

DON'T MISS THE SAVIOR THIS CHRISTMAS

Good morning! We're on the second part of our series I'm calling "Welcome the Savior". We're talking about what happens when we welcome Jesus in our lives. Last week, I said hope is what we get. Hope today and hope for tomorrow.

But you see, in order to welcome the Savior, first you must recognize that there is a Savior and who the Savior is. Sadly, although Christmas is still celebrated in this country and many parts of the world, they don't know what Christmas is all about. The world in general think of Christmas as just a festive time, a time to gather with friends and relatives to eat, drink, and be merry or to exchange gifts or to hang decorations. They see the lights, they hear the sounds, they taste the food, they touch the gifts, and yet they still miss the Savior on Christmas. So, I've entitled our message this morning, "Don't Miss the Savior this Christmas."

Now, if you're a Christian, is it possible to even miss Jesus on Christmas? And the answer is yes. You can miss it for the same three reasons most people missed the Savior at the very first one about 2000 years ago.

So what I want to do today is to look at the three most common reasons people have Christmas all around this season and still miss the Savior. They don't get it. They may enjoy the temporary things Christmas brings but they don't get the eternal benefits of really knowing Jesus. Then I want us to look at how can you ensure that you don't miss the Savior this season and the rest of your life. Let's get right into it.

Three reasons why people miss the Savior Jesus are found in the first Christmas story.

• Busyness (The Innkeeper)

The first one is busyness. Busyness is the first reason that we can miss Jesus. This by the way was the innkeeper's mistake at the very first Christmas.

You know the story. In the last week of her pregnancy Mary and Joseph have to go to their hometown of Bethlehem. They live in a city called Nazareth in Israel and they have to go their hometown called Bethlehem. A little tiny town where they are going to be involved in a census for taxation with the Roman government.

When they get there, Mary goes into labor. And Joseph tries to check her into the local Holiday Inn. The innkeeper comes out and says, “Sorry – no vacancies. There’s no room in the inn. We’re all filled up.”

Afterwards, Luke 2:7 tells it like this: “*...and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger,* [by the way, what’s a manger? A manger is simply an old English word for a feed trough. That’s all it is. It’s a bucket or a basket or a box, a wooden box that you would put grain in for cows and donkeys and other livestock. So when Mary lays her baby in a manger, it’s not something fancy; it’s a feed box for cattle. It’s about as humble a birth as you can have. She places him in a manger...] *because there was no guest room available for them.*”

There was no guest room available for them. From the innkeeper’s perspective this is actually a good thing because his business is booming. If you own a motel you want it sold out. You want no vacancy. He’s thinking, “This is good.” Business is good this Christmas (of course it wasn’t Christmas yet). So it’s good news for him. He has no use for this little baby or this pregnant woman. And he certainly has no idea who he is snubbing.

The point is this: Busyness with his own business caused him to miss the greatest opportunity in his life. The Son of God was going to be born in his inn. Can you imagine the PR power of that? You could put up a sign: Son of God born here! And you would be sold out in your inn for the rest of your life. He missed – literally – the greatest opportunity. God was coming to earth in human form. He

could have been a part of that history. But he missed it because he was busy with his business.

Are you too busy with your business to make room for Jesus this Christmas? I'm not talking about your house. I'm talking about your schedule. I'm talking about your thoughts. I'm talking about your time, your budget, your plans. Are you so busy with everything else you don't have any room? There's no room for Jesus in your life, in your heart, in your mind. You could be so busy Christmas time you miss meeting God and he is being born right next door in the stable and you aren't a part of it. That's the first reason people miss Jesus – busyness.

The second reason people miss the Savior is familiarity.

2. FAMILIARITY (The Religious Leaders)

Familiarity. What I mean by that is you're so familiar with the Christmas story that it doesn't inspire or amaze you anymore. You have celebrated Christmas your entire life. You know the story of Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus. You know the story of the shepherds and the wise men. You know the story of the angels singing glory to God in the highest. And that's why your whole attitude toward Christmas is "Oh, okay!"

You see, you can become so familiar with something it doesn't amaze you anymore. You miss the beauty because you *think* you understand it. And you take it for granted. You see it but you don't do anything about it. This mistake, the mistake of familiarity, was the mistake of another group of people the first Christmas. That is the religious leaders of Jerusalem.

It is interesting to me that God has come to earth in human form, the Son of God is being born, and not a single religious person is invited. Not one religious authority. Not one priest, one scribe, one theologian, one philosopher, none of them. None of them are invited to the party. They all missed it. And they all missed it because they're so familiar with the story.

