

I. Introduction and Jimmy's Christmas Story

I wanted him to lead it off, and he represents in our church the men and women, him and his wife, that really are always there, whatever needs to be done. I promise you, whenever we are having an activity or something is going on, like a picnic or whatever, and all the rest of you go home or you have some place else to go, which is fine, and the mess is left there to clean up, I always look over my shoulder and Jimmy is always there, and he is always saying what needs to be done. I think that sums him up the best, and I love him with all my heart. He is my friend, and I appreciate all that he does and brings to this church.

This is going to be my Christmas story. It is one I have had for quite some time, and I have shared it with some people, and some people know about it, but this has kind of got a different twist than it normally has. If everybody has their Bible, turn over to Romans chapter one. This may seem like an unusual place to go for a Christmas story, but I am kind of unusual anyway, so we will just take it with that.

I accepted Christ back in September 1988. A year before that, a friend of mine was witnessing to me and their family. You know how you always have different events going on at your churches, just like we have here. The church that he was going to, he was telling me about some events that he had going on in programs, and he asked me if I and my family wanted to come to what they called the Living Christmas Tree.

I did not know what a Living Christmas Tree was. I mean, this Living Christmas Tree, I had never seen anything like that before. This thing was huge; it was humongous. It was like a great big stage, and this thing went all the way to the ceiling. Some of you, I know, know what the Living Christmas Tree is, so I am not cutting it short by any means. It had lights all over. They had living bells that they rang and they sang. People got up inside this structure, and they had little spots up there where everybody sat and they sang songs. This was quite different than what I was used to seeing at Christmas time.

Anyway, he asked me to come, and he said, "How many tickets are you going to need?" I thought, "You mean I have to buy tickets to go to this thing?" He said, "Well, you do not have to pay for them. I just need to know how many are coming." I said, "Okay, all right." So I told him, and he got me the tickets. They had different times where they showed up or you went to this event. This was a lot different than what I was used to, and it was just totally more than what I was looking for. This Living Christmas Tree came alive, and it was a big choir. They just started singing, and they finally ended up telling a story about Jesus. I thought that was pretty cool after it was all said and done, but it was different than what I was used to seeing.

When I was a kid and I was growing up at Christmas time, you know how the song goes, "He's making a list and checking it twice, going to find out who's naughty and nice." Well, I was on the naughty end of that song all the time. For me, at Christmas time, I was not a bad kid, but I just was not really, you know, I really did not do everything my mom and dad told me to do. I would

stay out late at night, ride my bicycle all over the place, and I just, when it was time to take the trash out, because we had the old trash burners, we used to take trash out and burn it, and I would not do that.

What my mom and dad did for me at Christmas time, in our bedroom, we had like a corner, like up there like that. Around Thanksgiving is when it about started. They had this crucifix about this tall. It was on a little pedestal, and it was set up there on a shelf. If you were good, it would move out on the shelf; it would come forward. If you were bad, it would go back in the corner. So, for me, it was like playing a game; it was just like up and back and up and back. I would pray at night, "Oh, come on, come on off that shelf, come on, I know you can come out there a little further, I will be good, I will do this, I will do that."

Most of the time, my sister would get mad at me. She would always tell me, "You know, if you do not straighten up, the cross ain't going to come off of there, and you know, you are just bad, come on, straighten up, you do it, right?" We went back and forth with that all the time. But the ultimate deal about that was, if it came off the shelf on Christmas morning, it was down underneath the tree. It miraculously came off that shelf and down underneath the tree. As I was a kid growing up, that is what I was used to doing.

Besides, you know how we went to that church, and they had the big Christmas tree, and that was their program. Well, a Roman Catholic Church, I grew up a Roman Catholic. The Roman Catholic deal is Midnight Mass. I do not know whether any of you know what Midnight Mass is, but it is the pomp and circumstance of everything. It is all of what, I mean, you had the Knights of Columbus come out, you have Christmas trees all in the place, the lights turned down real low, and you just, you have a procession. You have a crib over here on the side, and you run up and down. Brandon can remember this because he played one of the little parts, and the little guys that take the baby Jesus, and they go up and down the aisles. This is what they do.

