

GROWING IN GOD

PODCAST



GIG70 – Do You Celebrate Christ Or Christmas

The name of this podcast today is, “Do You Celebrate Christ or Christmas?” This is something that I am really burdened about, because I know that the Christmas season is something that always takes up our attention, and we find ourselves immersed into so many things – advertisements, going to the mall, the shopping, the decorations, everything that goes along. And for me, honestly, it is a time that I have concerns about what we are really doing as believers. Are we celebrating an event called Christmas, or are we celebrating Christ, which was the original intent. In the concept of the word Christmas is "Christ mass," which was the mass taken on the evening of Christmas, celebrating Christ and celebrating the birth of Christ.

As we know, Christ was not born on December 25th, and He was not born on January 7th, which is when many churches, both Western and Eastern faiths, celebrate Christmas. It was probably more surrounding the Feast of Tabernacles season, in that area of time. But that doesn't necessarily have to be an issue, because anytime is a great time to celebrate Christ; and anytime would be great for telling the story of Christ, and becoming immersed into and immersing the world into a focus on the love of God for the world, which was His motivation for bringing His Son into this earth. And that is what we should have surrounding Christmas as our focus.

Now it is difficult, because – really, if you look, for instance, on the Internet, which I am not saying is a great place to do scholastic research, but it certainly can give you the temperature of what is going on in society around us – when you check out searches that can be done about Christmas, you find that many people, most people possibly, relate to Christmas as a global secular holiday. This is a pretty large group of people who see Christmas as something that is just a secular celebration throughout the world. In other words, there is no religious meaning behind it, there is no significance in the name. I remember a time when people used to protest the use of the word Xmas, as it was written, and talked about putting Christ back into Christmas. In a sense, that is what we are speaking of here. Are we putting Christ back into the celebration that has become for many, if not most, a secular holiday? And even those who celebrate around the world Christmas as some type of a religious holiday are not necessarily celebrating Christ, or focused upon Christ.

Do you recognize that many Buddhists celebrate Christmas? Hindus, in fact, celebrate Christmas also. And you can find occurrences in world religions over the globe where Christmas is celebrated. Obviously, it can have a religious aspect to it; but that religious aspect has nothing to do with Christ. And that is my point in this podcast, is that we, as believers in Christ, should be celebrating, if we are going to celebrate, Christ. We should celebrate His birth, we should celebrate His life, we should celebrate His death upon the cross, and we should celebrate the fact that through Him was given to us by God salvation and eternal life. And I think if we are going to celebrate Christmas, this should not only be the focus within our own hearts on a personal level, but it should be the focus that we have for our families. And there are things that we should do in our celebration and decoration to proclaim this same Gospel story to the world around us.

But we see in many instances that what has taken place, and I believe through the will of Satan, is that we have made Christmas devoid of Christ. And certainly, we have made it devoid of His salvific work on the cross – which is, by the way, the ultimate reason for His birth, was for the Father to bring Him to the cross and have Him, in obedience to the will of God, die, in order that we might be freed from our sins and come into eternal life and salvation. Many churches, I think, even don't during this time have enough of an emphasis on Christ in the celebration of Christmas. I think it is almost sort of a side note, a little bit, unless you are part of a church that really does have some type of what is termed an Advent teaching or practice.

The Advent teaching takes the month and focuses upon different aspects of the birth and the life of Christ. It has a way of bringing, through the lighting of candles and reading of Scriptures, and stories, and prayers, bringing the whole celebration into a focus on Christ. And I think, again, this is a very positive thing; but I don't believe a lot of churches put this type of energy into the focus upon Christ – His birth, and His life, and His cross.

