

Simply Christmas

Pastor Bryan Clark

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:1-20)

You know, there's just something magical about children and Christmas. I remember when my girls were little, there were just magical moments. I think back to when I was a child and Christmas was a big deal in our home. It was just a wonderful day. But I also remember consistently, year after year, at the end of Christmas Day feeling very sad. As a matter of fact, I often remember my Mom trying to console us as we were just sad because it was all over. And you knew it would be another year before it would be back again. Maybe part of it for our story was there was just so much pain and suffering in our home and Christmas Day was like a reprieve. Like a day of refuge. But we always knew at the end of the day, December 26th comes and reality sets back in again.

I don't know that it's all that different for us as adults. I think it's the searching for that magical moment that drives the pace at Christmas. It just becomes so hectic; it's becomes so fast-paced. It's like, "What are we doing? What are we searching for?" Spending money we don't have, swiping the credit card, trying to find the magic. I see these commercials on TV where people are buying \$50,000 cars for Christmas, and you can't help but ask, "What are we doing? What's going on here? What are we searching for that we seem to be unable to find?"

I think we want life to be like a Hallmark Christmas special where everything at the end just magically falls into place. But as you're well aware, life is not a Hallmark Christmas special and there's a lot of pain and there's a lot of hurt and there's a lot of confusion. But isn't that why we gather this Christmas Eve? To remember that's why Jesus came? Jesus didn't come to give us one

day a year of escape. He came to be the Savior of the world. He came to deliver us one day to what the Bible refers to as a new heaven and a new earth. It's a place your soul longs for today. I like to think of those magical moments, whatever that means to you, those moments you experience and something inside of you just wishes the moment would never end. Why can't I have this moment forever? Whatever that is for you, I think that's a glimpse of the world to come. It's a glimpse of the world as God intended it to be. He promises to deliver us to a place with no more tears, no more sorrow, no more heartache, no more partings. It's the magic you're trying to find in this world but you're never really going to find it here.

The message to first century Christians was not a message of health, and wealth and prosperity. If you understand first century Christianity, that message is ridiculous. First century Christians were headed into persecution. They would be persecuted, they would be imprisoned, and many would be put to death for their faith. That's why the message was not, "Trust Jesus and everything is going to make sense." It was the promise of the return of Jesus to deliver you to the new heaven and the new earth. That your hope is in the world to come, and once you understand that, you have what you need to face whatever it is you're going through now. Many of those first century Christians would die for what they believed to be true because they believed God told the truth when He told them He would deliver them to a new heaven and a new earth and it would be everything their souls long for.

But the only way that was possible was for God to send His Son and deal with the biggest problem all of us have. I don't know what you're going through this Christmas Eve, but I do know this – your biggest problem isn't a health problem. Your biggest problem isn't a financial problem. Your biggest problem is not an emotional problem, and your biggest problem is not a relationship problem. Your biggest problem is a disease that Isaiah identifies as sin. The biggest problem all of us have is we are sinners before a holy God and that keeps us separate from God. He cannot deliver us into the new heaven and the new earth to dwell forever with Him in His presence without the sin problem being dealt with. That's the whole point of Christmas. *For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior.* It's not one day a year. It's forever in the presence of Jesus. But the only way that could be possible is if God dealt with the sin problem, so He sent His Son Jesus to ultimately die on the cross to make payment for sin. To pay our debt that He might turn around and offer us new life, salvation, the forgiveness of sins *freely* as a gift to those who choose to receive it.

I don't know what you're going through this Christmas Eve. I do know life gets really hard and it can get really painful. But once you understand that God has promised the world that your soul longs for with Him forever in His presence, it gives us the hope to face whatever it is we're going through today. It seems to me since that is freely given to anyone who chooses to receive it, there's every reason for a Merry Christmas.

Video (Jason Knott):

My name is Jason Knott and I have served as a pastor at Lincoln Berean for five years. My wife and I have two kids – we've got Ethan who is 11 and Mikayla who is 9, and they are the best. I love them. Melinda and I, we're coming up on our 14th year anniversary on December 30th.

A year and a half ago life was going fantastic. Our kids were thriving, I have loved my job – loving that. And on the way to a family vacation on our way to Yellowstone I started noticing as I was driving that my left thumb, I couldn't pull it back. And I just thought, "That is the weirdest thing." After coming back from vacation, my hand kept getting worse so I went into a Dr. and they thought it was a pinched nerve. I actually even had surgery for that. But after that I felt like there's

something more to this, I think. So, I ended up going to a neurologist. The Dr. wanted to see both Melinda and I and I knew at that point probably something was pretty serious once they'd done all the testing. We got in there and he told us that it was ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease.

The type that I have is very aggressive. Most people don't live beyond a year and a half from first symptom. So, we're wrestling with this diagnosis and it's really hard knowing that it's probably over. I was preparing to die. This is it, there's no cure. And then I found out that there was this possibility. It was a really small chance but if I had the right stuff in my body then I could be in a trial that had some promise to it. So I get there and the Dr.'s were blown away. They were like, "We can't believe you're here. The timing is incredible." And so a miracle happened and I got into the trial.

The Dr.'s were hopeful that they could actually stop the ALS, which if that happens it's world news. I mean, that's never been done before in history.

But it was really hard going down to St. Louis knowing that basically my life depended on this drug. So, that was 9 months ago starting the trial and now today we're still definitely in the middle of the battle. I feel it attacking my body. I mean my left arm is pretty much gone. My right arm is still struggling and going down. I can feel it attacking my diaphragm. And I would say there's fear; there's frustration; there's sadness; there's anger every single day. I face battles that I've never faced before. And in some ways, I don't know how to walk this through; I don't know how to do this and so I feel an incredible need for something outside myself. I don't have it within me.

ALS is a horrible disease and man I want a cure. I would love to be healed from it; I'd love to spend more time with my family; I'd love to be here longer. But, as awesome as it would be to be healed from that, Jesus came to do even more than that. We all have a deeper disease within us and that disease is sin. We need reconciliation with God. We need to be reunited with Him. We've cut ourselves off from Him. And He came to offer that. To offer a free gift. And incredible gift, and it's awesome because I will raise this hand again someday; He will make everything new. And all the pain and sadness and hurt will be no more. We'll have no more crying and no more tears, and I can't wait for that day. So He's going to renew it all. But He wants relationship with me and He wants relationship with every one of us and He came to die and rose from the grave to make that happen. To offer that free gift of salvation. I want relationship with Him, "Will you accept My love? Will you move towards Me?"

I would say that I feel some great things happening in my body. It's possible this medication might work. But that's also not my ultimate hope. I'm going to die someday. All of us are going to die someday. Even if I survive ALS, if I'm one of the first in the world to survive it, I will die someday. So there's got to be something greater – my hope is not in this medication even if it does save my life. And that's really what Christmas is about – it's about Christ being with us. And that He's come into our darkness to bring us hope.

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