

## **Christmas: A Sobering Christian Reality**

It's always amazing how people can remember their past, and yet forget how things *really* were. They don't remember the bad stuff. They only remember the good things/times. They look back and view things through *romantic, rose-colored glasses*. *I'm certainly guilty of it too, especially when it comes to my Marine Corps days*. This is when my wife lovingly reminds me of all the other "not so good" things that were day in and day out realities of those "good old days." *"Do you not remember this, that, and the other thing happening during those 'good old days?' Do you not remember all those things that caused you to lament how you couldn't wait to get out?"* She's right too. I tend to forget all the pain and sorrow and things that made me angry, and only remember the good times. We all do it, but I guess I notice it more with moms. I don't know what it is in women that makes them this way, but it seems like all moms have a *knack* for remembering the "joys" of pregnancy and child birth, all the while *forgetting* about the discomfort, the mood swings, and the pain. *"I would do it again in a heartbeat."* *Really?* That's not what you were saying when you were sobbing because you couldn't fit into your jeans, or you were vomiting up gum you swallowed in the Second Grade thanks to morning sickness. That's not what you were screaming while you were crushing my hand and cursing my lineage while bringing our little bundle of joy into the world! I guess I shouldn't complain though. If women didn't wear those rose-colored glasses after childbirth, every woman would only ever have one child—no more. There wouldn't be a wife in the world that would let her husband anywhere near her if she remembered *everything* about pregnancy and childbirth!

Okay... so where am I going with this? Well... as we come together on this first Sunday after Christmas, it is with this same understanding of *amnesia-like, rose-colored glasses* that we begin our meditation this morning. Think about it. I don't know of anyone who ever looks at Christmas as a *dark and sobering time*. It's "*Merry Christmas*," right? Understand: I'm not talking here about the typical seasonal depression. I understand the short hours of daylight, the cold temps, the money pinch, the family issues that make this time of year rough for some people. I know full-well that this time of year is dark and depressing to some people. I get that, but that's not what I'm referring to here. *Christmas isn't seen as a dark, sobering time by anyone*. Nobody looks at Christmas the same way as they do at September 11<sup>th</sup> or December 7<sup>th</sup> (Pearl Harbor Day). Nobody ever considers Christmas time to be a time of "infamy." Through our rose-colored glasses, we see only a festive, joyous time.

Understand, too, this also includes Christians. I'm not just talking about the commercialized, secular version of Christmas. I'm talking about the *theological*,

*churchly understanding* of Christmas. It's all fun and joy! It's a birthday party for Jesus, full of Christmas cheer and the magic of Charlie Brown's Christmas spirit! And if you're not feeling it, **something must be wrong with you.**

So what's the problem with that, Scrooge? Who cares if no one sees Christmas as an *infamous, dark time*? Well...it goes back to what we've been talking about this past Advent season. Why did Jesus come to this earth to be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a lowly virgin in a lowly stable in lowly little Bethlehem? ***He came because of our sin.*** This was God's plan of salvation. His Son would live and die for us, for our sins, in our place. He would pay our justly-deserved wage of death in our place precisely because we can't make payment ourselves—not even for one single sin, let alone an eternity's worth of sin.

Let me ask you: Do you think this victory over sin, death, and the devil came *easy*? Did the devil just tuck tail and run when Jesus came into this world? Did he just ***roll over and die*** when Jesus came into the world? **Absolutely not!** He didn't roll over and die then, and he's still **actively** roiling and raging now, seeking to ***destroy*** the faith and all who are in the faith. You, especially, who are gathered here today around the Christ and not around the presents under the tree... the devil hates you the most!

