

**"Pressing on with the Mission"
Don't Waste Your Christmas
Philippians 2:5-11**

Introduction

- When I say the words “Christmas Spirit” what comes to mind? Tiny Tim? A reformed Scrooge or Grinch? Generosity till it hurts?
- Maybe it’s something [Erma Bombeck](#) once said. “There's nothing sadder in this world than to awake Christmas morning and not be a child.”¹ Is Christmas Spirit childlike wonder?
- Or is real Christmas spirit is better captured by what [Taylor Caldwell](#) once said. “This is the message of Christmas: We are never alone.”² Is Christmas spirit togetherness and family?
- Maybe the words the angels had for the shepherds comes to mind when thinking of Christmas spirit. *Peace on earth, good will toward men.*
- I want to suggest to you this morning that real Christmas spirit is more in line with what [Dale Evans](#), wife of [Roy Rogers](#), described when she said, “Christmas...is love in action.”³ Real Christmas spirit is not just an attitude. It’s not just a feeling. It’s not just a motivation. Real Christmas spirit is an attitude that gets translated into deeds.

Transition

If you haven’t yet done so please open your bible to Philippians 2.

- Listen to [Philippians 2:5](#). *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.* More than just think like this, more than just have the state of mind that Jesus had, Paul uses a word here, *attitude*, that he’s already used once before in this chapter, [verse 2](#), *be like-minded*. And he uses a similar word, a closely related word again in [verse 3](#), *in humility*. By the time we get to [verse 5](#), this piling up of these words is Paul’s way of saying, ““Do this! Act as I have just said!””⁴ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*
- I want to suggest to you this morning that the attitude modeled by Christ and described by Paul here in [Philippians 2:5-11](#) describes the real spirit of Christmas. In fact...[Slide #2]

Big Idea

- **You waste your Christmas if you fail to adopt Christ’s attitude at Christmastime**
- You waste your Christmas if you drift through the Christmas season and think you have Christmas spirit but fail to think and act this way.
- Last week when we looked at these verses we focused more on the theology of Christmas. For those of you who weren’t here last week and are wanting me to go into detail about what this passage says about Christ’s two natures you can check out what I said online. This week I want to focus more on what all of this theology means for how we should live. Last week

¹ Erma Bombeck (1927-1996), American author and humorist.

² Taylor Caldwell (1900-1985), English novelist.

³ Dale Evans (1912-2001), American film actress, singer and songwriter. Wife of Roy Rogers.

⁴ O’Brien, p. 204.

the theology of Christmas. This week the ethics of Christmas; if you really have Christmas spirit this is how you should act. Are you with me?

- What I want to show you from this passage are...

Organizational Sentence

- **Three attitudes that exemplify real Christmas spirit**
- The first two are attitudes modeled by Christ himself. The third is not something Christ models but really more of a response on our part—the third is an attitude of response. Three attitudes that exemplify real Christmas spirit. Again, I think the implications are this; if we don't have these attitudes among us we **waste our Christmas**. These attitudes are what Christmas spirit is all about.

Transition

Look at [verse 6](#) for the [first attitude](#). [Slide #3] Real Christmas spirit requires us to have **an attitude of relinquishment**.

Main Points

- Listen again to **Philippians 2:6**. *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.*
- If you remember from last week we talked at length about the phrase Paul uses here to describe Christ's attitude; the attitude that motivated him to take on flesh—to become human—the attitude that led to the Christmas story. Paul says Christ had an attitude that *did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*.
- That phrase *did not consider equality with God something to be grasped* simply means that “Jesus did not regard his equality with God as something to be used for his own advantage.”⁵ In other words, Christmas came about because Christ modeled for us **an attitude of relinquishment**. Not a relinquishing of his deity. But a relinquishment of the privileges of his position. A relinquishing of his right to hold and keep what was rightly his. A relinquishing of his status as one equal with God. No exploitation of his rank as deity. The attitude Paul describes of Jesus here is an attitude that refuses to use one's own status for one's own gain.⁶ **An attitude of relinquishment**.
- What I want to suggest to you this Christmas is that if you really want to get into the Christmas spirit then *your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*. You must seek to relinquish what's rightly yours. You must seek to use your status, your position, whatever that might be, for the advantage of others. Honestly, it doesn't really matter what your status or position in life is. I don't care if you're a doctor or you push a broom for a living. It makes no difference whether you are poor or live high on the hog. Whether young or old there are things about your status or position or rank or state in life that afford you opportunities that you alone have—that are unique to you—nobody else shares. The question this passage forces us to ask is how this; how are you using that status, that position, that rank, to serve others, for the advantage of others. Christmas is about relinquishing whatever you feel you

⁵ O'Brien, p. 215.

