

## INTRODUCTION

Someone asked me this week if I was going to be preaching a "Christmas message" today. I told them I was just going to continue with my verse-by-verse study of 2 Corinthians. As I hope you'll see, any passage about Jesus is appropriate for a Christmas message and I believe the passage we find in 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 is a perfect Christmas text.

Don't you just love opening presents? I'm curious, how many of you open presents on Christmas Eve? How many on Christmas morning? How many of you open some at both times? I'm sure this has never happened to any of you, but JUST suppose you should receive a Christmas present sometime and you open it, and it's a gift you really don't like. So what do you say? Don't worry, I've come up with a top 10 list of things to say when you open a Christmas present you don't really like:

10. Hey, this is what I call a gift!
9. Well, well, well ... what do you know?
8. I've always wanted one of these—jog my memory—what's it called again?
7. Boy, you don't see many of these anymore!
6. I promise I'm going to find a special place to put this!
5. You say this was the last one? I'm glad you snapped that baby up!
4. Hmm ... I must have missed the big Ronco/K-Tel/Ginsu merger this year!
3. I really DON'T know how to thank you.
2. You really shouldn't have, really.

And the #1 thing to say when you open a Christmas present that you don't like is: 1. I don't deserve this! So, if someone opens your present this week, and says one of those statements, you'll know how they REALLY feel!

Not all presents are worth appreciating. Jim Bob was talking to Bubba and said, "What are you gettin' your wife for Christmas?" Bubba said, "Well, she said she either wanted a diamond necklace or a new 4-wheel drive Jeep. So I got her a 2 carat diamond necklace." Jim Bob said, "That's pretty expensive. How did you decide on the necklace?" Bubba said, "'Cause you can't buy no fake Jeep!"

Of course, the most valuable Christmas gift ever given was when God the Father gave His Son to save us—and there was nothing fake about that gift. It was a genuine love gift. When Jesus came into the world, He made all things new.

2 Corinthians 5:16-17: "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Christmas is a happy time, because everybody likes to get something new: New clothes, new toys, new gadgets, and new bills. Someone has said in December we sing, "Jingle bells" and in January it's "Juggle Bills."

This scripture has had a tremendous impact on my life because it's one of the first verses I ever memorized. It's such an important verse that I'm actually going to teach on it twice: Today, and then again 2008 after I complete the series on embracing change. In this message I want to share with you four new things that have come as a result of Jesus being born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago.

## 1. JESUS SET A NEW STANDARD FOR MEASURING TIME

The timing of the birth of Jesus wasn't an accident. God planned it from before the foundation of the world. The Bible says, "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of woman..." (Galatians 4:4) Many of the Old Testament prophets had predicted the coming of the Messiah, and many details about His life and death. But the prophet Daniel even predicted the exact date of His birth. The magi who showed up looking for the birth of the King of Jews weren't just guessing; they were from ancient Babylon, current Iraq, where Daniel had lived most of his life. 450 years before Jesus was born, Daniel wrote out a prophecy found in Daniel 9 predicting exactly WHEN the "anointed one" (Messiah) would come. It is most likely the magi who sought the Messiah were familiar with Daniel's writings. They were the descendants of 10 generations of wise men who had been studying Daniel's prophecies and were waiting for the time to be fulfilled.

But not only was the timing of His birth significant, but since the coming of Jesus, civilization measures time based upon His birth. Anytime you see the designation, B.C. (Before Christ) or A.D. (Anno Domini which means "the year of the Lord"), it is a reminder that Jesus is the most influential person who ever walked on this planet. The birth of Jesus literally split history in half!

When Jesus celebrated His first birthday, Mary or Joseph, or the rabbis didn't say, "Okay, so this now 1 A.D.!" It wasn't until 525 A.D. that Roman monk Dionysius Exiguus calculated the dates of Jesus' birth (actually he slightly miscalculated the dates, so it's likely Jesus was actually born in about 4 B.C.). Before Dionysius established this new way of dating, most of the Roman Empire used the founding of Rome, designated as A.U.C., for dating purposes. The new system based on Jesus' birth spread through Europe until it was widely accepted by the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Since the Renaissance, it has been the most utilized dating system in the world. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was used almost exclusively to date world events.