One thing I would like to see people do, especially as believers, is just to be more honest with ourselves, and recognize what we are doing or not doing. I don't think we should enter into something this significant; if we are going to call it Christmas, if we are going to say it is about Christ, then let's bring Christ into it. Let's teach our children, our families, and ourselves about the story of Christ; not just His birth, but all of His life. As we said, the purpose of Him being born in that manger, the purpose of God bringing Him forth into the earth, was that He would come to that event on the cross, which, by His death and suffering, brought salvation and redemption, and opened the door for that redemption to all mankind. And that, again, is why we need, as people who are of faith, to focus during this time on spreading the Word of the Gospel to people. Because the fact that Christ opened the door for salvation doesn't mean people have accepted it, or walked through that open door.

So again, we see that the devil has, I think, been very successful in accomplishing his purpose, which is removing the power of God through the cross of Christ from this event of Christmas. We should have a tremendous focus. We should care about these things. Because really, when you think about it, the devil could care less about how much fun we have, or how much joy we enter into, or what philanthropic works we do during this time of Christmas. How many lights we have; whether we have a Christmas tree; if we Christmas Carol, or do other events; none of that means anything. We need an importance and a focus on saving souls, and bringing about the Kingdom of God into the earth.

First Corinthians 1:18 says, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." We should recognize that this time of Christmas should be an emphasis on the power of God that He brought into the earth to give us the opportunity for salvation. And even though this story of Christ is foolishness – and maybe that is why people shy away from telling the story of the Gospel to their friends and neighbors and communities, even during the time of Christmas, because, according to the world, the cross is foolishness – but to those who believe, it is the expression, it is the very power of God to bring about salvation. Therefore, we should find in our hearts an openness to tell the story; to not just celebrate it in our family, but to really tell the story of Christ and the salvation which He purchased for us. It should be something that we delight in.

If sometimes you are timid about talking to people and witnessing, as we call it, recognize that the time of Christmas is a good time to speak of it. Because people are in a time of celebration. They are in a time of joy. They are looking for happiness; and many times people don't find happiness during Christmas. We see a lot of people going through much depression, because it is supposed to be a time of joy, but

they can find no joy. So it should be easier during the season of Christmas for us to witness of our faith than any other time of the year. And so I encourage you, to the world it may seem like foolishness, and in the heart and mind of the devil, he wants people to relate to it as foolishness; therefore, they just turn it into a secular celebration. But in the heart and mind of God, it was the beginning of the execution of His will on the earth, that He bring His Son to birth in human flesh and start this process of our salvation.

If you choose to celebrate it as a secular time, then do that in all honesty, and enjoy it. But don't try to mix it with being a religious holiday and being about Christ, if you are doing nothing to bring Christ into it for either yourself, or your family, or your community. What I encourage us to do, however, as believers, is to choose to celebrate Christmas as something that is a focusing. We can't pretend to be pleasing God in celebrating Christmas, we can't pretend to be honoring Him or worshiping Him for the birth of Christ, when we are in fact not. But on the other hand, we can have a focus; and this is what I believe we should do. This should be our purpose in this season of Christmas, is that we move forward, away from the secular concept, and we bring about the story of the Gospel and let it be heard, seen, and known, as far and wide as possible.

You know, those who refuse the cross, as Philippians says, they become enemies of the cross. In chapter three, starting at verses 17-21, it says, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly" – and secular – "things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." He has the power to subject all things to Himself. And this is the story of Christ, Jesus, Yeshua. It is the story of His birth. It is the story of His life, and the story of His cross. And we should enter into and immerse ourselves in the power that is available in Christmas.

In Galatians 3:13-14 it says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." This is an illustration that I want to use, this Scripture. Because, what is your celebration? You say, "Well, we are going to have a tree. We are going to have all these decorations." Listen, that is fine. I don't have a problem with that. What I have a problem with is if we are not using those things as illustrations and methods of teaching to bring the Gospel story. You say, "Well, how do I do that?" Okay, well, we just read a great Scripture. If you are going to have a tree in your house, okay, fine. Why do you have a tree? What are you representing by that tree? Well, here is a great Scripture: "Cursed it is every man who hangs on a tree." That is what Galatians is talking about. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