⁶ O'Brien, p. 216.

deserve because of your status—and giving up the right to claim that for yourself and instead using that position or rank to serve others, for the advantage of others. Let me say it like this. If you don't use your position for the advantage of others, especially at Christmastime, then you've wasted Christmas.

- One of the things I get teased about every Christmas is my love of obscure Christmas carols; like the 15th century carol *Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming*. Ever heard of it? I thought so. Or the one we sang together on Christmas Eve *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*. Sounds more like a rap song or a video game than a carol doesn't it? One of my other favorite carols is *Good King Wenceslas*. *Good King Wenceslas* tells the story of this king who, along with his page—his servant boy, seeks out a poor man in the cold of winter so that he can shower the poor man and his family with gifts that only he himself.
- The last stanza of the song says this...

In his master's steps he trod
Where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed
Therefore, Christian men, be sure
Wealth or rank possessing
Ye who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing
- In whose steps are you treading this Christmas? The ethics of Christmas aren't that you work your tail off, you slave away all year so that you can get what's coming to you, so that you can heap blessings upon yourself. The ethics of Christmas don't mean you spend more time grasping and holding. The ethics of Christmas aren't about upward mobility—they're about wrong-way chutes and ladders. Becoming downwardly mobile—on purpose. The ethics of Christmas require you to tread in your master's steps, to have the same attitude as Christ who relinquished the privilege that came with his status so that he might bless others. That's real Christmas spirit.
- In a message on this same passage [Bill Hybels](#) says “How willing are you to relax your grip on your prerogatives and privileges? How loosely do you hold your positions and possessions? Most of us would put up a real fight before we would part with something precious to us. We'd scream, "Mine! Mine! I don't care who wants it, needs it, asks for it, or calls for it. What's mine is mine!" We're clutchers... We clutch power when we're able to obtain it. We clutch positions and titles. We clutch possessions and resources, time and energy. Even the most mature Christians among us wrestle constantly with letting go and relaxing our grip on that which we hold dear for Christ and the kingdom. Anyone who thinks that's not true is not being honest. We're clutchers by human nature. It's terribly difficult to relax our grip once we get it tightened around something we value. But here's Jesus, the holder of all the prerogatives of deity. Everywhere he turns in the universe the cherubim and seraphim are crying, "Holy, holy, holy. Worthy is the Lamb. The whole world is full of his glory!" In that kind of heaven, Jesus says: I'll relax my grip on all that. I'll take a demotion if in so doing I can please God the Father and serve people whom I love.”⁷

⁷ Bill Hybels, “The Story of Seven Demotions: *A life committed to Christ is a life committed to downward mobility*”, [PreachingToday.com](#)

- You waste your Christmas if Christmas slips by without adopting this same attitude of Christ's. Don't waste your Christmas.

Transition

There is a **second attitude** that makes up real Christmas spirit. [Slide #3] It's an **attitude of humble sacrifice**.

- In particular, listen to **verses 7-8**. *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!*
- The words that drive Christmas, that make Christmas happen are the words servant, humility, and sacrifice. These words embody real Christmas spirit.
- Look at the text. Paul says that Jesus, being equal with God in every way, chose to deprive himself of his rights as God and make himself nothing. In other words he became a nobody by taking the very nature of a servant—by becoming human. The Creator becomes the creature.
- The ethics of Christmas, real Christmas spirit means adopting this same attitude of humility—this acceptance of going lower, of becoming less. Think about it. What's more humble than God himself becoming a baby, born in a backwoods little town, born in a stable? And then for thirty years living in obscurity, with nobody realizing who you are, never drawing attention to yourself.
- **Philip Yancey** in his book *The Jesus I never Knew* asks the question, How did Christmas day feel to God? He writes, "Imagine for a moment becoming a baby again: giving up language and muscle coordination, and the ability to eat solid food and control your bladder. God as a fetus! Or imagine yourself becoming a sea slug—that analogy is probably closer. On that day in Bethlehem, the Maker of All That Is took form as a helpless, dependant newborn."⁸
- That's the real spirit of Christmas, but only part of it. We're called to **humble sacrifice**. *Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*
- In **Mark 10:45** Jesus says that's why he came. He humbled himself in order to serve us. "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" The reason Jesus came in the flesh was to serve you. Did you realize that? How? Jesus serves us by his sacrificial death, by dying in our place. His willing and obedient death on your behalf, by means of a cross is his supreme act of humble service.
- Death by cross was about as humiliating, about as humble as you can get. In Jesus' day crosses weren't symbols of faith that people would jingle jangle around their necks as fashion statements. They were symbols of shame and scandal. It'd be like us wearing a piece of jewelry in the shape of an electric chair. Crosses were torture instruments. Jesus humbled himself in that he obeyed God even to the point, even if it meant dying a humiliating death on a cross.