However, you may not be aware that over the past century there has been a deliberate attempt to reject the use of B.C. and A.D. With the infectious spread of secularism in America, most public schools and many scientific organizations have changed B.C. to B.C.E. which stands for "Before the Common Era." They have changed A.D., the year of the Lord to "C.E." which stands for "Common Era." Now I'm going to get on a soapbox and picket organizations that use B.C.E. and C.E., but you can't help but realize this is just another attempt by secular forces to move our culture away from the principles and beliefs that made us great. I don't know about you, but I'm going to keep on using "Before Christ" and "in the Year of our Lord" when I'm referring to dates.

As our Congressman, Louie Gohmert, pointed out, those who yell the loudest that our Constitution doesn't mention the Lord ignore the fact that the final words in the original copy of

the U.S. Constitution says, “Adopted September 17, 1787 in the year of our Lord!” He’s right. Our founding Fathers clearly were referring to the Lord Jesus when they dated our Constitution.

The point is that the coming of Jesus into the world was so earth-shattering that His birth and life have established a new standard of time! It doesn’t matter WHAT letters you use, when you start writing 2008 on your checks in a few days, you’ll know why that number is 2008 even if someone puts the letters XYZ beside it! Jesus remains the central figure of history. No other person has accomplished that. As the old saying goes, “All the armies that have ever marched; all the navies that have ever set sail; all the Parliaments that have ever sat; all the kings that have ever reigned—put together, have not affected the life of mankind on earth as powerfully as that one solitary life.” Jesus established a new standard for time.

## 2. JESUS GIVES US A NEW UNDERSTANDING ABOUT GOD

One of the many prophecies about the coming of Jesus is found in Isaiah 7:14. That prophecy is repeated verbatim in Matthew 1:23, “The virgin shall be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him ‘Immanuel’ —which means, ‘God with us.’” The name Immanuel gives us a totally new understanding of who God really is.

Before Jesus, God had always been so unapproachable that He told Moses that if anyone looked at Him, they would instantly perish. But with the birth of this son to a virgin. For the first time in history, God became Immanuel, God WITH us. Of course, God had always been “with” His servants in a spiritual sense. He was with Abraham when he left Ur. God was with Moses as He led the children of Israel toward Canaan. He was with Joshua as they entered Canaan. But with the birth of Jesus, God was *literally* with man! He took on human flesh so He could be seen, touched, and loved—and so that He could die. God had spoken like thunder from Mt. Sinai to Moses, but when the infant Jesus uttered His first cry on that morning, it was the first time God had spoken through human lips.

There are some groups who claim to be Christian, but they reject the doctrine that Jesus is equal with God. My one word response to them is: EMMANUEL. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus didn’t just come to teach people about God, He was God in the flesh who came to be with us.

In John 14:8, Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus said, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been WITH you (notice the preposition) all this time? When you see me, you see the Father.” Now, if you had looked at Jesus you wouldn’t have thought, “That’s God.” He appeared as an ordinary man. In fact Isaiah 53:2 says, “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” Jesus wasn’t born with a golden crown on his head or a silver spoon in His mouth. There wasn’t anything about His physical appearance that would tip you off about Him being God in the flesh. Charles Wesley expressed it well in those words we sing at Christmas: Jesus was “veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, Hail the Incarnate Deity. Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emanuel.”

You may think, "Well, if Jesus was Emmanuel, and He was with them 2,000 years ago, He's no longer here, so is God no longer WITH us?" We have something much better, actually. Later in John 14 Jesus was talking about sending the Holy Spirit He said, "you know Him, for he lives WITH you.." What He was saying was, "I'm God the Father and God the Spirit. I've been with you." (John 14:17) And then Jesus said, "And He will be in you!" The only truth more glorious than God WITH us in Christ IN you the Hope of Glory!