Let me give you the picture. The Bible tells us that wise men from the East had seen some kind of star. We don't actually know who they were. They were in the East and they start heading toward Israel. They had looked up all of the prophecies and they knew that the Savior of the world was to be born in Israel but they didn't know where.

We don't really know who these wise men were or where they're from. The Bible just tells us they were from the East. Maybe from the Philippines that's why they were late. All we know is they were scholars, that they studied the stars, that they paid attention, and when they saw something unusual they said, "Let's go check it out."

But do you know why any religious leader was not invited? Because Jesus is not about religion. Jesus did not come to establish a religion. In fact he came for the opposite of religion. He said you don't need rules, regulations and rituals and restrictions. What you need is a relationship to God.

What had happened is that over the centuries as they kept waiting for the Savior of the world to show up, the religious leaders started adding all traditions on. By the time Jesus arrives, people are paying more attention to the traditions than they are to God.

Does that sound vaguely familiar? We have so many traditions around Christmas now. And they keep adding on. There's Santa Claus and there's Rudolph the red nosed reindeer and there's Frosty the snowman and now there's Elf on the Shelf. They keep adding new traditions. They're just piling on! Let's make this a tradition, let's make this a tradition, and nobody's even talking about the reason for the season. Why God came to earth.

Today a lot of intelligent people will participate in every one of the Christmas traditions. They'll put up lights and they'll have parties and they'll send cards and they'll light a Christmas tree, and they'll give gifts. They'll do every single

tradition. Yet show no concern at all for checking out why we do all this stuff in the first place. It's so that God could have a relationship with you and you could have a relationship with God. And if you miss that you have missed Christmas even if you put up a tree.

You can put up Christmas lights and still be in the dark. The Bible says it like this. Look at this verse on the screen: Ephesians 4:18 (CEV), *"Their minds are in the dark, and they are stubborn so they have missed out on the life that comes from God."* Their minds are in the dark.

They just don't get it. Why? Busyness and familiarity.

There's a third reason why most people miss Christmas. The day after Jesus was born it was not a headline. It was in no paper. Nobody announced it. Most people missed it 2,000 years ago. The third reason they missed it was because of fear.

3. FEAR (King Herod)

Fear is the third thing that will cause you to miss the true meaning of Christmas this year. It is a sad fact that some people actually fear Christmas! They're afraid of it. That's why they fight it. They fight the nativity scene. They file lawsuits against it. Because they're afraid of the message of Christmas. This by the way was not the innkeeper's problem, not the religious people's problems. It was King Herod's problem.

Herod is a very wily, crazy guy. He's the king of Israel. But he's actually a Roman citizen. And he's of Arab descent. So he's not Jewish. He had come in and overtaken the city of Jerusalem and appointed himself as king. And the Jews hated Herod. They hated him. He was given the title king of the Jews and he was an Arab, working under Roman authority to suppress the Jews.

The background of Herod is this. He was paranoid. He was a very crazy, literally crazy, sick crazy man. He was afraid of Christmas because he was afraid

of *anybody* who might threaten his kingdom, who might threaten his reign, who might depose him as king of the Jews.

He was so paranoid – let me explain this – anybody who got close to him he thought might overthrow him, he had that person killed. He had his wife killed because he thought she might overthrow him. He had his mother killed because he thought she might overthrow him. He had two of his sons killed early on in life because he thought they might. He had his brother-in-law killed. Five days before Herod died he had the rest of his children who were in the area killed because he didn't want any of them to succeed him. And he had all kinds of prominent Jews in the nation of Israel rounded up and put in prison. And he said the moment I die I want you to kill all of them because I know that when I die nobody's going to weep over my death. But when they die people will weep so at least somebody will be weeping on the day I die. He was nuts!

When the wise men show up from wherever it is – India or China or wherever – when the wise men show up and say, “Where is this baby born to be king of the Jews?” Herod goes ballistic. He goes nuclear. He is just going crazy going, we've got to find this guy because I'm not letting anybody take my place.

So in an attempt to wipe out all of the competition Herod makes a rule that says every baby boy born in Bethlehem in two years must be murdered. And it was called the Massacre of the Innocents. He was that crazy. He was very, very afraid of Christmas happening.

You don't have that kind of fear. But I know a lot of people who are afraid to get to know God. They have three fundamental fears in their heart. If I really open up my life to Christ I will lose my freedom and I can't do all the things I want to do. I will lose my fun; I won't get to do anything fun anymore. And I will become a fanatic; I will walk around in polyester pants and big hair and say, “*Baby!*” and act like some religious nut case.

