

“Keep the Christ in Christmas”

A woman named Melissa James asked her Sunday school students to draw pictures of the Holy family. When the pictures were handed in, she saw that some of the youngsters had drawn the conventional pictures. The Holy family in the manger, the Holy family riding on a donkey and so forth. But the drawing made by little Jonathon confused her. So she called him up and asked him to explain the picture, which showed the picture of an aeroplane with four heads sticking out of the windows. She said, “I can understand why you drew three of the heads to show Joseph, Mary and Jesus. But who’s the fourth head?” Jonathon said, “Oh, that’s Pontius the Pilot.”

And the point is not only has many adults become misled about Christmas but many of our children have become confused too, especially at school when they have their nativity plays. Someone said that the phrases that best sums up the Christmas season is “Peace on earth, Good will to all and Batteries not included.”

Funmi and I are always teaching our kids the real story of Christmas. We don’t teach them that Jesus was born on the 25th December but that he was born but born of a miraculous birth into this world. So for that reason I would to focus this morning on some of the many misconceptions that people have including Christians at this time of the year.

It is one of my favourite times of the year. It’s a time where the whole world thinks about good will, a time for giving and it is a time where most people think about peace and joy. It is almost the only time of the year where the rest of the world sings our songs and that is one reason why we should keep Christ in Christmas.

But, a lot of people are drifting away from that. A lot of people just think that Christmas is all about Santa Claus and they use Christmas as an excuse to get drunk and celebrate. But the ironic thing is, some people don’t even know what they are celebrating.

A demon walked passed Satan one day and said very sarcastically “Merry Christmas master”, and the devil turned around and said “Yeah, and keep it merry because if they ever get serious about it, were all in trouble”.

It is a time of celebration; it is a time of joy. Did you know that when the bible talks about the birth of Jesus, the word “JOY” is mentioned 7 times? I think the people here in Liverpool can do with a little more “Joy”, don’t you think? Don’t you think that this world just needs to chill out? People are just too tense, they are too busy running around trying to get some last minute shopping done. Someone else once said that Christmas is the season when people run out of money before they run out of friends.

But people are so busy and you almost feel like you want to stand in the middle of the town centre and shout out “Listen, can you stop for 5 minutes and listen to Jesus?” “Can you put a little time a side in your life and just think about Jesus?” “You know that guy who is the reason for the season?”

I used to work beside a woman named Caroline Hall and it was at Christmas time a few years ago, when she stopped to think about Christ. And it was then that God opened her heart and she obeyed the gospel and she was baptised for the forgiveness of her sins. She started to think about her many friends who hadn’t obeyed the gospel and so she wrote a poem with her friends in mind.

I would like to share her poem with you because it also touched my heart. It’s called “The shops are so busy.”

The shops are so busy; the children are **high**,
The lists are endless, that I write with a **sigh**,
Why do we do it, someone tell me **please**,
Before I really do, end up on my **knees**.

But wait just a minute, this year is different you **see**,
Maybe not to you, but it sure is for **me**,
Because I’ve found the Lord, well really he found **me**,
And I’m trying my best; to be the way he wants me to **be**.

Getting baptised wasn’t easy for **me**,
Being scared of the water, I thought I would **flee**,
But the Lord was with me, that Sunday night **here**,
So peaceful and calm, yet so full of good **cheer**.

Life's not always easy; I know that too **well**,
 But with the Lord on your side, you never can **tell**,
 He'll help you find answers, and show you the **way**,
 And he's waiting to hear from you, all through the **day**.

So remember this Christmas, what it's really **about**,
 And when the Lord calls on you, please, please don't be **out**,
 Let him come into your heart and your **life**,
 Let him take away all of your **strife**.

The Lord is our saviour, I've found that this **year**,
 So have a good Christmas, and please join us next **year**.

Caroline didn't leave Christ out of Christmas; infact Christ found her at Christmas. Now loved ones, Caroline found joy that year. But she was one of the lucky ones; she didn't buy into the lie, which is usually spread around this time of the year. People say, "Do you need some joy?" "There is a great movie premier on TV tonight" "Do you want some more joy?" "Woolworth's has got a great sale on"

Do you want to know a secret? The apostle Paul discovered a secret. A secret that kept his personal happiness from being dependent upon external circumstances in his life. Now evidently, it has remained a secret to most people today. Evidently most people in Britain do not know this secret. Because in Britain it is the season of our discontent.

