

The Ugliness of Christmas

1 Timothy 1:15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

- One of our best-loved Christmas carols, White Christmas, was written by Irving Berlin for a 1942 movie "Holiday Inn" starring Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire. When Bing first heard Berlin audition the song in 1941, he reassured Irving that he had created a winner. Bing's preliminary evaluation turned out to be a vast understatement. White Christmas, a song of peace and yearning for "the ones we used to know," was released to a war-torn public during the darkest days of World War II. By the end of the War it had become the biggest-selling single of all time. White Christmas sold more than 30 million copies worldwide and was recognized as the best-selling single in any music category for more than 50 years.
- At this time of the year, it is the joy of many preachers to speak about the beauty of Christmas and the wonderful events that took place in Bethlehem. Even with the busyness and stresses of the holiday season, everything is basically bright and light and cheery and happy for most people. The Christmas cards that we receive present to us almost a world of fantasy, beauty, wonder, loveliness ... and that is one side of Christmas, without question.
- But without putting a damper on things, we must admit that there's also another side to Christmas. There's a very ugly side. And there are a lot of ways we could approach that. We could talk about a dark, cold night in a small non-descript village in Palestine where a lovely young woman gave birth to a baby in the most unsanitary wretched conditions imaginable, standing in the filth and manure of a stable. We could talk about the ugliness of a man named Herod who, because he feared the loss of his control and power, massacred all the babies in that region. We could talk about the population in Jerusalem, totally indifferent to what God was doing, or the religious leaders who quickly grew to hate their own Messiah. Yes, Christmas does have some ugly aspects.
- But there's something even uglier than those things. Lurking behind every beautiful scene on every Christmas card, behind every lovely sentiment of Christmas, behind all of our holiday trappings, is something very vile and very ugly, the most wretched heinous hideous reality in all the universe. To have a proper understanding of the beauty of Christmas, you need to also understand the ugliness of Christmas.
- The dark and ugly side of Christmas is SIN. The heart of Christmas is this, that Christ came into the world to save sinners. Christ was manifest to take away sin. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sin." **The real beauty of Christmas is to understand the ugliness that it cures!** Christ's coming deals with that which blights all of human life, with the phenomena that damns every soul to hell, with the evil that pervades the entire world – SIN! It is because of sin that there are tears and pain and war and fighting and anxiety and discord and unrest and fear and worry and sickness and death and famine and earthquakes and pollution. **All those things which mar our existence are the direct result of sin.** Sin disturbs and disrupts every human relationship, whether between man and man, man and creation, or man and God.
- Thomas Watson, the great Puritan writer said, "Sin has turned beauty into deformity and the wicked takes more care to have his sin covered than cured." Men are much more prone to excuse their sin then they are to examine it.
- And so it's fitting that at this time of the year when men would cover their sin with all the beauty of Christmas that the covering be torn off, if but for a brief moment, to reveal the ugliness that is behind it all. Christ was born to be the Savior who came to deliver men from sin. If there were no sin there would need to be no Christmas. So we cannot divorce the two and we cannot hide behind the fantasy, we cannot hide behind the smoke screen of Christmas cards and all the rest, sin must come to the forefront.
- Sin is the evil from which no one escapes. And all who die in childbirth or from heart disease or cancer or war or murder or accidents or old age or whatever else, all are dying because of sin. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." Every person on the globe will die and the blame will lay at the feet of sin.
- **But the Bible says Jesus Christ came into the world to save us from sin. That's the reason for His coming. Sin is the ugliness of Christmas!**
- When Leonardo da Vinci was preparing to paint his masterpiece which most of the world is aware of entitled "The Last Supper," he sought long and diligently for a model who could be for him the face of Jesus Christ. At last he located a chorister in one of the churches of Rome who was lovely in life and features, a young man by the name of Pietro Bandenelli. Years passed and the painting remained unfinished. And da Vinci was able to finish everything but the final character, who was Judas Iscariot.

- However, he could not find a face that represented to him the degradation of a Judas. So he looked long and hard to find a man whose face was hardened and distorted by sin. And at last on the streets of Rome he found a beggar with a face so villainous that he shuddered when he looked at him. He hired the man to sit as the model for Judas Iscariot and painted his face on the canvas. When he was about to dismiss the man he said, "By the way, I have not asked your name." To which the man replied, "My name is Pietro Bandenelli, I also sat for you as your model of Christ." The sinful life of many years had so disfigured the man's face that the fair beauty of youth now was debased.
- And that's what sin does to everyone, the whole human race. It is the degenerative power in the human stream that makes man susceptible to disease, disaster, illness, death and hell. And it is the reason for Christmas. Every broken marriage, every disrupted home, every shattered friendship, every argument, every disagreement, every evil thought, evil word, evil deed, every good deed undone, good thought unthought, good word unsaid can be attributed to sin.
- And that is why in Joshua 7:13 it is called the accursed thing. It is compared in Scripture to the venom of snakes and the stench of a grave. And anything that is that sinister and that powerful and that totally debilitating for the whole human race must be dealt with if God who was infinitely holy is to bring man to Himself. Thus Christ came into the world to deal with sin. So, you cannot look at Christmas and celebrate its peripheral elements, you must understand that the heart of it is the ugliness of sin.

