

Don't Miss This

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Date: 24 December 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Getting ready for Christmas, we decorated the sanctuary at the first of December and the choir who has been practicing for months, ramped up their efforts to get ready for the greatest Christmas musical presentation that I've ever been a part of.

Wasn't it wonderful? It really was. I spent a month talking about what Christmas really means and what we really get when Jesus came unto us.

And you have been decorating, you've been baking, you've been planning and shopping for at least a month and all for it to be right here on us now.

I tried to order some last minute things a week ago Sunday and I was told that my Prime package would arrive in a week. So much for that.

I ordered one package a couple of weeks ago and knew it wouldn't make it, or pretty sure it wouldn't make it. Don't, it's not going to make it, but it's coming, it's in the mail. So the question is, are you ready? And I don't want you to miss this. What a shame it would be if you missed it.

[1 : 2 8] I don't want you to miss getting the gift that you really cherish. Unless you got outlandish with your asking. And if so, you get nothing but a lump of coal.

However, if you ask within reason, man, I hope you get it. And I hope you get to give the gift that you really wanted to give.

And I hope the response is as grand as you hope it is. Christmas gets fun when we get more concerned about giving a good gift than getting a good gift.

And don't miss that. I hope you get to celebrate with those that you love. For some, Christmas is tough. Because traditions change and because we lose those that we love and with that we lose some traditions.

And then sickness messes up planned events sometimes as well. We ate Thanksgiving at the Waffle House one year. Because we were eating with loved ones and one of those beloved got sick.

[2 : 3 8] And it was the one who was toting most of the meal. And so she canceled Thanksgiving. I wanted her to feel better, but I was stunned. It was in the day when America honors Thanksgiving and everything closes down so that true Americans can eat like gluttons and fall asleep in front of an NFL football game.

Only the Waffle House, to our knowledge, was opened on Thanksgiving. And that was only for the un-American heathen. And we joined them that year. We were elbowing through the heathens to get a gourmet meal fixed right in front of our eyes.

And then to be called sweetie by someone who had it tattooed on her arm. It's precious. A lot different than Mama's table. But sickness does that kind of thing.

Rips through you, not only through your gut, but it also rips through your plans. And I'm sure it has for many this year as well. But if you stay well and the rest of you stay well, don't miss this.

It's Christmas. I don't want you to miss the decor and the lights. When you get overstuffed with food and gifts on Christmas, go ride down Earl Street in Greenville.

[3 : 54] And see the large Santas in the yard. Or ride by Chanticleer across from the hospital. And see the large Nutcrackers. There's another neighborhood that's got all large inflatable snowmen.

Go and take a ride through there. And look scornfully at the houses that did not participate. Who are darkened except for their own Christmas tree. But don't miss this.

I expose my children to Tiny Town when we move back. And they can't get enough of it. Just one word for it.

It's amazing. It's indescribable. That's all I can say. Don't miss this. But even with all of that, if you're not careful, you'll still miss Christmas.

Because even with Christmas everywhere, it can still be missed. Christmas really isn't lights and sound and songs and decor or even gifts.

[4 : 56] Although there's nothing wrong with any of that. And I like it all. But in the midst of that, we could be like Ahaz. King Ahaz missed it all.

He was a mess. He was the king of Judah and two countries had teamed up against Judah and were coming after him. And he didn't know where to turn, so he decided to turn to Assyria.

Not a good choice. That would be like America relying on China or Russia. And I encourage us not to do that. Ahaz knew he was in a mess.

And Isaiah chapter 7 verse 2 tells us that he and his people were shaking like a leaf on a tree in a robust wind. God told Isaiah to go meet Ahaz and that he would find him checking the water supply.

That's a man in panic, my friend. You're only as good as your water supply. The man was a mess. Isaiah told him to calm down.

[6 : 09] His enemies would not succeed and they didn't. Isaiah, excuse me, Assyria crushed the enemies. They made Judah submissive to them for generations and so weakened the nation that it led to a downfall by another enemy a little over 100 years later.