I love the story about the little Sunday School kids who put on their own impromptu Christmas play. One little girl said, "I'll be Mary. Another said, "I'll be Joseph." Another said, "I'll be a Shepherd. I'll be a Wise Guy." One little boy thought for a moment and said, "Babies are delivered by doctors, so I'll be the doctor." The teacher didn't want to discourage their creativity so she said, "Sure, you can be the doctor." Everyone took their places. The little boy playing the doctor took the baby doll, and since he didn't have any lines from the Bible, he made up his own. He smiled and said to Mary and Joseph, "Congratulations! It's a God!"

Rejoice, the new has come! Jesus not only gave us a new standard for time, He also gives us a new understanding about God. There's more new things for us though, because:

### **3. JESUS OFFERS YOU A NEW BIRTH**

The Bible says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope ..." (1 Peter 1:3)

In John 3, there was a religious man named Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night (he was the original Nic at night). Nicodemus was a Pharisee, which means he was more religious and morally pure than most of us in this room. He was cultured and educated, yet Jesus said, "Unless you are born again, you will never see the Kingdom God." Jesus said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit... You must be born again." (John 3:3, 6-7)

That means there are two kinds of births. There is a physical birth, which is the birth of the flesh, and there is a new birth, a second birth, which is being born of the Spirit. I was born the first time on January 16, 1953. I can't remember it, I just have to take my parents' word for it, and that piece of paper called a birth certificate. When I was born of the flesh I received a set of genes and chromosomes from my parents; this DNA determines my nature. I look like my dad, and laugh like my mother. When I was born again on March 11, 1961, I was "re-gened" or regenerated. I received a new nature—the nature of Jesus Christ. I don't remember my first birth, but I can clearly remember my new birth.

Have you ever been born again? Some people ask, "Can you be born again and not know about it?" That's kinda like saying you can be married and not know about it. If you aren't born again, the time will come when you wish you'd never been born physically. That's what Jesus said about Judas, who betrayed Him. He said in Matthew 26:24, "It would be better for that man if he had not been born."

When you were born of the flesh you were given physical life. When you experience a new birth you receive eternal life—real life. Many people are asking, "Is there life after death?" A more

important question is, “Is there life after birth?” If you haven’t been born again, you really aren’t living, you’re only existing physically.

How many of you have a live Christmas tree in your home this year? Are you sure? Because unless that tree is still planted with its roots in the dirt, it’s not live, it’s dead. Oh, you can decorate it and it looks better than it ever did growing in the ground, but when it was cut off, it was cut off from life. Sometimes people can look pretty good with all the decorations of culture, religion, morality, and education, but if you have never been born again, you are cut off from life.

#### **4. JESUS CHANGES YOU INTO A NEW PERSON**

Jesus set a new standard for time, He gives us a new understanding of God—Emmanuel, and He offers you a new birth. But that’s not all, He also has promised to change you into a new person. The Bible says, “You were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus ... to be made NEW in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:21, 23-24)

There are two new gifts in this passage that Jesus gives to His children. First He gives you a new attitude—you start thinking differently. Then He gives you a new self. Paul uses the language of putting on a new self like you put on a new suit of clothes.

I started 2007 with a series called “Refresh: What to do when life crashes.” There were two main truths I kept hammering on. First, your attitude determines your altitude. This series was based upon Jesus’ beatitudes, which are “attitudes that outta’ be!” The second truth I stressed was that we are powerless to change ourselves—but that’s okay because Jesus is able to do what we can’t: Change us. He transforms us.

Now when you think about *how* Jesus changes a person, don’t think about a gradual metamorphosis, like a tadpole changing into a frog. We’re more like frog that’s been kissed and turned into a prince! Jesus came to us in our fallen sinful condition, and He kissed us with His grace, and transformed us into new people. He doesn’t make us a new brand, He makes us brand new! Jesus is still in the life-changing business.

