

Those Who Missed the First Christmas

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[0:00] We will not be doing 2 Timothy tonight.

Instead, I'm going to bring a little Christmas message.! You've heard of the Grinch that stole Christmas.! This is the Tom Holland that stole the Christmas message.

! Nevertheless, I steal from good people. I don't mess around. I knew that Christmas was getting really close because I was in Walmart last September and I went to the garden area and they had all the Christmas stuff and they were putting it on the shelves.

So I said, wow, it's getting closer. And now, of course, we're just mere days away. Primarily because of my mother, Christmas has always been my favorite time of year.

Now, my dad pioneered the Middle East for fill of petroleum and that was in the hard days of flying. You didn't just get on an airplane and fly to the Middle East, which I've done many times.

[1:22] It took four or five days to get there. It took four or five days to get there. Four or five days home. So in those days, when you got there, you stayed. There was nothing for him to stay 10, 12, even 15 weeks at a time.

And I do remember one Christmas, my mom and I went out the day after Thanksgiving. Dad had left and we bought a Christmas tree and put it up.

And by the time Christmas got there, my gosh, if you breathed on it, the needles would fall off. And if you lit a match anywhere in the house, it would have combusted and just burst into flames.

But I also remember stringing popcorn. Anyone ever string popcorn? And Levi, you don't have a clue what we're talking about, do you? We were stringing popcorn and mom, I think I ate more than I strung, but mom was telling me about Jesus as we strung that popcorn.

I remember that. So that was a wonderful time. Now, sadly, most people miss the real Christmas.

[2:31] You know, there could be some fellows in here that will miss Christmas. And you'd think, most people would think, well, that's impossible in America because we drown in a sea of stuff that serves as a prelude to Christmas Day.

The radio stations, one radio station plays hymn, Christmas music, not hymns, secular and Christian. They start the day after Thanksgiving, and they do it through Christmas, 94.1.

We got it all on the radio station. Yeah. And the television will typically show its wonderful life, you know, 497 times. Lights and displays will be everywhere.

It's Christmas time. But still, a lot of people are going to miss out on Christmas. And it's always been like that. It's always been like that. Many, in fact, I would have to say, most people missed the very first Christmas.

They didn't connect. Now, you've got to put that in context. The creator God of the universe, you mentioned him yesterday as the creator.

[3:55] The creator of the universe lowered himself lower than angels, put upon human flesh, and dwelt among us.

He pitched his tent with us. And most people back then, as now, missed out.

And I want to mention a few individuals or groups who missed the first Christmas. And the first one I want to mention, and we'll leave out most people because of time, but the first person that I want to mention that missed Christmas was the innkeeper.

Now, you can go to the Bible record, and there are words in the Bible that are very sad. I mean, they can literally become very emotional, make you tear up. Now, two of the saddest words ever spoken at the time of the first Christmas were the words, no room.

I have no room. And we get those words from the gospel written by Dr. Luke. And here's what he had to say, writing by the power of the Holy Spirit, in chapter 2, verses 1 to 7 of the book of Luke.

[5:21] Now, in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.

This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.

Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was with child.

While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger, that's a food trough, because there was no room for them in the end.

One thing that's often not commented on is God, in his sovereignty, can use whomever or whatever he wants to accomplish his will.

[6:45] Here, he had Caesar Augustus declare a census, and that got Joseph from Mary to Bethlehem, where Micah said that's where the Messiah is going to be born. Everything we know, though, in Scripture about the innkeeper, we learn from about ten words.

Because there was no room for them in the inn. That's what we know about the guy. That first Christmas night, a young Jewish couple called upon the innkeeper.

They were desperate. Mary was very close to her delivery time. Joseph was probably reacting to that like most men.

He was clueless what was going to happen next. And it is possible that the innkeeper perhaps just didn't want to be troubled.

Now, I know every TV show, every movie, you know, they're full, there's no room, because the people, they're there for the census, and that may be what was happening. But the Bible is not clear to us as just to what an inn was in first century Palestine.

[8:06] Very doubtful it was a Hampton Inn, you know, just north of us here or the one all across the street. It may have been a house with some guest rooms.

It may have been just a little shelter of some type. It could have been anything from a bed and breakfast to a lean-to. We simply do not know what type of facility constituted an inn.

We do know that Mary and Joseph sought help but found no hospitality. It is interesting, this is kind of a side note, but the construction of the language is such that they may have been turned away. And underline that word may. We don't really know. They may have been turned away because the innkeeper didn't want their kind there. Now, we know they were poor.

