The Reason for Christmas

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Let me invite you to turn to 1 Timothy chapter 1.

! 1 Timothy chapter 1. As we think about the reason for Christmas, why do we celebrate? Why do we remember in this way?
Why do we sing the songs that we do? Why do we take time every year to focus our attention on the birth of Christ? And even a more important question is, why did Christ come in the first place? What really is the reason for Christmas? And we understand Christmas is a time of celebration. This is a season of family.
This is a season of joy. We talk about joy. We read Scriptures about joy. We sing of joy, and rightly so. And I hope that for each of you this week, that it is a week of joy.
[1:07] I hope you're able to be with your family. I hope you're able to spend time with those closest to you. And I hope there's a time of encouragement and laughter, and that it is a week truly of joy.

That each of you, I pray, can enjoy that part of Christmas this week. And I always want to take a moment to give voice to the reality that, while it is a season of joy, that does not stop, at the same time, from there being a season that can be hard.
It's not one or the other. For so many families in our congregation that have lost loved ones, or for any number of reasons, that Christmas season can be both a time of joy, and it can be a time that's difficult.
It's not just one or the other. As John mentioned a moment ago, for some in our church, this is your first Christmas without a spouse. And we think of you.
We remember you and are aware of that reality. A number in our church, that's true for them this Christmas. Others of you, this is your first Christmas without a parent, and some without a child.
[2:25] I just want you to know that if that's the situation you're in, that you're remembered. And that doesn't mean it's not also a season of joy. That doesn't mean you don't also celebrate.

But as happens with humans, as being a human being in this world, there are moments where we experience all those range of emotions.
Life can be complicated. Emotions can be complex at times. And that's true for many of you this Christmas season. Great joy and also loss.
And it's not just the loss of a loved one that can make this season hard. There's other life factors. Some of you are brand new to this city, and we're glad that you're here and so grateful you've joined our church.
But for some that are new to our church, you're here new because you left somewhere else that had been home to you for a long time. And that can make the holidays difficult. Or maybe someone in your family has recently moved away, and that can make it difficult.
[3:34] And as always, any kind of relationships with a child or a parent that may not be what you dream they would be can be heightened, and that struggle can be increased at times like Christmas.

And again, it doesn't mean you don't enjoy the season. It doesn't mean there's not laughter and hope, and we feel all those things, but this can be a complicated season for so many.
And if you are today thinking to yourself that you must be the only person in this beautiful sanctuary with the beautiful music that doesn't just feel completely on the Christmas mountaintop high, just understand you are surrounded by hundreds of people who feel and experience so much of what you do.

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And while Christmas is a season of joy and a season of celebration, for others it may not be that it's the grief of a loved one that you've lost.
It may just be that life itself this year has seemed a little flat. Maybe financially it's been a difficult year, or maybe you lost a job this year, or maybe you still have a job that you wish you could find something different.
[4:55] Sometimes our life, our year, a season we're in just feels kind of flat, and if that's the case, maybe this Christmas season for you feels a little flat.

It doesn't mean you don't enjoy it. It doesn't mean you're not having fun with your family. It just maybe feels like something's just not exactly how you wish that it were, not exactly how it used to be.
After all, we live real lives. We're real people in a real world. Things aren't always perfect. We understand that. And while this is a season of joy, and for some, a season of loss, there's another word that sometimes describes this time of year.
Maybe not so much exactly this week as we focus on Christmas, but next week as we come to the end of the year, and for many people, they evaluate their year, and evaluate their life, and think about the new year.
There's another term that sometimes can describe how people feel at the end of the year, and that's the word regret. Sometimes we come to the end of the year, and there's things that we regret.
[6:09] Maybe there were goals you had set for 2025, and you didn't follow through with those things. Maybe this was a year you had planned to make some changes in your life, and that didn't happen.

Maybe this was the year that you wanted to get your finances under control, or you wanted to seek to restore broken relationships. Maybe as a student in school, you had planned to be more studious, and more careful, and to make better grades, and you come now to the end of another semester, and maybe that didn't happen.
Maybe for some, it's a time of regret spiritually, because there are certain sins, and temptations that have been defeating you, and you had truly hoped, and planned, and desire to gain victory over those things.
And here you come to the end of the year, and it hasn't happened. Maybe it's a time of year you evaluate your life, and there is regret, because you feel like maybe you've missed a lot of opportunities.
Too much television. Too much television. Not enough television. Not enough serving. Too much wasted time. Not enough living by priority.
[7:35] Regret can be something that we feel this time of year. And I just want you to understand that as you think through this Christmas season, there's always the temptation to feel like everything has to be perfect.