That is the story of the tree. Christ hung on a tree. He hung on a cross for us. We also see the tree present in the Garden, don't we? We see that man's sin, and because of his sin, God closed off the access to the tree of life. But there is a tree of life, and that is in Christ. He is our life. And He is the one that brings to us life. He is the one that brings back access to the tree of life that was shut up, in the

book of Genesis, because of the sin of man. So we lost access. But in Christ we have the access. So you can sit around your tree and you can talk about that very great reality. If you look for the Scripture, it is in Deuteronomy 21:23, where it talks about "Cursed is every man who hangs on a tree." And this, of course, is prophetically speaking to us about Christ.

You say, "Okay, well, I've got the tree. I am going to have a manger scene in my house." Then again, don't just have it be a little trinket that sits on a counter somewhere. Tell the story. Tell the whole Gospel story about His birth. Tell the story about His life, about the miracles. Tell the story about how He suffered for us and went to that cross. I can talk more about the Scriptures of the whole Gospel story; and I'll do more of that at the end of this, because we will pick up the Scripture references into the show notes and also into the transcript of this time of the podcast. But I just want to give you the illustration. You want a manger scene? Great. Don't have it be like an idol sitting around the house. Have it be an illustrated sermon for teaching everyone who comes into your house what this time means to you, its importance that Yeshua appeared in the flesh as a man. In Philippians 2:8 it says, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Why was He born in that manger? Why did He come first as a child and grow as we grow? Because He is an illustration to us of the fact that we can walk with God, even though we are in the flesh, and found in appearance as a man. So was He. And yet He learned to humble Himself, and become obedient to God, and enter into a walk with God by the Spirit and in the power of the Holy Spirit – even to the point of this death on the cross, through which He won our salvation. There are many things that that manger scene can speak to us about.

Colossians 2:9-15 says, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Do we recognize that this baby was able to grow, and in His physical body see indwell the fullness of God? "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." All of this we see in this young baby, Christ, who was born into the world in human flesh; and yet He was able to accomplish all of these things. How much more, with Him in our lives, should we be able to become? We should be able to teach our children what He was able to do, even though He faced all the things that we face on a human level, in the difficulties of our human flesh, in our human nature. And yet look at how He connected with the Father, became one with the Father, and opened the doors of salvation for us.

Oh, the stories that you can tell through these decorations that are around your house! Make them living illustrations of the Gospel of God to your family. You say, "Well, I am going to hang lights all over my tree and around my house, and I am going to have lights everywhere." Okay, well again, let them be an illustration. Let them be a teaching tool that you use to talk about the Light. John 8:12, "Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, 'I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life.'" What do those lights represent? "Oh, I don't know, they are just light bulbs hanging around my house and my tree. And when the holiday is over, I can't pay my electricity bill." No. Use them to illustrate Christ, who He was to the world, who He is to us now.

John 1:3-5 says, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men." His life, this Light of Christ that we are talking about, of Jesus, of Yeshua, His life was a light for men. And, "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." We can talk about that, how the Light can be right before our eyes. And yet when Christ, the Light, was standing before men, they were so given to the darkness that they could not see the Light that God had brought.

John 9:5 says, "'While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.'" This is, of course, Christ speaking. He says, "I am the Light of the world." So we recognize, the Light is important. We should celebrate the Light, but not a bunch of light bulbs. We should celebrate the Light which is Christ, which is Jesus, Yeshua HaMashiach. We celebrate You as the Light of the world. And You still are.

One other thing that we can do is talk about this, in Matthew 5:14-16 – not only is Christ the Light, but He says, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." So, what decorations do you have? What celebrations do you have during this time? What do you enjoy? Find the Scriptures that you can use to point to the Gospel message that these things illustrate of what you are doing, and why you are doing it. Teach your children. That was the point of the Shema prayer in Israel, that you teach your children when you walk, when you sit at home, when you walk by the way; in everything you are doing, let it be a teaching to your children. Let it be a teaching to your family about the story of God, about the story of His salvation to us that He is bringing. And let this celebration of Christmas give us a multitude of illustrations to talk to our family and our children about, as we sit in our homes and as we walk by the way. The Gospel message, it can be represented. It can be acted out. Everything can be a teaching tool. Everything can be a reminder to us to illustrate the life, the death, the salvation.

