

## Sermon Series – Some Gifts are More than Just a Gift.

### #4 – Christmas in 3-D

#### Genesis 3:1-15; Luke 2:11; Galatians 4:4-6

**Introduction:** When you hear the words, 'Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your nose...' **you know it is that time of year again.** 'Tiny tots with their eyes all-aglow will find it hard to sleep tonight.'

That song and so many others we've grown up hearing over the years, capture the anticipation we have at this time of the year. Just think about it; when you were a kid, the question you kept asking was, '**When will Christmas be here?**' Now you think, "**Is it Christmas time again, already?**"

Just so you know, for thousands of years, Jewish children were taught that one day God would send a Messiah. Year after year, and century after century, they had the anticipation and expectation of the coming Messiah. Their question would be, '**Will this be the year?**'

I think one of the hardest places to be in life is in the waiting room; not knowing what the doctor will say, not knowing whether or not the tumor is malignant or benign, not knowing whether it's cancer or not, not knowing if the operation is successful, not knowing whether or not you will get that job, not knowing if you will ever meet someone to spend the rest of your life with.

Here's a little nugget for all of you who find yourselves in a waiting room or one day will be: **Keep Praying – Keep Working – Keep Watching – Keep Waiting because God is never late.**

I think there are three major expectations we have at Christmas.

1. First, most people have Emotional Expectations of Christmas. We hope that somehow, someday, something will happen that will allow us to feel the warmth of the "Christmas spirit."

That's why we decorate the house and go to family parties, office parties, church programs, and listen to Christmas music that we've heard hundreds of times before and watch our favorite Christmas movies.

Most of us believe that there ought to be an "up" feeling associated with the season. [There are Emotional expectations of Christmas.](#)

2. There are Material Expectations. Most people expect to give & receive gifts and cards.

That's why retail stores start putting up their Christmas displays in October. They're banking on the fact that giving and getting is a big part of what Christmas is all about.

Unfortunately, real life doesn't always turn out that way. Sometimes, you get what you want, or you get stuff you don't like or want, and that can leave you feeling empty. Or you spent more on a gift than someone spent on you.

*[People have emotional and material expectations of Christmas.](#)*

3. When it comes to Christmas, most people have high Relational Expectations. By that I mean that we believe we ought to experience the love of family and friends at a deeper level during this season.

Relational expectations are one of the reasons so many people travel at Christmas. Where are they going? **Home** ... to be with family and friends. It's why Christmas is so painful for people who can't get home or who have lost loved ones.

In the movie ("It's a Wonderful Life"), after his life totally falls apart, what's the lesson that George Bailey finally learns on Christmas Eve? As the entire town gathers around his Christmas tree, younger brother Harry reminds him that **"the man, who has friends, has everything."**

[We all want to enjoy this time of year. We all want to create memories that remind us that Christmas is a time like no other. We all want to have our high hopes and expectations fulfilled, but even if all your emotional, relational, and material expectations are met, you can still miss the true meaning of Christmas. So, what I want to talk about today is seeing \*\*Christmas in 3-D.\*\*](#)

[The only way Christmas will exceed all your expectations and be more than just a gift is if you view it in 3-D. \*\*Let's PRAY\*\*](#)

If you got a bulletin this morning, there was a gift in there, so Merry Christmas. You all have a pair of 3-D glasses that when you put them on and look at the lights

on your Christmas tree will show whatever symbol is on your glasses.

The entire concept of 3-D viewing is very interesting. Unlike horses, our eyes are located side-by-side in the front of our heads and thanks to this proximity each eye takes a view of the same area from a slightly different angle. Each eye picks up visual information that the other doesn't.

The two separate images are sent to the brain for processing. When those two images arrive simultaneously in the back of the brain, they are united into one picture and the result is what you are seeing is a 3-dimensional stereo picture.

The English word "stereo" comes from the Greek word, "stereos" which means, "firm" or "solid." In other words, with stereovision you see an object the way it should be seen in 3 spacial dimensions (width, height, and depth). It is this added perception of the depth dimension that makes 3-D viewing and stereovision so very special.

When we think about Christmas, we generally think about two questions: **When?** and **What?** In other words, we think about when Christmas is and it seems the Christmas season begins earlier and earlier with Christmas music, shopping, and bargains all leading up to that one special day - December 25th.

Then, we focus on the **'what'** of Christmas. What do we want for Christmas? What are we going to give others for Christmas? What do we want to do for Christmas. For most people, that is where their thinking stops. And so, they don't see Christmas in 3-D; they only see it in 2-D.

There is a third dimension of Christmas that gives the depth and the 3-D effect to Christmas that people often miss, and that is the **"Why?"**

Why do we celebrate Christmas? Why do billions of people, at this time of year, celebrate the birth of a baby in Bethlehem, two thousand years ago?