That Christmas would be all about a feeling, and an emotion. All about something that you create with your hands, and the perfect meal, and the perfect house, and the perfect schedule.
And most of us that have raised kids know what it's like to have everything planned perfectly, only to have yet another Christmas with a sick child.
Or another Christmas where one of the parents is sick. Or somebody can't come into Christmas that was supposed to because of illness. And no matter how hard we try to make things exact, and perfect, and all put together, life just many times doesn't allow that.
Many times, the imperfections of life just find a way to take place again, and at this time of year, we may feel those imperfections a little more keenly.
[8:51] And as we celebrate, and we enjoy, and we hope, and sometimes we hurt, and we grieve, and sometimes we regret.

All of these are what it means to be a human being. All of these are what it means to live in this world, and yet, I want us to make sure this morning that we don't substitute a man-made feeling at Christmas for what Christmas is really all about.
But instead, that we would be reminded that what Christmas is really all about is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, most of us in this sanctuary would affirm that, we believe that, we would say yes to that, and yet, in reality, if we're not careful, so many times, it can be the imperfections of the season, or the imperfections of our life, that tend to dominate our thinking at Christmas, rather than putting our attention on the truest meaning of this Christmas season.

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My hope for this morning is not to cause you to ignore your emotions, or ignore what you're going through in life, but rather to interpret everything you experience through the lens of the truth of why we celebrate Christmas.
In 1 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 15, it says, this saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.
[10:48] This is, after all, what this season is all about. This is what every single day of our life as Christians should be about, is the remembrance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

And that doesn't mean that we don't still enjoy our family gatherings, and that doesn't mean that we don't still grieve loved ones we've lost. What it should mean, though, is that through any high or low, that there is a perspective, a balance to our life to which we remind ourselves that the reason we celebrate Christmas is because Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
That's why He came. And ultimately, for us to rightly enjoy anything, we have to know the reason for it.
when someone gives you a gift, if you don't understand what that gift is for, you will not be able to enjoy it to the fullest.
If somebody were to give you at Christmas time a ring, maybe your husband, ladies, gives you a ring, and you say to yourself, what a great hammer this is.
[12:23] I can use this to hammer a nail into a wall. The ring looks the same, the ring costs the same, it will not be enjoyed rightly. You've got to understand the reason for which it was given.

In our house, we've got a digital picture frame filled with pictures of our grandbabies and every morning, that turns on, it's the first thing I see in our room when it comes on and there's pictures of our grandbabies.
But if we did not have pictures loaded on it, it might just seem to be some kind of a paperweight or some kind of a unique decoration.
And without pictures loaded on that, it would be of very little value. Same gift, same look, same design, but not rightly enjoyed.
To fully understand and appreciate and enjoy a gift that is given, it must be rightly understood of what it's intended to do. Which is why all around the world, there will be millions of people who in one sense celebrate Christmas.
[13:40] will even sing the same songs that we may sing and may even go to the same kinds of buildings on Christmas Eve or in churches today, and yet, if they don't understand the meaning behind the gift, it cannot be properly and rightly appreciated.

to see Christmas as merely a time to gather with family would be to miss the point.
To see Christmas as merely a time to exchange gifts and cards would be to fail to rightly appreciate all that Christmas is, not because those things are wrong or bad, but because none of those things are the ultimate reason why we celebrate Christmas.
Christ came into the world to save sinners. Any celebration of Christmas where that is not the heart and the meaning behind it is to miss the very purpose of the gift.
So I want us to think for a few minutes this morning here from 1 Timothy, chapter 1, about what Christmas means for us. What it means for us.
[15:13] Now I sincerely hope that you have a great week of celebration with your family. That's a good thing. I sincerely hope you're able to experience the smiles of your children and grandchildren.

That's a great thing. I hope you're able to enjoy some time off of work and get some extra time of rest and fellowship with people closest to you.
Those are good things. But none of those things are the heart behind the deepest meaning of Christmas.
Christmas is 1 Timothy 1, verse 15. To understand what Christ has done for us.
So, number one, Christmas is about God keeping His promise. Let's read this greater passage together to see all that is being said here.
[16:12] 1 Timothy 1, verse 12, says, I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to a service.

