

# A Broken Christmas

No big idea.

*Matthew 2, Luke 2*

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## INTRO

This week I've entitled the message a broken Christmas.

You could subtitle this message, "What happens when Christmas brings you pain?"

I recognize that simply by saying that title it doesn't sound like an incredibly uplifting, tidings of comfort and joy, kind of Christmas message! Nonetheless, it is needed.

We're going to be looking at 2 passages today, contrasting two accounts of parts of the Christmas story. We're going to be in Matthew chapter two first, and then we're going to look and contrast that to Luke Chapter 2

Put a marker in your Bible at Luke Chapter 2 and open up to Matthew Chapter 2.

## QUESTION - CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

Do you have any vivid memories of certain gifts you've received for Christmas? After 40 Christmases, there are surely countless gifts I received that I can't remember or quickly ended up in the trash somewhere. But there are other gifts that I remember like yesterday, the joy of them created a memory.

I still remember that **first electric guitar and amp** my parents got me when I was probably around 13 years old. I remember walking in the front room, seeing the Christmas tree and a fire in the fireplace, and looking to the left of the tree, and seeing a tall package in red wrapping paper.

I remember opening that package and pulling out that new Fender Stratocaster and feeling an overwhelming sense of joy and gratitude. I couldn't put that guitar down all day.

Every time I look at that guitar I also remember all the practice my parents had to endure, every attempt at stardom with half-decent bands, and all the bad songs everyone had to endure... but it all points back to that Christmas.

Christmas has an incredible way of etching indelible memories into our minds that stick with us.

- Perhaps it was that gift you always wanted, or a surprise visit from a family member you weren't expecting to see, or that incredible prime rib dinner!
- Perhaps it's a memory of that meal that went wrong or that family member =you were hoping wouldn't show up... but did, or the fact that you got every gift you never wanted and nothing that you did!

## **CHRISTMAS PAIN**

But what happens when Christmas gives you the gift of pain? You say, "Well Josh, that wouldn't be a gift at all!" Maybe not, and maybe because of Jesus, it potentially could be. But why do I bring up such a gruesome statement at Christmas time?

- Because I've learned that pain is no respecter of persons, holidays, or circumstances.
- Death, sorrow, sickness, and even tragedies seem to randomly and happily ignore our celebrations, joy, happy moments, holidays, and all the things we create to make the season bright.
- Sin, sorrow, death, pain, tragedy don't respect our Christmas wishes.
- So what happens when tidings of comfort and joy are drowned out by the cruel voice of agony, disappointment, or despair? What happens when the only carols that are being heralded through the halls of a home on Christmas are the ones of mourning, loneliness, or loss?

Josh, seriously. It's Christmas. What kind of Christmas message is this?

### **I'll tell you.**

- It's the kind of Christmas message that deals with reality.

- It's the kind of Christmas message that acknowledges that in a sinful and fallen world, tragedy still happens, even on Christmas.
- It's the kind of message that is honest about the fact that some people this Christmas Eve will find themselves in the middle of a road of brokenness with no end in sight, and no destination in view.

## QUOTE

One theologian and the author of "Joy to the World," Isaac Watts, wrote those famous words, "No more let sin and sorrow grow..." He knew the reality of sorrow. Regarding pain in life, he wrote:

*"It's as if one drop calls down another until we are all drowned in seas of grief."*

Isaac Watts,

## APPLICATION

Now before you get up and walk out, I want you to know that you need to stay. Why? Because no one is immune from living in a fallen world and all of the effects of that.

- Trust me. I hope and pray this is your best Christmas ever; that it's filled with joy, happiness, and health.
- But we must not ignore reality. This Christmas many in our community might awaken to a broken marriage, and dying loved one, the loss of a job and income, a lost friendship, or a tragic accident.
- And many might end up asking this Christmas, "God, why?" Now I don't claim to have the answer to that question, but today, hope to demonstrate to you that Christmas pain can be met with God's presence in a way that brings supernatural hope.
- If you look at the first Christmas account and take away all the cultural add-ons... without the Christmas trees and the presents; without the holiday meals and the gathering of the families, and just read the account for what it is, you find two very radical things about the Christmas story.

- Number one is that the Christmas story is a story of tragedy, of fear, of unanswerable questions, of uncertainty, and even of death (We'll talk about that in a moment).
- And yet, at the very same time, the Christmas story intersects with the greatest joy, the greatest hope, and the greatest glory that humanity has ever known or ever seen.
- The first Christmas story is a picture of the tangible and physical **hope and promises of heaven** intersecting the **hurt and the pain** of the human experience.

