



The Gospel for Christmas by Brian Watson

We envision a congregation whose love for Jesus and one another leaves a clear and compelling witness for Christ.

Christmas is often a time of busyness, of things to do, places to be, and foods to eat. It's certainly a time of business, of buying and receiving gifts. With all the things that are happening in the month of December, there's one thing left behind: Jesus.

If someone is going to put Christ back into Christmas, it's going to have to be the Christian. We can't expect anyone else to do this. We should seriously consider celebrating Christmas differently than the world does, with fewer gifts, no Santa, and more of a focus on Jesus. The world is not a neutral place. (See James 4:4 and 1 John 2:15-17, for example.) Satan is trying to distract us from truth and our mission by enticing us to have a Christless Christmas. He's the father of lies (John 8:44) and the deceiver of the whole world (Rev. 12:9) and he would like nothing more than for Christians to buy into these lies. After all, he's making war on us (Rev. 12:17). We must fight hard to celebrate Christmas in a way that honors Christ and makes much of him. It's easy to get caught up in the world's Christmas traditions without thinking about what we're doing. We have to make an intentional effort to reject the idolatry of Yuletide to exalt Christ in all his glory.

One of the greatest ways to exalt Christ is to tell others about him. Even with all the distractions, Christmas remains a great time to tell people about our Lord and Savior. But in order to share the gospel, we must know the gospel and be prepared to share it in a simple and winsome way. The following outline of the gospel will be presented in four parts:

God, man (or human beings, if you want to be politically correct), Jesus, and response. I didn't invent this basic outline; it's been used by many, including Greg Gilbert in his recent *What Is the Gospel?* (I highly recommend that book, particularly because it is short and easy to read, and it also tells us what the gospel is not.) If you remember God, man, Jesus, and response, you'll be able to share the gospel. (I'll put a lot of Scripture references in endnotes, for future reference.)

1. God

Christianity is the story of God, who is eternal,¹ all-powerful,² all-knowing,³ omnipresent,⁴ good,⁵ perfect,⁶ and loving.⁷ He is also the creator.⁸ He created everything for his purposes, so that he would be glorified.⁹ When he created the universe, including our planet and everything on it, he made it good.¹⁰

Christianity tells us that we have a purpose in life: to love God and to worship him. We are not cosmic accidents or animals. The universe didn't create itself. The story of God explains why we exist and how the universe came to be.

2. Man

Christianity is also the story of human beings, who were made to know God and to reflect his greatness. (Part of being made in God's image¹¹ means we are somewhat like him, but it also means we were made to reflect God's glory, to represent him in his world.) We were made to be like God, and in some ways we are, but we have all rejected him and rebelled against him.¹² Even though we

see the evidence of God in all of nature, and even though we have a conscience that gives us a sense of right and wrong, we do not seek him or listen to what he says.¹³ Because the first human beings disobeyed God, nothing is the way God originally intended it. Because we disobey God, our lives are hard, we fight with each other, we get sick, and we die.¹⁴ Sin separates us from God, and it also separates us from each other and from the way we were originally made to me.¹⁵ Our problem is not so much individual sins, but the power of sin, which is like a disease that corrupts us.

Because we disobey God, he has the right to punish us.¹⁶ He is a perfect judge,¹⁷ and the evidence shows that all of us deserve punishment, which means eternal separation from God and anything good.¹⁸

Christianity tells us what is wrong with us and the world (sin). It tells us why things don't seem right or feel right. It tells why we are capable of doing great and noble things and committing horrible acts of selfishness and destruction. This problem is one that we can't fix. Our good deeds cannot compensate for our sin problem.¹⁹ No amount of education, medicine, or technology can fix us and this world.

3. Jesus

Christianity is, finally, the story of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is the really good news, because only Jesus can fix our problem of rebellion against God. He is the only one who can put us back together with God, and one day he will make all things new.²⁰

continued

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Matthew 1:21



The Gospel for Christmas (*continued*)

In the fullness of time, God sent his only Son.²¹ Because he is God, he is also eternal,²² but he became man when he was born of the virgin, Mary.²³ Unlike us, he lived a perfect life, obeying God the Father, and loving others.²⁴ Though we deserve punishment, Jesus took our punishment for us when he died on the cross.²⁵ Crucifixion was a horrible, painful death that the Roman Empire used for criminals. Jesus, our substitute, died such a horrible death because our disobedience to God had to be punished. Only Jesus' death can justify us, or make us innocent in God's eyes.²⁶

When Jesus rose from the grave on the third day after his death, he showed that his sacrifice on the cross paid the penalty for sin.²⁷ Jesus' resurrection gives us hope and shows us that one day all of his followers will have their own future resurrection.²⁸

Christianity tells us how the world and everything in it can be fixed. It gives us a purpose for living, it tells us the problem, and it gives us the solution.

