

### **Longing for Christmas to Never End**

What part of Christmas do you wish would never end – the music, the gift-giving, the food, the decorations? Anybody in your neighborhood leave their Christmas decorations up all year? Does that annoy you? Have you heard about Neil Olson in Wausau, Wisconsin, who didn't take down his Christmas tree for 44 years? And it was a live tree or at one time it had been a live tree. It stood in a corner of his small house with the same ornaments, same tinsel, and same electric lights for 44 years. After about the tenth year, he was afraid to turn on the lights because he said, "I was afraid the thing would blow up like a bomb!"

Why didn't he take it down? Was it just laziness? No, Neil was longing for something. Neil had six sons and he told them that he was going to leave the tree up until all six of them sat around that tree with him one Christmas. They all came to see him separately but never found a way to all get there on the same Christmas. So, until 2014 when Neil died, the tree stayed up.<sup>1</sup>

Is there something you want to see happen in your life and you're hoping that the power of Christmas might bring it about? Well, the Bible does tell us that there definitely is power in Christmas but it's not a "magic genie" kind of power. Do you want to know what kind of power Christmas has? Let's see what the Bible says. First ...

#### **I. Because of Christmas, Jesus' Kingship Will Never End.**

God has made significant promises in the Bible. In fact, they're more than just promises; they're covenants. I'm making a distinction between a "promise" and a "covenant." Here's why: when we say we "promise" to do something, it's not the same as when God says He promises to do something. When God promises, He ALWAYS does exactly what He says He will do. Always. When we promise to do something, we try to do it but sometimes things happen that are out of our control, which prevent us from keeping the promise. But with God, nothing is out of His control. So, He ALWAYS keeps His promises. And to distinguish God's promises from our promises, I'm using the Bible word "covenant" to refer to God's promises.

Now, with God, there are two kinds of covenants – conditional and unconditional. Conditional covenants are like the Ten Commandments. God said to the Israelites that He pledged to be their God IF they kept the commandments. If they didn't stay loyal to Him, He wouldn't continue to protect them, bless them, or live with them. That's a conditional covenant.

But God also made unconditional covenants with individuals and with groups. An unconditional covenant meant that God would do what He promised no matter what the individual or group of people did. Even if they were disobedient and turned their backs on Him, He would still fulfill the covenant. And what are some examples of God's unconditional covenants? Here are four...

- God's Covenant with Noah was unconditional. He promised that never again would there be a worldwide flood. (Gen. 9:8-17)
- God's Covenant with Abraham regarding the land of Israel was unconditional. No matter what Israel did, God promised that the land would one day be theirs again. (Gen. 15:9-21) [This is where Reformed Theologians lose their way and fall onto the path of Replacement Theology, which says that Christians have replaced Israel in God's plans. This can't be true because God's promise of it is unconditional.]

- **God's Unconditional Covenant with David** that a descendent of his would become the ultimate and eternal King of not only Israel but of all believers in Jehovah. (2 Sam. 7:8-16)
- **God's New Covenant of a New Heart** is unconditional for Israel and anyone who has sinned that God will provide a way for their sin to be forgiven. (Jer. 31:31-34)

Now, why do I take you through all that? Because Ps. 89 is based on God's unconditional covenant with David. Listen to verses 3-4 with that in mind:

**You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one;  
I have sworn to David my servant:  
'I will establish your offspring forever,  
and build your throne for all generations.'" (Ps. 89:3-4)**

And what did the angel Gabriel say to Mary? He said... (Lk. 1:31b-33)

**"... you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."**

And why should this matter to you? Because through the New Covenant of grace, even Gentiles (non-Jews) like me can claim Jesus as my King because I'm in His kingdom. And what does God's covenant with David promise about Jesus' kingship? Three times in the first four verses of Ps. 89, we find the word "forever," referring to some part of this Son of David's kingship. In other words, Jesus' kingship will last forever. When Jesus rose from the dead, His eternal kingship was ratified. You see, we know something as fact that the shepherds had to believe by faith. We KNOW that the baby in the manger would prove to be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! (Phil. 2:8-11)

**And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

And how long will His kingship last? It will last forever and ever. And if He's the king forever, then His covenants, His promises, His rule will last forever as well. That's the first part of Christmas that will never end. But there's a second eternal part of Christmas. It's this...

## **II. Because of Christmas, Our Citizenship in Heaven Never Ends.**

If Jesus is your king, then you are a citizen of His kingdom. The apostle Paul said...

**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God ... (Eph. 2:19)**

And remember that if you've committed your life to Jesus, your citizenship has already begun. Which means that you're a citizen of heaven NOW and an expat here on earth. So, the old country/gospel song is affirming seminary-level theology when it proclaims:

*This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' thru.  
My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.  
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,  
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.*

Now, we need to consider for a minute what it means to have our citizenship in heaven. First of all, it means we have protection when things get crazy. When I travel in another country, I carry a passport. If I feel endangered in any way, I can call or I can go to the American embassy or consulate for advice or protection. Why? Because I'm an American citizen.

God provides the same spiritual protection for us. Through His Word, He advises us of dangerous conditions and places in this “foreign land” we’re living in. And He promises to protect us when we are about His business. Speaking of Jesus, His spiritual ambassador in this world, God says in Ps. 89:

**“And I will make him the firstborn,  
the highest of the kings of the earth.  
My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,  
and my covenant will stand firm for him.  
I will establish his offspring forever ...”** (Ps. 89:27-29a)

Do you understand that we’re the “offspring”? This is not a promise of total physical protection, though God often does protect us physically. But the covenant being spoken of here is speaking of an eternal protection. Many Christians have died serving Christ, just as Jesus Himself died. What is promised isn’t physical protection but physical resurrection and being “established” as an honored citizen in Christ’s eternal kingdom. That’s a higher-level protection.