**Illustration:** A professor at law school used to begin his first class every year by putting two numbers on the blackboard a "4" and beside it "2." Then he would ask this question, "What is the solution?" Students would immediately call out numbers like "6." Another would say "2." Then, several would shout out "8." At each answer the teacher would shake his head, "no." When they were done the

professor would point out their one fatal error.

He said, "There is one reason why you cannot find the solution and that is because you have failed to ask this key question: **'What is the problem?' Unless you know what the problem is you will never find the solution.**"

**Why Christmas?" "Why did Jesus come to this earth? Why was He born?"**

Contrary to popular belief the story of Christmas doesn't begin in Matthew, the first book of the NT. It begins of all places in the first book of the OT, in Genesis in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve; two perfect people at perfect peace with God and each other, living in a perfect world.

You will never understand what happened in Bethlehem if you don't understand what happened in the Garden of Eden.

When you see Christmas in 3-D, you see that it is God's solution to the world's greatest problem. Three things: Turn with me to Genesis, chapter 3.

## **I. Christmas Solves Our Sin Problem**

*1Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'*"

*4"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.*

*She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (Gen. 3:1-7, NIV)*

Immediately we are privy to a discussion that took place between the serpent and Eve. Now right off the bat we know Eve is in trouble because you never dialogue with the devil.

**Humor:** A lady came home one day from a shopping spree and her husband said, 'What did you buy?' She looked at him sheepishly and said, 'Honey, I bought a \$500 dress.' He said, 'Why did you do that?' She said, 'The devil made me do it.' He said, 'Why didn't you say, 'Satan, get thee behind me.'"' She said, 'I did, and he said it looked really good from back there.'

Now that's what happens when you begin to discuss things with the devil. Here's a quick mini sermon on how to deal with temptation:

- 1) **Remember** that 'your adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.' (1 Peter 5:8)
- 2) **Repeat** - to him the word of God. Three times in the desert Jesus said to the devil, "It is written," and the devil was defeated.
- 3) **Resist** - "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7)

Notice the progression that leads to sin.

A. The devil **DISTORTS** what God really said. Did God really say, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" No! God said, "***You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.***" (Gen. 2:16-17, NIV)

## **B. DOUBT**

The first question ever found in the Bible is this, "**Did God really say?**" (v.1) It is right here that the slippery slope to sin begins, doubting the word of God.

Dr. John R. Rice wisely said, "**Never put a question mark where God has put a period.**" Satan used that question mark to create doubt in Eve's mind.

## **C. DENIAL**

Doubt always leads to denial. First, there was denial of the word of God. Today we have those who are saying, "It doesn't really matter what God says about sex and sexuality. To each his own."

He also denied the wisdom of God. ***"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*** (vv.4-5) Now this was the beginning of the "I can be my own god" movement.

Satan also denied the wrath of God. ***"And the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die.'"*** (v.4)

#### **D. DECEPTION**

***"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*** (v.5) In effect, the devil was saying to Eve, "You ought to make your own decisions. You ought to demand your rights. You ought to determine your own destiny. You eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and you will be just like God." If you become your own God, you don't need God. You can do what you want.

**God's word is distorted, Eve doubts, denies the truth of God's word, is deceived and next, we see...**

#### **E. DESIRE**

***6When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*** (v.6)

Satan appealed to her physical desire. For the woman saw that the tree was "good for food." Satan appealed to her emotional desire. "It was pleasant to the eyes." Satan appealed to her intellectual desire. She saw it was "a tree desirable to make one wise." Her flesh, her soul, and her mind all wanted the forbidden fruit.

Eve was caught in the worldly trap described in I John 2:16, ***"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."*** You can trace all temptation and all sin back to one of those three areas of your life.

#### **F. DECISION**

The desire led to a decision. ***For after she saw how good the food would be "she took of its fruit and ate."*** (v.6) Now notice that the devil did not make her do it. She ate because she wanted to, not because she had to.

### **G. DISTRIBUTION**

After she ate ***"She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it..."*** (v.6) Why did Eve give this fruit to her husband? Because misery loves company. Sinners want others to sin with them.

### **H. DISGRACE**

***"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so, they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."*** (v.7) For the first time Adam and Eve experienced shame. Perfect fellowship had been fractured. Faith had been replaced by fear. For the first time in human history a man's wife had to go shopping for clothes.

### **I. Death**

God had warned Adam, ***"In the day that you eat of this fruit, you shall surely die."*** Well at first glance it does not appear that Adam and Eve died. But I tell you they did. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. That did not happen, but spiritually they died. Spiritual death is the separation of the spirit from God.