## QUOTE

*“Christmas represents heaven’s greatest promise meeting earth’s greatest pain.”*

Josh,

## INCARNATION

That’s what the incarnation is all about it’s about; God not letting us suffer pain on our own, but walking in our shoes, experiencing our grief, and taking on our sorrows so that we aren’t alone in them.

Really quick, I want to give you an idea of this theological concept we call the incarnation.

- In simple English, the incarnation is the event in which the eternal God clothed himself in human flesh and partook of the human experience; God come down to Earth.
- The incarnation was the greatest of all Christmas miracles.

Contrary to common belief, Jesus was not just another human baby who grew up to be a real neat Christian guy. We’ve been studying this in-depth through the book of Hebrews. Jesus is given the title “Son of God,” revealing his divine nature. His name Immanuel literally in Hebrew means “God Is with us.”

- When you look at what we might call the Christmas timeline and rewind it past the beginning of time, guess who you see? Jesus.
- If you fast forward the timeline past the end of time, guess who you see? Jesus.

We often read the Christmas accounts of Matthew and Luke... Well, don’t forget John’s Gospel.

John doesn't start his Christmas account in Bethlehem, but in heaven, before the world began.

- “In the beginning, was the word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.” And as he continues as this course, he makes this amazing statement, “And the Word became flesh and well among us.”
- And then you fast forward all the way to the end of your Bible, to the last chapter of your Bible, Revelation 22. There we see Jesus, and he makes his statement to John. “I am the alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.”
- Imagine celebrating Jesus' birthday with your kids! How many candles do you put on Jesus birthday cake? You could just tell them that Jesus is forever old and he's forever young.
- He is the eternal God-made flesh, or as Paul puts it with such eloquence, “And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up in glory (1 Timothy 3:16).

### **And this Christmas we need to be reminded of this.**

I know most of us, maybe all of us in here, know and understand *the gospel*. But when you think about it in the context of Christmas, In the context of real-life confusion, uncertainty, and pain, we recognize something about life, right?

That death, pain, and sorrow have been the inevitable plight of man ever since humankind use their God-given gift of free will to rebel against their creator. From that point until the incarnation, until Jesus showed up on the scene, the only hope Man had to look forward to was a life filled with pain, sorrow, and meaningless death.

That is it.

That is the only hope man had before Jesus came.

But the entrance of Jesus into humanity carrying the name Emmanuel, God with us, is the day that marked this event when God put his foot down. In essence, saying, “Not on my watch!” I am not going to let my creation that I created in my image and that I love, bear their grief and pain alone; bear the eternal consequences and the weight of their sin on their own shoulders. I am not going to let that happen!”

- And boom, a baby came out in Bethlehem. Born and conceived of God, the Holy Spirit.

## INTRO

When it comes to the Christmas story, we are most familiar with the common passages.

- We know about the Magi from the east and the shepherds in the field. We know about Mary and Joseph, the trip to Bethlehem, and no room at the inn.
- We know about Zacharias and Elizabeth. We know about the virgin birth and the rest of the events of the nativity.

But there is a portion of the Christmas story that often gets skipped, and for obvious reasons.

- It is a story that you probably won't read around your Christmas tree this year.
- It's a story you probably won't hear on Christmas Eve or in sermons all throughout the country.
- It's a story you won't hear on Christmas Day.
- It is a Christmas story that conveys the depth of human depravity and wickedness. It invokes countless questions and raw emotions. It opens up deep theological debates, yet something about this story, I find extremely hopeful.
- In this passage, I see a horrific scene. I see man at his worst.

Let's set our context as we come to Matthew Chapter 2.

- After following this great star and sign in heaven, these Magi, these wise men, these scholars, these astronomers from the east find the place they have been seeking out.
- This king would be born based on prophecy that they had heard. They had followed the divine heavenly sign to the land of Judea, and they inquire of King Herod as to where the baby messiah would be born.

### **King Herod is shocked.**

- He's taken by surprise when he finds out that a king has been born and he has not known about it. His heart becomes worried because he is a jealous, insecure, and power-hungry man who would see any messiah figure as a threat to his throne and dynasty.

- He wants this infant dead. And so, under the disguise of wanting to worship this new king, he looks at the Wiseman and says, “when you find this baby, bring him back to me so that I may kill... I mean, worship him.
- Upon finding Jesus in Bethlehem and presenting their gifts of worship to him, the wise men are warned in a dream not to return to Herod, but to escape back to their country on a different route.