Though, formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent opponent, but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

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And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus, the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.
Christmas is about God keeping His promise. A Redeemer had been promised all the way back in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3, verse 15.
God had promised to give a new heart to His people. God had promised to make a way for sinners. God had promised to send His chosen one, the Messiah.
[17:18] The people had longed for the Redeemer to come, and now at the first Christmas, that promise has been kept, the prophecies fulfilled.

Christmas is about God keeping His promise. promise. If Christmas reminds us that our God is a promise-keeping God, then we ought to be encouraged by all the promises God has made to us. Christmas reminds us that God keeps His promise so we really can believe Romans 8 when it tells us that God works all things together for good for those who love Him.
You may be going through something right now in your life or in your family that feels very painful and nothing about it feels good and nothing about it feels like it has a purpose.
Nothing about it feels like there's anything redemptive there. But remember, Christmas reminds us that God keeps His promise and God has promised to work together all things for good for those who love Him.
[18:33] God promises to be at work in your life continually. He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it, Philippians 1 says. God is still at work in your life.

He hasn't given up on you. He hasn't left you. He is at work in your life. The Lord has promised to be with us.
And maybe today you feel alone. You may feel alone because you're in a new city. You may feel alone because you're in a new church. You may have lived in the same house and been a part of the same church for 30 years surrounded by hundreds of people you know and yet still you feel alone.
The Lord promises to be with His people. And Christmas reminds us that God keeps His promise. So be encouraged, dear friend, that our God is still with you.
God promises to hear the prayers of His people. And He still hears yours. Maybe you find yourself in a season where it's hard to pray.
[19:46] Maybe you find yourself in a season so filled with loss and grief or confusion or doubt or uncertainty. It may be that you have grown prayerless.

And can I just encourage you, dear friend, Christmas is a time to remind us that God keeps His promises. And one of His promises is that we have the blessing and gift to pray directly to our Father.
Take advantage of that gift. gift. If in your life, in your heart, you've grown prayerless, you don't have to earn your way back, you just come before His presence even this day in prayer and our God hears His people.
Christmas reminds us that God keeps His promise. There's something else that we celebrate at Christmas though, and that is that Christmas is all about forgiveness. Christmas is all about forgiveness.
We've looked at verse 15 that Christ came into the world to save sinners. Let me remind you, this is the heart of the gospel, that Christ saves sinners. So, if today you feel the weight of your sin, and if today you're just so aware maybe of how short you've fallen of what you should be this year, can I just remind you, Christ came to save sinners.
[21:12] Not perfect people, there are none but Christ. He came to save sinners. Now, we shouldn't make light of our sin, and we shouldn't pretend that sin is no big deal, but neither should we think to ourselves that our sin somehow would disqualify us from the grace of God.

This is the very reason why Christ came into the world, is to save sinners. And you may think to yourself, well, God may save some sinners, but maybe you think your sin is just too much.
But let's look again at verse 15. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.
Christ. Paul knows his own heart. He's aware of his own sin. He's aware of his past.
And Scripture reminds us here that even one who would reject the gospel if by grace they would repent and believe, they would be saved.

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[22:28] even one who has lived a life so filled with sin and rebellion, if by grace they would repent and believe, they would find forgiveness.

Verse 16 says, but I receive mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example.
your salvation is a way to show the greatness of Christ. If Christmas is all about God keeping his promise and Christmas is all about forgiveness, then let's understand the reason why we have been given the gift of salvation and ultimately the reason for it is to display the greatness of Christ.
Go back to verse 14. the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with faith and love. Christmas is all about God's grace overflowing.
I hope this Christmas season you experience that. I hope you experience the overflowing grace of God and the overflowing love of God.
[23:53] And I'll just tell you this, as one who loves this season and as one who loves the decorations and the gifts and the sights and the sounds of Christmas, I love all that stuff.

