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Christmas: How Close Can You Get? Knowing Him for Salvation



Part 34 (061217AM)

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The saddest story of Christmas is how those closest to Christ's birth completely missed that first Christmas; and that tragedy has continued to this day. You can be **so close and yet so far away!**

The real purpose of Christmas was shown by God at Christ's birth, God confronted the world with *the only gift everyone really needs*.

Christmas is about the gift no one seeks but everyone needs.

God so loved the world that He sent Jesus to save lost people from their sins.

God came to provide the only gift that everyone absolutely, critically needs—the substitutionary death of His Son, who came to meet our critical, eternal-life-threatening need prompted by our sins.

So the gift of Christmas is Christ's work of salvation. That gift involves meeting the critical needs each of us have in our lost, sinful and fallen condition.

This morning as we continue to see those elements of salvation that Christ's birth has brought, we do so by asking the question, "How close can someone get to Christ and His gift of Christmas and not be saved?"

The answer is sadly that you can get very close. Missing Jesus and His salvation is seen most vividly in the story of Christmas. Those closest to the coming of Christ were most untouched by it! In both Luke and Matthew's record we find that you can grow up in the shadow of God's Temple, hear God's Word every day of your life, meet the Wise men themselves, explain the Old Testament to them—and still miss everything, if it is not inside your heart and mind.

ACQUAINTANCE vs. KNOWLEDGE

Christmas is a time to remember that Jesus came to save us from sin and live within us. Beware of getting so close in every way—**but in your heart**, to Christ. Beware of being **acquainted with Christ** but never **knowing Him**. Webster's Dictionary says that knowledge has three levels: recognition, acquaintance, and experience. Knowing Christ means a personal experience of His grace that leads us to partake of His salvation.

How close can you get to Jesus and still be too far away[1]? That is what the religious leaders of Christ's day demonstrate to us this Christmas. So close they got, and yet so far away they remained. It is possible to be as close as them, and yet miss all that Christ and Christmas have to offer.

Matthew 2 and Luke 1 introduce us the chief priests and scribes, with daily immersion in the Scriptures, endless hours of singing and serving, and constant exposure to all that God had left to point to Him and His salvation—they only held God's Word externally—never in their wills and souls. God was only near in their mouths—and not in their hearts.

Look with me in [Matthew 2: 1-6](#) this morning as we see those closest to Jesus—missed Him completely.

ONLY ACQUAINTED WITH GOD

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Part: 6 The Origin of Christmas Traditions

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Part: 3 Lessons in Worshiping Christ

Part: 2 Anna: Living a Life of Praise

Part: 2 God In A Manger

Part: 1 The Fullness of Time: The Day Jesus Was Born

So who were these students of God's Word that were as close as anyone could be and yet missed Christ's coming, and Christ's gift of salvation? They were the Chief Priests and Scribes. They were perhaps those most acquainted with God of all people who ever lived.

- They lived in the presence of God as He accepted the offerings and sacrifices all day long at His Temple.
- They saw all day long the symbols and pictures of salvation in the substitutionary deaths of countless animals offered in atoning sacrifices to God.
- They held the Holy revelation of God's Word in their hands as they read; and in their minds as they quoted the sacred commands of God each day.
- They sang each day from the Psalms in public and private worship.
- They recited, memorized, and discussed the Word of the Lord from their earliest days—and often knew many chapters by heart.
- They wore the clothing that reminded them in every way of God as He wrote chapter after chapter on how his servants were to dress as they ministered in His Temple.

Yet all that exposure to God ended up only in their head, not in their hearts. Stop and ask yourself this morning, has all that you know about God traveled yet the 18 inches from your head (intellectual knowledge) to your heart (a choice of your will to embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior)?

They did not choose to let those truths invade and take over their hearts and wills. The spiritual skin of their lives, overexposed to the Light of God's truth, had developed the deadliest cancer of all—**spiritual indifference**.

- They cared not for God—they just knew all about Him.
- They loved not the Lord—they just spoke often and deeply about Him.
- They longed not to know and worship Him—they just helped others get to Him.

Remember what Jesus said about them?

Matthew 15:8 *'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.*

Think of the dangerous place these religious leaders found themselves in.

- Every day as they dressed in their priestly vestments the sacred anointing oils made with the secret and unique formula mandated by God, causing them to smell like no one else on earth ever could as they approached the Lord.
- Every day their hands and clothes were deeply filled with the indelible scent of incense as the fragrant smoke rose before God as a picture of their prayers of worship.
- Every day they came home with blood stained clothes from the substitutionary sacrificial animals they offered according to God's Word.

NOT LOOKING FOR JESUS

What happens if you are very religious and yet indifferent to any heart felt depth to that truth? The answer can be seen in these religious leaders who knew all about God's Word but were not personally seeking to know God.

Matthew 2:4-5 *And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:*

So they knew about the texts but failed to notice the significance of this event. They knew it, but didn't care enough to go five miles south of town and experience it.

They pointed others to seek out the Savior but never went to worship themselves. Chief priests and religious leaders—they knew the prophets but did not believe the prophecy.

They were over familiar with God; they were indifferent to His Word and thus very close but unconnected. So

1. **They missed JESUS—these Bible scholars had the Word but never saw the God of the Word.** They dealt with God's Word, but God's Word was never allowed to deal with them.

Isaiah 29:13 *Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.*

2. **They missed JESUS—these students of God's Word were religious but not true worshippers.**

John 4:24 *God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

3. **They missed JESUS—these servants of God were only acquainted with God, but they had never experienced Him.** They were good at the outward motions but not the inward worship.