So my idea, after seeing all that and seeing this Living Christmas Tree, I thought, "Well, these programs are pretty good. That is not bad." So the Living Christmas Tree was quite different as far as me going to his church and seeing that. Then there were some other things that were different about it. They had Monday Night Bible study. Monday Night Bible study, as you know, was any question you wanted to ask about the Bible. I thought this was great. This is after I had grown up, got married, and started having kids. This was great. Any question you wanted to ask about the Bible, and you got your answer. It was not like you just went to this Bible study, and everybody just kind of, "Well, this is my idea." No, no, no, you asked a question, you got an answer.

I thought this was great. There were always seasonal questions, seasonal questions about Christmas, seasonal questions about Thanksgiving, seasonal questions about Easter and Halloween, and all those things. I thought that would be neat to go to. So I went to the Monday Night Bible study, but I did not get to answer the questions, but I got my questions answered. Bob was laying out these questions about Santa Claus, just like Thursday night down here, last Thursday night. If you were here Thursday night, you got somewhat of what I got back in 1987,

1988, about the Christmas tree over there in Jeremiah 10:3, about the "ho ho" coming out of the north over in Zechariah 2:6.

Then we read over in Romans chapter one, verse 21.

Romans 1:21-23

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

I tell you, when I saw that, that was like a revelation. Bob laid that all out like he did Thursday night. He laid out that corruptible man, like Santa Claus, the birds, like Thanksgiving, like the four-footed beast, like the Easter bunny, and the creeping things, like Halloween. Man, I had just seen something that I had never seen before. You talk about excited, I was excited.

But I found myself right smack dab in the middle of that verse. In verse 21, it says, "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." That is where I was. I was one of those that says "they." I was that "they." I was that one that changed what the glory of God was. I found myself right there in that verse. I got all excited about that. I wanted to share that with everybody. I had found out really what Christmas was. It was not this, it was not what I thought it was. It was not all the purpose of pomp and circumstance.

I read over in Proverbs 15:23, as I was growing older, it says, "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!" I was excited. Here was the season, man, I was right into Christmas time. I was ready to share what God had given me through the Bible. Bob said, you have heard him say, "Don't be stupid and take this out there because they ain't going to believe you." When you tell me, that was me. I did exactly that. I was so excited about the revelation that God had given me through that. I had never seen that stuff before.

So what did I do? My sister was my concern. I got all excited about that. So what do I do? First thing, I run over to my sister's house. "Hey, you are not going to believe this. You need to see this. Look at this, about this." I said, "You need to get saved. If you do not, you are going to die and go to hell. You are going to do all..." I mean, and she starts crying. She starts breaking down and she starts crying. My brother-in-law comes out, and he says, "You need to leave. If you are going to make her cry like this, I do not want you to come back. You need to leave." I am like, "Whoa, what just happened? Oh, you have got to be kidding me." He was serious. He was not playing around.

So I left. I still had that, you know, "kiss the reason for the season," wrong reason. I still had that mentality. But I missed over there in the Bible what it says about Colossians 3:6, "Let your

speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." I missed that one.

As time went on, a buddy of mine I was going to church with, you might have known him, at that time, Tom Hall, he did not know about the Roman Catholic Church. He did not know how all other things were done. He asked me, "Jimmy, I would like to go to a Midnight Mass with you." I said, "Well, Tom, I do not go there anymore." He says, "Well, I still would like to go. I do not know anything about that. I would like to find out those things." I said, "Okay, all right, we will go."

So that Christmas, he called me up. We wait around. Usually everybody meets over at grandparents' house. We wait around, we play games, we sing songs, and we eat, and then we just eat, and we just do more eating. We lay around, we wait around until 11:30 comes. When 11:30 comes, everybody goes to church. So anyway, I told Tom, "If you get there about 11:30, something like that, we will be early."

So we go there. We go to my old church where we used to go. We are standing up there. Tom walks in, and he just looks around. He goes all the way down to the altar. He is getting on the altar. He is walking around on the altar now. Here is the priest back over here, and the altar boys are coming out. Tom is just up there, nosing around. He is looking at the Christmas tree. He has not got a clue that that is sacred ground up there. He has not got a clue. He is just walking around all over the place. I said, "Tom, come on, get back down here, man. You cannot be up there." The altar boys come out, and Tom is going, "Well, I have a few questions to ask. What is all this?" I said, "Come on, Tom, I will tell you. Come on back here."

So yeah, we got back there. We watched the whole show, and the Knights of Columbus were all lined up on the side. They looked like three musketeers, if you guys did not know that. They bring them all out. They come on. They have their swords. They are standing there all on the sides. Everybody is out there. They have the lights. They turn the lights down real low, and the choir starts singing. It is just, you get all this stuff.

