

The People Who Missed Christmas

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[0:00] What a privilege to be here with you in my home church.

! I must say to you this morning that having heard the choir sing, having heard you join with the choir, the scriptures that Jonathan chose and we read, and then the video, perhaps it would be better just to have a hymn of invitation and all of us come down here and pray to our God and our Savior.

It was an amazing moment for me. I appreciate the fact that some of my colleagues from Voice of the Martyrs are here today. Remember them in your prayers as they minister to the persecuted church and as we know the persecuted church ministers to us as they often do.

I knew that Christmas was close last September when Walmart was stocking their shelves with Christmas items.

And now we are mere days away. I'm sure that it is primarily because of my mother, who has now gone on, that Christmas has always been my very favorite time of year.

[2:03] For me, it has always been a time of family and friends and memories of years gone by. Sadly, most people in the world and most people in America miss Christmas year after year.

They miss Christmas. Some of you in this room may miss Christmas this year. Now, we might think that would be impossible in America because we are literally drowning in a sea of stuff that serves as a prelude to Christmas Day.

The radio stations play Christmas tunes. Television will be showing *It's a Wonderful Life* 497 times this year. Lights and displays are everywhere.

It's Christmas time. But sadly, many people will miss Christmas. And it's always been so. It's always been like that.

Most people missed the very first Christmas. The creator God of the universe, Lord himself for a time lower than angels, put upon himself human flesh, and dwelt among us.

[3:42] In the original language, he pitched his tent with us. And most people back then, as they do now, missed Christmas.

They missed out. I want to mention to you this morning a few individuals or groups who missed the first Christmas. Now, at times, the Bible records words that can be very sad.

Two of the saddest words are, just a little bit, are, no room. And we get those words from the gospel written by Dr. Luke.

And let's listen to what he had to say, writing, of course, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Now, in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census would 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 town.

[5:00] 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. Because there was no room for them in the inn.

Everything we know from Scripture about the innkeeper, we learn from those words.

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

[6:14] And they were desperate. Mary was in labor. She was very close to the time of delivery.

Now Joseph, I guarantee you, was like the other men in this room. He was clueless.

He didn't know what to do. When our youngest son was born, I was in the room. And I did what I was told, which was to stay out of the way. And I did that.

But I guarantee you, Joseph was clueless. There's no scriptural evidence he was even there when she delivered. It is possible that the innkeeper had some space available.

We can't be dogmatic about that. But he just didn't want the trouble. Now the Bible is not clear to us exactly what a first century inn was in Palestine.

[7 : 25] It may have been a house with some guest rooms. It may have been some type of shelter. It could have been anything from a bed and breakfast to a lean-to. We just don't know.

But we do know that Mary and Joseph sought help there and found no hospitality.

It is an interesting side note that the construction of the language is such that they may have been turned away because the innkeeper didn't want their kind there.

They found no room for them. We know they were very poor. We know that Mary was going to deliver a child at any moment.

And we know that they were turned away from the inn. Perhaps the innkeeper just didn't want the bother. The innkeeper would not know that night that had he found them even simple accommodations, the God of the universe would have been born on his property.

[8 : 38] What an honor that would have been. The innkeeper was a census. The innkeeper was busy.

There was no indication that he was hostile. No indication that he was unsympathetic. He was just busy. Too busy to help them find a shelter.

I would suggest to you that the innkeeper was exactly like millions of people today. They are consumed with activity.

Christmas time is especially time consuming. We become involved with shopping, house cleaning, banquets, school programs, concerts, parties, and other things that all compete for our attention. With the clutter of activity, we run the risk of missing the Son of God as we celebrate his birth at Christmas.

[9 : 54] The innkeeper missed out, fellas. He missed out because of ignorant preoccupation. He was too busy and he didn't have a clue who these people were.

There was another man who missed Christmas. He was different from the innkeeper. The innkeeper was ignorant. This man was very well informed.

We read about him in the second chapter of Matthew. Some of these we're going to cover we've already read. We'll read them again. Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, the magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

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 the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, 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.

[11 : 25] 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.

A supreme hypocrite and liar. Herod pretended that he wanted to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. In truth, he was fearful of the one being called the king of the Jews. Herod saw that as 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 in panic.

Herod had a panic attack when he heard that a king would be born in Bethlehem. His position, he believed, would be in great jeopardy.

[12 : 40] Unlike the innkeeper who was preoccupied, Herod was operating out of a sense of fear. He had purchased the title king of the Jews from the Roman government.

He himself was not a Jew. He was Idomenian. He was also the consummate politician, currying favor with Rome in any way he could.