If I could pick a song that could sum up our culture in my lifetime, I would pick a song called, "I can't get no satisfaction." Now I know a lot of you know that song, it was a song by an old group called the Rolling Stones. But I remember that song when I was a kid and it is just as true today that people are running around saying, "I just can't be content, I can't get no satisfaction".

We are bombarded everyday from the moment we turn on our radios in the morning to the moment we turn off that TV set at night. Bombarded by propoganda that you are never really going to be happy until you move into this neighborhood or until you buy that car, until you wear this suit, until you put this perfume on, until your kids go to this school and wear those clothes and get into this college. And everyday, it is relentless. How can you be happy until?

And I want to ask you this morning, has the propoganda of a continually dissatisfied culture been affecting your joy level? My friends, we've been looking for contentment in all the wrong places. And there is great irony here. We're buying into the world culture, were working 90 hours a week, were knocking ourselves out, giving ourselves high blood pressure and ulcers and do you know why? We're doing it to try to find what the world doesn't have.

Paul says to the church in Philippi about people of the world, "they don't have contentment, it's a secret and they don't know it because they don't know Jesus." But Paul knew it and Paul lived like he knew it. And so in Philippians 4:12, Paul said, "I've learned the secret at being happy at any time and with any thing that happens in my life."

You see I think that some Christians don't have much joy because they spend too much time in the world and not in Christ. Listen friends, none of those things the world offers are going to give you lasting joy. Real joy is anchored in something permanent. Matthew 1:23 says, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel --- which means, "God with us".

His name doesn't mean, "God was with us", His name means "God is with us". What does it mean that Jesus Christ has been born? It means 2 things. It means that he understands my pain and he knows my weakness. There is not a hurt I've felt, a sorrow I've known that he just cannot understand.

You see, at Bethlehem, Jesus Christ became one of us and there is nothing you have went through and there is nothing you are going to go through next year that he cannot understand. He sympathises with us. That's what it means when it says, "God is with us", but it doesn't just mean that he understands us. It means he is never going to leave us.No matter what we go through, God is with us.

Remember when the apostle Paul was on trial and everybody deserted him.

2 Timothy 4:17+18 says, “But the lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might here it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack.”

What did Jesus say to his disciples the last time they saw him? “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”. Where is Jesus now? The bible says that, “he is seated at the right hand of God.”

But let me say this, whenever a Christian goes through some kind of hurt or persecution, Jesus shows concern. He gets so concerned about one of his own, he stands up and he takes notice. That’s what happened to Stephen when the people started to stone him.

Acts 7:55+56 says, “ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, “Look” he said “I see heaven open and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God”.

What kind of message was Stephen getting from heaven in the midst of his hurt and persecution? You see, Stephen wasn’t just amazed at seeing heaven open, he was amazed that the Son of Man was concerned enough to stand up from his throne and be concerned. That was the message Stephen got from heaven, it was a message of comfort, and he noticed that all of heaven was concerned. It was a message to all the other angels to **stop, look, listen; one of my brothers is in need. It’s like the little boy who tried to learn the Lord’s Prayer. And he would say, “Our Father in heaven, how do you know my name?”**

Now that gives me comfort, because the one I am praying too is so aware of me, he can tell me how many hairs I have on head today. We must never forget to keep Christ in Christmas. No matter how busy you are. No matter how much pain you are going through. Because it doesn’t matter to Christ, what the time or place is, he is with you and he gets concerned if one of his own gets in distress.

Remember at this time of the year, we don’t call this season Jesusmas, we call it Christmas. Whenever Jesus was born, it is a season to celebrate the birth of a king. The birth of the anointed one. The birth of the messiah. And remember that Jesus wasn’t just born to redeem, he was born to rule.

