

The Star – A Journey of Love
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We are in a sermon series entitled The Star: A Journey to Christmas. Today I am speaking on A Journey of Love.

Have you ever wondered why God came to earth as a baby? Did He come so we could get presents? Isn't it interesting that on the first Christmas wise men gave gifts to Jesus; now we're more concerned about getting gifts from others?

Did Jesus come to earth so we could eat a lot of food, have time off from school and work? Was He born in a filthy barn so we could have a Merry Christmas?

Today I want to examine what the Bible tells us about why God came to earth and we'll discover the greatest love story ever told! We find this story in Matthew 1:18-23 –

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 be 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." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us."

This passage shows us the two main reasons Jesus came to earth:

- Jesus came to save us from sin.
- Jesus came to be God with us.

It was God's will to send His Son as a sacrifice for our sins so that we could have a relationship with God the Father. This is the greatest love story ever told.

Think of someone you love.... Your spouse, your children, your parents.

As much as you love them...God's love is even greater.

He loves you way more than you could ever love anyone.

He even loves you more than you love Him.

1 John 4:10 says:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

This is the first reason for the season-

1- Jesus Came To Save Us From Our Sins

1 Timothy 1:15 says:

This is a true saying, and everyone should believe it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...

Whether they know it or not, want it or not, everyone needs a savior. D.L. Moody once said that before you can get a man saved, you must first get him lost. You see, many people don't come to Jesus because they don't see the need. They say, "It's OK for you, but I don't need religion." What they need is a revelation of their own lostness.

Until you know you are lost, you won't try to get found.
 Until you know you are bound, you won't try to get free.
 Until you know you are a sinner doomed to an eternal hell, you won't try to get saved.

To be lost is to be unable to find your way ... to not know where you are or how to get where you need to go.

Probably everyone here has been lost. I have. Actually, I'm directionally challenged. I totally depend on Joe to find my way around.

Years ago, I had a job as a merchandizing rep. I had to travel around Texas visiting stores. Joe literally drove me to every single store (This was before the day of GPS apps on cell phones) so I could see the way AND I wrote down directions... AND I STILL GOT LOST.

But at first, I didn't always realize I was lost. I would be driving around listening to music enjoying the sights...and then it would hit me... where am I?

So I would call Joe and say, "Help, I'm lost."
 And he would say "Where are you"?
 And I would think, "Why are you asking me where I am?"
 If I knew I wouldn't be calling you.

Then I'd say something like... "Well, I'm on the highway, and there's a mall on the right, and a big open field on the left and there's a split in the road so which way do I go?"

And he would say, "Can you be a little more specific?" Finally, he would figure out where I was and direct me.

My point is that for a while I did not know I was lost.

I was enjoying the sights and having a good time till I realized I was lost. When I realized I was lost, I needed someone to show me the way. Up until then, I was having fun and enjoying myself.

What a description of our current generation. People don't know where they are or how to get to where they need to go. They're lost and they don't even know it. But they're having fun!

Sometimes even spiritual people are clueless: They think they're Christians because they're American or because their parents are Christians.

They say things like... "I've been Christian all my life." No you haven't - not according to the Bible.

Maybe your parents are Christians, but God has no grandchildren. You must come to Him yourself. That requires repentance – a change of mind and a change of heart.

One of the most important truths in the Bible is that we all are sinners who need saving from sin and its destructive results in our lives. Paul said in Romans 3:23 that all people have *sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.

People who don't see their own lostness are comparing themselves to the wrong person. They compare themselves to other people around them and conclude "I'm not so bad." You can always find someone worse than you.

When my kids were younger and they would get in trouble they would say things like... "Well at least I didn't kill anybody or rob a bank."

But the true standard is not other people; it's Jesus Christ. The issue is not how you measure up to other people – it's how you measure up against Jesus. And we all fall short of Him because we all have sinned and He hasn't.

And you know what? Our sin actually earns us something. The Bible says that *the wages of sin is death...* We all die because of sin.

Dying is not bad – dying lost is bad. Why? Because there's no hope for salvation at that point. So, God made sure we don't have to die lost. John 3:16 says –

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The wages of sin is death ... but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Christ was born to die for our sins – to give us the gift of Salvation.

THAT is what Christmas is all about.

Not only did Jesus come to earth to die for our sins-

2- Jesus Came To Be God With Us

This shows how much God loves us - He wants to be with us! Jesus came as Immanuel – which means God with us. However, there are things that keep us from getting close to God. I can think of three things that keep us from being close: a wrong view of God and a wrong view of self and a wrong view of life.

All our life we are bombarded with the wrong message about who we are. Maybe we had-

Emotionally absent or abusive parents.

Parents that divorced.

Rejection from our peers.

We try to get close to God and others but we can't seem to. Some of us here today don't feel loved by God, our husbands or children.

Sometimes, no matter how hard we try life gives us the message that we really aren't loved. In the deepest part of our being the enemy is at work telling us... "If God really loved you He wouldn't let this happen to you."

The question in our hearts is "Why God?" Why didn't you protect me? Deep down inside we wonder... Does God really care?

I received a text from someone recently who was having a crisis of faith. Her first question was... "Where is God?" She went on to say, "If God loves all his children, I don't understand all the pain and suffering we have to endure." She closed by saying... "The more I read the Bible the less faith I have."

This made me so sad and I know there are so many people who feel this way. But this is a totally wrong view of God.