We know that Mary is about to deliver a child at any moment, and we also know that they were turned away from the inn. Perhaps the innkeeper just didn't want to be involved with the mess.

[9:19] I mean, I don't know how else to put it. The innkeeper would not know when he found them such simple accommodations that night that the God of the universe would be born on his property.

All he had to do was open up his property to them. I mean, you know, if he had known, I mean, surely he'd say, take my room, you know, take my house. I'll sleep out in the barn.

But he had no way of knowing that his creator was going to be born that very night. The town was full of people for the census.

The innkeeper was busy. No indication that he was hostile or unsympathetic. He was busy. And guys, don't get too busy at Christmas to lose the Savior in your busyness.

Because people, this time of year, are consumed with activity. Christmas time is especially time-consuming.

[10:22] We become involved with shopping, house cleaning, banquets, school programs, concerts, parties, and other things that all compete for our attention. And with that clutter of activity, we run a risk of missing the Son of God as we are to celebrate his birth at Christmas.

I would suggest to you that the innkeeper miss Christmas out of ignorant preoccupation. He was just too busy. There was another guy in the vicinity that missed out on it.

He's a little bit more despicable than the innkeeper. The innkeeper was just ignorant. There was a guy named Herod. He missed Christmas.

But he's different than the innkeeper. The innkeeper was ignorant. This man was very well informed. He even had priests surrounding him.

We read about him in the second chapter of Matthew. Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, Where is he

who has been born king of the Jews?

[11:40] For we saw his star in the east and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.

Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them, Where is the Messiah to be born? They said, In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what has been written by the prophet.

And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah. For out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod secretly called the Magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the child. And when you have found him, report to me so that I too may come and worship him.

Here we have a supreme hypocrite and liar. Herod pretended he wanted to worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

[12:46] In truth, he was fearful of the one being called king of the Jews. There was only room for one king, and that was Herod.

Herod saw this as a competition for his throne. That phrase, He was troubled in Greek means he was agitated, stirred up, and shaken.

It is often used to describe a person that is in panic. He was in a state of panic. Herod was in panic because his position was in jeopardy.

Now, what Herod couldn't know then, he was going to lose his position in a few years anyway because God was going to remove him from planet Earth, and he was going to stand before this little baby that was going to be born there.

Now, unlike the innkeeper who was preoccupied, Herod was operating out of a sense of fear. Let's remember some things about him.

[13:54] He had purchased the title king of the Jews from the Roman government. Herod was not even a Jew himself. He was an Idumean.

He was also the consummate politician carrying favor with Rome any way he could. And now he hears that a child is being prophesied as the coming king of the Jews.

Herod was attractive to the Roman authorities because he was ruthless. That really fit into their scheme of governance. He extracted taxes from the people by brute force.

He was a murderer even before he ordered the killing of the children in Bethlehem.

He killed not only wife, but some of his own sons as well, whom he saw as conspiring against him and as competing for his throne. A little side note on the children that were killed.

[15:01] I heard a pastor just the other day doing a Christmas message and he says, he believes those babies that were killed have a very special place in heaven, very honored, that they will be identified as ones that gave their life.

You know, the Messiah is going to give his life for them. They gave their life for the Messiah that night. Herod is the type of person spoken in Scripture when it says, we do not want this man to reign over us.

Instead, people believe they are masters of their own fate. They are captains of their own souls. Herod would never bow to anyone, especially he's not going to go five miles from Jerusalem and bow to a baby in a food trough.

Not going to do it. He missed Christmas, as do all who will not bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Herod missed Christmas out of jealous fear. Jealous fear. Tell you someone else who missed Christmas, and that was the religious leaders.

[16:23] The Jewish leadership. That was another group that missed the first Christmas. And let me suggest to you, and I'm sure most of you in here have studied some of the prophecies in the Old Testament.

These were the very people who should have known from the prophecies that the first Christmas was at hand. They should have known that.

In fact, the religious leaders of Israel knew very well where the Messiah would be born. They even informed Herod that the Old Testament prophets said his birth would be in Bethlehem in the land of Judah.

They knew about the prophecy of Micah. Micah 5.2 But thou, Bethlehem, Mephrata, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of these shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.

So the very people that knew the prophecies, studied the prophecies, the religious leadership, missed Christmas, the first Christmas.

[17 : 42] Now, it's difficult for Gentiles living in the 21st century to understand the dreams and wishes of Jews living in the 1st century in Palestine.

These people yearned for the arrival of the Messiah. They prayed for him to come. They prayed every day. They woke up thinking, could this be the day?

