DISCOVER THE REALITY OF CHRISTMAS

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By Pastor Stan Matthew 1:22-23

PASTOR STAN WEESE SERMON SERIES: DISCOVERING CHRISTMAS SERMON TITLE: "DISCOVER THE REALITY OF CHRISTMAS" SCRIPTURE TEXT: TOPIC: CHRISTMAS DATE: DECEMBER 4, 2016

-- In C. S. Lewis' story The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe four children go to stay in the home of an eccentric professor and discover in the attic a magical wardrobe that is a passageway into a wonderfully strange land called Narnia. The first child who crawls into the wardrobe and enters Narnia is Lucy, the youngest of the four siblings. As she edges towards the back of the dark wardrobe, she feels something cold and hears a crunching sound under her feet and soon finds herself in a snowy forest. Oddly, there is a lamppost in the midst of the snowy forest with a gas light burning brightly. As Lucy is staring at the lamppost, she has a chance encounter with a faun named Mr. Tumnus. From the waist up he looks like a man, but from the waist down he has the body of a goat. As Mr. Tumnus prepares some tea, he and Lucy carry on a conversation.

Cf., scene from The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe video

Scene: / Start: 0:19:04 / Stop: 0:20:07

-- Try to imagine such a world - a world without Christmas, without the traditions that are part of this marvelous season - no Christmas lights or Christmas trees, no beautifully wrapped gifts, no Christmas carols, no manger scenes.

This morning I want us to think about what it would mean if Jesus had never been born. If there were no Christmas, what implications would that have?

I. What No Christmas Would Mean about God.

-- First, let's consider what no Christmas would mean about God.

A. Remote & Removed

-- If Jesus had never come, it would mean that God, if He exists at all, would be removed and remote. He would be like the god of the Deists - the creator who doesn't get involved with His creation, like an old-time watchmaker who crafts a handmade watch, winds it, and then just lets it run without ever touching it again. Without Christmas God would be like Islam's Allah, who is a righteous judge but not a God of love who wants you to have a personal relationship with him and to know him intimately.

B. Transcendence & Immanence

1. Theologians talk about 2 characteristics of God - His transcendence and His immanence. Transcendence means that God is exalted above and rules over His creation. Immanence means that God is present with and accessible to His creation. We see both of these in the Bible.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

-- Without Christmas only the first part of that verse would be true of God - He would dwell on high but not with us, certainly not in our hearts.

2. What Christmas tells us about God is that He is immanent - He's the God who comes to us and is with us. That's what Matthew tells us in a comment following the account of the angel's appearance to Joseph to tell him that Mary's unborn child is indeed the Son of God.

Matthew 1:22-23 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: **<sup>2** Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

-- Christmas tells us that God has come to live among us as one of us, God in human flesh in the person of Jesus. We call that greatest of miracles the Incarnation, and it means that we are not alone. It means that God not only dwells on high but also in our hearts.

II. What No Christmas Would Mean about Us

-- If Jesus had never come and there were no Christmas, it would have serious implications about God - and also for us.

A. First: We Would Be Lost without Hope of Forgiveness.

-- Jesus said that He came "to seek and to save the lost," but if He never came the lost could never be saved.

The Christmas story is the good news of great joy, as the angel declared to the shepherds: Luke 2:10-11 "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for

all the people. **¹¹**For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

B. Second: Life Would Have No Purpose Or Meaning.

-- A second implication of no Christmas for us would be that our lives would have no purpose or meaning.

1 Corinthians 15:17, 32b And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. … If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

-- Paul says here that if Christ hasn't died for our sins and been raised again then we're still under the bondage of sin and without any real purpose or meaning in life; the best we can do is to live each day for as much material and physical pleasure as we can get.

Without Easter's Resurrection there's no purpose or meaning to life, and without Christmas there's no Easter.

C. Third: We Would Have No Future.

-- A third implication of no Christmas for us would be that we would have no future - at least, no future with any hope. Without Christmas there would be no hope for the defeat of Satan and for deliverance from the evil that darkens and afflicts this world. In Revelation 20 John sees a vision of the end of the world.

Revelation 20:11-12a, 15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.<**sup>12** </**sup>**And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. … <**sup>15** </**sup>**And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

-- Without Christmas there would be no names written in the book of life, and all of us would be headed for eternal damnation.

-- But the glorious message of Christmas is that Christ has come to deliver us from the penalty of our sin and eventually from the presence of all sin.

Hebrews 9:27-28 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

III. What No Christmas Would Mean for the World

-- Finally, no Christmas would have severe implications for the world we live in. If Christ had never come, there would have been no Church. Although the Church has been imperfect and made many mistakes, still it has had a wide-ranging positive impact on the world we live in.

A. The Roman Empire

-- From its earliest days the Church has made positive contributions to our world. For example, in the 3rd and 4th centuries a number of epidemics swept through the Roman Empire, killing tens of thousands. Although severely persecuted, Christians were frequently the primary caregivers during those epidemics. Moved by their faith in Christ, believers cared not only for their own families but also for their afflicted neighbors.

B. The Arts

-- Additionally, during its 2,000-years of existence the Church has had a powerful influence on the arts. From Michelangelo's paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel to Van Gogh's "Starry Night," from Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" to Handel's Messiah, and Tolkein's Lord of the Rings to C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia, the Christian faith has inspired and Christians have produced some of the world's greatest works of art.

Č. Modern Science

-- And something that would surprise many secular American is the fact that modern science was born out of a Christian worldview. Some of the key founders of modern science - people like Francis Bacon, Blaise Pascal, Michael Faraday, and many others - were committed Christians whose faith inspired and informed their investigations of God's creation.

D. American Society

-- And from the Thanksgiving Pilgrims on throughout the history of America, Christians have

had a significant and positive influence on shaping the character of American society. The first hospitals, orphanages, and educational institutions were founded by Christians. Harvard, Yale, and almost all of the earliest colleges and universities in this country were started by Christians.

Likewise, charitable and social organizations like the Red Cross, the YMCA, the Salvation Army, and Prison Fellowship were all founded by Christians moved to show God's love to those in need.

Across the country much of the disaster relief rendered to victims of hurricanes and floods and other disasters comes from Christians and church groups. In Minnesota and Wisconsin, Southern Baptists are less than 1% of the population, but at almost every major disaster in the Upper Midwest our Minnesota Wisconsin Disaster Relief ministry is present feeding people and providing many other emergency services.

Here in the Twin Cities thousands of children will receive a Christmas present from an incarcerated parent, a present that most would never have received, because of the Angel Tree partnership between Prison Fellowship and hundreds of churches. Twenty of those children will receive a present because of the believers here at North Center.

CONCLUSION

Towards the end of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe Father Christmas appears as a forerunner preparing for the arrival of Aslan, the Christ-like lion who is the creator and rightful ruler of Narnia. When Father Christmas arrives the spell of the evil witch begins to break, and the shroud of snow covering Narnia begins to melt and patches of green grass and spring flowers begin to appear.

Show scene from The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe Scene: / Start: 1:10:40 / Stop: 1:11:30

Sometimes it seems that the winter of evil will never end. But the good news of Christmas is that Christ has come and has broken sin's death grip and offers the spring of hope and new life to all.