“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

—John 10:10

For many years now people have lamented the secularization and commercialization of Christmas, and there are no doubts but that is a very significant problem. However, I would like to call your attention today to the trivialization of Christmas. When you watch the various Christmas programs that appear at this time of year, you certainly see that clearly.

If you tried to find out what Christmas is all about from watching TV, you would have a hard time. It seems to be something about someone that lives on the North Pole. In fact, I read about a little boy who said to an adult when he looked at a manger scene, “What in the world is that camel doing there. Doesn’t he know there are no camels on the North Pole? Santa uses reindeer.” And of those we have aplenty, red noses and all.

Then there is one group that happily seems to have gone the way of all flesh. Remember the singing chipmunks that serenaded us at Christmastime for a number of years. I often thought that was putting up the singing of the “Three Blind Mice” against the “Hallelujah” chorus. Tragically, some people prefer the former.

Christmas doesn’t need such embellishments. Christmas is the most fantastic, glorious, amazing event that ever happened in this world:

• When the almighty, eternal Creator of the galaxies clicked His fingers and galaxies leaped out of nothingness.
• When He waved His hand and the Milky Way appeared in the blackness of night.
When this One who swirled His arms and spiral nebulae came out of the vacuum of space.

When this One, this everlasting, omnipotent, omniscient God, the Creator of all, came and visited this planet.

Wouldn’t you think that all of the movies and stories of Christmas would want to focus on that? If it weren’t for that perverseness in the human heart, they all most certainly would, but they would rather think about other things—things of less significance because they don’t know this glorious God who has come.

I love the words that Jenni Till just sang, “Mary, did you know . . . when you kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God?” I would venture to say that half the people in America didn’t know that. “Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation? . . . Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations? . . . And the sleeping Child you’re holding is the Great I Am! I Am!” (Song by Lowry and Green)

“Whom shall I say has sent me?” asked Moses on the mountain, and that voice that spake from the burning bush said to tell them that “I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:14). The ever-living One, the One who never was or never will be but always is—the great I AM—sent Moses to the Egyptians, but He came Himself for our salvation. “Mary, did you know?” America, do you know?

WHY DID HE COME?

Perhaps it might help to remember why He came. In John 10:10, Christ made this most astonishing statement, “I am come that [ye] they might have life.” Can you imagine running into anyone anywhere in this world who would make a statement like that. “I am come into the world that you might have life.” Preposterous! Absurd! And yet that is what Christ said. “. . . that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Let’s consider today just a few of the elements of that abundant life. One thing we probably rarely think about is: If He had not come, we would not know that God loves us and we would not love God. Now, I venture to say that probably ninety-eight percent of you never heard that before. You have supposed that people have always loved God. Not so.

If we could take the calendar and let the pages flutter back through the ages, through the centuries, back to the very day that Christ was born, and allow us to settle down on the Appian Way outside the great city of Rome, you would discover something that most Americans would find astonishing today, and that is: No one loved God.

Across the Way where there are many going back and forth to the great imperial city, you find a small marble temple. You see some haggard looking people, cast down, going in and out. Finally, when the last one has left, you walk into the temple, and there you espy a priest. You say to him, “Sir, whose temple is this?”
He looks at you somewhat surprised, thinking surely you must be a foreigner, and says, “Why, this is the temple of the great god Aesculapius, the god of health, healing, wisdom, fortune, and good harvest.” Aesculapius, invented by the Greeks, spread to Rome; he became extraordinarily popular.

You say, “I notice that all of the people coming in and out were so downcast, so haggard looking. No one seemed to be smiling.”

The priest said, “Of course not. The only people that come here are the people whose crops have failed, whose health has fallen apart, who have lost what they have. They are the ones who come to seek a boon from Aesculapius. But when things are going well, when one is robust and the fields are tawny with all manner of crops, they don’t bother the god. Of course, you wouldn’t want to do that. You might anger him and he might cast a thunderbolt your way.”

And you say, “But don’t any of these people come back to worship him and to thank him because they love him?”