When you invite Christ into your life he doesn't make you more religious. He makes you more human. Irenaeus said "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." You're not really living, you're just existing if you're not connected to the Creator who made you.

The bottom line is this, you were made by God and you were made for God. And until you understand that, your life is never going to make sense. The only reason you're alive is that God made you to love you. He wants you to learn to love him back. God knows everything about you; you know almost nothing about God. God wants you to know him. God wants you to have a friendship with him. That's why he came to earth in human form so you can go, "That's what God is like! That's what he wants us to be like."

So he says I want you to get rid of your fear. Bottom line on Herod is that Herod's deepest fear was this: I don't want anybody to be in control except me. Does that sound vaguely familiar? I don't want anybody to be in control except me. I don't want anybody else to be king. I want to be king. It's the Herod mentality. I'm not going to let anybody else be king in my life. Not even God who made me. That fear caused him to say, I don't have any interest. Herod, the king was five miles away from where Jesus was. The king could have gone and visited the King of kings. But he didn't.

The Bible says in 1 Timothy 6, "*Some people have missed the most important thing in life – they don't know God!*" (TLB)

Folks, you can know all kinds of other stuff but if you don't know God you missed the purpose of your life. Because you weren't put on this planet to mark things off your to do list. You were put here to get to know God and to prepare for being with him forever in eternity.

So how do I not miss Christmas?

Let me give you a little formula. Do you remember when you were a kid, they taught you a couple of safety rules. One of them is if your shirt or coat catches on fire you stop, drop and roll. Remember that? Stop, Drop, and Roll. That's what you're supposed to do if you catch on fire. And if you're standing at a street corner you're supposed to Stop, Look, and Listen before you step into the street to see if there's any traffic.

I want to take that same little formula of Stop, Look, and Listen and I want you to remember it as **the three keys to not missing the Savior this Christmas**, in fact, the rest of your life. As I say, you can have a Christmas tree in your house and still miss Christmas. You've got to stop, you've got to look, and you've got to listen.

Take note of these three things:

- **STOP filling my life with less important things.**

That's the first thing you've got to do. Stop filling my life with less important things. Don't let busyness keep me from knowing God.

Let me show you a couple of verses quickly.

Psalm 39 says this: "***All his busy rushing ends in nothing. He heaps up riches for someone else to spend.***"

Would you agree you can be so busy making a living you forget to make a life? A saying goes, "Beware of the barrenness of a busy life". Because activity and productivity are not the same.

One of my mentors was the father of modern management, Peter Drucker. He used to teach me you accomplish more by doing less, by not being so busy. Busyness can fill your schedule and it will fracture your family. The greatest tragedy is that most people are too busy for God.

What's the antidote? The antidote is to stop running and slow down. That's the first way you really get to know the meaning of Christmas. You've got to stop running and slow down.

The Bible says it like this. Psalm 46:10, *“Be still and know that I am God.”* One of my favorite verses, btw.

It’s interesting to me that of all the people that God announces he’s coming to earth in human form as the Son of God, the first group that he tells is the shepherds. Shepherds? Are you kidding me? Sheep herders?

You need to understand that in that culture 2,000 years ago sheep herders or shepherds were the lowest rung on the status ladder. They were lower than criminals. They were considered stinky, dirty, smelly, worthless people.

So who does God tell the good news to first? The shepherds. The sheep herders. The outcasts. The people on the fringe, on the edge, the people that nobody else wants to associate with. He tells them first.

Why does God tell the shepherds that the Son of God had been born in Bethlehem before he told anybody else?

One of the reasons was they weren’t busy. They were just there. They were out there sitting around on a starry night with a bunch of sheep. If an angel shows up what else have you got to do? Listen. There’s no television. So they’re obviously not in a hurry. When God says go to Bethlehem and see this new baby, they go. They’re not like, “Sorry! We’ve got three Christmas parties we’ve got to go to first.” They weren’t busy.

God always speaks to the person who is willing to listen. And God doesn’t talk to you if you go, Excuse me God. I don’t have any time. I’ll talk to you tomorrow. No wonder God never talks to you. You’re too busy. You don’t take time to just sit still and be quiet and read the Bible and just be quiet. “I don’t have time to get to know God.” - Then you’re too busy.

Proverbs 10:27 says this: *“The fear of the Lord adds length to life.”* In other words if you need more time, you need to give some to God. Whatever you need more of you give to God. You need more money? Give some to God. You need

more energy? Give some to God and you'll get more energy. You need more talent? If you use your talent for God, God will give you more talent. Whatever you give to God he gives you more of.