However, in the midst of all of that, Isaiah says to Ahaz, there's more going on than this and you don't need to miss it. God is up to something bigger.

And he says it this way. Isaiah chapter 7 verse 14, Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

Now this didn't happen in Ahaz's lifetime. This was bigger than his life. It was bigger than his reign. It was bigger than his nation. It didn't come for hundreds of years later. But this sign that God would give him came just like he said it would.

Ahaz missed it and it led to his downfall and to those around him. And now for us, this sign of God came a long time ago. And it is easy to miss because distraction can cause us to miss it.

[7 : 35] The very thing that marks the season can cause us to miss it. We get so busy thinking about our special event or thinking about our special dish or thinking about our special gift or thinking about our special loved one that we miss the overall gist of what the season is really about.

So let me show you what this verse shares with us, what it really is. The first part of that tells us that God gives before we even ask.

God told Ahaz to ask for a sign. And Ahaz refused to do that. He was afraid.

He didn't want to ask anything of God except to bail him out of the situation. And so he didn't do what he was told to do and he refused to ask for the sign. He disobeyed God even more than he already had.

And he who had a wretched past. God gave him a sign, as this scripture declares, without him even asking. That's the grace of God. The grace of God gives us opportunities that we don't even ask for.

[8 : 49] He gives grace without us even initiating the contact. He's the one that initiates it. Every time he comes to us before we even know we need him.

It also tells us that God gives before we are even prepared. It says a virgin will conceive. That had never been done before and it's never happened since.

And Mary was not ready for that. Joseph, who she was engaged to, he wasn't ready for it either. And that's because salvation through Christ, which is the hope that comes through this virgin birth, was not made by human strategy.

It was made by the miraculous hand of God. There's nothing they contributed to it to make it happen. The Spirit of God made this happen.

That's the key. There was no way that they were ready for that. And God didn't wait until they got ready. God never waits until we're ready. He never waits until we're prepared.

[10 : 01] How do you prepare to meet our God? How do you prepare to properly present ourselves to him? How do we do that? We can't do that.

We're incapable of doing that. All of us. If you think that you will fully embrace Christ as your Savior when you get ready, I got news for you.

You'll never get ready. He comes to us. That's the message of Christmas. He comes to us as we are.

God gives before we're prepared. That's the amazing grace of God. And lastly, this verse tells us that God gives before we even know it.

Emmanuel means God with us. He came to us before almost everyone even recognized it. God announced it to shepherds in the field through a chorus of angels.

[11 : 04] I bet that got their attention. He gave a sign to those that put their trust in the stars. That's what the wise men did.

And then he came to the humblest of means, and that's the shepherds that I am sure you're well aware of. He took the world by storm without them even knowing it.

And that's the way he comes to us. Elijah was even looking for him one time. He saw a great and strong wind, but that was not how God came to him.

He saw the earthquake, and that was not how God came to him. He saw a fire, but that was not how God came to him. God came to Elijah in a low whisper, a still, small voice.

And that's often how he comes. Not in the tinsel, not in the lights. Not in the huge inflatables that are cool to see.

[12 : 13] Not in the elaborately wrapped gifts. Not in the rush to peek under the tree. He comes in an animal's stable.

Through a babe wrapped in barn rags. And lying in a stone trough. He comes in the stillness of the night.

With a new mom just taking it in. Luke 2 verse 19 says, But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.

It is my hope this Christmas that you can do the same. Oh, folks. Don't miss this.

Enjoy the tree. Enjoy the treats. Enjoy the loved ones. Enjoy the gifts. But don't miss this.

[13 : 27] It's not abrupt. He is not rude. He gives to us. But nothing like we would expect.

Don't miss Jesus. This Christmas. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, I love you. And I thank you for the love that you have for us.

That not only did you come to us through a virgin as a babe, but God, you come to us in our time of need.

You come to us in conviction. You come to us even through Christmas celebration. May we, oh God, respond to you as you speak to us and help us in the midst of all of the festivities to not miss you.

In Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen.