



# A Christmas Kind of Relationship

*Hebrews 4:14-16, 2 Corinthians 8:9, Philippians 2:5-8*

## INTRO

I've found that one of the most challenging aspects of preaching is deciding how to approach Christmas and Easter.

- On one side, you have almost infinite content, but on the other side, you have one story. After nearly 15 years, you start to find that almost everyone who listens to you has pretty much heard every Christmas sermon you've preached.
- And I love Christmas. I love the fulfillment of prophecy, confirming that God has come and dwelled among men. I love the genealogies of Jesus and the messy grace written into each story and each character, culminating in the perfect plan of God being accomplished. I love the glorious moments, the angels appearing to men, breaking heaven's 400 year silence. I love the not so glorious moments, the moments that required normal people to live by extraordinary faith, journeying, suffering, believing that God working amid the most confusing and demanding moments in life.

Well, some people are stressed during Christmas because of gift preparation, house, and food prep, and Christmas events of all kinds; I'm stressing myself out about what I'm going to say on Christmas Eve.

I found myself, once again, in that stressful place. Here it is, the most joyous season of all, one of my favorite all-time holidays; here I am, stressed, short with my wife and kids, and feverishly trying to put together some coherent thoughts about Christmas. I was going to preach revelation, but that didn't feel right. I was going to preach about 4 other messages that didn't feel right, and yesterday, it hit me: the people who need me the most today are feeling the most neglected because of my stress. Then the thought hit me, "This is the opposite of what the first Christmas was all about."

- **The first Christmas was not about God ignoring humanity because of the stress of His big job. It was about God engaging with humanity, despite the sacrifice, humility, and investment it required.**
- **The first Christmas was God saying, "Instead of being annoyed by humanity, I'm to fully invest myself in humanity. Instead of responding to humanity in anger, I'm going to respond in compassion. Instead of giving humanity a piece of my mind, I'm going to give them me, all of me, so that they can know the extent of my love and desire to be with them forever."**

**So, I took 30 minutes to prepare this entire sermon, prayed, shut my computer went and did some projects with my son, gave my wife a hug, spent time talking with my daughter, and today, I want to encourage you to do the same.**

## RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are complex things.

- Without a raise of hands, how many are currently anxious because you're not sure how you're going to deal with that complex family relationship during Christmas? How many of you ARE in that complex family relationship because of some unhealthy pattern or sin you haven't yet sought to make right? How many marriages are on the fringes because this Christmas, instead of sacrificial love, it's become the war of expectations: *she should, he should, he doesn't, she doesn't, if only he, if only she...*
- How many kids will get everything they want for Christmas except the thing they need the most: invested, caring, engaged parents who care enough to get out of their world and into theirs?

That's why today, whether you need it or not, I'd like to encourage all of us to have, "A Christmas kind of relationship."

There are three Bible passages that express the attitude of the first Christmas, the moment God came to us, to die for us, so that we could be with him.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**[Heb 4:14-16 NKJV] 14** Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **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.

#### **BIBLE PASSAGE**

**[Phi 2:5-8 NKJV] 5** Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, **7** but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

#### **BIBLE PASSAGE**

**[2Co 8:9 NKJV] 9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

## **1 Jesus came our way**

#### **APPLICATION**

He did this twice:

- The job of the high priest was to make intercession and offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. He would be included since he himself was also a sinful man. Jesus however, being sinless, has become our perfect high priest.
- Hebrews 9 tells us that Jesus offered not the blood of animals, but His own perfect blood on the altar before God in heaven, offering a perfect sacrifice that would wash away sin once and for all.
- But before He ascended to heaven, 33 years prior he descended through heaven down to earth.

YES... that baby in a manger was not simply a good man or a future prophet. That baby was none other than God Himself—

- The one who created the very dust that he was born in.
- The one who imagined the very feet, hands, skin, and bones that he would now inhabit.
- Jesus passed down through the heavens to come our way because we, on our own, could never go his way.
- The Bible says that in our sinful state, we are lost, wandering enemies of God. Because we could not go to Him, He came to us— motivated by His great love for humanity.

This incarnation was prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus was born in Isaiah 9:6:

*[Isa 9:6 NKJV] 6 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

All these names of God belong to Jesus. He is the “Mighty God” who put on the weakness of human flesh. He is the “Eternal Father” who stepped into our temporary timeline. He is Emmanuel - God— yet at the same time— with us...

YOU SEE, this is what I love about the Christmas story:

***“Jesus did not live his life above us, He lived his life with us.”***

The Christmas story reminds us that God was not afraid to get His hands dirty in order to come clean up our mess.