One of the greatest things we do as a sacrament in the church is what we call Communion, where we take bread and wine, and we bless it, we break it as Christ broke it on that night of His suffering. And He says, "Do this in remembrance of Me." So if the bread and the wine can be an illustration and a reminder to us of what Christ did and of His cross, how much more and why not have all of these other elements of Christmas, likewise, be reminders to us of the sacrifice, the salvation that Yeshua brought to us. He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." Maybe we should relate to Christmas more in that way. Let's do it in remembrance of Him. Let's bring Him back into it. Let us celebrate Him in everything we do. Let everything we do be an illustration and an item that brings to us a remembrance of Him.

Normally in the podcast, I try to end with a few points that you can remember. What I would like to do instead is just give us some more Scriptures that you can write down. You will find it in the show notes. Because I want you to dig into this. I really pray you do something with this. It takes a little energy to make this happen; but if you take the Scriptures, spend a little time in study, you can dig up the significance in these Scriptures I am about to give you, and you can teach them, and you can let them live for you.

I am going to go back first and give some from a prophetic level. In Genesis 3:14, we find a good opening about the curse that was brought upon man and upon the earth, and the prophecy about the seed of the woman that would come and bring the final solution.

In Genesis 22:16, we see that the blessing was sworn to Abraham about bringing the seed that would be the Christ and be the salvation.

In Isaiah 9:6, we also have prophecies about the Child that would be born, and the government would rest upon His shoulders.

In Micah, chapter five, starting at verses 2 through 5, we see the prophecies over Bethlehem where the Child lay in the manger, and we see the prophecies of who He was to be, and that He would arise as a Shepherd of the flock of His people, and that He would fulfill the prophecies.

Isaiah 53, 1 through 12, are tremendous prophecies about Christ and the salvation that He would bring, the things that He would suffer, and the deliverance that He would provide.

First Corinthians 15:1-8 talks about the fact that the preaching of this Gospel is our salvation, and we hold fast the words which are preached to us, lest they be in vain. But He was buried, and He was raised on the third day, according to the Word of God. Let those things not be in vain. Let them be alive in our lives.

Going to the Gospels now – of course, you can read the whole Gospels. All four Gospels tell the story in a complete way. But I will give you some beginning Scriptures to work with. Luke the first chapter is a great place to begin, and go all the way through Luke 1 and 2. You find some of the elementary story about the birth, and the pronouncement of birth, and the things that transpired with John the Baptist. Matthew 1 is another place, actually chapter one, chapter two, chapter three, some of those beginning chapters of Matthew give the beginning story; but of course, all of Matthew tells us the complete Gospel story of salvation. So I encourage you to get into all of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Find the places to read that come alive to you, that you can in turn make alive to others as you tell the story.

We have time before the Christmas season comes, hopefully when this podcast comes out. So do your work with it. Take time every night. Don't wait for Christmas day. Don't wait for Christmas Eve. Begin the month speaking about it, telling a story. Get together every evening and read the Word together, and tell the story. Some of the key Scriptures about salvation that you will find are in John 3:16. Most of us know that: "For God so loved the world." And we can't forget that this Christmas was triggered by the love of God, where He gave His Son to us.

John 10: 27-28

Romans 6:23

Titus 3:4-7

Romans 8:28-39

All of these give very specific, powerful stories or emphasis on the salvation that we have in Christ. So I encourage you to take some of these, as well as the Gospels, and put them together as real teaching for yourself, for your family. Again, let it be alive, and let it be well for you. I bless this time. Let it be that we celebrate this year Christ, rather than Christmas.