

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
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God's Promise to You

Christmas Eve Service

A few weeks ago, in our life group, the person leading the devotional just did so with this idea that nothing is missing. And since then, I've been wrestling with that idea; that concept. I have been really arguing about it in my head. I'm like, but things are missing! As I'm driving down the road, I'm having conversations - I'm like but there are things missing. How can we say, as Christians, in this broken world that nothing is missing? It doesn't really make sense. I don't want to just naively turn my head and say things that aren't true and try to pretend like everything is happy. So how can we say that nothing is missing?

You see at Christmas time we really focus on nostalgia and tradition, right? This is where you've been. The stockings are hung. The tree is decorated. The gifts are wrapped; or maybe they're not and you're going to have a long night, right? Santa's coming and you have his milk and cookies. All the things, the Nativity is out. Maybe you have the Advent wreath. We focus so much on trying to make sure that everything is perfect, that it really brings attention to the reality when something is missing.

I was raised in South Texas, so what was always missing for me was snow. Right? We had a lot of 85-degree Christmases, like we're going to have tomorrow. And I had watched the shows, *It's A Wonderful Life*, or whatever it is where they run to the window on Christmas and the flakes begin to fall. I just kind of died to that dream thinking, 'Hey, I'm never going to experience it.' *I'm dreaming of a white Christmas*... No, I'm not! OK? Because I'm guarding my heart because it's not going to happen. Right? Until one magical year – 2004 – it was the year that I got married. It snowed 9 inches in South Texas! (Picture of JP on Monica in the snow is shown.) There we are. #bringbacksideburns. I just remember it was magical! Everything was covered in a blanket of snow. Everywhere you looked, all the color was robbed, it was just this blanket of white everywhere you could turn.

I remember that year, we went to my grandparents' small church. It was a small Lutheran Church in the country, and we watched the Christmas pageant, like we did every single year. It was so rich in nostalgia, and nothing was missing. (Picture of the church is shown.) There is the church. But as the years fast forward, my grandfather passed away - he's missing. My grandmother lost her memory - it's missing. A father died - he's missing. It seems to me that there's so much missing. So how could we say, 'Nothing is missing.'?

For just a few minutes this morning, I want to look at what was missing in the Old Testament. Then we're going to examine the Christmas story and see what was missing there. Before you leave and walk out those doors, in just a few minutes, I want to finish by asking the question,

‘How can we, as followers of Jesus Christ, have the audacity to say that nothing is missing.’ If you're focused on what is missing this Christmas, you might be missing it.

As we walk through the Bible, there's all kinds of things missing, right? It doesn't take long. We get to Genesis 3 when sin enters into the world. It rushes in like a storm and suddenly so much is missing. You guys know the story of Adam and Eve, but as you fast forward the tape and you get to Genesis 7, a loving God looks down on the world and sees that it is covered with evil and wickedness. And He has to erase the sins of the world, so His wrath comes down by way of a storm and a flood. And the story that we read to our children is one about everyone being wiped out.

There was one faithful man named Noah who began to build a boat, or an ark. What was missing was a way of salvation. A way to erase the sins of the world without everyone having to die. As Noah and his family trust in this boat, God's wrath comes down, and in the boat, whoever trusted in this wooden object is lifted up. They are moved on to salvation. As humanity prospers, it doesn't take God's people long to be become slaves again; not just to sin and death, but to the Egyptians. In Exodus 14, we have the exodus. It's where God's people are in slavery to the Egyptians and God is going to make a way out for them. They are stuck in a cage and He's going to provide a key. He sends 10 plagues and Pharaoh eventually lets them go, but as they run to freedom they come up to a sea. There's no way out. What's missing is a key, until one faithful man – Moses - lifts his arms out and the waters part. God frees His people and delivers their enemies to them. You would think they would trust Him implicitly from that moment forward, but they don't.

