

Christmas Is Here! Don't Miss It!

Text: Luke 2:1-7

Ebenezer Scrooge, the main character in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, although fictional, was so infamous for being unkind, uncaring and miserly miserable that to this day his name is used as an adjective to define those characteristics. By the end of the novel there was a one hundred eighty degree turnaround. I love the dialogue between Scrooge and the boy on Christmas morning after his frightful night: "What's today?!" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps loitered in to look about him. "Eh?" returned the boy, with all his might of wonder. "What's today, my fine fellow?" said Scrooge. "Today!" replied the boy, "Why, CHRISTMAS Day." "It's Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it." The closing words of the book read, "...And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us every one!" Old Scrooge had missed a near lifetime of Christmases, but never again after his Christmas conversion.

As we return to the New Testament, we discover there were four groups of people who missed Christmas. How sad to live in the days in which Jesus walked in the earth and not acknowledge who He was or why He came and then, even sadder, to miss the opportunity to love, worship and follow Him. Let's talk about it:

1. THE PREOCCUPIED: THE INNKEEPER

Luke 2:7: "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." These are the only words that give us inkling about the disposition of the innkeeper. We are safe in presuming that had this Jewish man, living in the Jewish world, known that the Messiah, of whom he had heard about all his life, could have been born in one of his rooms, he would have found room, even to the point of giving Mary and Joseph his own personal lodging. Luke 2:1: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." Can you imagine how busy it must have been with people returning to the place of their personal heritage? Luke 2:3: "And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city." So we see families like Joseph and Mary traveled the whole distance of the country to be in Judea, because they were both of the lineage of David - Joseph through Solomon and Mary through Nathan.

The innkeeper, like so many in our world today, was probably not antagonistic, he was just preoccupied. He was probably feeling good about his financial situation, having every room in his inn filled to capacity. He was caught up with what he had going for him at that moment and did not bother to see the entire world was about to be turned upside down, and the beginning could have been in his inn. But instead, Jesus was born in the manger, surrounded by more animals than people.

Christmas is the most commercialized holiday in the world. So many are caught up with their own little world they haven't given thought that we are celebrating Christ coming to the earth. Imagine going to a little boy's birthday party, the house filled with guests buzzing with friends in fanciful conversation, but no one is talking to the birthday boy. Then, to add insult to injury, no one brought a present to him; they all exchanged presents with each other. I think you can already make the application.

2. THE TOTALITARIAN: HEROD

Matthew 2:1-3: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." This cruel, tyrannical, puppet king of Rome was self-centered and would have no competition. He was king and no one else would rule beside or over him.

One of the underlying reasons people miss Christmas is because to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and King (as He indeed, most certainly was and is) means we must abdicate ruling our own life and crown Jesus the King instead. Romans 1:25: "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen." Think of it, our Creator comes to earth and he is rejected as King and substituted for an unworthy monarch, that of oneself!

3. THE RELIGIOUS WORLD: THE PHARISEES

Matthew 2:4: "And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born." Herod had no intention of joining the wise men to find and worship Jesus. He just wanted to know the whereabouts, so he could eliminate any possible competition. Amazingly, Matthew 2:5 and 6 says, "And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." These religious leaders knew exactly where the Messiah would be born. How very sad. They were five miles from their King, but they did not join the wise men to find Jesus.

Many people are caught up in religious tradition, while Jesus is lost in the bright lights and customs. While some sing "Away in a Manger," their hearts are far from there. Jesus said in Matthew 15:7-9: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

These religious leaders accepted the written word and rejected the Living Word. They adored the Book, but not its Author. They magnified the gold of the temple, but brought no gold to the One of Whom the temple was dedicated (Matthew 23:16, 17). Yes, the most religious men in the world chose ritual over relationship. Many are missing Christmas today for the same reason.

4. THE FAMILIAR: NAZARETH

John 1:46: "And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see." Luke 4:16: "And he came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read." Jesus then takes the prophecy of Himself as Messiah from Isaiah and then through the Scriptures, announces that He is the Christ. The Bible records the response in Matthew 4:22c: "...Is not this Joseph's son?" In other words, the people from his home district were saying, wait, what? - this cannot possibly be Messiah; this is Joseph's son. We know who He is. Oh, but they did not know Him! The hometown folk even decided to kill Him (Luke 4:28-30). Matthew 13:57: "And they were offended in Him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in His own country, and in His own house."

Far too many times, I have witnessed to people who have said to me, "Oh yeah, I know everything you're saying; I was reared up in that." There are some, perhaps here today, that have been in attendance and even involved in ministry. You attended Sunday School, Vacation Bible school, educated in Christian education, youth camps and conferences and have even participated in Christmas programs at church – but you missed Christmas. This is the saddest group of all. You have been so near, but yet so far away. Please! Don't miss another Christmas! It was not too late for Scrooge and it's not too late for you!

Merry Christmas! And may God bless us, everyone!

-Pastor Pope-