When it comes time for Holy Communion, or the communion time, most of the time the people that come in, the men, because they stayed up all night waiting for this event, are most of the time pretty well-sozzled. So they come to church drunk, or have been drinking. The wives are coming to church. They are crying because their husbands are drinking. They are wanting them to get right and everything. Now I am using Christian phrases, which that was not even thought of back then. But now they are wanting them to get right. They are wanting to go to the Holy Communion. They are down there, and they are pulling them down. I have seen guys literally crying because their wives wanted them to do something they did not want to do. Their wives wanted them to do something that they were not going along with. It was not because they were drinking. It was because they did not believe what they were having to be made to do.

That Midnight Mass was quite a deal. We sat there and watched the whole thing. Tom looked over at me and says, "Jim, have you ever went over and talked to a person and asked him any questions?" I said, "No, I really have not." He said, "Well, I would like to." So we walked over there after the church, and everybody left. We stayed. We hung around. We got him back over

there in the back and said, "We have got a couple questions we would like to ask you." He says, "Okay." Later on, we found out that this priest was drunk. He was an alcoholic.

We asked him, "Do you guys teach salvation?" He says, "Well, yeah, yeah, we believe in salvation. We believe in Jesus. And we teach that." He said, "Well, what do you do with over there in John, where it talks about, do you know whether or not you can have eternal life and go to heaven?" He looked at both of us and he says, "Oh, you cannot know that. You cannot know that." So we walked out of there that night having the understanding why all those people feel the way they do. There was a point in my life I was in that same spot.

You can know for sure that you can have eternal life. You can know for sure that you can spend eternity with Christ. Do not take me wrong. I like Christmas, just like anybody else does. I like the presents. I like the trees. I like the food. I like to see the grandkids and all that stuff. But most of all now, my burden is for those lost people who changed the truth of God into a lie and worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. I pray this season that the lost world will see us or see God's true glory rather than the one that I felt like I was in Romans chapter 1. And that He will allow us to use us to let them see the truth. That is my Christmas story. Thank you.

II. Kyle's Message: God's Perspective on Jesus' Birth

All right, well, they are switching their microphones out. Grab your hymnals again. You do not have to stand unless you want to stretch your legs. This is a unique portion of our church. If you looked around here this morning, or have been before, 75% of our church is young couples. I really appreciate that. Young couples, it is hard to reach them today, and most churches fail in doing it. But yet, there are the young couples in this church that really are the lifeblood. If we never win another person to Christ, we will always be the fastest growing church in Missouri just because of our birth rate we have got going on here. Last week, we had to put a sign on the water fountain down there, "Do not drink the water," because we have so many.

In all the years I have been in ministry, I do not know that I have ever had the young men and the young ladies that we have in our church today that I have ever had in my ministry. I have got some of the greatest young blood in this church that have the desires to really learn the Word of God. On top of that, I have some that are the older crowd. But these guys are the future right here. I want to say publicly to your family here today that you have done a great job with this kid. I love him like he is my own, and I know he is not. But I look at him and I look at Casey, and I wish I had 1,000 just like him. I want to thank you. I am glad you are all here today because I do not want you to just hear him, but I want you to hear what I have to say because it goes to you as parents and as a family. You have done a wonderful job.

I have been in this business a long time, and I can weed out the thoroughbreds from the mutts. He is a thoroughbred, and so is Casey. It is because of you, and I thank you for doing your work that made my job easier. It is guys like this, and we have got a host of them in our church today, and Casey just represents that group. I have got a whole bunch of them. I love them to death. I can say the same thing about just about every one of them up here. But I asked him to speak today to represent that part of our church that really, really, really is going to, in the next 20

years, if Jesus tarries, is going to become Old Paz Baptist Church. I just love you, Kyle. I love you with all my heart like my own boy. You are a good man, and we have a good time in the Word of God together. You go ahead and give them what God has laid on your heart.

That introduction kind of blows my message away. I do not know if I need to do anything now. Well, this morning I have to say I have officially achieved my lifelong dream. I have always wanted to wear one of these little things here. It has been my goal since I was little. You can ask Casey, the last few weeks we have been pulling out videos from when I was younger. My two little sisters and I, I used to hold the video camera, and we would play newscast for them. So I mean, I have always had a dream to use microphones and cameras and stuff.