The last thought before they drifted off would maybe the Messiah will come tomorrow, the Deliverer, and deliver us from the Romans or whoever had them in bondage at the time.

The hunger for the people, for the arrival of Messiah, was indicated by their zeal, their initial zeal, for the ministry of John the Baptist.

They went out in flocks to see him. When he came on the scene, many believed him to be the Messiah. He had to specifically tell them that he was the forerunner to the Anointed One.

[18 : 54] And in spite of his denials, people flocked to his ministry. Many who heard John were the religious leaders. Some of those guys hung out and listened. But when the Christ child was born, those same leaders would not walk five miles to Bethlehem to pay him homage.

So the innkeeper was ignorant. Herod was fearful. But why did the religious leaders miss the birth of this child? They had all the facts necessary to know when and where Jesus would be born.

So why did they miss him? Well, basically because they didn't care. They really didn't care. We're talking about the leadership now. The Messiah was not that important to them.

They had their station in life. Deep down, they didn't feel they needed a deliverer. They had arrived. They'd already arrived. They were self-righteous.

They kept the law. They were proud of the fact that God had made them perfect in a sea of sinfulness. You know, thank you, God. I'm not like other men. So when the child was born, the religious leaders were indifferent.

[20 : 11] And mark this thought down, brothers. The root of indifference is always pride. It is always pride. These men were engrossed in their own pride.

Their pride had birthed self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, and a life of ritualistic living in place of true worship.

Bottom line, they didn't have time for the Son of God. They didn't have time. In a very short few years, Jesus would become such a threat to their way of life, they would plot and carry out his murder.

That's how entrenched they were in their system. Now, indifference is a profound sin against Christ. It is also the prevailing attitude toward him on this earth today.

People are indifferent. Yeah, there's some people that blaspheme his name, but most people are just indifferent. At this very moment, millions are worshiping him and billions could care less.

[21 : 22] They could care less. Through indifference, the religious elite missed Christmas. They missed Christmas. They missed out the first Christmas out of prideful indifference.

That's what sunk their ship. Prideful indifference. Someone else missed out. Another group. The inhabitants of Jerusalem.

They missed it. The entire city of Jerusalem. The Lord sent no herald to Jerusalem, the religious capital of the world. Instead, he had his angels appear to the lowest of the low.

Shepherds. Isn't that phenomenal? Boy, I love that. They go. He sent the message to the shepherds tending their flocks within sight of the walls of Jerusalem.

Again, we go to Dr. Luke. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, watching over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were sore afraid.

[22 : 33] And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you. You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child. And all they heard, wondered about those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen as it was told unto them.

[23 : 57] That's the second chapter, verse 8 to 20. Now the citizens of Jerusalem could have easily walked to Bethlehem. They're watching the star.

And it's now casting light over Bethlehem. It's only a few short miles. They saw the star settle over the village. They could have been there in less than an hour, but they didn't make the journey. Why did the entire city of Jerusalem miss the first Christmas? They missed it because of religion. They missed it because of religion.

The people of Jerusalem were very religious people. It was the hub of religious activity for the whole nation. The temple was there.

People flocked to make sacrifice to the Lord. People were consumed with the swirl of religious activity. There was always a festival of feasts, ceremonies, washings, and other legalistic things going on that they were busy wanting to participate in.

[25 : 04] By the way, I always remind my classes that if you get a dictionary old enough, 1800s, and look up the word religion, it says a return to bondage.

That's the original meaning of the word religion. Remember Jesus, when he's on earth, he fought organized religion all the time. Organized religion put him on a cross. They were busy worshiping the right God in the wrong way.

They were caught up in the externals of true religion and had abandoned the heart of faith. Their religion, their religious activity, and their religious upbringing taught by men, taught that Messiah would come as a conquering hero, overthrow their oppressors, sit on a throne, and build thrones for them.

That was their prevailing attitude. How could a baby born in a stable laid in a food trough do anything for them? See, this is one of the proofs of Scripture.

Nobody in this room, if they're going to write a fictional account of the birth of God's Son, would have him born this way. We would never have thought that. We'd have him in a mansion with gold and servants.

[26 : 27] God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. In humility, he was born. The hardest people to reach for Christ in the entire world are religious people.

Very difficult. They cannot see the depth of their spiritual poverty. In fact, again, the original meaning is a return to bondage. Religion has damned many a soul to hell.

Those living in Jerusalem missed the first Christmas because they were caught up in their religion. The citizens of Jerusalem missed out because of religious ritual.