## 2 Jesus knows our way

### APPLICATION

Why was the birth of Jesus so significant? Because it was more than God bringing us a Savior. It was God Himself coming to be our savior through sacrificial life and death.

*It's been said that many babies are born to become kings, but there was only one king who became a baby.*

Why? Why not snap his fingers and make all sin disappear? Why not show a mighty sign in the heavens and force everyone to believe in Him?

- **Because God created us in His image. He exists in an eternal triune relationship. For all eternity, the Father, Son, and Spirit have dwelt in unity, peace, and perfect love. God desired that we would be one with Him, have peace with Him, and dwell with Him in perfect love. And because we could not relate to God on our own because of our sin, He chose to relate with us, because one of us, so that He might empathize with us and allow us to see Him in a way that we would be relationally drawn into His presence.**

### APPLICATION

**Hebrews 4:15 - 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.**

The same author says it like this back in Hebrews 2:

**[Hbr 2:17 NLT] 17 Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people.**

This became a reality on a spring evening in Bethlehem:

**[Luk 2:6-7 NKJV] 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.**

Have you considered these circumstances?

- I've often wondered beyond the story and the Christmas pageants... God is giving His son to earth, to humanity. How would he choose to come, to make his entrance?
- And yet, when you think of the reason Jesus came, His mission, the way he came makes perfect sense.
- Jesus did not come the first time to be made an earthly king, with earthly riches and earthly status. Jesus came to establish a heavenly kingdom full of poor, weak, wretched sinners saved and redeemed by His grace. He came to relate not to the self-righteous, pious, self-dependent person but to the sinner, the broken, the failure, and His enemies.

### **THINK ABOUT IT...**

- He was born to an unmarried teenage girl who was the scandalous talk of the town—in many ways a true crisis pregnancy.
- He was born in a stable because his poor parents were forced temporarily into a homeless situation because of new government regulations and decrees.
- He was born with no earthly father, therefore making him heaven's foster child to a young, unprepared couple!
- The announcement of His birth didn't resonate throughout the hallways of palaces but through the fields of shepherds, the lowest class, the poorest vagabonds, and the seemingly most undeserving audience for the greatest King ever born.
- Even the wealthy merchants and kings from the east who brought great treasures of earthly wealth didn't come to promote or parade themselves before the new king but to humble themselves, bow, and give their greatest treasures to this divine majesty who came to walk in their shoes, feel their pain, and save their souls.

From the first time he let out a cry of weakness and frailty as a human baby, He was declaring to all humanity, "God desires to relate to you! To the weakest and the poorest to the richest and the strongest!"

**2 Corinthians 8:9 - "You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by His poverty he could make you rich."**

We aren't talking about material riches. Jesus was rich... he was divine.

**[Phi 2:6 NKJV] 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,**

For your sakes He became poor

**[Phi 2:7-8 NKJV] 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.**

So that by His poverty, he could make you rich.

Again, not by increasing your bank account balance. But by bringing you into the inheritance of the saints. The wealth of eternal life, joy, peace forgiveness of sin, and everything you need for life and godliness.

- **It was so that he could look down at a prostitute who was worthy of death and say, "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more."**
- **It was so He could sit down at a well next to adulterous Samaritan women and tell her about living water that could satisfy her forever.**
- **It was so he could reach out and touch an unclean, leprous man and bring him complete wholeness.**
- **It was so He could hang on a cross and look over at a convicted felon and say, "Today you will be with me in paradise," then look down at his enemies and say, "Father forgive them..."**
- **It was so he could reach out to you and I, in the poverty of our pride, greed, selfishness, lust and rebellion and say, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest," making us sons, daughters, and co-heirs with Christ.**

## **APPLICATION**

APPLICATION: Are you weak today? He became weak to make you strong. Are you feeling rejected? He became rejected so that you could be accepted by God. Are you lonely? He went to the cross alone so that you might become a friend and child of God. Whatever you are, wherever you've been, Jesus knows. He's traveled that road. The only difference is that he didn't sin. This works to our benefit because it was his sinless life that allowed him to take our sins upon himself and bear our punishment and offer us His righteousness.

But just because his life was free from sin, it wasn't free from struggle. Every struggle you and I face in this life, Jesus has faced; he faced it so that he could be a savior who

empathizes for us in our frail state.

#### APPLICATION

I don't mean to over-simplify this, but the picture we have of Jesus at Christmas is that He stepped out of His place to step into ours. Perhaps what brings true value to life is not the things we obtain but rather the way we step outside of ourselves to sacrificially serve others.