I must first say that it falls right along with what Bob said. The first 20 years of Casey and I's life, we walked around as orphans in this world. It was around this time two years ago that God brought us here to our family. You guys have all been so amazing to bring us in and welcome us with open arms. We just cannot thank you guys enough for everything that you have done for us, and hopefully things continue on and go as well as they have the past two years.

Let us pray.

Father God, I just thank you for this opportunity we have to be here this morning to talk about your Son, Jesus Christ, who did everything perfect for us, Lord. Because of Him, we have a perfect model. Because of Him, we have a light to follow. Because of Him, we have an opportunity to have a relationship with you. I just thank you for each and every one of us here this morning that we were able to make it safely. Just pray that your words are spoken through me this morning. We thank you. We love you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Some of my family is here this morning, and this may come as a bit of a shock to them, but I never really was a big fan of school. There were a few things that I enjoyed: football and track and basically anything that was active. But looking back now, there is something that I am very thankful I had the opportunity to experience. Throughout the eight years that I was in high school and college, I had many speaking opportunities. Nothing of this magnitude, of course. In hindsight, I think God was just preparing me for the future. Most of these messages were based on some type of Bible passage or character that at that time in my life was helping me or teaching me something in particular.

The only regret I have about those opportunities is that I did not have the information that I know now, that Bob has been so gracious enough to share with all of us, and the Lord has been so merciful enough to allow me to retain a small portion of. But I have put in time researching, and I have put in time preparing for speeches. So my first thought when I was asked to be a part of this morning's service and prepare a message kind of based around Christmas was, "Oh, this is going to be great. I am going to have so much information to put into this." But when I sat down and started working this out, what I realized was going to be one of the easiest messages I thought I was going to organize was quickly becoming one of the most challenging. That was because I was trying to use the thoughts and experiences that I had rather than what had actually taken place. This is simply because of the way I had grown up thinking Christmas was all about.

I know most of you are probably thinking, "A Christmas message? What in the world could be so tough about a Christmas message?" And rightly so. Most of you probably have no trouble. But for me, I literally had to think outside the box. From the time I was able to comprehend, until I was about 13, Christmas was all about me. How many cool things I could get. How many big gifts under the tree I would get. At that point, when I finally started to realize that there were other people in this world besides me, which Casey might argue still has not really fully developed, but Christmas became about a man that came to this earth to save you and I from going to hell.

But it was not until about two years ago when we started coming here to Old Paz Baptist Church and God using Bob to unlock the Bible for us all that I learned that not only is December 25th all but a pagan holiday, it was not even the day Jesus was born. Talk about throwing somebody into a whirlwind. So back to my original problem. How in the world do I create and put together a Christmas message without either:

A.) re-preaching verbatim a message Bob has already done, or

B.) talk about how great a day December 25th is because it was the day Jesus was born?

Obviously, neither one of those will work. So what I want to do this morning, since as Jimmy talked about, the world has kind of put Christmas and the birth of Jesus on December 25th, I want to look at the birth of Jesus, but not from man's perspective, rather from God's perspective through man. What I mean is, why did God need Jesus to come to this earth? Why would God leave the incorruptible to enter into the corruptible? What was the purpose behind all this?

If you were to go around the city this morning and ask people what Christmas means, you would hear things like, "Oh, it is the day the Savior was born," "the day the Jewish king was born," "time for family to celebrate with friends," "gifts." You would hear a lot more, and most of them are probably legitimate answers. But the only problem is that this is man's concept. They have their perspective, not God's. So what is God's perspective and purpose?

➤ God's Plan

➤ God's Promise

Let us pray.

Father God, I again, thank you for the opportunity that we have to be here this morning. I thank you for everything that you showed, not only myself and my family, but this church family. We just pray God that as the morning continues on, you continue to speak loud and clear and just help us to understand why we are here and what the birth of your Son really means for us. So we thank you, we love you in Jesus' name. Amen.

III. Daniel's Message: The When, Where, and Why of Jesus' Coming

That was great. Our next speaker, Daniel Collier and his wife, Stephanie. Stephanie had surgery on her foot this week, so she is back here, got her leg up, but she is doing good. We have been

praying for her all week. Daniel and his wife represent really another key element in our church. Daniel and I knew each other years ago. When I started this church, him and his wife were not here. In fact, he just came in about the last four or five months. But Daniel represents, and we have got a number of couples in our church just like this, that we were connected together at one point. Then God separated us out and really took them through some schools. He did not have the benefit of a lot of what you have, coming every week, but Daniel is the kind of guy who gets it on his own.

Daniel, he is a digger. I mean, I could, and I would not do this, but I could, when I get up here, when I preach, I am always exact, try to be as exact and lay everything out where it is supposed to be. We all make mistakes, but if anybody would catch my mistakes, it would be Daniel. Daniel keeps me honest, and I love him for that. He is my buddy. He brings an element to this church, as some of the other guys do, that he went through the fire, and he learned some things that are very unique that we all can benefit from. Then God saw fit in His timing to bring us back together. He is a valuable asset to me and will be even more so as we move on and we do things that God has for us to do. He has an incredible knowledge of the Word of God. I appreciate, and I thank God every day for the men and the women like this that God brings back and really lets me take the benefit of what they have learned. So Daniel, you come and you give us what God has got on your heart, and I love you, man.

How is everybody doing this morning? Okay, we are at the Chiefs game here. So I am going to try and do everything to give all glory and honor to our Chief, Jesus Christ. The thing of it is, this is not just your normal Christmas story that I am going to share with you because of the fact I have four points the Lord laid on my heart. Like Bob had said, yeah, I have been through fire. I have been through a lot of things in life. But the bottom line is God is the one that we all have to look to for our security and for our trust and for our hope. It is just realizing that He has given me some things, and I just need to apply it to my own personal life every day. In order for me to be able to share with others, I have to be living it. I have to be working on it in my own life.

God teaches me a lot of things, but the main thing is, I thank the Lord for my wife. God gave me a woman that loves the Word of God, loves the Lord. He has given me a family that I can thank God for. My daughter is here today, and my son had to work, and we have got a couple of grandkids, so we are old people. But it is all just thanking God for what He has blessed us with because there are others that do not have that.

God has laid on my heart four points in a prayer, but the prayer has already been said. What it is, is dealing with the when, when did Jesus come, the where, where did He come, and the why, why did He come? Then there is a what, but we will talk about the what later. The whole thing comes down to me understanding in my own personal life, knowing His Word.

- The When
- The Where
- The Why

➤ The What

IV. Bob's Closing Remarks: What God Wants for Christmas

I am just going to take a very few moments here, and obviously there is nothing that I can add to what was said today, but I think I kind of want to, I do not want you to miss anything that was said today. There are a number of things that I want you to take home with you today. We have been talking in the last couple of months, or really last couple of weeks since we finished our last doctrinal study, I told you how I was going to just take a couple of months and work through some practical things. We have been talking about and focusing on those practical things of life, the absolute things that I am trying to encourage you to get into your life, into a notebook, that you look back and you see the things that God has done.

I certainly could not add anything to anything that anybody said today. All three of them did a great job. In fact, the greatest gift that anybody could ever give me for Christmas was you three guys standing up here and giving back what I have given to you. Yet at the same time, I know that many of you could stand up here and do the same thing, but there is something out there that this needs to be an encouragement, a challenge for you. There is no reason why next year you should not be up here. Of course, all you have to do is basically do what each of them have said and put the Word of God into your life the way that it needs to be.

We talked about a number of great principles, and I just want to kind of put, as Daniel said, icing on the cake, so obviously he likes cake. We talked about a number of great things, and last week as far as I am concerned was the pinnacle. For some of you boys who are really going to develop your skills into being a real leader and your wives, but I talked about the great principle that you give God what is right in your life, not what is left in your life. We focused on that, and my whole purpose has been to get you to look internally, look down deep inside and ask yourself some questions, look within you.

I talked about 1 Corinthians chapter 8:3, how that you cannot fake true spirituality.

1 Corinthians 8:3

But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

That true love always identifies itself with the object in question. I talked about the old message that I heard years ago talked about the standard of living versus the standard of life. We look at it and we talk about a standard of living and we judge our standard of living by what we get. But in the Bible, that is not about a standard of living, it is about a standard of life. We judge the standard of life by what we give. We talked about the seven characteristics of God and we need to have in our own lives, looking at His character versus our character.

I came to the point where I asked you, we talked about what it takes to please God. I asked you, "Have you ever thought about God at Christmas time is always the last one on your list?" Somebody, you guys said it today, and we know that Christ was not born on December 25th. Now, do not, people get nervous, we are not like Jehovah Witnesses. I have a Christmas tree in

my house, and everybody in this building loves to have Christmas. I mean, I love presents, I love family time together, I love Christmas trees, I love the little kids running around, I love all the things to do, I love the presents, and I love, you said you said presents twice, I really like presents. I am into it, man. When my kids were growing up, I dressed up as Santa Claus and I went through the whole thing. So to me and to us as a church, we just know the bottom line, see?