When Herod gets word that he had been slighted by these wise guys. He is very, very angry.

# 1

## Christmas Under Herod's Rule

### BIBLE VERSE

[Mat 2:16-18 NKJV] **16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry (who was angry, Herod or God?); and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”**

### OBERVATIONS

Here are the five words that describe Christmas under Herod's rule, and they're all found in this chapter.

- There's **ANGER** (Herod was angry)
- The second word we see is **DEATH**
- The third word is **LAMENTATION**
- The fourth word is **WEEPING**
- The fifth word we see is **MOURNING**.

And we might be able to call that the realities of a fallen world. The reality of Christmas in a fallen world under the rule of Herod, where there is inevitable death, lamentation, anger, weeping, and

mourning.

## CONTEXT

How's that for the Christmas season? And yet it's an integral part of this story.

- If it doesn't make you sick just reading it, I'm not sure what could.
- Herod joins the long, innumerable lists of the deplorable and wicked dictators that have ruled in this world.
- Apparently, by the time the Magi arrived, Jesus was around 2 years old or younger.
- After hearing of a potential Messiah's birth, Herod's diabolical mind starts spinning and comes up with this bright idea.
  - I want to eliminate any threat to my throne.
  - Bethlehem was where the king was born.
  - We'll just kill all of the male children under two years old in Bethlehem and ensure that we get rid of this problem.
  - Some scholars note that Bethlehem and its precincts were so small and had such a small population base, that maybe about 20 to 30 baby boys were affected by this edict.

Yet, when it comes to human life, no number is too small?

- 20-30 moms
- 20-30 dads
- Innumerable, brothers, sisters, cousins, grandpas, grandmas.
- Aunts, uncles, family members.

Having their greatest treasure ripped from their hands unexpectedly.

## APPLICATION

Jeremiah prophesied that the weeping, lamenting and mourning was so great that no one could be comforted from the amount of grief and sorrow that hung over that first Christmas season.

***And what makes it even harder?***



If you observe carefully, there might be some who would say that this whole horrific event was initiated because God sent Jesus into the world.

- One might argue, **“If Jesus wouldn’t have come, Herod wouldn’t have been angry. He wouldn’t have had all the children killed. Why would God initiate such a horrible and tragic massacre and not do anything about it?”**

And that’s a great, honest question. It’s a question that I don’t think anyone has the full answer to.

### **Questions of “why” are always the hardest questions in life?**

- **If God, then why my loss, my pain, my difficulty?**
- **The questions of why are often the ones that cause people to question their faith.**
- While this is natural, I think it shouldn’t decrease our faith in God at all. It should just help us realize that we don’t fully understand everything He’s doing yet.

### **EXAMPLE:**

- When scientists run into a question that they don’t understand or don’t know the answer to, do they stop believing in science?
- When doctors run into a medical issue that they don’t understand, do they stop believing in medicine?

I just want to encourage you. Questions are a natural part of understanding and growing and learning about God and the way He works. And we don’t always have the answers to the questions, but we have answers to a lot of questions and that should always give us great confidence in the character of the God that we do know.

***I always like to try to tell people when the questions of “why” are too much, focus on the question of WHO.***

### **APPLICATION**

I can see the moms crying out to God... WHY!?

- But what if that murderous night wasn't a result of what God did, but a result of what man did?
- What if Jesus never came and Herod went on a jealous killing rampage anyway? I mean Herod killed his own sons.
- What if the events of that night are the exact reason WHY Jesus had to come? You see, all those babies went to heaven. And because Jesus came all those who would ever live or die from that point on would have the opportunity to experience eternal life, forgiveness from sin, and ultimately a world free from any type of Herods?
- **You see the tragic events of life are inevitable in a fallen and broken world, but because Jesus came, they are also redeemable.**

#### EXAMPLE: Welch's baby Bennet's death

For the remainder of our time, I want to focus on two possible scenarios for Christmas. First, I want to look at Christmas under the rule of Herod (or the world), and then Christmas under the rule of Jesus.

#### BIBLE VERSE

[Jhn 10:10 NKJV] 10 "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have [it] more abundantly.

## 2

## Christmas Under Jesus' Rule

#### INTRO

But now I want to contrast Herod's Christmas with the angels' announcement to the shepherds of Jesus' birth in Luke chapter 2.