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's why they had him where he was at. He extracted taxes from the people by brute force if necessary. He was a murderer even before he ordered the killing of the children in Bethlehem.

He killed not only a wife but several of his sons who he thought wanted his throne. Herod is the type of person spoken of in Scripture when it says, we do not want this man to reign over us.

[13:47] He didn't want a baby to be king of the Jews. Instead, Herod and others believe they are masters of their own fate and the captains of their own soul.

Herod would bow to no one, especially a little Jewish baby born in Bethlehem. He missed Christmas.

Everyone who will not bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ miss Christmas.

Herod missed Christmas out of jealous fear. He missed it out of jealous fear. There was another group that missed the first Christmas.

It was the very people who should have known from the prophecies that the first Christmas was at hand. They had the prophets.

[14:51] They had Micah. They had Daniel. I'm speaking of the religious leaders of Israel. They should have known the very hour of his birth from the Old Testament Scriptures.

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

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

Yet the very people that knew, the religious leaders missed Christmas. They missed it. It's difficult for Gentiles living in the 21st century to understand the dreams and wishes of the Jews living in first century Palestine.

They were an oppressed people. They yearned for the arrival of the Messiah. The deliverer. They prayed for him to come.

[16:15] They prayed every day. Come and deliver us. They prayed for him at night. They woke up thinking, Is this the day?

Do we wake up thinking, Is this the day for his return? The last thought they had before drifting off to sleep, Would Messiah come soon?

The hunger of the people for the arrival of the Messiah is indicated by their zeal for the ministry of John the Baptist. When John came on the scene, many believed him to be the Messiah.

Though he specifically told them that he was not the Messiah, he was the forerunner to the Anointed One. And in spite of John's denials, people flocked to his ministry.

Many who heard John were religious leaders of Israel. But when the Christ child was born, those same leaders would not walk five miles to Bethlehem from Jerusalem to pay him homage.

[17:26] You can exit Jerusalem and stand at the south gate and see the lights of Bethlehem. That's how close they are. And the religious leaders wouldn't go down there.

The innkeeper was ignorant. Herod was fearful. But why did the religious leaders miss his birth? Why did they miss this child?

They had all of the facts necessary to know when and where Jesus would be born. So why did they miss him? I would submit to you this morning they missed him because they didn't care.

They didn't care. The Messiah was not that important to them. They had their station in life. They were in the leadership.

Deep down, they didn't feel a need for a deliverer. 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.

[18:39] So when the child was born, the religious leaders were indifferent. And mark this thought down, my beloved. The root of indifference is always pride.

They were prideful. 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.

They simply had no time for the Son of God. In a few short years, Jesus would become such a threat to their way of life, they would plot and carry out his murder.

Indifference is a profound sin against Christ. It is also the prevailing attitude toward him on earth today.

At this very moment, millions are worshiping him, and billions could care less. Through indifference, the religious elite missed Christmas.

[19 : 50] The religious leaders missed Christmas out of prideful indifference. Prideful indifference.

There was another group who missed Christmas. It was 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 lowly shepherds, tending their flocks within the side of the walls of Jerusalem. One of the thousands of facts of the authenticity, authority, and inspiration of Scripture is to have God born into the human race, and the announcement comes to shepherds. To shepherds. We would never invent a fictional account, a novel, having God come to shepherds. Shepherds were the most despised members of Hebrew society.

Why? They were unclean. They were unclean. They were not allowed in the temple or the synagogues because they worked around unclean sheep. They were considered unclean. They smelled.

[21 : 07] People didn't want them around. Here's what Dr. Luke says. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch 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. 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 shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was the angel, with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

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

[22 : 20] 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 this child.

And all that they heard, all that heard it, wondered at 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. The citizens of Jerusalem, could have easily walked to Bethlehem, a short five miles.

They saw the stars settle over the village. They could have been there, in far 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 Christmas. Doesn't that sound like an oxymoron? They missed Christmas, because of religion.

[23 : 34] The people of Jerusalem, were very religious. Jerusalem was the hub, of religious activity, for the entire nation.

The temple was there, and people flocked, to make sacrifice to the Lord. The people were consumed, with the swirl, of religious activity.

There were some, making sacrifices to the Lord, when the Lord was being born, five miles away. Just five miles away. And there were festivals, and feasts, and ceremonies, and washings, and all other kinds of things, to participate in.

Sounds like our Christmas time. They had all this stuff, going on. They were busy, worshiping, the right God, in the wrong way.