You could see the transformation in the expression of his face as he looks at you with utter total astonishment and says, “Love a god? Why, man, that’s the most preposterous thing I have ever heard. No one loves a god! Oh, we fear them and we may seek a boon from them, but we do not love them. We hope they will go the way and be involved in their own pleasures, because they are really men writ large. They have their own desires and pleasures in life, and we don’t want to anger them. But love a god? Nobody loves a god! Certainly, no god ever loved a puny human being!”

GOD IS LOVE

Then there were written those words in the Holy Scriptures, perhaps the most profound words ever written—not a long, complicated, convoluted sentence with difficult grammar, but a simple sentence—three simple single syllables, and yet a world of meaning: “God is love” (I John 4:8). Such a thing was never dreamt by man before. Walk into any temple in India and look at the grotesque and horrid features of the marble statues frozen in awful grimaces. They look like something out of a monster movie or a bad nightmare. That such things would love us, or that we could possibly love them, was unheard of until Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Not only did He make the statement “God is love,” but also He backed it up with His life. He went about performing His occupation. And what was that? What did He do? He did good. That’s what He did. He went around and healed the sick. He raised the dead. He opened blind eyes. He enlightened the ignorant. He did good. That was His job, because He loved us. “I have loved thee with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3). And so we came to see that God, indeed, in truth and reality, was love.

I recall one time talking to a man about fifty-five years old who had been in church all of his life, and I asked him who he thought Jesus was. His answer was typical of millions in this country this very day. He said, “Oh, he was a great man.”
I said, “Anything more?”

He said, “He was the greatest teacher that ever lived.”

I asked, “Anything more.”

He said, “What could be more?”

I said, “Well, let me tell you something you obviously have never learned. According to the Scriptures, according to the entire historic Christian Church and all of its branches, Jesus of Nazareth was and is the everlasting and eternal almighty God.”

Instantly, his eyes filled with tears, and he said, “I never heard that before, but I always thought it would be so nice if God was like Jesus.”

I said to him, “Dear friend, God is Jesus.”

Ah, the wonder of His love, to know that He loves us even to the agonies of Calvary is a marvelous boon that all who have felt that love know.

A LIFE OF MEANING AND PURPOSE

Second, I might point out to you that another blessing Christ brought with Him is meaning and purpose to life. Without Christ, life would have no meaning or purpose. Today, in the Western world, most people either believe in Christianity or they believe in atheistic evolution. Those are the two most popular philosophies of our time. If you believe in evolution, life has no meaning. As Beyond a Reasonable Doubt puts it:

If man is really the product of a great accident, his destiny is annihilation. Our lives will have meant nothing. Our lives would be, as Shakespeare said, “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” This is the view of the nihilist who says that life is meaningless. This view leaves man with no hope, only despair. Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Ernest Hemingway all died bitter and lonely men.

(That, the students are not told about in colleges today. They are encouraged to read the novels of Hemingway, which are wonderfully written, but all express his unbelief and his hostility toward Christianity. They don’t tell the students how he died, how the end of his life came. They don’t tell them about the time he took a shotgun and put it into his mouth and blew his head all over the wall because he felt life was meaningless and purposeless.)

Hemingway took his own life with a shotgun thinking that the only aspects of our lives we can control are the time and means of death.

The person who does not believe in God is often one of the saddest and loneliest individual on planet earth. The future ushers in the loss of all persons and possessions he treasures. After death, this person will never see his loved ones again. . . . This person finds amazement in the wondrous universe around him but considers the universe a result of chance.
Unable to know his origin or reason for existence, this person is humiliated by an utter helplessness and brevity of life.

No, do not be deceived by the bravado of unbelief. If you study these lives to the end, you discover the truth.

Ah, dear friend, does your life have meaning? What are you living for? That was a question Dr. Louis Evans, Sr., asked at a fraternity house in Los Angeles years ago. There were young men sitting all around the frat house on chairs and couches and on the floor and everywhere, and he said to them, “Gentlemen, what are you living for?”

One of them raised his hand and said, “Well, I’m planning to go to law school when I graduate from here and become a lawyer.”

He said, “Well, that’s commendable. That is how you are going to make your living, but what are you living for?” The student looked puzzled and couldn’t answer.

Another one said, “Well, I want to find just the right girl and get married and have a nice house in the suburbs and three or four kids.”