Let's look at Luke 2:10

- Here, the angels appear to the shepherds who are keeping watch over their flock by night.
- They are the first to receive the announcement of the Messiah's birth.

And here is their story.

## BIBLE VERSE

[Luk 2:10-14 NKJV] 10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 “And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

## APPLICATION

Let’s take a look at the 5 highlighted words found in this Christmas announcement:

1. Fear not (**COURAGE**)
2. Good tidings (**GOOD NEWS/GOSPEL**)
3. Great **JOY**
4. **PEACE**
5. **GOODWILL / DELIGHT**

Contrast those words of what Jesus can bring to the words of what Satan wants to bring. It’s safe to say that whether you know Jesus or not, you will experience the words that come with living in a fallen world. Those are some inescapable, temporary realities. In a world where Satan still roams, and wicked people still reign, there will be anger, death, lamentation, weeping, and mourning.

- Turn on the news. There’s enough pain, fear, and uncertainty to drive everyone toward a paranoid, painful Christmas season!
- On top of that, we have a very real battle over the government-sanctioned murder of babies going on right now in our Supreme Court.
- Yes, it’s hard to wonder sometimes how God could just watch it happen. He could come and put a stop to all of it today... and one day He will. But he doesn’t right now. He is waiting concerning His promise to return, but he doesn’t because he is pleading with this world to come and know the hope, life, forgiveness, and eternal promise that is found in Jesus.

## WHAT JESUS BRINGS:

- In the face of satan's harmful **anger**, Jesus gives us **courage**.
- In the face of **death**, there is **good news**, good tidings that death is not the end.
- In the moments of **lamentation**, Jesus can offer **great joy**.
- In moments where **weeping** is inevitable, Jesus can provide supernatural **peace**.
- And in our state of **mourning**, we can experience God's **goodwill**, mercy and delight towards us in Jesus.

## APPLICATION

The invitation of Christmas stands today to all those who are under the rule of Satan.

- Satan steals, kills, and destroys, Jesus gives life, and that more abundantly.
- Satan seeks to destroy life, Jesus seeks to redeem life.
- Satan creates tragedy for destruction, Jesus always uses tragedy for good.
- Whose rule do you want to be under this Christmas?

## BIBLE VERSE

**[1Th 4:13 NKJV] 13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.**

## APPLICATION

Mourning and grieving are normal and healthy parts of life. These are not things to avoid or escape from.

And yet the Bible tells us that there can be a quality and a character to our mourning and sorrow in Christ that is different from anything else this world can experience. The hope of Jesus being alive and having accomplished eternal salvation for us causes our mourning to be rooted in an eternal reality.

And because of that eternal reality, have you noticed...

- We can be utterly broken and at the same time experience incredible comfort.

- That our minds can be full of unanswerable questions and yet we can be overcome by a wave of divine peace.
- My body and my emotions can be utterly drained and at the same point, I can find a well of sustaining strength and joy from a source outside of myself.

In Jesus, the hope of heaven collides with the pain of earth.

#### QUOTE

*“We rejoice in spite of our grief, not in place of it. Grief is grief, but grief with God has its own characteristics that set it apart.”*

Unknown,

#### APPLICATION

Our grief doesn't disappear, it becomes united with the hope of Christ.

When you mourn without Christ, you eventually run out of resources, but grieving in the hope of Christ, His resources never run dry.

And here's a beautiful implication...

- When Jesus ascended to heaven He sent the Holy Spirit. Jesus was Immanuel, God with us. The Holy Spirit is Parakletos – God alongside us, upon us, and in us.
- This means that when we, filled with the Spirit of Jesus, enter into a broken world full of broken lives, we become the conduit of Christ's resources to those who are living in and under death and sorrow.
  - Christmas brings an incredible opportunity to the Christian to show the comfort and love of Jesus, as a light, in times of darkness and difficulty.

#### CONCLUSION

As we look at these contrasting events of Christmas... a tragic night of death by the hand of a satanic despot, and a glorious night of announcement that the son of God has come into the

world to bring His peace, joy, favor, and goodwill to mankind, I want to close by looking at three practical ways the incarnation of Christ can meet us this Christmas.

### A. IT MEETS US IN OUR EXPECTATIONS

God always has a greater plan than what we can see in a moment.