As you get to 1 Samuel 17, you see God's people - the Israelites - cowering down to a group called the Philistines. In fact, there's a giant there. Anybody know his name? Goliath is his name, that's absolutely right. There he is and he's shouting murderous threats against God and His people and what's missing in the equation is just a flicker of courage. Just a flame. Just one person to say, ‘No, no, no, not on my watch. Not my God.’ God raises up a faithful young man. What's his name? It was King David, the shepherd boy. With David and his sling and the Lord, he pushes back darkness. He slays evil with a flicker of courage, a flame of trusting God, the flame of faith. Evil is thwarted.

Here's the problem guys. Noah. Moses. David. I said they were righteous, but they weren't. These were not clean guys, right? If Noah died for Moses' sins who would die for Noah sins? And if David died for Noah's sins, who would die for David's sins? Because in this you have murder. Right? You have drunkenness in Noah. You have David's adultery? Right? They made a mess of things, and we could add our sins to the list, right? We could add our lust, and our pride, and our envy, and our greed. How about our anger? Who is righteous and is going to take those away? He's the one that's missing. He's the one that the prophet Isaiah wrote about. He said, **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; the Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”** That same prophet 700 years before Jesus shows up on the scene, so 700 years BC - before Christ. He says, **“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”**

So, who was missing? The one who can erase the sins of the world without everyone dying? The one who can really unlock the cage of sin and death. This is the one who is missing. The one who gives us the Holy Spirit, not a spirit of timidity, but one of power, love, and self-discipline. And we call him the Messiah.

You know the story, it's familiar to all of us. It seems like there's a lot missing in it, right? There's no room at the inn, that's missing. There's no doctor present, that's missing. There's no epidural, that's missing. Right? There's no suitable place to place the savior of the world. The King of kings. The Lord of Lords. **“For all things were created by Him and for him.”** And we are going to put Him in a feeding trough, in a cave. It's a really crazy story. So how, as Christians, can we say that nothing is missing?

Let's examine the baby for just a minute. Let's look at His name. It's Jesus. In Hebrew Yeshua - God is my salvation; or God is our salvation. That He is the one who came to be crushed for our iniquities. The story so familiar to you, that you might forget how crazy it is. That salvation is found in Him alone! He's the one to take away the sins of the world, Jesus. He's the only one that can come over here (JP moves to the board where he had written lust, anger, murder, adultery, greed, etc. and he begins to erase them.) and deal with this.

John 1:29 says, **“The next day John – that is John the Baptist – saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** Salvation is found in no other name but Him. And in Him, there is no sin. He's the only one that can do it. Who had to die? Only Him. What else is His name? Christ. It comes from the Greek word Christos. The Hebrew version of that is Masiah. So, Christ and Messiah, they're the same word - one is Hebrew, and one is Greek. They mean ‘the anointed one’; that He is the long-awaited king. He's the promised one that was to come to unlock His people from slavery. You might say that He is the key, He's the way out of the cage. Once He unlocks you, He gives you a story and you get to carry that key forward and unlock other people out of their cage as you herald the good news!

I know that a lot of us have a passion to take the gospel to the nations, but it's interesting to me that here in Waco, TX, the nations come to us. In fact, my friend Cameron was sharing the gospel on Baylor's campus and met someone who moved here from China. She had spent her life making fun of Christians until she saw Cameron's Bible and how it was all tattered up in all of the writings. She says, ‘Man, what's going on there?’ Cam was able to share the gospel with her and she would describe her salvation like a key. I want you to listen to Claire's story.

A videoed interview of Claire and Cameron plays. See transcription below.

**Claire:** In China, in my hometown, there's a really big group that thinks God does not exist. And there's a little small group that thinks there is a God. So, they will laugh at and mock them and just insult them. And so, I just searched, ‘What is God?’ It said it is like a higher sense – similar to Buddha or something else. So, I didn't care too much about that.