### 3 Jesus is our way

#### APPLICATION

How many of us are not in daily need of grace and mercy from God? In some minds, God is nothing more than an intolerant, abhorrent judge who can't wait to destroy everyone.

- Nothing could be further from the truth! Yes, God is a righteous judge who will one day return to make things right and punish sin, as it should be punished. But God is also a merciful Father who desires that none should perish but that all should be saved.
- He has an abundant, endless supply of mercy and grace to freely give out under one condition. That you come through the WAY He has provided. FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- When you come to God on the merits of Jesus, you will find endless forgiveness, grace and mercy at your disposal. Sounds like a great deal to me!

#### HIS PURPOSE:

You see, that baby born in Bethlehem was born to die! He was not only a gift, He was a sacrifice.

EXAMPLE: Only God could have orchestrated such a seemingly backward story that made perfect sense. When Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling cloth and laid him in a manger, she



was doing it out of necessity but was also giving the perfect prophetic picture of what Jesus came to do. The manger wasn't a handmade wooden baby crib she found on Etsy. **It was a carved stone feeding trough for animals.** At the time for the Passover sacrifice, shepherds would have taken the purest lamb, wrapped it in cloth to protect it from blemishes, and laid it in the stone trough to keep it from breaking any bones before leading it to the slaughter. It's no wonder that the first invitation of Jesus' birth went to shepherds who understood the symbolic picture of what they saw. Later, the invitation would extend from shepherds, the lowest, to wisemen from the east, kings. They brought Him gifts: Gold fit for a King. Frankincense was harvested by piercing a Boswellia tree until it bled out the aromatic resin, and myrrh was harvested the same way, by bleeding a tree. These were perfumes used for burial. All of these images, right at the beginning, displayed a King that was born to die, the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of the world.

- At His birth, He was driven to Bethlehem by a Roman emperor. At His death, He was driven to Calvary by a Roman governor
- At His birth, He was placed in a wooden manger. At His death, he was hung on a wooden cross
- At birth, he was surrounded by animals. At His death, he was surrounded by the bulls of Bashan
- At His birth, He was wrapped in swaddling cloth; at His death, His clothes were torn off and gambled away.
- A star lit the sky to announce his birth; darkness covered the earth to announce his death.
- At His birth, there was no room for Him in the inn; at His death, there was no room for Him in the hearts of His own people.
- At His birth he was worshipped and adored by shepherds and wise men; at His death, he was mocked and beaten by soldiers
- At His birth, angels sang; at His death, heaven wept.
- At His birth, Mary pondered all these things in her heart, at His death her heart was torn in two.
- He was born in a cave; He was buried in a cave.
- At His birth, King Herod tried to have Him killed but failed; in the end, the Pilot ordered Him to death and failed because three days later, Jesus walked out of the grave alive!

**Christ had a mission, and He knew what it was. To seek and save the lost.**

- **[Isa 61:1 NKJV] 1 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound..."**

- Over 33 years of life, he lived the perfect life we couldn't live therefore making him qualified to gain salvation for us. He taught humanity about the heart and kingdom of God so that we might know the way we ought to live.
- He suffered and died innocently at the hands of men, willingly taking the place of death and judgment we deserved. He rose from the grave, ultimately conquering death for all those who would choose to believe in Him by faith.

Jesus was born to die, but he died to live again, forever offering everlasting life to any who would believe.

Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me."

## POEM

The Greatest gazed down,  
And tears streamed from heaven  
Over a broken and helpless mankind.  
Our sin would not refrain Him  
And His love did constrain Him  
To breach Heaven's borders, weakness to find.

The Highest Majesty made Himself lowly  
To serve, redeem, and restore  
We, who are nothing, so that we might be raised  
The veil of separation was torn

**AS** THE LEAST HE CAME— born under scandal to a poor peasant couple, a divine foster child to humanity,

in a dirty stable now part of a frail human family.

**TO** THE LEAST HE CAME— to the wounded sinner full of shame—

To shepherds and kings— and all in-between—

The unexpected melody of heaven's refrain

**FOR** THE LEAST HE CAME— He became like me yet without sin,

and took mine that I might begin

To know grace, to know love, to know what He always intended life to be

Free, and wrapped in His beauty.

Come down from heaven's place— beard torn from His face

Every single shame of mine he bore and left no trace

Of my bitter guilt buried in His amazing grace

He is the Greatest who became the least

for the least of these, for you and for me

Heaven's gift this Christmas Eve

His offer is free— will you now receive?