• WHAT IS SIN?

- John Bunyan said, "Sin is the dare of God's justice. Sin is the rape of God's mercy. It is the jeer of His patience, the sleight of His power and the contempt of His love." But more than that, what is sin in simple terms? The definition of 1 John 3:4 puts it as clearly as any, "Sin is the transgression of the law." Sin is breaking God's law, any violation of God's law.
- Sin is **lawlessness**. It is living as if there were no God and no law, no authority, no standard, just like people live today and have always wanted to live. It denies the reality of God's law. It says God is not in charge and cannot put on me a binding rule. It is living beyond the boundaries God has set. It is thinking that is unacceptable to God, speaking that is unacceptable to God, behavior that is unacceptable to God, the violation of His law.

- There is no sane reason to violate God's law other than the fact that men desire to run their own lives, to do what they will and deny God His rightful place. All of God's law is for man's good. But man is like horse who has a beautiful pasture to graze in, but leaps the fence only to land in the mud; man has defied the beauty of what God has provided within the framework of obedience to His law, he has leaped the fence, overstepped the boundaries and landed deep in the quagmire and muck of his own sin and cannot extricate himself. And so, though we can look through Scripture and find many different kinds of sin and many different terms to express what it is, the simplest definition is that it is a violation of God's law.

• WHAT IS SIN LIKE?

- **Sin is defiling.** It is a pollution of our very souls. It is to precious metal what rust is. It is what scars are to a lovely face, what stain is to silk cloth, what smog is to a clear sky. It makes the soul red with guilt and black with evil. In 1 Kings 8:38 the sin of man's heart is compared to oozing sores of a deadly plague. In Zechariah 3:3, it is compared to filthy garments. According to Zechariah 11:8, it makes God loathe the sinner. And according to Ezekiel 20:43, when the sinner sees his own sin, it makes him loathe himself.
- **Sin is defiant.** It is clenching your fist and striking a blow in the face of Jesus Christ. No matter what homage you may want to pay to Him at Christmas, sin strikes a blow in His face. Sin drives a nail in His hand. Sin crushes a crown of thorns on His head. Sin jams a spear into His side. Sin spits on Him. Sin mocks Him. Sin says "I will do what I will do, I don't care what Your claims are or who You are."
- **Sin is ungrateful.** Acts 17:28 says, "In Him we live and move and have our very being." Without God we wouldn't be here. Sin is such gross ingratitude because it seeks to dethrone and destroy the one who gave us all we have. But that's the nature of sin.
- **Sin is incurable.** Jeremiah 13:23 asks, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" The answer to that rhetorical question is no. And then the prophet says, "Then may you also do good that are accustomed to do evil." There's nothing human beings can do for themselves that can change the effects of sin – not all the resolution in the world, not all the self-effort, not all the religion. Sin is humanly incurable. Sin is the incurable leprosy of the soul. It can't be legislated out. It can't be philosophized out. It can't be psychologized out. It can't be wished out. It can't be pushed out by self-effort. Sin is a disease cured only by one thing, and that is the blood of the divine physician Himself.

- **Sin is hated by God.** Sin is the only thing that God has eternal hatred against. God does not resist a man because he's poor or ignorant or crippled or ill or despised by the world or limited in ability or because they seem to have little to offer. There's only one thing that alienates a person from God and that is sin.
- **Sin is hard work.** All sin causes is pain and yet people go through pain to do it. It's a strange compulsion our nature gives to us. Jeremiah 9:5 says, "They weary themselves committing iniquity." That is the essence of sin. It is so perverse that, ignoring the pain and the consequences, men go after evil and weary themselves in the process. People go to hell sweating.
- **Sin is bondage.** Sin brings us under the dominance of Satan. People think that they're free, really free to do whatever they want. But the only free person is one who has had his sin covered and is free to do what is RIGHT. A sinner is not free. He is under the total domination of sin and the control of Satan. But John 8:36 says, If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.
- **Sin is empty.** Paul says the sin of Adam has subjected the creature to vanity, subjected the creature to emptiness, to uselessness. There is something missing. There's great dissatisfaction. Solomon said, "Vanity of vanities, emptiness of emptiness, all is nothing, all is nothing." A man enters the world with a cry and leaves with a groan and nothing in between, only emptiness. Sin has torn man down from the place of honor. He has lost his dignity. He knows no lasting joy, no hope, no peace, no meaning.
- **Ultimately, the worst thing about sin is that it sends men to hell!** Charles Spurgeon said, "Man is hanging over the mouth of hell by a solitary plank and the plank is rotten."
- This is the ugliness of Christmas, but thank God, it ultimately brings us to the point of its beauty, because the beauty of Christmas is that Christ came into the world to save sinners!
- Ezekiel Hopkins many years ago said, "It is not man's cannots but his will nots. It is not impotency but obstinacy that destroys him." If men will not receive the cure, they will die of the sickness!
- No matter what you may think and what warm sentiments you may have about Christmas, unless you understand the ugliness of your own sin and embrace Jesus Christ who alone can save you from that sin, you don't have the slightest connection with Christmas! BUT YOU CAN HAVE IT, BECAUSE JESUS CAME TO SAVE YOU!