Let me tell you this, if you don't understand and experience the overflowing love of the Lord Jesus Christ, there's not enough decorations you can put up to make this season what it should be.
This is a wonderful time of year to be with your friends and your family, to exchange gifts. Those things are wonderful things. those things will never make this season what it needs to be if you don't experience the overflowing love of God.
And my friends, it takes time in the Word and time in prayer and time in personal devotion and worship to get your mind set on the overflowing love of God.
God, our world is a rushed one. Our lives are busy and hectic. One of the good things that this season can bring for us, hopefully, maybe some extra days home, some days off of school, some days off of work to slow the pace, but we've got so much at our disposal now that even our time of rest can be filled with so much busyness.
[25:32] I just want to encourage you at some point in this Christmas season to find some quiet, peaceful, extended times to just take in the overflowing love and grace of Jesus.

peace. It takes time. It takes quiet. It also takes purpose.
You don't stumble into times of worship and prayer. You prioritize times of worship and prayer. And if this Christmas season you feel like something's just missing, could it be that what's missing is your time before the Lord all by yourself, just worshiping and thanking Him for His overflowing love and grace.
Christmas is all about God's forgiveness. forgiveness. And as you experience His forgiveness, it may be that what you need to do as you think about the forgiveness God has given you is extend forgiveness to somebody else.
Maybe somebody this year has hurt you. Maybe somebody this year has not been a good friend or someone has forgotten you or someone has kind of left you behind.
[27:06] It could be that you're holding on to anger and bitterness, refusing to let go what someone else has done to you. And if Christmas is all about God's forgiveness to us, it would make sense the way that we could reflect His character this Christmas is to then give forgiveness to one who has hurt us.

Easier said than done, I know. But if Christmas is all about forgiveness, then maybe that we need to give that in turn as God has given to us.
There is another part in this text that I want to draw your attention to and that's a third reality that Christmas is about change. Go back to verse 13. He says, though formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent opponent.
Paul, before he was a Christian, was one who was against the church, against the gospel, opposing the things of Jesus Christ.
He says, that's who I formerly was. And yet, by God's grace, as he sent Jesus Christ into the world, the grace of Jesus took hold of Paul's heart and changed him.
[28:38] Back to verse 13. I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent opponent. Note this, but I received mercy.

mercy. This is what Christmas is all about. The change that mercy brings to us. Christmas is about change because Christmas is about the gospel, and the gospel is about changing us, taking us from death to life, from darkness to light.

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My friends, please understand the gospel message, not the one that you hear from the world, the one that you read in the scripture. Jesus did not come into the world to make you more successful at your dreams.
Jesus did not come to help you fulfill your goals. Jesus is not some secret that you've uncovered to help you achieve your agenda.
The gospel is about giving you a new heart. with new affection, and new passion, and new dreams.
[29:58] If you go back to the example of Paul, he was a blasphemer, he persecuted Christians, he was violent, and yet, in grace, God forgave him.

And the evidence that he has been saved is that he says, I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an opponent, but he has been changed by mercy.
Now, Christians, we're still imperfect. We still have an unredeemed flesh. We still have temptations outside of us and temptations inside of us.
We still sin. Praise God for his grace that washes over us, but it should be true that you can look at your life and see the evidence of the change that salvation has brought to you.
I'm not asking if your life is perfect. It's not that you should have perfection, but you certainly should have a new direction in your life.
[31:08] And if the mercy of God and the grace of God has truly taken hold of you, there will be evidence of change. And as you come to the end of a year, it's natural and fitting and healthy to consider what habits should you change as you go to a new year, and where can you live with more wisdom.

And we think about things like diet and exercise and finances and all those things are perfectly good to get in order. If those things are out of order, it's hard for us to live the life that we need to be living.
But while you're evaluating all those things, don't neglect the weightier, more important matters. Are you growing in faithfulness to the Lord?
Are you growing in your knowledge of the Word? Are you growing in your obedience to the Word? Are you growing in forgiveness? There's change that should be a part of our life.
And so often when we get to this time of year, we tend to look at changes we want to make, and it's not that those changes are bad or sinful, they're just so small compared to eternal matters.
[32:33] Paul says, here's who I used to be, but mercy changed me. This is why Christmas is all about change, because if, verse 15, Christ came in the world to save sinners, then if, verse 13, mercy changes us, we ought to see the evidence of that change in our life.

Christmas is about God keeping His promise, and Christmas is about forgiveness, Christmas is about change, and fourthly, Christmas is about giving glory to God.
Look at verse 16, I received mercy for this reason that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life.
Key in verse 17, to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.
Amen. Verse 17 reminds us that only God is worthy of our worship because only God is all wise and all powerful and full of glory.
[33:54] It is the character of God, the presence of God that drives His heart to praise. And so, you put all of it together, the Scripture says the reason for Christmas is that Christ came into the world, that's what we celebrate at Christmas, the birth, the incarnation of Christ, He came into the world physically to be our sin payment, to give us forgiveness, to bring about life change in us, and therefore the only response that would make sense for us is to give glory to God.