4. Response

The good news of Christianity is that everyone who turns from their rebellion against God and loves, trusts, and obeys Jesus is forgiven of all wrongdoing. Everyone who believes this message is declared innocent by God. Everyone who believes this message will one day live forever in a perfect world, which Jesus will one day create when he returns.²⁹

In order to be part of this good news, you must stop living for yourself and

start living for God. This starts with believing that God is who he says he is in the Bible. It starts by trusting that Jesus' death pays the price for everything wrong you have ever done. And it starts when you follow him. This means learning about him by reading your Bible. It means praying to God and having a personal relationship with him. And it means becoming part of a community of other believers, a community we call church.

Being a Christian is not always easy. It means our lives will be permanently changed.³⁰ God changes us by giving us the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the one true God.³¹ The Spirit changes us from the inside out, by giving us new hearts, by guiding us, and by helping us follow Jesus.

Conclusion

Those who do not know Christ are lost. They are without hope in this world, and they are desperately trying to find something that will satisfy their souls. They search for meaning in consumerism, relationships, and achievements, but none of these things will satisfy. They keep drinking water that won't satisfy their spiritual thirst, and we know where to get the living water that will leave them to thirst no more (John 4:10-14). This saying may be trite, but it's true: the best gift you can give someone is Jesus.

Put Christ back into Christmas by telling them the gospel. You may not have all the answers, and you may not be the most eloquent speaker, but you have a priceless gift to give. It is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

- ¹ Ps. 90:2; Isa. 41:4; Rev. 1:8
- ² Gen. 18:14; Ps. 115:3; Matt. 19:26; Rev. 4:8.
- ³ Pss. 139:1-6; 147:4-5; Jer. 20:12; 1 John 3:20; Rev. 2:23.
- ⁴ 1 Kgs. 8:27-29. Ps. 139:7-12; Jer. 23:23-24.
- ⁵ 1 Chron. 16:34; 2 Chron. 5:13; Pss. 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; 136:1; Jer. 33:11; Mark 10:18.
- ⁶ Matt. 5:48.
- ⁷ Exod. 34:6-7; 1 John 4:8.
- ⁸ Gen. 1-2; Ps. 33:6,9; John 1:3; Acts 17:24-27; Col. 1:15-16; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 4:11.
- ⁹ Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16.
- ¹⁰ Gen. 1:31.
- ¹¹ Gen. 1:26-27; see also Ps. 8:3-8.
- ¹² Gen. 3; 1 Kgs. 8:46; Rom. 1:18-32; 3:23; 1 John 1:8. Consider also Eccl. 7:20, 29; Eph. 2:3.
- ¹³ Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-32; 2:14-16.
- ¹⁴ Gen. 3:16-19; Rom. 6:23.
- ¹⁵ Isa. 59:1-2; James 4:1-4.
- ¹⁶ Consider Exod. 34:6-7; Hab. 1:13.
- ¹⁷ Gen. 18:25; Ps. 7:11; Isa. 33:22; Rev. 16:4-5.
- ¹⁸ Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:5-12; Rev. 20:14; 21:8.
- ¹⁹ Isa. 64:6.
- ²⁰ Rev. 21:5.
- ²¹ John 3:16-17; Rom. 5:6-11; Gal. 4:3-7.
- ²² John 1:1-2; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1.
- ²³ John 1:14; Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-45.
- ²⁴ The four Gospels bear witness to this, but see also Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5.
- ²⁵ John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Deut. 21:22-23/ Gal. 3:13; Col. 2:13-14; Isa. 53:4-17/1 Pet. 2:22-25.
- ²⁶ Rom. 3:20-16; Gal. 2:16-17.
- ²⁷ See Rom. 4:24-25.
- ²⁸ 1 Cor. 15.
- ²⁹ There are many verses that indicate a proper response to Christ, including Acts 2:28; 3:19-21; 16:30-31; 17:30-31; 26:19-20. See also the entire book of 1 John. For verses on true faith, see Rom. 4:13-25; James 2:14-26; Heb. 11.
- ³⁰ John 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:17.
- ³¹ Rom. 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14. The Trinity is one God in three Persons.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Romans 1:16