Most of you know my testimony –
As a child I was sexually abused by my step-father.
As a little girl all I wanted was to be loved.
I wanted my step-father to value me and protect me.
Instead he abused me and caused me unspeakable pain.

As a result of this I had a wrong view of God and myself.
When bad things happen to us it shapes our concept of God and our self.

We think...how could God love us and let bad thing happen?
This only pushes God away because...
How can we be close to a God who we believe doesn't protect us?
How can we be close to a God who we believe is reluctant to bless us?
How can we be close to a God who we believe is harsh and demanding?

The answer is "We can't." Instead we must see him as He is.

I John 4:16 says *God is love*. God is always motivated by love and never acts toward us in an unloving way. Even when He allows us to go our own way. Even when bad things happen.

You see I know God didn't cause my sexual abuse. He wasn't asleep on the job when my stepfather chose to violate me. It was the evil devil and my stepfather who caused this insidious act. And through it all God was right there with me giving me the strength to endure. He knew that I would forgive and overcome and help countless other women do the same.

Listen, if you want to blame someone for bad things that happen, blame the devil, or sin or the wrong choice of others... and sometimes it's our own wrong choices. Just don't blame God because God isn't to blame. As a matter of fact...God is blameless.

I can't say I understand it all because I don't but this one thing I know...God is good and he will never cause us harm. He is God with us.

The well-known story of the Prodigal Son and his father gives us a picture of the real God. Even though his prodigal son chose to go his own way and waste his life, the father still loved his son and longed to be with him. Luke 15:20 shows us the Father's heart.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

Here we find a father waiting for his wayward son. Every day he looks to the horizon, watching, waiting, hoping to catch a glimpse of the child he loves. The child that demanded his inheritance, ran away and squandered every cent.

Yet, the father saw him and had compassion on him. This is a picture of the real God – the God who is love.

But the world tells us we should have things on our terms. So, we want God to do what we want when we want. We live in a 911 society. In an emergency, you pick up the phone and dial 911 and within minutes help is there. What a contrast to how God does things.

- Think about Joseph – agonizing for years in a prison for a crime he didn't commit.
- Think about the Children of Israel suffering 400 years of bondage under Pharaoh – crying out day and night for deliverance.
- Think about Mary and Martha. They ask Jesus to come and heal their brother Lazarus but instead He lets him die.
- Think about all of us – burdened under the weight of “things gone wrong” waiting for this same God to rescue us.

Certainly, we can relate to Psalm 13:1-2 which says:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Certainly, all of us have felt this way. All of us can relate to Joseph and to the Children of Israel and to Mary and Martha. But their stories don't end here.

- God rescues Joseph and makes him King over Israel.
- The Children of Israel find deliverance and blessing in the Promised land
- Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Our story doesn't end here either. God sends His son Jesus Christ to be Emmanuel – God with Us. He will give us victory, He will bless us, He will deliver us... because He loves us. So, how do we get close to God?

You may be thinking by praying, reading the Bible, and going to church... All these are necessary but we can do all these and not be close to God. So how do we get close to God? By responding to the spirit of God!

You see, God is the initiator – He draws us. In John 6:44 Jesus said,

No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him.

God's part is to draw us to Himself. Our part is to respond by hearing God and doing what He tells us.

If you look at the great saints in the Bible and in history, you will find they were all very different.

Moses was different from Isaiah;

Elijah was different from David.

Yet they were all close to God.

What was the key? They all had one thing in common: spiritual receptivity.

They differed from the average person in that when they felt the inward drawing toward God they did something about it.

Song of Solomon 1:4 says - *Draw me away! We will run after you.*

Are you running after God? Most people seek after possessions or positions or power or prestige. But God wants us to seek Him. When we seek Him, we will find Him and we will know Him more and more.

Jesus said in John 17:3 –

Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

Eternal life is not based on what you do – it's based on who you know!

So the question for us today is, "Do you really know Jesus?
Do you know how much you need Him?"

In the greatest love story of all time – Father God sent His only Son to earth to be born in a stable and die on a cross.

In the journey to Christmas, we usually think of people like Mary and Joseph or the wise men who made a journey. But think about the journey that Jesus made! He made the greatest journey of all – from heaven to earth! From a throne to a manger!

And He did it all for you – to give you forgiveness of sin, His gift of eternal life and relationship with God.

One day many years ago I met a young man named Joe Oakley and we fell in love. So, we stood up in church in front of a bunch of people and said 2 words that changed our lives forever – "I do."

We made a lifetime commitment – for better or for worse. And the rest of our lives have been spent living out the implications of those two words – I do.

I want to ask you today - have you ever said, "I do" to Jesus Christ? It seems like many people are just dating Jesus. They're just trying Him out and if He's not what they want, they move on.

But Jesus gave His life for us, now He wants us to live for Him.

I want you to understand that:

When Jesus says, I DO – He never says I DON'T!

When Jesus says, I WILL – He never says I WON'T!

He is Immanuel – God with you!

He will never leave you or forsake you!

For better or for worse – God is with you!

For richer or for poorer – God is with you!

In sickness and in health – God is with you!

In good times and in bad times – God is with you!

When everyone else forsakes you – God is with you!

You can count on Jesus – our Immanuel – to always be with you!

When Jesus says, I DO – HE DOES!

So I ask you today - Have you ever said "I do," to Jesus?

"Lord, I need your forgiveness and I need you to be with me. I want to know You and love You and live for You."

If you've never done that I hope today you will say, "I do" to Jesus Christ. It will change your life... forever. So, take this journey of love today.