

What's the Message – the Meaning of Christmas

Our lesson today is focused upon the meaning of Christmas for each of us.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Our prayer today is that through this study each of us would gain a deeper understanding of the importance of Christmas in our lives, and be more ready to share this insight with people who do not yet know their Lord Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Teacher, this being Christmas week, I was wondering if you had a special message for us that would relate directly to Christmas and its importance.

Yes, Dale, I do have a story in mind. It is an old story and some of our listeners may have heard it before, certainly some of my students should recall it. But I think it is worth hearing again to reinforce the necessity of the Christmas event. However, let's have you set the stage with the background of the story.

Alright. Let's give that a try. It begins this way: there was a couple who had been married for several years; she was a dedicated church member, active in the congregation and attending services regularly. He was not. She felt that he stayed away from church just to spite her. And the more she pushed and tried to persuade him to come with her, the more stubborn he grew in his resistance.

At Christmas one year, she tried again and pleaded with him to come with her to the special festival service. Again, he stubbornly refused. And this time he gave her an emotionally charged reason. He said that he could not go because the whole idea that God would turn himself into a man and come to earth to save mankind was preposterous. It was illogical to believe that something so powerful as a god who created the world could ever belittle himself to stoop to such an act. Why would your God, if there is such an entity, do such a thing?

“For me to attend this particular service would speak out to people in body language, so that they would think I agreed and accepted this nonsense. That would make me a hypocrite of the highest order. No, on this of all times, I cannot go with you to your church service.”

His response crushed her, and left her speechless. Crying to herself, she left and went on to the service. The only thing he said further to her as she went out the door was, “be careful driving home, the weather is predicted to turn stormy.”

And stormy it became. A record storm with wind gusts over 60 miles-per-hour, and snow so heavy that one could not see clearly more than a few feet. His concern for the safety of his wife did grow, but those thoughts were interrupted by some loud “bumps” against the house. Turning on his outside lights and trying to make out what might have caused that noise, he began to make out that the yard, as far as he could see, was filled with some objects.

There were a couple of moments that allowed some increased visibility, and gradually he determined that his yard was covered with geese that had been forced down by the strength of the wind. Now his concern was focused on the welfare of those birds. They were late in the season to be migrating, and now they were prisoners of this ferocious storm.

The storm continued howling, and his concern for the birds grew. What can I do to help them, he wondered? Then he thought, maybe if I could get them to go into the barn, they would survive. If not, they will freeze to death. So he bundled up in his warmest clothes, and risking his own safety with the wind, made his way to the barn to open its doors.

Now, that accomplished, he felt that he had done his good deed. The barn was open, and surely the geese would find their way to safety. But no, the geese would not enter that dark unknown. He thought, maybe I can chase them into the barn. But that didn’t work either, it only made his own situation more precarious. So he tried putting a trail of corn out, leading to the barn, to entice them to go in. But that only got the geese to go to the front of the barn doors.

He was almost exhausted, fighting against the wind, and now against the stubborn geese. How can they be so stubborn and refuse to go into a place to save their lives, he thought. But he tried one more time, and put some of his chickens at the front of the barn attract them, to show them that it was a safe place. All to no avail. He had no more ideas about what to do. So he gave up and struggled back into the warmth of his house.

As he thought about the situation, the idea crept into his head: “if only I could become one of them, I could lead them into the barn and they would be safe.” He realized it was a silly idea because that was impossible. That is when the next thought hit him, and hit him hard. “Becoming one of us at Christmas is exactly what Jesus did. This whole idea of God becoming a human does make sense after all. But why would God do that? This I still don’t understand.”

Yes, Dale, our stubborn agnostic had learned the first important point about Christmas, that it was necessary for God to become one of us, to accomplish something that we could not do for ourselves. But there was much more for him to learn, and after going to church with his wife for some months he began to learn what the familiar passage of John 3:16 means.

Remember that this passage begins with the words, “For God so loved the world . . .” It was not that the world deserved the hand of God to save them, but that God loves us with a depth we can not fully comprehend now. It is just like the geese could not comprehend this man’s attempts to save them.

In time our former-unbeliever came to learn the meaning of some other passages, particularly these words from the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John: *He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world knew Him not. He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not. But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.*

Yes, Christmas was a miracle that is hard for us to understand logically, but it makes the most sense of all.

Our next lesson will resume the continuity of our regular series of study.