Joel 2:13 *So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.*

4. **They missed JESUS—they were religious professors not possessors; they were hearers and not doers; they were talkers and not walkers.**

2 Peter 2:19 *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.*

5. **They missed JESUS—they had a lifetime of religion but were only self-righteous, not righteous through God's work.** They felt they were GOOD enough for God. Consequently God's Word wasn't for me, it's something for others.

Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

6. **They missed JESUS—because God only comes to those who see their lost condition.** They knew all about God, but didn't care enough to go five miles south of town and experience it. They pointed others to seek out the Savior but never went to worship themselves. They knew the prophets, but did not believe prophecy. God can only be found when we seek Him!

Deuteronomy 4:29 But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. (NIV)

What did these so close to Christ miss? They missed the greatest gift, what every one of us really needs. We began last week to see the first three elements. Here they are in conclusion.

Remember that Christmas is when God offered the only gift that everyone really needs? But that gift must be received. Jesus said that only to as many as "received Him" (*John 1:12*) it is those that become a part of God's family. Now look back at:

THE ONLY GIFT EVERYONE REALLY NEEDS

As you think about Christmas, gifts, presents, giving and receiving—why not check and be sure that you have received the most important of all gifts.

Only if we have received Him, Jesus who came to save us from sin, do we really have anything in our possession that matters. Every other possession and gift can be stripped away from us by death, disease, or disaster. Only Jesus will never leave us or be lost; only He can save and keep us forever.

Have you received the one and only gift that you (and everyone else) really needs? It starts with:

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS—CRITICAL NEED #1

Because of our sin—we are all debtors to God's Righteousness; so we need forgiveness.

Christmas is all about Jesus coming to live and then die the substitutionary death to take the hopeless debt we owe to God and pay with His own life our eternal death sin has caused us to be responsible to pay--**that's forgiveness.** A Sinner stands before God as a debtor and that debt is forgotten by His payment.

Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace NKJV

We also saw:

THE GIFT OF JUSTIFICATION—CRITICAL NEED #2

Because of our sin—we are all guilty convicts in God's sight; so we need justification.

Christmas is about Jesus who died to take guilty convicts and destroy any record that that ever committed a crime and takes their place in the punishment—**that's justification!** A Sinner stands before God as accused and is declared righteous by His imputed righteousness.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, **we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ, NKJV

Justification is what Christ did for me on the cross; it is immediate and was completely finished in me the instant I was saved; activated the moment I trust in the Person of Christ Jesus and His finished sacrifice of the cross; it is my position as declared right in God's sight.

Then we saw:

THE GIFT OF REGENERATION—CRITICAL NEED #3

Because of our sin—we are all dead in our trespasses and sin; so we need regeneration.

Christmas is about Jesus who died to take us who are dead in our sins, bring us to life and welcome us as family members, full of endless life and brand new—**that's regeneration!**

Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, NKJV

Have you **experienced the power of an endless life**, and every day partaking of the powerful presence within of the very Lord God Almighty?

That is the third part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF RECONCILIATION—CRITICAL NEED #4

Because of our sin—we are all enemies of God; so we need reconciliation.

Christmas is about Jesus who died to take enemies and make them friends—**that's reconciliation!** A Sinner stands before God as an enemy and is made a friend by His peace.

*Romans 5: 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, **having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.** NKJV*

Have you experienced **the wonder of friendship with God?**

That is the fourth part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF ADOPTION—CRITICAL NEED #5

Because of our sin—we are all strangers to God; so we need adoption.

Christmas is about Jesus who died to take strangers and make them part of the family—**that's adoption!** A Sinner stands before God as a stranger and is called a Son by His choice.

*Galatians 4: 4-6 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, **that we might receive the adoption as sons.** 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" NKJV*

Adoption is not our entrance into God's family, the way a homeless child would enter an adoptive family in our society. Rather, our only hope of getting into God's family is by *regeneration* or "the new birth" (John 3: 3). In New Testament language, the word used by God for *adoption* means "placed into a family as an adult son." This denotes our *standing* in God's family of God: we enter God's family not as little children but we enter as adult sons with all the privileges. **Entrance** into God's family is by regeneration, but **enjoyment** of God's family is through adoption.

Have you experienced **the joy of being adopted into Christ's family?**

That is the fifth part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF REDEMPTION—CRITICAL NEED #6

Because of our sin—we are all slaves to unrighteousness; so we need redemption.

Christmas is about Jesus who died to take slaves and make them freed forever—**that's redemption!** A Sinner stands before God as a slave and is granted freedom by His ransom.

John 8: 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. NASB

*John 8: 36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, **you shall be free indeed.** NKJV*

Have you experienced **the thrill of being liberated, set free, and rescued by God forever?**

That is the sixth part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF SANCTIFICATION—CRITICAL NEED #7

Because of our sin—we are all defiled; so we need sanctification.

Christmas is about Jesus who died to take our soiled and misdirected lives that always get wasted and make them clean, focused and fruitful—**that's sanctification!**

John 17: 17 "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

Romans 6: 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Sanctification is what Christ is doing in me because of the cross; it is an ongoing process never completed on earth until I meet Jesus face to face at death or His coming; it grows with each obedient choice I make empowered by the Holy Spirit; **sanctification** is my practice made right by becoming more conformed to His image.

That is the final part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

Christmas is a time to remember that Jesus came to save us from sin and live within us. Beware of getting so close in every way—**but in your heart**, to Christ. Beware of being **acquainted with Christ** but never **knowing Him**.

[1] 041219AM