I will never forget one time, I was preaching someplace or a Bible study or whatever, and somebody asked a question, and I laid the whole thing out just like I did Thursday night, how that we know that Christ was born at the Feast of Tabernacles, brought the whole thing together, how December 25th got started and where it all comes from. A guy came up to me afterwards, and he was very upset. He said to me, "You are really teaching heresy." I said, "Well, what heresy was that?" He said, "I cannot believe that you do not believe that Christ was, that is a national Christian holiday. How can you stand up there and say that Jesus Christ was not born on December 25th?"

I will never forget. My answer was one of these things that God just puts into your mind. I said, "Well, you know how I know that Christ was not born on December 25th?" He says, "Well, no, I would like to know." I said, "Because I promise you, you do not believe that either." He said, "Oh no, I believe it." I said, "Really?" I said, "Well, let me, do you really believe that Christ was born on December 25th and that is His birthday?" He said, "Absolutely." Without a hesitation, I looked at him and said, "Then what did you get Him?" What did you get Him? Do not tell me you believe it is His birthday.

You know what always bothered me about Christ's birthday? We give everybody else presents. If it is His birthday, why does He get anything? Would you like it if we had a birthday party for you? Joe, would you like it last night? We had that birthday party for you, and we had you up there, and we told you that, going out there, Nikki let it slip, that we got a birthday party for you, and you walked into the house, and you are expecting everything, and everybody says, "Happy birthday." And then everybody bought me presents. You walk over to the cake, and it is "Happy birthday, Bob." No, I would not like it.

My point is this. Do you know what God wants for Christmas from you? Have you ever stopped and even thought about it? Then just putting an end to this and putting it all together, have you ever, ever asked yourself what God wants for Christmas? Very simply, very simply, very plainly, you know what He wants? He wants you. He wants you. We talked about the character of God as giving and giving of your life and God's character, my character needs to line up with God's character.

When I look at the thing, I was telling somebody this week, I think it was Stephanie, about Song of Solomon, how that when you get into the book of Song of Solomon, when I began to look at it and study it, it took on a completely different, changed my whole perspective of things because I really began to see, when God looks at me, what He really thinks and what He really feels. Then it teaches me back what I should feel and think for Him. As I was thinking about this, I thought, you know what? What God wants for Christmas is me. He wants me to understand whether He was born on December 25th or the Feast of Tabernacles, whatever He was born, He gave His life

for me, and that was His gift to me. His gift to me was Him coming into the world to die on that cross and become my sacrifice for Him. That is His gift to me.

You know what the gift He wants back from me and you? If you are a Christian today, He wants you to take your life. Just as He died on the cross, He wants you to die to self. Just as He hung there and gave His life and expired on that cross so many years ago, He wants you to die to this world. Just as He was your sacrifice on that cross as a Lamb of God, today He wants you to be His sacrifice in this world, only in a living sense, the living sacrifice.

If we were going to have a, God forbid, a Bob Alexander lookalike contest today, and we got four or five of you guys together, and your assignment was, and you are going to win a great prize for it, but you got all week to get yourself to next Sunday to look like me. Act like me, talk like me. We are going to have a contest. You are going to come up here, so next Sunday we get here, and boy, you guys have got me down. I mean, some of you have got your hair like mine, you have got my mannerisms. You have got everything down. So you each get about five minutes to portray yourself as Bob Alexander. Then we put you all together, and I will tell you what. I am in the mix because you know what? It is when a real Bob Alexander comes forth. Nobody can tell. You guys have got me down to a science. So you fly my mother in. She cannot pick who I am. Finally, after it is all said and done, after an hour and a half, my mother is in tears now thinking, "Oh my God, there are five of him." All of the things have happened. Finally, I step forward as the real Bob Alexander, but these guys are an absolute carbon copy of me.

But you know what? You know what the truth of the matter is? There is only one really me. You can imitate me. You get my mannerisms down. You can look like me, kind of like Brad Pitt. You can cut your hair like mine, and you can do everything I do. The truth of the matter is at the end of the day, you are still not me. You know why? Because the real thing that will always separate you from being me will not be how you imitate how I talk, how I walk, how I look, or what I do. It will be the fact that you have to get my mind to really be me.