Psalms 145:13 says, “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations”. The picture the world gets of Jesus is this sweet little baby laying in a manger. Christmas cards are full of this little baby boy just lying there as sweet as could be. It’s almost as if Jesus was born in a manger and then that is it, that’s the story of Jesus, a nice little baby. But, we know that the story of Jesus doesn’t end there. Because Jesus’ rightful place isn’t in a manger; his rightful place is a throne.

Matthew 1:18-21 says, “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”.

The message is about a forgiveness that will never fail.

A little boy said to his daddy, “Who is Jesus?” His daddy replied “He is the reason for the season” The little boy said, “But I thought Santa Claus was the reason for the season?” Then his daddy said, “He is, if you prefer Nintendo to eternal life”.

You see the issue in the bible is not, **what date was Jesus Christ born?** The issue in the bible is, **will you have Jesus Christ as your saviour?** Our greatest need was for forgiveness and so God sent a saviour. **There was a wise old man who said to a wise little girl “What is the meaning of Christmas?” And the wise young girl said, “I don’t know, is that the day that Jesus died?”** Well, there is some truth in her answer. Christmas is the day Jesus came so he could die.

What did Jesus say just before he came? Hebrews 10:5-10 says, “Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: Sacrifice and offerings you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said ‘Here I am---it is written about me in the scroll---I have come to do your

will, O God.” First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the Law required them to be made). Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made Holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Jesus was born so that he could die for you and for me and take the punishment that we deserved.

What do you think of this time of the year? What do you think of this time of the year, when you get cards and wrapping paper, signs and symbols and ornaments of these cute little things with halos, wings and nice little faces that are as sweet as they could possibly be? I don't think you should be thinking that in your mind when you read the word “Angel” in the bible.

Can you tell me a single story in the bible where an Angel appeared and someone said, “Isn't that nice?” “Isn't he lovely?” In the bible when an angel showed up, almost always, what was the first thing they had to say? “Don't be afraid” Because whatever they look like, they put you down on the ground in terror.

Remember, one of God's Angels killed 186,000 of God's enemies. These are mighty creatures and in scripture they had 3 basic functions, To worship, to witness and warfare. So don't believe all these nice little pictures you see all over the place with these nice little creatures on them. Don't be deceived by the world's interpretations of Angels and Christmas.

Have you ever heard anyone praying for peace in the world? This is a common prayer especially at this time of the year. Now as Christians I believe we should pray for peace but I don't think the world understands what they are praying for. They think no more wars. No more murders. Everybody getting along with everybody else. Let me tell you, the world seeks peace through positive thinking, tranquillisers and Electro-therapy, “WRONG”

Jesus said in Matthew 10:34. “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword”. Jesus said in John 14:27. “Peace I leave you with; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives”.

Jesus says it is his peace he gives us. So what is his peace? Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul says in Philippians 4:7 “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

We get migraines and ulcers and high blood pressure and work ourselves into early graves and were miserable and we snap at people, when our tempers are high. Because all the stuff we're worrying about and we say, “why does God let this happen to me”? Do you know what God who is up heaven is thinking? “Why are they letting this happen to them?” “Why don't they pray?”

Now Paul doesn't say, “Now if you pray about everything God will always give you everything you ask for”. What Paul does say is, “when you start regularly praying to God you are going to get what you need most of all, you are going to get the experience of a supernatural touch in your life”. Paul says, “you are going to get a peace that will flood life, that you cant even explain but you cannot explain away either.”

Now this is hard to talk about because some of you have perhaps never felt that peace and you think I'm sounding crazy. But there have been times in my life where I have poured out my heart to God, that the peace that God sent was so present, I literally felt it. And I cant explain it, the Bible says, “It's beyond understanding.” But it's God's gift of a supernatural visitation to you. To take away your worry.

You see Christians have something special. Our peace comes from the relationship we have with our God. Our peace comes from the assurance of heaven for those who are faithful. Our peace comes from the knowing that the blood of Christ is continuously washing our sins away. And our peace comes from knowing that our salvation is assured and already taken care of. That's what the Christian peace is.

A man was walking home late one night when he came across a woman, who was standing under a streetlight, looking intently down the street, The man says to the woman “What are you looking for?” The woman replied “My keys” The man said, “Where did you loose them?” The woman said “Over there” The man said “Why are you looking over there?” The woman replied “The light is better.”