Now that Adam and Eve ate this fruit, inside they immediately died in their spirit, progressively in their soul, and ultimately in their bodies.

Distortion...doubt...denial...deception...desire...decision...distribution...disgrace. followed by death. Wow, but there was one more thing that happened.

### **J. DISMISSAL**

***"After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life"*** (v.24)

God had to dismiss them from this perfect paradise because He cannot fellowship with sin. A good God doesn't send people to hell, people send themselves. Hell is that place where God will not be.

What we just read is a description of what the Bible calls "**sin.**" It is the first sin

ever committed. I realize in this post-modern age, the word "sin" has fallen on deaf ears and is even ridiculed. We call things like this a "mistake" or "misjudgment", people don't lie, they misspeak, but God calls it all "sin." Sin is simply **disbelieving** the Word of God and **disobeying** the Will of God.

Sin led to shame. Shame led to separation. Separation led to sorrow, and sorrow led to suffering. Adam made the down payment on sin, and we've been making installments ever since. But that is exactly where we learn what Christmas is all about.

Because of what happened that day, there is a hole in the soul of humanity that can only be filled by that little baby born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

## **II. Christmas Meets Our Need for A Savior**

The problem of sin has now entered the universe and God immediately gives the solution. It is wrapped up in a single verse that carries within it the hope for the entire world. ***"15And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*** (Genesis 3:15, NIV)

This is the first prophecy that we find in the Bible. Even more than that it is the first gospel sermon ever preached in the Bible. It is a promise of someone who will come to rescue us from our sin and that someone is Jesus Christ.

The word for ***"offspring"*** in the Hebrew language is literally the word ***"seed."*** For centuries, this baffled ancient Jewish rabbis, because we know biologically, the woman has the egg, and the man has the seed.

God promises that this One who will rescue us from sin and defeat Satan would be born from a woman. In all the rest of scripture, we read that children are born from their father, but no father is mentioned here.

Centuries later, Isaiah, the prophet, explained it this way, ***"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*** (Isaiah 7:14, NIV)

This redeemer is going to be a human being, who has an earthly mother, and a



Heavenly Father.

### **III. Christmas Provides Us the Gift of Salvation**

You may never have heard of Genesis 3:15 referred to as the "First Christmas Story", but that is what it is, because it is the very first verse in the Bible that tells of a Savior who would bring us salvation from our sin. The most familiar Christmas verse that we all know is Luke 2:11; ***"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*** (Luke 2:11, ESV)

What is the very first word that is used to describe this baby? **"Savior."**

From the time of Genesis 3 the greatest need of humanity was not a fitness trainer, a financial advisor, or a religious leader. Everyone on this planet is a sinner who needs a Savior who can provide salvation. You will never see Christmas in 3-D until you say and mean these four words, **"I need a Savior."**

There are two equally dangerous things people do with Jesus. They tend to leave Him in a cradle at Christmas and leave Him on the cross during Easter.

You can't just see Christmas in one dimension or even two. Christmas is in 3-D. You could also say that the first dimension of Christmas starts when God promised a Messiah would come.

The second dimension of Christmas continued with the expectation and anticipation of that promise to be fulfilled - which it was.

There is a third dimension of Christmas that shows us this promise was kept and it exceeds all expectations. It truly is a gift that is just more than a gift.

Ask the average person on the street to tell you the story of Christmas and they will start talking about angels, shepherds, mangers, stars, and wise men. They will recount the historical story of Christmas. If they know anything about the Bible, they will tell you to go to the gospels of Matthew and Luke, because Matthew and Luke tell us when Christmas happened, how Christmas happened, and what happened.

**About 50 years after the birth of Jesus, and 20 years after the death of**

Jesus, the Apostle Paul gives the theological version of the story. He tells us why Christmas happened and, most important for us, what it really means.

## I. Christmas means I Can Have Spiritual Freedom

1. ***"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship."*** (Galatians 4:4-5, NIV)

From the time God spoke creation into existence, and put the first breath into a human being, God had this moment in time written on His calendar in bold print - "Birth of Jesus."

Remember, for hundreds of years, the Jewish people had waited on the Messiah. Though they didn't know it, they were waiting on a Savior. At Christmas, the wait was over.

God sends a son and brings Him into this world through the womb of a woman, just like every other son and daughter. For a former Jewish rabbi to write this and believe this, it exceeded all expectations of anyone that studied the Bible that God would come to planet earth in human flesh. Paul then tells us why Jesus came.