- Have you had these moments in life where you know better than God? I certainly have.
- At the moment I have all the most logical and reasonable arguments to make with God about why He should be doing something different than what He's doing.
- Lord, if you would just do it my way. Lord, if you could just see my vision. Lord, if you could just see my desired outcome or if you would just think the way I think, everything would be OK.
- My thoughts, He says, are not your thoughts. My ways are not your ways. As far as the heavens are above the earth. That's a long way. So are my thoughts above your thoughts and my ways above your ways.
- And yet how many times has God given you the grace to be able to look back over one year, two years, five years, 10 years, 20 years, and say "God thank you. Thank you that you were right. Thank you that you are wiser than me. Thank you that you are more intelligent than me. Thank you, Lord, even for the pain."
- And granted, there are other moments where I'm convinced that on this side of heaven we will never be able to see the divine purpose in them, and we need to learn how to be OK with that. **For we walk by faith, and not by sight.**

### QUOTE

*The Christian perspective must always be inward and not outward, eternal, not temporal, spiritual, and not tangible.*

### B. IT MEETS US THROUGH IDENTIFICATION

Jesus didn't come and live a plush life of comfort and ease. Jesus came and subjected himself to suffering, pain, rejection, mourning, and even death so that He might fully identify with mankind's

pain.

One of my favorite verses that we will be studying soon in Hebrews is chapter 4:15 – **[Heb 4:15-16 NKJV] 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

And you say, “Well yeah, but Jesus didn’t have to go through a divorce, and Jesus didn’t have to go through the loss of a child, and Jesus didn’t have to go through being married to my spouse, and Jesus didn’t have to experience my specific pains and challenges. How can Jesus empathize with me?”

- I would like to make an argument today with you that not only does Jesus know the human experience from being a human, but he knows your experience because on the cross he specifically bore the sins pertaining to your life directly.
- Every pain that is associated with sin, every pain, sorrow, and tragedy that is associated with being part of this wicked and fallen place, He carried upon his own shoulders, as though it belonged to him.
- So you can’t really tell me that Jesus doesn’t know what you’re going through. In fact, He is the only one out of every person that’s ever lived, or who ever will live that understands you fully and completely.

## QUOTE

*“Oh, when we are journeying through the murky night and the dark woods of affliction and sorrow, it is something to find here and there a spray broken, or a leafy stem bent down with the tread of His foot and the brush of His hand as He passed; and to remember that the path He trod He has hallowed, and thus to find the lingering fragrance and hidden strength in the remembrance of Him bearing grief for us, bearing grief with us, bearing grief like us.”*

Alexander McLaren (Scottish Preacher),

### C. IT MEETS US THROUGH PURSUIT

The incarnation teaches us that God does not stand at a distance, observing our pain from afar, but according to His will and His timing, inserts himself as our deliverer and pursues us in our pain.

I can honestly say it's been in my greatest moments of pain that I have come to see God the clearest. Maybe not in the moment, but always at some point along the way, God reminds me that He is there, and has not left me alone.

I have to agree wholeheartedly with Elisabeth Elliot, who certainly knew what it meant to have loss and pain in life when she wrote this?

### QUOTE

*“I am not a theologian or scholar, but I am very aware of the fact that pain is necessary to all of us. In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence and love of God.”*

Elisabeth Elliot,

### APPLICATION

This last year has been a year of a lot of pain for a lot of people. I have sat with many hearing the questions of, “Why did God do nothing when my pain was the greatest?” In pondering that question time and time again, I believe that God actually did the greatest something by doing nothing. Josh, what do you mean?

Because when Jesus was implanted into a womb, and he came out with force, trauma, and blood. And 33 years later, He hung on a cross in force, trauma, and blood. And as the son of God hung on a cross, you know what God the Father did?

### NOTHING!

- He didn't send angels down to rescue him.



- He didn't say get off the cross, I can't bear to see you suffer.
- When Jesus cried in the garden while sweating drops of blood, "if there's any other way..."  
Do you know what God said? NOTHING.

And that great "Nothing" that God did as he watched his Son bear the penalty and the pain of our sin, was the greatest, something he could have done for anybody.

Because this was the only way in which we could have a God Who is with us in our pain, and in which we can have a hope that is secured for us when this life is over. So God did do something. God did respond to your grief, sickness, mourning, and pain. 2000 years ago, He responded by giving you eternal hope and victory over death in His name!

***For some, maybe even all of us as we don't know what tomorrow holds, this might feel like a broken Christmas. But it doesn't have to be a Christmas that is void of God's healing presence, peace, and the comfort provided through the body of Christ.***