⁸ Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Zondervan, 2002), p. 106

- Christmas without this element of humble sacrifice isn't Christmas—it's something else. "Separate Christmas Day from Good Friday [and the cross], and Christmas is doomed--doomed to decay into a merely sentimental or superstitious or sensuous "eat-drink-and-be-merry" festivity of December. Bethlehem and Golgotha, the Manger and the Cross, the birth and the death, must always be seen together, if the real Christmas is to survive with all its profound inspirations.⁹
- *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.* You waste your Christmas if you fail to humbly and sacrificially serve others at Christmastime. Not that we die for people. You waste your Christmas if you fail to lower yourself, humble yourself for the purpose of serving others. That's what Christmas is all about. **Corinthians 8:9.** *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: although He was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich.* We are called to do the same.

Transition

There's a **third attitude** we are called to adopt. This last one is not one that Jesus models for us per se. It's more of an attitude of response based upon what Jesus has done for us. Look at **verses 9-11.** **It's an attitude of worship.**

- Listen. *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
- The only proper response to the events of Christmas, to Jesus taking on flesh, to his humbly serving us by his death, is worship. You waste your Christmas if you fail to honor and exalt and worship Christ at Christmastime.
- Look at the text. God does something in response to Jesus humble sacrifice. *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.* That phrase *exalted him to the highest place* doesn't mean that Jesus obtains a status that's higher than what he originally had. God exalting Jesus means God vindicated Jesus. God exalting Jesus is his way of approving of what Jesus has done; it's his way of honoring Jesus' sacrifice. By drawing attention to Jesus, by exalting Jesus to the highest place, God is "declaring that the right thing for people to do is to forego their own rights and be humble" like Jesus.¹⁰
- The way to really have Christmas spirit is to do to Jesus what God himself does. Exalt him. *That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Real Christmas spirit is worshiping Jesus.
- Zero in on **verse 11** with me for a second. That worshiping Jesus is proper is seen by the fact that God bestows upon Jesus the name *Lord*. That name *Lord* is the name God chooses for himself in the Old Testament. **Verses 10-11** are actually a loose paraphrase of **Isaiah 45:18-24**; a section that highlights the Lord God's ability to save and the appropriate response to God's saving activity.

⁹ PreachingToday.com, J. Sidlow Baxter in "Awake, My Heart." *Christianity Today*, Vol. 40, no. 14.

¹⁰ Marshall, p. 55.

- Let me just read those verses from Isaiah to you. Listen. **Isaiah 45:18-24**. *For this is what the LORD says-- he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited-- he says: "I am the LORD, and there is no other. 19 I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain.' I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right. 20 "Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. 21 Declare what is to be, present it-- let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. 22 "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. 23 By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. 24 They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.'" All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame.*
- Back to Philippians. What Paul seems to be saying here in **Philippians 2** is that this Jesus, who saves people by and through his death, is one and the same with the Lord God of the Old Testament. Jesus is the Lord God who saves. The Lord God is to be worshiped. Jesus is to be worshiped. The Lord God saves. Jesus, by his death and resurrection, saves. Real Christmas spirit is recognizing and worshipping Jesus for who he really is. He is the Lord who saves.

Conclusion

- Have you ever heard of Festivus? Celebrated on December 23rd Festivus is a made-up but very real and celebrated alternative holiday in response to the commercialization of Christmas. It was popularized by the TV show **Seinfeld**, and in the words of **Frank Constanza** on the show, Festivus is a holiday for the average person; “a festivus for the rest of us.” Instead of a tree there’s an aluminum pole. Instead of gifts there’s the airing of grievances and feats of strength.
- There’s a whole lot of talk these days of taking back Christmas; fighting what Christmas has become. For some, the protest of what Christmas has become means the mocking, stupid anti-holiday Festivus.
- You really want to fight what Christmas has become and take back Christmas? The ethics of Christmas are clear; do as Jesus does. *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*. Celebrate Christmas by relinquishing your rights. Quit grasping and holding and clutching. Celebrate Christmas by humbling yourself to serve. Celebrate Christmas by worshiping. Act this way, do this and you will have recovered what Christmas is all about; you won’t have wasted your Christmas.