***"To redeem those under the law..."*** (Galatians 4:5, NIV)

Now who are 'those under the law?' That is all of us. We are all under the law of God. There are physical laws of the universe, and there are also spiritual laws of the universe, but there is a problem. **No one has perfectly obeyed God's law, and "breaking the law" God calls "sin."**

Sin puts us in debt to the God of the universe. It doesn't matter which law you have broken or how many you have broken or how many times you have broken it. James, the brother of Jesus, gives us this piece of advice.

***"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."*** (James 2:10, NIV)

In God's eyes there are no misdemeanors; there are only felonies. When you owe a debt that you can't pay you need one thing - **redemption**.

Paul just told us that Jesus came to redeem us. The word "**redeem**" means, "to pay a debt completely off." Jesus didn't come at Christmas just to bail us out, but to pay our sin debt and free us from spiritual bondage once and for all.

How did He do that? Jesus perfectly kept the law. He never sinned in word, thought, or deed! He didn't owe a debt He couldn't pay, so He paid a debt He didn't owe. Your sin mortgage has been completely paid off. Because of that, we can now enjoy spiritual freedom.

## **II. Christmas means I'm Part of a Supernatural Family**

When we continue to read, we find that Jesus came so "**...that we might receive adoption to sonship.**" (Galatians 4:5b, NIV)

That word '**adoption**' would have resonated in a unique way 2000 years ago. Normally, when we think of adoption today, we think primarily of babies and little children. There was no term for adoption in Jewish terminology. Nobody adopted babies. Adoption was primarily a Roman custom.

Romans did not adopt babies or children; they adopted full-grown adults. Rich people would have children, but like a lot of families there would be problems, and it may be that the father, though he loved his son or daughter, didn't trust them with the estate. He felt like they didn't meet his standards, so he would go out and find a young man that was of good character, good reputation, that he felt would be a fit for his family, and he would adopt him, and make him equal to his own children, and an heir to the father's estate.

God looked at us, not when we were good, but when we were bad, not when we were worthy, but unworthy, not when we were righteous, but were sinners. God said, "**I'm not going to just pay your debt and set you free, I'm going to take you into my family.**"

It would have been more than enough if God had just wiped the slate clean, paid

the debt off, gave us a get out of jail card, and set us free, but He doesn't stop there. He doesn't just give us forgiveness; He gives us His name. He doesn't just get you out of jail; He takes you home.

If you are an adoptive parent, you understand more than anybody just how wonderful this is. Adoption is always intentional. Nobody adopts because they ***have to***, they adopt because they ***want to***.

I've heard of unplanned and unwanted pregnancies; I've never heard of an unplanned or unwanted adoption. It gets better than that. God not only wants you to come live with Him, but He comes to live in you.

Listen to this next verse. ***"Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'"*** (Galatians 4:6, NIV)

While Jesus was on earth, He called God "Father" over 200 times. If you go to all the prayers in ancient Judaism, you never find God referred to as "Abba, Father." No self-respecting Jew would ever address God as "Father" and yet this Jewish rabbi, Paul did and tells us because of Christmas we can too. **We are not just a bunch of people who meet in a building. We're God's family.**

### **III. Christmas means I Have God's Eternal Favor**

If you want to know the difference between religion and Christianity it is right here in this verse. Religion is all about keeping the rules. Christianity is all about the relationship of a child to a father. Religion produces self-righteousness. Christianity produces sons and daughters.

Religion is about **your performance** - keep the law and do good.

Christianity is about **your position** - you are the son or daughter of a Father that has adopted you.

Then, as if that wasn't enough, he says in verse 7, ***"Since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."*** (Galatians 4:7, NIV)

Christmas tells us that God not only set us free and took us home, but He's given us the keys to the castle and the chariot and every other good and perfect that comes from the Father. When you give your life to Jesus, He gives you all that He

owns, and the bible says He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and the hills underneath.

**STORY:** There was a sign offering a big cash reward for whoever found a lost dog. The description of the dog said, "He's only got three legs, he's blind in the left eye, he's missing a right ear, his tail has been broken off, he was neutered accidentally by a fence, he's almost deaf, and he answers to the name '*Lucky*.'"

That dog has been through a lot, but he isn't just lucky to be alive! He's blessed because he's got an owner who loves him and wants him back. That's the "why" of Christmas. That's what redemption is all about! Do you know that you and I have a God who loves us, and wants us?

## **CONCLUSION**

Take away all the warm fuzzies, all the presents, all the moments with family, and friends, and the true meaning of Christmas doesn't change. God takes on flesh and comes to Earth in the person of Jesus, lives the perfect and sinless life that you and I cannot live, dies on a cross to pay the penalty for our sin - a penalty that you and I couldn't pay in all of eternity - and rises from the dead three days later, so that you and I can have eternal life. **And that, my friend is Christmas in 3-D.**