmas such a big deal? What difference does it make? How can a baby born 2000 years ago on the other side of the world, stop traffic in 2020?

It's because it was no ordinary baby. The Bible says, God came to earth. That's bigger news than when man landed on the moon. God invaded earth. He split history into A.D. and B.C. Every time you sign an official document what's your reference point? Jesus Christ. 2020 from what? From Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, "**God loved the world so much that He gave his Son.**" It's amazing but when He entered the world He entered just like everybody else does. As a baby.

Of all the ways God could have chosen to enter the world, why did He choose to come the way we all came? Possibly So He wouldn't scare us. Nobody's afraid of a baby.

But He was no ordinary baby. If He had stayed in the crib, we wouldn't be here today. He grew up and He taught some things about God (because He was God) and He died on the cross. He went from the crib to the cross. The Bible says, "**For unto you is born a Savior.**" And He became our Savior.

So what? Even if He was God. What difference does it make?

It makes a big difference!

The Bible says that because Jesus Christ came at Christmas time, three things can be true in your life.

I want you to remember this as we go into 2021. Because Jesus came at Christmas ...

1. My past can be forgiven.
2. My present can be managed.
3. My future can be guaranteed.

That pretty much takes care of your life. Your past, your present and your future.

1. BECAUSE JESUS CHRIST CAME AT CHRISTMAS, MY PAST CAN BE FORGIVEN.

Romans 3:23-24 (Living Bible) *"All of us have sinned yet now God declares us `not guilty' of offending him if we trust in Christ who freely takes away our sin."*

That's good news. The fact is none of us are perfect. I don't measure up to my own standard, much less God's. We all have regrets.

We all have regrets and guilt has a devastating effect on our lives. It robs us of happiness. It causes depression. It can make you sick. Guilt does all kinds of things to us because we don't know how to get rid of it. People will do anything to relieve guilt. They'll take drugs or get drunk or try therapy or go to Disneyworld. They try thrills, travel or become workaholics. Anything to cover up the things they wish hadn't happened in their life.

But there's only one solution. And that's forgiveness. The good news is God wants to forgive you. He wants to clear your conscious. When God forgives you there's several things about it that you need to know.

It's instant. He doesn't make you wait to forgive you. You don't have to wait through a long period of time before you're forgiven. It's instant.

It's undeserved. You'll never earn it. You can't work for it. You can't beg God for it. You can't bribe God for it. It's undeserved.

It's complete. The Bible says, when we confess our sins to God, God says, "*Their sins will I remember no more.*" That's one of the most amazing verses in the Bible, that God can forget. The God who made the whole world, chooses to forget your sin once it's forgiven.

What God forgets, you can forget too. That's good news. Most of us, even if we believe God forgives us, don't forgive ourselves. We hold onto guilt over the years. Satan wants to keep you under guilt, but God says it's forgiven.

If there is anything that's good news it's that God says my past can be forgiven. Regardless of who you are or what you've done or what you think you've done, you matter to God and He cares about you. He wants to forgive you.

2. MY PRESENT CAN BE MANAGED.

It seems the more people I meet, the more stressed out people I meet. I don't know if it's the economy or COVID-19 or what, but I think you'd agree that life can wear you down. It gets to

you. If you look around it seems people are searching for additional power everywhere. Notice the best sellers. They are all about power; How to dress for power, how to eat for power. People are always looking for additional energy. People say "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." Good news. The Christ who came at Christmas about 2000 years ago can give you the power to manage your present problems.

Philippians 4:13 *"I have the strength to face all conditions by the power Christ gives me."* You don't know what '2021 holds, but you can face anything. God assumes the responsibility to meet your needs. That's amazing. When you give your life to Christ, He assumes responsibility to take care of all your needs. **"God gave us His own Son. Can we not trust such a God to give us everything else that we need?"** He says He'll supply all your needs. If He supplies all your needs, what else is left? Nothing.

3. MY FUTURE CAN BE GUARANTEED.

Hebrews 2 *"Jesus became like us to set free those who were slaves all their lives because of the fear of death."* The fear of death is a universal problem. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, educated or uneducated, white, black, brown, whatever, we're all going to face death. It a universal problem. It is an inevitable fact of life that we're all going to die. The mortality rate in America is 100%. Since we're all going to die, it seems foolish to go through life unprepared for something you know is inevitable. That just doesn't make sense. I know someday I'm going to die. Everybody else in history has, except for Enoch and Elijah so I guess I'm going to. So, it makes sense to be prepared for it. You're not ready to live until you're ready to die.