**Cameron:** Can you tell us the image that got brought to your mind about the tower when we were reading together?

**Claire:** There is a tower in my Grandmother's community. It looks very creepy and very old – over 100 years and the door is locked. And at the time, I was just playing with my younger sister near the tower, and she said, “Oh Claire, do you want to get in that tower? It would be super cool, and we can be the first person in the tower.” I said, “Oh, it is really cool – but the door is closed. How would we get in there?” And in my heart, I had said, Oh please give me a key. I just want to get into that tower. I just want to take the adventure. I just want to be the coolest child in the community. But after I just thought that I hear a voice behind us – like something dropped on the grass. So, we just find a really old key in that grass and use that key to open the door of the tower. The doors actually opened! It's very clean inside. I think maybe it is just like that time when I was a child. God hears my prayer for the key for me and He just drops it.

Its like the tower looks very creepy. It's like my old image of God and Christianity, but actually after I use the key to open the tower it looks really clean inside. So, I should be very brave to take the key. For me, it's Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is a very incredible and amazing things for me. Imagine that He just didn't die for Himself, He is not guilty, He just died for the guilty people of the world.

After I became a Christian, I know the true meaning of this day is Jesus' birth. God brings the greatest gift to all the people to the world. So, it is very meaningful!

(Video ends and JP is speaking again.)

Imagine how much God must love that young lady to bring her from China to Baylor University to run into our friend Cameron to hear how Jesus unlocked the tower? He shows her a way forward and gives her life. It may be my favorite name, or the one most relevant to this season, when Matthew repeats the name that is given in Isaiah, the Prophet. Immanuel - it means God with us. This is what Christmas is.

See every other world religion out there has you working your way up to God for a chance to earn heaven. In Christianity, the one true religion, the one true God comes to the earth to save us; to rescue us. And so, if His Holy Spirit is with us, then we have that flame living inside of us. He did not give us the spirit of timidity, but one of power, love, and self-discipline. This is how we as Christians can say at this time that nothing is missing. Because the one who created the heavens and the earth, all things good that you know, came here to live with us. And if you've trusted in Jesus - His death and resurrection - for the forgiveness of sins, then He lives in you. God lives in you and with you! If the one who created all things is with you, then what is missing? If God is with us, who can be against us? If God is with us, whom now shall we fear?

You know who was missing? The shepherds, nah they were there. Mary and Joseph, peasants, they were there. Pagans from the East? Sorcerers? They were there – eventually they got to the King. Do you know who was missing? It was those dead in religion. Those who are going through the motions. See the reason that we can say that nothing is missing is because the God who created the heavens and the earth, He came here to be with us. Maybe, the only thing that is missing is a right relationship with Him. And that is what today is a reminder of. Right? As you

leave here, you are going to go out there and take this flame to people. (JP has lit a candle). I hope – I don't mean to be heavy handed, but maybe you have been going through the motions for so long that you forgot that was the calling on your life. And so, it is going to get dark in here and if I can keep this lit – which is a big if – you guys can get your candles. Here is the deal, do not pull out any lighters. I do not want any cheaters. I honestly, listen to me on this, I want that corner over there to feel the angst. And because the room is not full, you are going to have to work to get the flame out. You are going to have to move to get it to the next person, just like when you walk through those doors. Okay?

It is going to go from right here, from you and that is it. I do not care if it takes an hour, it will take an hour. I know some of you are like, 'we have kids here'. I truly want you to feel it up there. I want you to feel the angst. I want you to feel the anticipation. I want you to wonder, is it going to get to me. Is it going to get to me? I want to talk to the children for just a minute. So, if you are here and you are under the age of let's say 12 would you lend me your ear. Can you hear me? (Kids call out yes.) Okay good! We need you guys. Okay? You are the example that Jesus gives. There is something about the way that you run to Him that He uses as an example for us older folks that have been going through the motions for a long time. We have been reading the Bible, we have been memorizing Scripture. And you have a courage about you – you have not learned to fear people yet. And I pray that you never do. So, as you go outside those doors, I pray that in the same way that flame will pass from one person to the next to the next to the next. That we would take the greatest story that has ever been told to a world desperate for it. That you would share with them why nothing is missing.

I love you guys so much and I hope you have the Merriest Christmas ever. There will be a place for you to leave your candles as you walk out the doors. Thank you guys.