They were caught up, in the externals, of true religion, and had abandoned, their hearts of faith. Their religion taught, that Messiah would come, as a conquering hero, and overthrow their oppressors.

[24 : 44] How could a baby, born in a stable, and laid in a manger, a food trough, do anything, for them? I would submit, to you this morning, that the hardest people, in the world, to reach for Christ, are religious people.

The hardest people, in the world, to reach. They cannot see, the depth, of their spiritual poverty. In fact, the original meaning, of the word religion, in Webster's dictionary, if you get one old enough, was a return to bondage.

A return to bondage. Religion has damned, many a soul, to hell. Those living in Jerusalem, missed, the first Christmas.

Why? Because they were caught up, in religion. They were too busy, being religious, and righteous, to go to Bethlehem, and bow, to the babe, in the manger.

The citizens of Jerusalem, missed Christmas, because of, religious, ritual. Religious ritual. They were caught up, in all the rituals, and didn't have time, for the Savior.

[26 : 06] There's another group, that missed out, on the first Christmas. It was the entire, Roman Empire. That's a way, of saying, the entire known world.

Because the whole, known world, belonged to Rome. All of Rome, could have shared, in the first Christmas, and the birth, of the Savior, but they missed it.

At that time, the empire, was under the rule, of Caesar Augustus, the grand nephew, of Julius Caesar. Augustus, was his title, meaning venerable. His actual name, was Octavian.

He ruled Rome, from 27 BC, to 14 AD. And actually, he was a benevolent, ruler. He ushered in a period, known as, the Pax Romana, the Peace of Rome.

He did away, with corruption. He introduced, a system of reform. But he then, got prideful. And he took upon himself, the title of, Pontifex Maximus.

[27 : 14] What is that? Means, the highest, priest, on earth. It was then, that he introduced, into the Roman Empire, emperor worship.

Emperor worship. And everyone, was required, to bow to Caesar, once a year, and proclaim him Lord. Proclaim him Lord.

There is one thing, though, that we remember him for. Not that he was a high priest, because he wasn't. We remember him, because he ordered, a worldwide census.

He ordered the census. This was the proclamation, decreed, by a pagan Roman, who was under the control, of our sovereign God.

God sovereignly, had him, declare a census. Why? Well, it brought Mary and Joseph, to Bethlehem, to fulfill, Micah 5.2.

[28 : 25] To fulfill the scriptures. 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 everywhere, including Bethlehem. They were monitoring, the census. They were registering people, and they were keeping order.

But, they missed the birth of Christ. Now, why did they miss his birth? In a word, idolatry. That's the engine, that drove, the religious behavior, of the Roman Empire.

Rome, had a pantheon, of false gods. A lot of false gods. They even pretended, that Caesar, was a god.

Christ, was not on the list, of Roman deity. He was not on the list. So, they missed it. The Romans, were pagan.

[29 : 37] Unless we think, that is something, that was 2,000 years ago. Let me just say to you, paganism, paganism, has, a strong grip, on the world today.

Perhaps the strongest grip, is paganism. Anything, that people place, before God, put in front of God, is pagan.

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

A number of people, have a pagan idol, in their home, if it controls them, called television. Now, we have a TV, but don't let it, control you.

Don't let it, master you. The, the idolatry, of the 21st century, in the west, is selfishness, and materialism. In my visits, to the persecuted, countries, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, I've had more than, one persecuted brother, tell me, we're praying, for the church, in America, we don't know, how you do it.

[30 : 59] We don't know, how you live, through your persecution. And I'm startled. And I said, what are you talking about? They said, the persecution, of materialism.

The person, the persecution, that you all endure, through materialism. How do you do it? Because they don't have, that battle over there. They don't have, that battle over there. Anyone, who is controlled, by any of the things, I have mentioned, will miss Christmas.

The Romans, missed Christmas, because they were trapped, in a system of worship, of false, gods. They had false gods, for everything.

And they were trapped, so deeply in it, that they were incapable, of falling on their knees, before the true God. There's a final group, that missed Christmas.

They didn't just miss, the first Christmas. They missed all of the Christmases, that followed. And I am speaking, of the people, of Nazareth.

[32 : 11] Nazareth, was a crude, vulgar, and uncultured town, and it was a long way, from Bethlehem. It was not some short hike, down there.

It was a long way. You may remember, early in the ministry, of the Lord, Nathanael said, can anything good, come out of Nazareth? Nothing had, until Jesus arrived.

Can anything good, come out of Nazareth? Nazareth, yet Nazareth, was the home, of Mary and Joseph. Nazareth, is where Jesus, grew up.