You say, I just can't keep up. I can't keep up. I'm so behind. You need to reverence God on a daily basis. A quiet time with God. Reverence for God adds hours to each day. So you've got to stop filling your life with less important things.

- **LOOK**

The second thing you've got to do is you've got to look.

What do I mean by that? Look closely at why Jesus came. You know that he came – it's called Christmas. Why? Could you give me the five or six reasons why Jesus came to earth? Could you tell me those statements, those quotes that Jesus said, I came to earth for this purpose. You need to look closely at why Jesus came. Make the effort to check it out, to investigate Jesus. Who was he, what did he say? What did he claim? Why does he matter? And what difference does it make to my life today? Do an investigation.

This is by the way what Herod told the wise men to do. It's one thing Herod did right. In Matthew 2:8, Herod tells the wise men, *"Go and make a careful search for the child."*

Go and make a careful search for the child. By the way, why were the wise men called wise? Because they made the effort to check it out. We don't really know what they saw in the sky. People said a comet. People said a star. We don't really know what it was. But if God can create the entire universe he can do anything he wants to. He can create a special star if he wants to because he made the whole universe. But we don't know what they saw.

But here's what we do know: Other people had to see it too. Because if it's in the sky the rest of the world could see it. While there were many people much closer to Bethlehem than those wise men who came from afar, none of them made

the effort. None of them made the effort. They saw the same star. They didn't check it out. They didn't look closely at why Jesus came. Others were close. At that first Christmas the people who came from afar didn't miss it. They took the time to stop and to look. And to look at the star.

That star points to Jesus. Even now, many people miss the star and therefore miss Jesus. They think they can go to heaven through their own efforts. But there's no way you're getting into heaven on your own. No way! Zero! Nada! Zip. No snowball's chance in hell you're going to heaven by your good works. Because you're not good enough and I'm not either. It's perfect. If we could get to heaven by just being nice people Jesus coming as the Savior would have been unnecessary. Jesus dying on the cross would have been a waste of time. The Bible says *"For unto you is born a Savior who is Christ the Lord."* Friend, you need a Savior.

I want to challenge you to not be like one of those people who celebrate all the traditions of Christmas year after year after year after year with zero curiosity about why we actually celebrate it. And what it means to my life today. God says you'll find me when you seek me with all your heart. God says I want you to be a seeker. I want you to check me out.

• LISTEN

Listen to the good news of Jesus. Don't be afraid of good news. Why would anybody be afraid of good news? The angel said to the shepherds, *"I bring you good news of great joy."* (Luke 2:10 ESV) Why would anybody be afraid of that?

What is this good news? In John 10:10, Jesus says, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"*.

That is what Jesus Christ came at Christmas to do. To give you life to the full.

You know why he came to give you life to the full? Because most people aren't really living. They're just existing. They get up in the morning, go to work,

come home, watch TV, go to bed, go to parties on the weekends and think, I'm living. No you're not living. You're existing.

Look at the next verse: *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."* (John 3:17)

God came in a way we all came into this world. By being born into it. Because he came to save us. "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." That's what the Christmas song says.

I don't know what you're going through. I don't know what kind of year you've had. It may have been a tough year, a rough year, a sad year. Many of us have gone through terrible times. Sickness, death, financial troubles, problems at work, criticisms, failed subjects, etc.

But I also know this: For unto you is born a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And he says, I have come that you might have life. I didn't come to condemn you; I came to save you and he says you're not really living until you know me.

So no matter what you're going through here's my advice. When things get really, really bad don't run from God. Run to him. Because you don't get any comfort running away. You just get more fear, more anxiety, more misery, more pain. When you run to God you get the comfort of God.

So let me just wrap it up. Which of these three things could cause you to miss Christmas? Busyness? Familiarity? Fear?

Let me just close with this. The whole reason we give gifts at Christmas is because the wise men started this tradition. They brought gifts to give to the baby Jesus. So today we give gifts to each other. Because the wise men brought gifts.

Can you imagine going to somebody's birthday where everybody gives gifts to each other except to the birthday boy? What kind of party is that? You get gifts. Everybody else gets gifts. But nobody gives gifts to the birthday boy.

What are you giving Jesus for his birthday? You're going to give gifts to everybody else and you're going to get gifts from everybody else. What are you going to give Jesus for his birthday?

You say, I don't know. What do you give the guy who's got everything? You give him what he doesn't have. What does Jesus not have? He doesn't have your love unless you give it to him. He doesn't have your trust unless you give it to him. He doesn't have your life unless you give it to him. And he's not going to force it. It's a matter of love. He gave his life for you. Will you give your life to him?