Have you noticed people don't like to talk about death? Why? Because they're afraid of it. Why? Because they're uncertain about what's going to happen when they meet God. You're going to meet God someday. You can run from God the rest of your life, but then you can't run any more.

How do you make certain what's going to happen on the other side? The Bible says, **"It's appointed unto man once to die."** That's one appointment you will not be late for. God already knows when you will die. But He doesn't want you to fear death. It says Jesus came to set us free from the fear of death. Why? If you already know where you're going and you already have a relationship to God and He's your friend, you're not worried about what's going to happen. I can stand before you and say in absolute sincerity, I am not afraid to die. I'm afraid of pain but I'm not afraid to die! I know where I'm going. I've already settled that issue. I'm already friends with God. For a Christian, death is just a homecoming, a transition to better things.

At Christmas time, probably the most used word you hear is "gift". Everybody's worried about getting the right gifts. Have you ever received a gift within a gift? A person once described a time he received a pair of ski gloves and inside was money stuffed into each finger. he didn't even know it was there until he stuffed my hand in it. It was a gift within a gift.

God has some gifts for you this year. They are three gifts, but they are wrapped up in one big gift, Jesus Christ. When you receive Jesus Christ, the gift, you get the three benefit gifts.

1) The gift of forgiveness. *"Let us praise God for the free gift he gave us in his Son we are set free, our sins are forgiven."* That takes care of my past.

2) The gift of strength. That takes care of the present. Jesus said, *"I'm leaving you with a gift, peace of mind and heart So don't be troubled or afraid."* He says, I'm with you. I'll handle it. I'll help you. You don't know what's going to happen, but I'll help you.

3) The gift of eternal life. Romans 6:23 *"The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

When you look at these gifts there are several things you notice:

1) They are very personal. They come in a person, in Christ.

2) They are practical. They are exactly what you need. they take care of your past, your present, your future.

3) They are priceless. They cost Christ His life. They cost God His Son. That shows the worth of you. When you receive a gift that expensive you realize somebody really values you. God says, you are valuable.

4) They are permanent. I've received a lot of gifts that didn't last til New years. This is a permanent gift. Like the Energizer Bunny, it goes on and on... for eternity.

Two questions:

1) Have you received God's Christmas gift of Jesus Christ? I can't imagine if George or Abigail had given me a gift and it was there under the tree, (or you gave me a gift) and three months after Christmas, you say, "How did you like the gift?" I say, "I'm sure I loved it, I just haven't had the time to open it yet."

The tragedy is many people celebrate Christmas, year after year, and they've never received God's Christmas gift. That

doesn't make sense! Have you accepted God's gift of forgiveness, strength and eternal life through His Son, Christ? You can't celebrate Christmas. You're not going to find it under the tree until it's in your heart. Have you ever received that gift?

2) How do you receive God's gift at Christmas? You receive God's gift by believing. What does it mean to believe in Christ? It means more than just having head knowledge. I'm a Christian, because I have committed my life to Christ.

Some of you remember the story of many years ago on Christmas day the world -famous tight rope walker, George Blondin, decided he was going to walk across Niagara Falls on a tight rope. They stretched a tightrope across Niagara Falls -- Canadians on the Canadian side, Americans on the American side. He was a real ham. He said he wasn't just going to walk across but he was going to push a wheelbarrow full of dirt across Niagara Falls. Everybody knew if he made just one mistake in balance, he'd fall off the rope and over the Falls and be killed. He gets on the other side and was safe. The crowd went wild. He did it again and pushed the wheelbarrow back across to the American side. When he got there safely the crowd exploded with praise. He did it again. He did it about 20-21 times that day -- back and forth. On the last trip he set the wheelbarrow right in front of a tourist who says, "You're incredible. I believe you could do that 100 times. I believe in you." Blondin took the wheelbarrow, dumped all the dirt out and said, "Get in the wheelbarrow."

That is very much what Jesus Christ says to you. If you believe in Jesus, put your money where your mouth is. Lay it on the line, make a commitment and say, "Jesus Christ, I receive Your gift of forgiveness, of power for today, and Your guarantee for

the future with You in heaven. In exchange for that I want to trust You with my life." That's what it means to believe in Him.

People attend church, whether in person or virtual for many different reasons. You are watching for many different reasons. Some of you out of habit, some of you out of tradition. Some of you are watching because a friend or family member invited you. Some of you are watching because "It's the thing to do". But regardless of why you think you're watching, God brought you here to say to you,
"I have a gift for you at Christmas. You matter to me." amen