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Getting Into the True Christmas Spirit Philippians 2:1-11

In 1732, Leonard Dober and David Nitschmann, two of the first Moravian missionaries boarded a ship in Copenhagen bound for St. Thomas. Their goal was to share the Good News of the gospel with the slaves on that Island. They were told they would not be allowed on the Island, and that no ship would take them there. So, as they left their full intent was to sell themselves into slavery so that they might live with the people and share Christ with them. As the ship pulled away from the dock it is said they cried out to the folk sending them off, "May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering". This became the rallying cry for Moravian missionaries for years to come. The story is often told that Dober and Nitschmann sold themselves into slavery and were never heard from again. In fact, the two intrepid missionaries never actually had to sell themselves into slavery. They were allowed to live on the island, working to support themselves, and in some great hardship spent several years ministering to the slaves. They met with some success, but the missionaries who followed in their steps would see thousands turn to Christ.

The testimony of Leonard Dober and David Nitschmann and their willingness to go to the extreme of selling themselves into slavery in order to share Christ with those on St. Thomas is but a small illustration of what Jesus did for us when He left Heaven and came as a baby in Bethlehem. Let us look at their example and that of our Savior so that we might be inspired to get into the true Christmas spirit.

This time of year, we hear a lot about getting into the Christmas spirit. The decorations. The music. The messages of ads and media – are all directed at putting us into this frame of mind. What is "the Christmas spirit"? Is it an overall sense of happiness? A general feeling of goodwill towards others – perhaps especially the less fortunate? Is it a longing and love for family and friends?

The Apostle Paul wrote for us a passage that describes exactly what the Christmas spirit is and encourages every person who follows Jesus Christ to "get into the Christmas spirit":

2...Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in

appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:2-11

Here in this passage Paul describe for us what is the true "Christmas spirit". Christmas is the time we celebrate when Jesus Christ, God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity came to earth as a baby in a manger. In doing so He took on human nature.

Verses 6-11 are the greatest description of what Jesus did for us when He was born in Bethlehem.

Consider His Lofty Position

He was in the form of God – He was (is) God!

He was equal with God. He was fully and completely equal with God. In John 17 Jesus spoke of the glory He shared with the Father before the world was even created (John 17:5).

Consider His Condescension

He emptied Himself. He laid aside the voluntary use and expression of His glories and power as God.

He took the form a bond-servant, the lowest of slaves. The Moravian missionaries were willing to leave the comforts of Germany and become slaves in St. Thomas. This doesn't begin to compare to that which Christ did to serve us!

He was made in likeness of men. He took upon Himself human nature and all that goes with it. He faced temptations. He grew hungry and tired. He experienced the emotional challenges we all face. This is perhaps that most amazing truth in all the Christian faith that though Christ was truly God, He took on human nature and was truly man as well.

He humbled Himself and became obedient, even to the point of death on the cross. What condescension and humility did He show that He would become man so that He could live, suffer and die, and rise again that our sins might be forgiven when we trust in Him.

In this Jesus demonstrates for us the true Christmas spirit. It is a spirit of humility that causes one to humble themselves, put others first, and sacrificially serve them.

Getting Into this Christmas Spirit

This is the greatest description of what Christ did for us, yet Paul shares this for a simple reason – to help us get into this true Christmas spirit. Notice verse 5: “***...Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus***”. Paul says have the same attitude, or “spirit”, that Christ had. In verses 2-4 Paul describes how this attitude would be expressed.

Be of the same mind.

Be united in spirit.

Be intent on one purpose.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit. With humility regard others better than yourself.

Do not merely look out for your own interest but for the interests of others.

What a description of the true Christmas spirit! Paul wrote these words to believers in the church

at Philippi. We have often said in our studies in the statehouse that the capitol is not a church. Yet if we seek to follow Christ, we must strive to determine how these truths apply to our service in the challenging environment of the capitol.

Other Aspects of Christmas Spirit

There are some other aspects of the Christmas spirit in Philippians 2.

A spirit of worship. When we read of what Christ did for us, we cannot help but be overwhelmed with a sense of worship to Him. We are amazed at what He did for us. We want to live for Him, fearing to sin against so great a love.

A spirit of joy and hope. When we read that He is now exalted by His Father and will one day rule and reign completely and be worshiped by all, we find a spirit of joy and hope.

A willingness to share the good news of the gospel. Jesus humbled Himself, took on human nature so that He might live and die in order to save us from our sin. The Moravian missionaries were willing to sell themselves into slavery in order to share that news. In 1934 John and Betty Stam lost their lives sharing Christ in China. In 1956 Jim Elliot and four of his colleagues were killed trying to tell the Huaorani people in Ecuador about Christ. In recent days, John Chau in North Sentinel and Charles Wesco in Cameroon both lost their lives seeking to share their faith. It may only cost us some discomfort and difficulty or perhaps even some ridicule but let us be willing to humble ourselves and sacrifice in order to share the good news with others – in our families, our communities, and even in the capitol!

We hope that as we consider how Christ humbled Himself, put us first, and sacrificially served us to provide our salvation, that this will help us get into the true Christmas spirit!

INTERIM BIBLE STUDY

Monday, December 10

12:00 Government Organization Conference Room
(Located on East Wing)