You remember, he flees to Egypt, he comes out of Egypt, he goes to Nazareth. He lived, a perfect life, before the people there. His perfection, didn't start at age 30.

We understand that, don't we? He was perfect. But when it came time, to reveal, to the populace, who he really was, he received, a startling reception.

[33 : 19] I mean, if you're going, to make an announcement, why not do it, to the home folks? Well, he did, and here's what happened. And all were speaking well of him, and wondering at the 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, Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown, but I say to you in truth, that there are 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 to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman, who was a widow.

And there were many lepers, in Israel, in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman, the Syrian, 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 the city, and led him to the brow of the hill, on which their city had been built, in order to throw him down the cliff.

But passing through their midst, he went his way. Why were they infuriated? One, one, he claimed to be the Messiah.

[34 : 47] Two, the people he mentioned, in his story, were Gentiles. Gentiles? God would help a Gentile? They're the dogs.

God only helps Jews. That was the mindset. The people were so enraged, by his claim, to be their Messiah, that they tried to kill him.

They took him, to the brow of the hill. And just as they were ready, to cast him in, basically he disappeared.

And he's going to do that again, a few times. He just disappeared. He went right through them. They didn't see him. They were all masked up, ready to throw him off the cliff. He disappeared.

Now, when you're trying to kill, God in human flesh, that is a form, of missing Christmas. People who want to kill Jesus, that qualifies, as having missed Christmas.

[35 : 49] Why did they miss Christmas, in Nazareth? He grew up there. They knew him. They'd heard about, what he was doing, in his ministry. They'd heard about Capernaum.

They'd heard about, turning water into wine. Why did they miss it? Familiarity. They missed it with familiarity.

They knew him too well. To them, he was no one special. He's just the carpenter's son. He's an apprentice carpenter.

He learned how to be a carpenter, from his dad, Joseph. Familiarity, mixed with unbelief, is deadly. Well, do we have that today?

Why, people raised, in a Christian home, who have heard about Jesus, from a loving mother, and yet, walk away, is a great tragedy.

[36 : 45] And we all know people like that. We all know people like that. How many people, do you and I know, who grew up in a church, they heard the sermons, they can repeat, the Bible stories, but they missed out.

They walked away, and they missed, the very meaning, of Christmas. The people of Nazareth, missed Christmas, because of their, contemptuous, familiarity.

Their contemptuous, familiarity. So why is it, that people, miss Christmas? Well one, there is, an ignorant preoccupation.

This is the time of year, when everybody, is preoccupied. And people, can just really, be ignorant, of what Christmas, is all about.

And as much, as I like the old fellow, it's not about Santa Claus. It's not about Santa Claus. People also, miss it out of jealous fear.

[37 : 52] Is there a jealous fear, in the world, concerning Jesus, today? Is there a jealous fear, concerning Jesus, in this country?

Well, let's go put a, nativity scene, over here, at Frank Phillips, and 75. We'll find out. We'll find out.

There is a great, jealous fear, in our land, today. A great, jealous fear. Especially, when we walk, outside the church, and we proclaim, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

Right now, in our country, it's okay to say that, in here, but don't go outside, and say that. And that's, sweeping the nation. It is sweeping, the nation. There's prideful, indifference.

Why do I need him? Why do I need him? I always remember, the story of the, folk singer, Jim Croce, who gave a concert, and when he was through, he went out the back door, to get in his limo, to go out to the airport, to fly home.

[39 : 05] And there was, a young man out there, said, Mr. Croce, could I have one minute, of your time? He said, sure, what do you want? And he said, I'd like to tell you, about Jesus Christ. And he said, what do I need him for?

And I've left out, the profanity. And he got in his car, and he drove to the airport, and he got on his private jet, and he went home, to Louisiana, but before he landed it, they flew into a mountain.

And he stood before, the king of kings. There was a, prideful, indifference. We will not have, this man, reign, over us.

People miss it, because of religious ritual. Always be on guard, with that. Always be on guard.

People miss it, because of false gods. They put other things, in front of the true God.

And then, this contemptuous familiarity. Well, of course I'm saved. I grew up in the church, and my mom was, a Christian. My dad was a Christian. It's not by osmosis.

[40 : 10] It's not by osmosis. Well, beloved, look down that list. Look down the list. Make sure, your name is not on that list.

Look inward. It's a busy time. It's Christmas. Look inward, and make sure, your name, is nowhere to be found, on that list.

And in so doing, make sure, that you don't miss Christmas, this year. Remember this, he came to his own, and 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.

Amen.