In Christianity, we have got a lot of Christians who are in a God lookalike program. They wear the clothes. They do the things. They say everything the way they are supposed to. They just do not have what really makes them Him. And that is His mind. What He wants from you and from me is He wants you and I to come to the point where that you understand that His gift to you was His sacrifice on Calvary's cross. What you can give Him if Christmas is this time for you and we are going to give gifts to everybody else, then you ought to give something to Him. What He simply wants is you.

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Now that is a profound verse. I heard a preacher a number of years ago, and he was talking about what the boys talked about today. He was talking about the uniqueness of Christ's life and His

birth. He commented from a biblical perspective that really opened up some things for me and really helped me understand a lot of things. But he said, "You know what? Christ's birth was not just special or unique because He was born of a virgin." I think a couple of guys made reference to Isaiah chapter 7:14 that talked about, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and should be born and talked about, call his name Emmanuel." That is a great prophecy. He said, "You know what?" He said, "That was an incredible thing, but it was not just that. It was the fact that this was the only baby born in the history of man that when He was born, by God's design, He was born to die."

You know, this baby was not born to fulfill His life. You look at your kids, I look at our grandkids, I look at Maddie, I look at McKenzie and little Alex. I say to Maddie, and she is so smart. I am down there, and she just goes into town. Little Kenzie, she is always just down like she is reading her Bible. She does not know what she is doing, but she has got to have her Bible wherever she goes. Little Maddie, and I said to Maddie, "You know what, Maddie? Someday you are going to really be a good discipler for grandpa. I am going to be able to put you with people, and you are going to be able to teach them the Bible." She gets all excited about that. I have plans for her as her grandfather. But you know what? My plans and Danny and Jamie's plans are for her to grow up and have a full life. God's plan when He brought His Son to the world was to never have a full life.

Have you ever noticed, when you start to read the verses about His birth, they become, take on an anonymous tone? Isaiah 53:8, the great passage dealing with Him, talks about the fact that He should be "cut off out of the land of the living." Even in Matthew chapter 1:21, when Joseph had met with the angel, the angel said that "he shall save his people from their sins." That is why in Luke chapter 2:7, to the careful eye when He is born, they wrapped Him in swaddling clothes. Swaddling clothes, ladies and gentlemen, are what they wrap the dead bodies in, their grave clothes. Remember the story of Lazarus when he was all wrapped up? That is swaddling clothes. By God's design, this baby was born to die. They even wrapped Him in swaddling clothes.

A couple of weeks ago, I was coming through some things, and I saw this, and it just kind of, this is my present to you. I am going to give you something today. It is one of those things that just kind of drops your jaw when you see it. He was born to die. Look at Luke chapter two very quickly here, and then we are going to be done. Luke chapter two, I want to show you something. I want to show you when you start to look for things in the Bible and you start to study the Bible, watch how this thing works. Luke chapter two, now Luke chapter two, He has been born for eight days. In this passage, He gets circumcised. Oh, by the way, did you ever notice that number eight in your Bible is a number of new beginnings? It is a picture of the day you got saved, a new creature in Christ Jesus, all things are passed away, and you get a new name written down in glory. Did you ever notice in His passage that He was alive eight days without a name, and they did not name Him and call Him Jesus till the eighth day? That is a picture of your new creature in Christ Jesus the day you get saved.

Then in this passage, it comes down here, and look what happens.

Luke 2:22-24

And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;

(As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

Now, if you would go over to Leviticus chapter 12:8, you would see that that is not correct. This passage only tells you about she has to bring the pigeons or the turtledoves. You will, with Leviticus, you will find that there is also a lamb involved. You know why she did not bother? She brought, she had a choice between the turtledoves or the pigeons, but you know why the lamb is not mentioned in Luke chapter two? You know why she did not have to be told to bring a lamb? Because she was carrying that Lamb in her arms, that is why. That baby was born to die. She did not need to go out and get a lamb. She was carrying the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world in her arms that day. That little Lamb became the salvation by His death on the cross. When John saw Him, John said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