But secondly, even if we flip and turn to the dark side, God promises that He will not abandon us. Listen to this:

**“If his children forsake my law  
and do not walk according to my rules,  
if they violate my statutes  
and do not keep my commandments,  
then I will punish their transgression with the rod  
and their iniquity with stripes,  
but I will not remove from him my steadfast love  
or be false to my faithfulness.  
I will not violate my covenant  
or alter the word that went forth from my lips.  
Once for all I have sworn by my holiness;  
I will not lie to David.  
His offspring shall endure forever ...”** (Ps. 89:30-36a)

Are you understanding the incredible depth of God’s covenant yet? This is almost beyond comprehension. God is telling you, if you commit yourself to Him but then, you use your own free will to cheat on that commitment and go over for a period of time to aid and abet the forces of God’s enemy, God still will not abandon you. Yes, there will be consequences. You’ll have to endure the pain of realizing that you actually helped the Devil deceive people and lure them away from salvation, but God will not abandon you to His enemy. Where on the face of the earth is there an organization or a military unit that would treat a traitor to their cause like that?

But Peter did that, didn’t he? In Jesus’ darkest, most vulnerable moments, Peter abandoned Him. In fact, it says that all the disciples went over and identified with the enemies of Jesus. And the next time Jesus spoke to Peter and the other disciples, what did He say? If someone betrayed you, what would you say to them the very next time you saw them? “What just happened? Why did you abandon me?” Isn’t that what we would say? But what did Jesus say to His closest friends who betrayed Him? He stood in their midst, not ten paces away, in their midst, eyeball to eyeball, and He said:

**“Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.  
Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. (John 20:19-20)**

J. Vernon McGee says that whenever the supernatural touches the natural the message is always “Peace” or “Fear not.” It’s true in the Christmas story isn’t it? God’s message, Jesus’ message to sinful traitors isn’t, “What’s wrong with you?” No, it’s always “Peace be with you.” And this too is a part of Christmas that never ends. Until time on earth is over, the message to every person living on the dark side will be, “Peace be with you. Come home.”

Do you need to hear that message this Christmas? Well, Jesus sent me to speak His message of peace to you. Will you receive it? Will you acknowledge that you need His peace? Will you admit you’ve been at war with Him and need to ‘come home’? That’s a very Christmas-like thing to do. It’s a profoundly powerful thing to do. If you’re already a citizen, the welcome mat is out. If you’ve never become a citizen of heaven, peace is offered. But do it now. No one has a guarantee of having a tomorrow. Ask Denise D’Ascenzo’s family.

But there’s one more important part of Christmas that will never end. It’s this...

### **III. Because of Christmas, the Impact of Your Life Will Never End**

We’ve seen in Ps. 89 that “*his throne ... it shall be established forever.*” (v.36, 37) But when will Christ’s Kingdom begin? Or has it already begun?

The Kingdom of Christ began at Christmas. The day Jesus was born was His inauguration day. Gabriel told Mary that at Jesus’ birth, the Lord God “*will give him the throne of his father David.*” (Lk. 1:32) And when the Magi came looking for Jesus, what did they ask of Herod?

... **“Where is he who has been born (past tense) king of the Jews? ...”** (Matt. 2:2)

So, Jesus’ Kingdom began at His birth; that was His inauguration. Do you see why the angels were so excited? They scared the shepherds half to death, but the king’s inauguration was happening!

So, Christ’s kingdom began at His birth, but when do we enter His kingdom? Well, Jesus explained this to Nicodemus by saying: (John 3:3, 5)

**“... unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”**

Jesus is describing what he called being “born again.” It’s not a process, it’s the single moment when we are born spiritually, just like there’s a single moment when we are born physically. And that moment happens when we admit our sin, confess it to Jesus and He forgives us. That’s the instant when we enter the kingdom of God.

And once we’re in the kingdom, what do we do? Back to Jesus with His disciples the day He rose from the dead. After He reinstated them, made peace with them, what did He do next? He gave them a mission to accomplish. Listen ...

**Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”** (John 20:21-23)

Now, let me explain this mission. Did He actually empower them to forgive or NOT forgive people’s sins? No. The truth for some has been lost in the translation. The phrases “*they are forgiven*” and “*it is withheld*” are grammatically perfect-tense verbs in Greek. A clearer translation into our English would be, “*they have been forgiven*” and “*it has been withheld.*” The perfect tense gives the sense of completed past action with continuing results in the present. My ESV Study Bible explains it this way:

The idea is not that individual Christians or churches have authority on their own to forgive or not forgive people, but rather that as the church proclaims the gospel message

of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit, it proclaims that those who believe in Jesus have their sins forgiven, and that those who do not believe in him do not have their sins forgiven – which simply reflects what God in heaven has already done.<sup>2</sup>

The mission we are sent out to accomplish is this, “*to proclaim the gospel message of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit.*” Remember Neil Olson, the man who kept his Christmas tree up for 44 years? What if, rather than threatening his sons with his Christmas tree to get them to come home, he had simply invited them to come with the offer, “Please come so that I can assure you that all is forgiven”? Who could resist such an offer?

Whom do you know this Christmas who needs to know that forgiveness is available? If you’re having trouble making that offer to someone, have you received it yourself? This is the key to causing Christmas never to end. It’s every Christian’s mission and great privilege. To whom could you proclaim not just “Merry Christmas,” but also “All is forgiven”? If you proclaim the gospel of forgiveness not only will you and others have a merry Christmas, but the impact of your life will never end. Let’s pray ...

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<sup>1</sup> “Dad keeps Christmas tree up 40 years until sons come home,” associated press, Dec. 26, 2014

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<sup>2</sup> ESV Study Bible, John 20:23 footnote, p. 2070