

Winter break, the season of giving, the holidays, etc. They may even say Christmas. We have come to that time of year, when all those phrases and others are tossed at us by the marketing world. We come to it ourselves with our own expectations. We get caught up in the plans, schedules, and to-do lists. Try as we might, even those of us who are Christian, we all get caught up in it, to some degree. I confess that I get caught up in it myself. That is why I am so grateful that the Lord woke me up last night and I was able to quiet myself and listen. Please allow me to share some of the things He reminded me of last night.

It is CHRISTmas from the phrase Christ's Mass. It is a time to celebrate and worship the coming of the Christ and Messiah into the world. Without the coming of Jesus into the world, we would be without hope and salvation. The many things that happen around Christmas are meant to point us towards Jesus, but now seem to distract us from Jesus. Let us take a moment and be reminded of the Truth.

Jesus came into a world full of people in need. Many of those people did not know they were in need. It took Jesus Christ to open people's eyes and break the chains of religion. Religion is people working to bind themselves back to God. It took Jesus to show them no amount of busyness and good works could earn eternity in heaven. His coming was the ONLY way. What was true in Zero A.D. is true today. How many people in the world are religious or about doing the right thing, even those who would call themselves "Christian"? It takes Jesus. Jesus not only came to die on the cross to remove our sins, but also to restore relationship with God. God could have removed our sin from us from heaven, but He came to earth to restore relationship and have relationship with us! We need the reminder, because it is so much easier for us to DO things, than to have a relationship with God. But if we are truly in relationship with God, we will do and give out of our love for Him.

It takes Jesus to be the center and source of all things. If we do not have Jesus at the center of all then we are backwards and working out of our own strength, knowledge, and willpower. Let us stop a moment and look that some things that are a part of the Christmas season. They are words that have been disconnected from Jesus Christ. Let us reconnect them to the Truth that they may have the power and correct focus.

Peace is the first. When people hear the word they think "no war" and that is one definition. Peace in our lives, with others and on the earth will NEVER come through our

effort alone or through the government. Peace only come in and through the person of Jesus. In Luke chapter 2, the angels come to the shepherds and proclaim peace on earth. The peace came because Jesus was born. His death on the cross brings peace with God, to those who surrender and are saved. When Jesus comes again, He will bring final peace on the earth. This will happen when He wins the last battle. So peace without Jesus will never happen. Jesus calls us to be peacemakers, not out of compromising the Truth and not by compromising Jesus. We are to be peacemakers by proclaiming Jesus and allowing Him to work through us. We can be distracted and confused, but we will never lose Jesus' peace. That is a witness to the world.

We hear a lot about joy this time of year. But joy that is disconnected from Jesus is not joy. Joy is not an emotion that comes and goes. It cannot be worked up or obtained. Joy comes with the advent of Jesus in the world and in our hearts. Joy is a state of being that only happens when we ask Jesus to live in our hearts and dwell with us. We might not always feel joyful as a Christian. However, if Jesus truly lives in our hearts, we will never lose that joy.

Love, so much can be said about the wrong view the world and consequently we have about love. Let us try to reconnect it back to God, the only true and perfect source of love. Love is not an emotion, emotions come and go. Love is a commitment. John 3:16 could be easily translated as the following. "God was so deeply invested and committed to His created people, that He sent a part of Himself to the Earth in the person of Jesus. He did this so that anyone who believes in Jesus would not live forever separated from God, but live forever with Him." Love requires a commitment and love requires sacrifice. The Father had to turn His back on Jesus and Jesus had to die so that, any who believe would have fellowship with and eternal life with God. If we truly learn to be loved and love from Jesus, then we can love others.

Christmas is often thought of as a family time. The problem is, human beings are not perfect. We ALL sin EVERY day. Try as we might we cannot fully make peace in our family. We cannot, on our own, live with real expectations for our family members. We have to remember that, family was established by God when He married Adam and Eve. It is proclaimed and promoted in the entire bible. We have to be humble enough to see that, only God can make a family. He is the one who draws husband and wife together. He is the only one who they can submit to that will hold them together. He is the one who blesses

them with new lives (by birth or adoption). We have to submit and lay our family and the issues down at Jesus' feet. Then we can ask Him to bring peace in our family. We can only truly know what it is to be family, because God, in the form of Jesus, died to make us part of His family.

Now let us move on to the big push this time of year. Presents/gifts/giving are the focus of so much. "It's tradition", "it is the right thing to do", "I need to recognize this person" are all messages that are out there. Giving should not come from obligation. God was in no way obliged to give us the greatest gift of all, Jesus. Gifts and presents are not meant to be the focus. They are ONE expression of the love and affection between us. Some times presents get in the way and divide us. But a gift does not have to be a thing. Being with each other mentally, physically, emotionally is one of the bests gifts out there. It took Jesus, God WITH us, to show us that we need a relationship with God. The gift Jesus brought us is amazing! He brought Himself. Jesus came so that we might, through surrendering to Him, be set free from the curse of the law AND that we might be restored to the family fellowship with the Father. Fellowship with the Father is the hole in our lives that NOTHING else can fill. What an amazing gift that only Jesus can bring!

OK now that you have stuck with this for this far, let us talk about how we can keep the focus on Jesus this CHRISTmas season.

Calls to action:

1. Like Mary & Joseph, we are called to surrender our plans to the Lord and let Him direct our path. It will not be easy, socially acceptable, or what we had envisioned, but it will be blessed and rewarding.
2. Like the shepherds, we are called to not be afraid. We are called to go welcome the Jesus Christ into the world and into our hearts. Then we are called to go and share Jesus with those around us.
3. Like the Wisemen, we are called to make the journey. We are called to lay down the treasures we have been given, by the Lord, to the only One worthy to receive them.

However, keeping Jesus as the focus does not just require action, it also requires us to stop and think.

1. Stop and surrender the busyness of your life.
2. Stop and surrender the events and functions that fill your calendar.

3. Stop and surrender your travel.
4. Stop and surrender your buying.
5. Stop and surrender your giving and receiving.
6. Stop and surrender your friends and family.

STOP and surrender ALL to Jesus, our Lord, Messiah, Savior and King.

Once we have put Jesus first in our lives, everything else will fall into the correct place and importance. But the stop and surrender process has to continue, or we will get distracted and out-of-order all over again. When Jesus is the focus, then you can go, do, serve, give, receive, and live. This is because, Jesus will be doing it in and through you. The blessings of His joy and peace will truly be yours to live in and yours to share.

So remember it takes Jesus Christ to have CHRISTmas and it take Jesus to have life. Without Him, nothing works and all things fall apart. With Him at the center, "all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)