You cannot rightly understand or celebrate or enjoy this Christmas season if in your heart you are not giving glory to God.
If you're going to truly enjoy this season, you're going to have to have a heart set on the glory of God.
God. And this is what the world misses entirely. The Scripture tells us He is immortal.
He lives and reigns forever. Invisible, not limited in space and time. The only God. No one is like Him. And to this God, verse 17, be honor and glory forever.
[35:23] Please notice this. God's grace led to Paul's gratitude. God's grace led to Paul's gratitude.

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So let me just speak heart to heart for a moment. Christmas season when you are young, usually, is all about joyful anticipation.
And some years, when you're young, you get what you hoped you would get. And some years you don't. But at this point, on this side of Christmas Day, it's all about joyful anticipation.
Once you've got kids, it changes. There's still joyful anticipation, but there's a whole lot of pressure you feel, and panic you feel, and all this week is about, is everything right?
Do you have the meal ready? And who's coming when? And what schedule are you supposed to have? And did you wrap this gifts? And even Christmas Day comes, and for so many people, the predominant emotion is not gratitude, it's pressure.
[36:53] Pressure to make it perfect. Pressure to make it memorable. Pressure to make it worth all the excitement. And for so many people, they'll go through Christmas and they will feel the expectation, and for many, they will feel the pressure, but very few, sadly, will feel the gratitude that this season is supposed to bring to our hearts.

to Him be honor and glory forever and ever. It is God's grace that led to Paul's gratitude.
So my friends, if God is still gracious, and if His grace is still sufficient, our hearts should be overflowing with gratitude.
gratitude, here's where it gets hard. If I ask you, is your heart overflowing with gratitude this Christmas season? If we're not careful, we'll stop and think, well, not exactly because finances are a little tight this year.
I haven't been able to buy all the gifts I want to buy. Is your heart filled with gratitude? Well, not exactly because this Christmas season is different than usual. We're not going to have everybody at our house.
[38:16] Or is your heart filled with gratitude? Well, not exactly because I'm a little sad, I'm a little lonely, things feel a little off. love. Again, I don't want to make light of the human emotions you feel, but my friends, please understand the meaning, the reason behind Christmas is that Christ came into the world to save sinners.

His grace is what this is all about. And when you focus on His grace, you have everything you need to be grateful. Otherwise, you're just looking to worldly things to try to make you joyful.
And when you live like that, you start looking at worldly things to give to your heart what only God can give.
So I think we would do well this week of Christmas. Within all of the final shopping and wrapping and planning and all those things, things, find some time to just let your mind and heart meditate on verse 17.
To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, to this King I give my honor and glory and will do so forever and ever.
[39:45] one author penned it this way, when God's work on us is done and we stand perfected before Christ in the last day, we will not exalt in our worth, but will sing with millions of angels.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and honor and glory and blessing. If that reality will be enough to satisfy our hearts for all of eternity, why live any day with lesser things?
Let your heart rejoice with gratitude this Christmas week because our God is gracious. in order to fully enjoy any gift, you must understand the reason it was given.
In the Bible it's clear for us that the reason we celebrate Christmas is because Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
sinners. And if you understand that, you have all you need to have overflowing joy. If you're here this morning and don't know Christ as your Savior, you've never before considered what this is all about, I would encourage you this day to receive by faith the greatest gift ever given.
[41:29] salvation. The Bible tells us that salvation, forgiveness, is not something we earn, not something we deserve, it's not something we achieve, it's something we receive by faith.

And if you feel like you're unworthy of that, you are. We all are. Which is why it's grace.
grace. And I would encourage and invite you even this morning in your heart to acknowledge before the King of all kings that you're a sinner, that you've done wrong.
That you would ask Him to forgive you and to change you and to make you new. that is the greatest explanation for why we have Christmas.

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Because Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Let that truth cause you to overflow with grace and joy this Christmas season.
[42:40] Our Father, we thank you for the clarity of your word. And I pray, Lord, this week would be filled with the joy that comes from our earthly relationships and our families.

Those are great and sweet gifts you've given to us. I pray this week would be filled with rest and renewal. Those are good gifts you give to us.
But only fully enjoyed if we rightly understand the reason for Christmas which is you sending your son to save sinners.
May that truth stay in our hearts and minds so much so that no matter what else may happen around us, we would be overflowing with joy not because the details of our life are perfect, but because your grace is sufficient.
We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.

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