That's what I mean when I talk about the rose-colored Christmas glasses we all tend to wear. I don't think most people know that ***Christmas time, as wonderful and joyous and merry as it is, is also supposed to be remembered as a very bloody yet triumphant time in the life of the Church.*** It's no coincidence that our earliest church fathers set aside the three days that follow Christmas Day as special days of remembrance and thanksgiving for fallen, faithful saints—***people who suffered and died in the name of Christ Jesus.*** December 26<sup>th</sup> is recognized as St. Stephen's day. You remember Stephen, right? He was one of the very first martyrs of the New Testament church. He was stoned to death for his faith. December 27<sup>th</sup> is remembered as St. John's day. Again, you know John. He was the guy who wrote Revelation. He was the one who suffered years and years of ***tribulation and pain and exile.*** Why? ***Because he was faithful to Christ in a world that wasn't.***

And then there's December 28<sup>th</sup>—the day we remember today as “the slaughter of the holy innocents.” This is the account we heard today in our Gospel lesson. Imagine—***little babies whose only crime was that they were born around the same time as the baby Jesus.*** That's why they are referred to as “innocent.” That's not to say that they were without sin, which is how some people still like to view babies today. **They were sinful.** They were offspring of Adam and Eve. Remember: The wage of sin is death. If they weren't sinful, they wouldn't have died. Still... these innocent little babies were slaughtered, and like I said, their

only “crime” was the fact that they were born when they were (which isn’t something any of them chose).

*So what does all this mean for us today? Why should we bring up such a terrible thing in the midst of a time that’s supposed to be merry and full of joy?* Folks: As I said earlier, the devil didn’t roll over and die when Christ came into this world. Christ’s victory over sin came with cost—**heavy cost**. What most people either don’t understand or fail to remember (or choose to forget) is that this cost **wasn’t just paid on Good Friday**. In Christ—the Christmas Christ—the babe born in Bethlehem—God was already rooting out sin, putting it to death, reconciling His fallen and sinful people back to Him. **Unfortunately, sin doesn’t die without a fight**. It never has and it never will. Those little innocent babies, whose only crime was being born in the **wrong place at the wrong time**, can rightly be seen as martyrs—the very first martyrs of the New Testament church. Faithful little babes, who were brought up in God’s Word and command, circumcised on the eighth day, presented in the Temple with offering and prayer and worship...things that ALL Jewish parents did, thereby exposing their children to the Word of God and the working of the Holy Spirit in that Word—**these faithful little babes were murdered because of Christ**. Kind of puts Christ’s words, “*unless you repent and become like little babes, you will not enter into the kingdom of Heaven*” into a whole new light, doesn’t it?

This is what we’re called to remember today and the next couple of days. **Take off the rose-colored glasses! Wake up! Sober up!** Christ’s victory comes with cost. His victory over sin—our victory over sin—comes with cost. **Jesus paid that full price for us, but that doesn’t mean that being a faithful child of God is easy**. It never has been and it never will be, at least not on this side of eternity. People died because of this faith. People died for this faith. Nowadays, we balk if our feelings get hurt or someone disagrees with our beliefs, even if our beliefs are heretical and false. We balk if we’re inconvenienced or told “no.” **The thought of dying because of faith or for the faith is completely foreign and outdated to us**.

My fellow redeemed: As we continue to journey through this Christmas season for the next **ten days until Epiphany**, take some time to view your reality through the **lens of the cross**, and not through the rose-colored glasses we so often wear. Recognized in humble, penitent faith, Christmas time really is a **sobering time**. **Understand: I don’t mean to say that it’s a sad time**. It’s not. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. In faith, we know that this is a **truly merry time**. This is truly reason to celebrate. Jesus came to earth for us and our sin. He paid the price in full. **We are saved in Him, because of Him**. It is finished! We have NOTHING to fear. There is your reason to rejoice, now and always!

My prayer for you is that you recognize this joyous truth in *all its clarity*. That's what I mean by sobering. I hope and pray that you understand the depth and depravity of your sin and what this free and unmerited gift of salvation means for you. *It's not something we take for granted*. It's not something we stash away out of sight until the gift giver comes around, and then we pull it out and act like it's been a cherished part of our life the entire time. *This is God's gift of life and salvation for you*. It came with a cost—a *heavy, eternal cost*. People died for you. Babies died for you and your salvation. God gave up His Son for you. Christ gave up heaven for you. He shed His blood and died for you. In Christ—the Christmas child and Passover Lamb—you are completely forgiven. This is your blessed, joyous reality, today and always. May God bless you with “Christ-colored glasses” that never forgets or takes for granted this *sobering, but blessed reality*.

AMEN