He said, “That’s very good, young man. Those are the people with whom you will do your living, but what are you living for?”

One after another the young men demonstrated themselves incapable of answering that question.

I would ask you: What are you living for? It’s not, indeed, until you find Christ that you will know from whence you have come and why you are here and where you are going and what you ought to be doing. Christ has called us to serve Him. We are to build His kingdom and advance His Gospel. That is what the Founders of this nation knew. They said, in The New England Confederation:

Whereas we all came into these parts of America with one and the same end and aim, namely, to advance the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Is that the purpose of your life? I hope it is today.

OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN

Third, another blessing we would not know if Christ had not come is that we wouldn’t know the forgiveness of sins. Oh, people can tell you that you are forgiven and a psychiatrist can try to lower your standard of living down to your actual living and make you think that you have been forgiven, but it really doesn’t work.

Psychiatrists have said that most people in our mental institutions are there because of guilt. Why is that? It is because God is a just God. He is just and holy, as well as loving and merciful. Because He is just and because we have been made in His image, that sense of justice resides in our souls, and we can’t get away from it. That is why we are so
outraged when we hear about injustice, because there is this inbuilt sense of justice. Then, when we violate that code, we are whipped by the scorpions of guilt, and it steals our peace, it robs our sleep and it burns our hearts.

I recall some years ago talking to a missionary to the Near East who was invited to speak in a Muslim university. He spoke about Christ and His salvation. When it was over, he invited all of those who would like to ask questions to meet him in a certain room.

Almost 100 students lined up and, one by one, and for several hours, he spoke to each of them. Almost all of them had the same question. It wasn’t an argument about the virgin birth of Christ or His death or Resurrection or His deity as the Son of God. No. They wanted to know one thing: How can I get rid of this guilt that is driving me crazy.

There is no forgiveness anywhere, because justice demands that sin be punished. “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). That is built into the very fabric of the universe. It cannot be sidestepped or avoided. Where will you go? “What will wipe away that bloody spot?” said the queen.

Only Christ can take it away. What can take away our sins? Nothing … nothing…. NOTHING but the blood of Jesus, because the wages of sin is death, because God is just, because sin must be punished. The penalty must be paid. He came Himself into this world to pay that penalty, to die that death, to suffer that pain that we might be forgiven. Only then is the burden lifted, and as with Christian in Pilgrim’s Progress, the burden broke from his back and rolled down the hill of Calvary to disappear in a tomb forever.

Have you experienced that relief from guilt, or do you know that you are still guilty? That thing that you did haunts your sleep. You cannot get away from it. It follows you wherever you go. Only Christ can take it away and bring peace to your soul.

**BLESSED ASSURANCE**

Lastly, if Jesus had not come, we would have no assurance about the future. No one would be able to sing, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine, O what a foretaste of glory divine.” We would not know that we would be with Him forever in Paradise, and therefore the fear of death would always be ours—that hollow-eyed, lank-jawed skeleton with his bony hand reaching out in the night seasons saying, “Soon, soon you will be mine.”

Only this One who said, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore . . .” (Revelation 1:18), and “. . . because I live, ye [that trust in me] shall live also” (John 14:19) can give us that assurance.

Do you have that blessed assurance? Has the fear of death been lifted from you? Can you laugh at that specter, knowing that for you, now, to die is simply to take one step from this world into Paradise? Only Christ can give that peace.
“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). I hope that abundant life is yours today. I hope you know where you will spend eternity, because a hundred trillion eons of centuries from now we will all still be alive, either in the bliss and felicity of Heaven or in the pain and condign punishment of Hell. Do you know. . . do you know where you will be? Only Jesus, the risen Christ can give you that assurance.

*****

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, for any here today who have not felt that river of love that flowed from Calvary’s mount flow into their hearts and wash away all guilt and all sin and all fear and all doubt, O God, may they say to Thee, “Lord Jesus Christ, come into my heart right now. I receive you as Lord and Savior. I repent of my sins and my rebellion, and from this day forward it is my desire to follow Thee.” In Thy holy name. Amen.

Sermon delivered by Dr. D. James Kennedy on December 16, 2001, at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.