That's how they missed it. Another group missed it and that was the Romans. And they were everywhere. They controlled the entire known world. They missed out on the first Christmas. All of this was in the entire Roman Empire. All this took place within the Roman Empire. All of Rome could have shared in the first Christmas and the birth of the Savior.

[27 : 33] But of course, they missed it. At the time, the empire was under the rule of Caesar Augustus, the grandnephew of Julius Caesar. Augustus was his title, meaning venerable.

I don't want to name a child venerable. His actual name was Octavian. He ruled Rome from about 27 B.C. to 14 A.D. He was actually a benevolent ruler and ushered in a period known as the Pax Romana or the Peace of Rome.

He did away with a lot of corruption. He introduced reform. But he took upon himself the title of Pontifex Maximus, meaning the world's highest priest.

And he introduced emperor worship in the provinces. Rome didn't care what you believed as long as once you did, you'd bow down and declare Caesar as God.

You see any problem with us doing that? We can't do that, can we? The one thing we remember him for was ordering a worldwide census. This was the proclamation decreed by a pagan Roman who was under the control of a sovereign God.

[28:44] And it was the catalyst that sent Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. The Christ of God, the Lord Jesus, was born in the heyday of the Roman Empire. Yet nearly all of Rome missed Christmas.

Roman soldiers were all over the country. They were in Bethlehem monitoring the census, registering people, keeping order. But they missed the birth of Christ. Well, how did they miss his birth?

And in a word, idolatry. Rome had their own gods, all false. They even pretended that Caesar was a god. Christ did not fit into the list of Roman deities, so they missed it.

The Romans were pagan, and paganism has a strong grip on the world today. Anything that we place before God is pagan.

So in America, millions worship at the feet of money, merchandise, power, prestige, popularity, and fame. All of those things get in the way of worshiping the true God.

[29:55] Anything that gets in the way of worshiping the true God is pagan. Many have a pagan idol in their home that's called a television. Most of us do have those things, don't we?

They're only good for watching Channel 378, which is very good in football when OU is actually winning. The idolatry of the 21st century is selfishness and materialism.

Anyone who is controlled by any of the things I've mentioned will miss Christmas. Now, the Romans missed Christmas because they were trapped in the worship of false gods.

There's another group that missed out and that's the people of Nazareth. That's going to be our final group tonight. They missed not only the first Christmas but all that followed.

And I'm speaking here of the people of Nazareth. Nazareth was a crude, vulgar, and uncultured town and it was a long way from Bethlehem. Nathanael would later say, can anything good come out of Nazareth?

[31:01] Yet Nazareth was the home of Mary and Joseph where Jesus grew up. He lived a perfect life before the people there. But when it came time to reveal to the populace who he really was, he received quite a startling reception.

And the people of Nazareth gave him quite a rude awakening. Luke chapter 4 verse 22. And all were speaking well of him and wondering in his gracious words which were falling from his lips. And they were saying, is this not Joseph's son? And he said to them, no doubt you will quote this proverb to me, physician, heal yourself. Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum. Do here in your hometown as well.

And he said, I truly say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was shut up for three years and six months when a great famine came over the land.

And yet Elijah was sent to none of them but only Zarephath in the land of Sidon, the woman there who was a widow. There were many lepers in Israel at the time of Elisha the prophet and none of them was cleansed, only Naaman the Syrian.

[32:17] These are Gentile people. And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things and they got up and drove him out of their city.

They led him to a brow of the hill on what the city had been built in order to throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away. I'd love to have seen that.

It's like Star Trek. You know, he just, he was gone. He went his way. The people were so enraged is his claim to be the Messiah that they tried to kill him.

That is a form of missing Christmas. And why did they miss Christmas? Familiarity. They knew him too well. To them, he was no one special.

He's a kid that grew up here. He was a carpenter. Familiarity mixed with unbelief is deadly. People that are raised in a Christian home and have heard about Jesus from a loving mother and yet walk away is a great tragedy.

[33:22] And many a mother's heart or a grandmother's heart has been broken over that occurrence. How many people do you know who grew up in church, they were there when the doors were open, they heard the sermons, they heard the Bible stories, but they missed out.

They walk away and they miss the very meaning of Christmas. The people of Nazareth miss Christmas because of their contemptuous familiarity.

So why do people miss the spirit of Christmas? Ignorant preoccupation, jealous fear, prideful indifference, religious ritual, false gods, contemptuous familiarity.

Look down that list. Make sure your name is nowhere to be found on that list and make sure that you don't miss Christmas this year.

Remember John, first chapter, verse 11 and 12, He came to His own, but those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God even to those who believe in His name.

[34 : 42] And that's what Christmas is all about. Thank you.