What does God want for you for Christmas? From Christmas? He wants you. He wants you and me to recognize the price that He paid for you and for me to be His sacrifice. Then He wants you and I to become that living sacrifice. A guy said to me one time, "I love God enough to die for Him." I said, "You know what? Anybody can die for Him. What is really tough is living for Him." I mean, you die for Him, it is over in a second. If they cut your head off because you are a Christian, I mean, it is over before you know it. Then you walk around and say, "I ain't got no body, bum bum, no body got me." It is over. They put you up in front of a firing squad and shoot you. You are dead in 10 seconds, unless they are bad shots. Dying for Him is the easy route. What is really tough is what you have got to live for Him day after day after day. That is where it requires, that is why He said in Romans chapter 12, He wanted you to be a living sacrifice. I am not saying that some of you down the line may not give your life in the cause of Christ. I am not going to say that at all, but I am saying in the general sense, He does not want you to die for Him. If everybody died for Him today, there would be nobody to tell the story. He wants you to do the hard thing. He wants you to be a daily sacrifice and live for Him. That is what is tough. That is what is hard. It is tough when you are faced with everything in this world that we are faced with. It is hard to come to the point where you live your life that day. He was your sacrifice, and He was God's gift to you. What does He want back? What does He want for Christmas? He wants you to take your life and give it back to Him as a living sacrifice.

I appreciate again what the boys have said today. In closing, I want to tell you this story. This is a true story. Years ago, during World War II, when the boys went into service, this was also true in Vietnam, it is probably still true today. When your boy went into service, I thought about this last night. We got home from the party, and it was blowing snow. I had to walk all three dogs and take them out there. As I got down there, God just kind of, down the end of the street, the Lord just kind of put this in my mind. I will tell you how in a minute.

In World War II, if you had a son that was in the service, they used to put a star in the window. It was a blue star, and that meant that you have a child serving in the armed forces someplace. If that boy or that girl was killed in war, combat, then they put a gold star. That meant that you had given a child. I remember one time years ago, in another church, I had preached. They had a beautiful memorial out in front for all the young men that were killed in World War I. This was in World War I, World War II, in Vietnam. It was beautiful. I remember looking at it, a little kid came up to me. I do not think he went to church there. He knew I was a preacher, and he says, "I really liked your preaching, preacher." I said, "Well, thanks, buddy." He says, "What is that?" I said, "Well, that is all the people of this church that died in the service." He looks up and he says, "The morning service or the evening service?" Yeah. I said, "No, no," but that is what they did back then, see.

When you die, that blue star was taken down, and a gold star was put up. It meant that you had given a son in the service of your country. A little boy was walking down the street with his dad one time, and he looked up in the window, and there was a blue star. He asked his dad, "Dad, what does that mean in that window?" His dad said, "Well, son, that means that that family has a boy that is in the service." They walked on. The kid, you know how little kids ponder things. He walked on, and pretty soon they came to one, it had a black, dark wreath on the door. There in the window, the blue star had been taken down, and the gold star had been put in. The little boy said, "Daddy, how come that one is not blue?"

Now, the man, the father, kind of thought for a moment, and he said, "Well, son, that means that they gave a boy, that boy got killed in the service of their country. They sacrificed their son that you and I might be free." He tried to put it in a context for the kid. The kid did not say a word. He just pondered all those things in his little mind like they do. They walked down and began to walk home and walked down the lane, and when they got out of the city lights, the clouds had parted, and there in the sky. This is what I saw last night, because the snow was over, and I looked up, and up there in the sky was old Arcturus up there, kind of a yellowish-white star. When that kid, he looks up, and the clouds parted away, and there was that gold, bright star up in the sky. He says, "Look, Daddy, look, Daddy. Does that mean that God gave His Son as a sacrifice for us and put His star in God's window?"

Yes, my friend, that is exactly what it means. 2,000 years ago, He hung on that cross, and He became your sacrifice. God hung His star in the heavens, showing that God too had given His Son in sacrifice for you. What does God want for Christmas? He wants you. He wants you to be His sacrifice. He wants you to take the rest of your life and give it to Him as a living sacrifice. That is the only gift He wants. He does not want your money. He did not want your house. He did not want your car. He wants you to recognize what He has done for you and then become that living sacrifice for Him. Thank you guys. I could not have said it better myself, and you did a great job of tying it all together, showing this church how the blend will work, how we have the best of all three worlds here pulling together to get the job done, raising up the youngsters, bringing about things, relying on the experience that God has given us, and pulling it all together for one purpose, that your church as its body, all of us together, could be that sacrifice in

this next year. You have a good Christmas. You think about what God wants for Christmas. If this is His birthday, what are you going to give Him?