You won't find peace in a lager bottle; you won't find peace by taking drugs. The point is this; if you are not in Christ you cannot enjoy God's peace. If you are looking for peace this morning, then you need to look in the right place; not where the world says you will find it. But where God says you will find it and the only place to find eternal peace is in Christ Jesus. Don't be fooled my friends, there will never be peace in this world, because Satan is still around and Satan doesn't want peace. And so there will be no peace on earth until Jesus comes back.

What do the people of the world give their children or grandchildren at Christmas time? I would like to ask you this morning, what is the most important gift you can give any child and not just at Christmas time but any time of the year?

A gardener was speaking to his friend and they were discussing whether or not you should teach your children about religion or just leave to them to make their own minds up. So they started arguing and the gardener was saying, "Of course it is important to tell them about Jesus, because you don't know what road they will take in life." And his friend was saying, "I think you should just leave them to make up their own minds". So the gardener said, "Would you like to see my roses?" And his friend said, "Yes" So they went to the back garden, His friend said, "What is this? There's nothing here except dirt and weeds" So the gardener said, "Well, I thought I would just leave the garden to make it's own mind up".

Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers do not exasperate your children: instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord".

The most important gift you need to give your children is a gift that is going to last for eternity. A gift that is going to help them get through life. A gift that is going to tell them that there is hope in this life. A gift that talks about a messiah. A gift that talks about a saviour. An eternal gift.

The world will give it's own interpretation of religion, but you need to give your children the gift of God's word in their lives. Because if you don't, you will not know what your children will grow up believing. Plant the seed of Jesus in their hearts as soon as they are old enough to listen to you. Let them know that mummy, daddy, granny and granddad loves them very much, but also tell them there is one who loves you even more than they can ever imagine. Tell them about Jesus and tell them how much he loves them.

If you haven't already done that, then today would be a good day to start. We need to tell them that Christ is no longer a cute little baby in a manger but he has grown and now he is on a throne. We need to keep Christ in Christmas and not just at Christmas but everyday of our lives, and let the world know about the gift of life they can receive at any time of the year.

And tell them about the real joy and about a peace that not only we can't understand but will also last for eternity. The real Christmas message is a powerful message and we need to let the world know what Christmas is really about.

There was an Indian, who sent some smoke signals to his girlfriend, And they used to send messages all the time about how much they loved one another. When off in the distance the army had just detonated an Atomic bomb, and a big mushroom cloud went up in the sky. And when the Indian saw it, he said to himself, "I wish I had said that!"

And the point is this. What kind of a Christmas message are you sending people? What kind of a Christmas message are your kids receiving from you?

I read a poem written earlier by a friend I used to work beside and I would like to finish by sharing it with you all again. Because I think it is a powerful message. It sends a message of over coming fear; it sends a message of stepping out in Faith and it sends a message of hope and invitation for the rest of the world to do the same and accept Jesus as their saviour.

"The shops are so busy"

The shops are so busy; the children are **high**,
The lists are endless, that I write with a **sigh**,
Why do we do it, someone tell me **please**,
Before I really do end up on my **knees**.

But wait just a minute, this year is different you **see**,
Maybe not to you, but it sure is for **me**,
Because I've found the Lord, well really he found **me**,
And I'm trying my best; to be the way he wants me to **be**.

Getting baptised wasn't easy for **me**,
Being scared of the water, I thought I would **flee**,
But the Lord was with me, that Sunday night **here**,
So peaceful and calm, yet so full of good **cheer**.

Life's not always easy; that I know **well**,
But with the Lord on your side, you never can **tell**,
He'll help you find answers, and show you the **way**,
And he's waiting to hear from you, all through the **day**.

So remember this Christmas, what it's really **about**,
And when the Lord calls on you, please, please, don't be **out**,
Let him into your heart and your **life**,
Let him take away all of your **strife**.

The Lord is our Saviour, I've found that this **year**,
So have a good Christmas, and please join us next **year**.

If you want to have real joy in your life, if you want to have everlasting peace in your life, then today would be a good day, to give in to God's will and become a child of God. If you are a Christian and you have lost the joy in your Christian life, then today would be a good day to renew your relationship with God.