My favorite Christmas song is “Mary Did You Know?” There’s a line that asks, “Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you NEW? This child that you delivered will soon deliver you.” That’s why Jesus came, to make people new. To deliver us from the destructive consequences of our selfish, sinful lives. Have you ever had a life-changing experience with Jesus where He changed you into a new person? If you haven’t, you can trust Christ today and He can make all things new in your life.

In about a week, lots of people will be shouting, “Happy New Year,” but because of Jesus we can proclaim to a lost and dying world, “Happy new YOU!” Because if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The birth of every baby has a potential to change the world. It’s amazing the difference a baby can make in the world. When a husband and wife have their first baby, their world changes for sure!

Brett Harte wrote a wonderful short story in the late 1800s entitled, “The Luck of Roaring Camp.” Roaring Camp got its name because it was the roughest, meanest mining camp in all of California. It was inhabited entirely by hard, surly men—except for one woman, named Cherokee Sal. Cherokee Sal was pregnant and dies giving birth to a baby boy. All the dirty, rough miners decide to try to take care of the boy and they determined the dirty box he’s laying in isn’t good enough, so they pool their money and send a man 80 miles round-trip to buy a fancy rosewood cradle for the boy they name “Tommy Luck.” Although there wasn’t a church in Roaring Camp, (and no need for one) Stumpy, who assumed the primary care of little Tommy Luck decided he should be properly christened.

I’ll pick up with Brett Harte’s own words, “We’re here for a christening,” Stumpy said, “And we’ll have it. I proclaim you Thomas Luck, according to the laws of the United States and the State of California, so help me God.” It was the first time that the name of the Deity had been otherwise uttered than profanely in the camp. The form of christening was perhaps even more ludicrous than the satirist had conceived; but strangely enough, nobody saw it and nobody laughed. “Tommy” was christened as seriously as he would have been under a Christian roof and cried and was comforted in as orthodox fashion.

And so the work of regeneration began in Roaring Camp. Almost imperceptibly a change came over the settlement. The cabin assigned to “Tommy Luck” or “The Luck,” as he was more frequently called, first showed signs of improvement. It was kept scrupulously clean and whitewashed. Then it was boarded, clothed, and papered. The rosewood cradle, packed eighty miles by mule, had, in Stumpy’s way of putting it, “sorter killed the rest of the furniture.” So the rehabilitation of the cabin became a necessity. The men who were in the habit of lounging in at Stumpy’s to see “how ‘The Luck’ got on” seemed to appreciate the change, and in self-defense the rival establishment of “Tuttle’s grocery” bestirred itself and imported a carpet and mirrors. The reflections of the latter on the appearance of Roaring Camp tended to produce stricter habits of personal cleanliness. Again Stumpy imposed a kind of quarantine upon those who aspired to the honor and privilege of holding The Luck. It was a cruel mortification to Kentuck—who, in the carelessness of a large nature and the habits of frontier life, had begun to regard all garments as a second cuticle, which, like a snake’s, only sloughed off through decay. Yet such was the subtle influence of innovation that he thereafter appeared regularly every afternoon in a clean shirt and face still shining from his ablutions.

“Tommy,” who was supposed to spend his whole existence in a persistent attempt to repose, must not be disturbed by noise. The shouting and yelling, which had gained the camp its infelicitous title, were not permitted within hearing distance of Stumpy’s. The men conversed in whispers or smoked with Indian gravity. Profanity was tacitly given up in these sacred precincts.”

The miners, who had often consumed large amounts of whiskey, decided that anyone who drank forfeited their privilege of holding Tommy. Soon, all the miners were stone cold sober.

Gradually the entire atmosphere of Roaring Camp changed because of the birth of a little baby. Instead of a bunch of drunken, dirty, mean old men, the birth of one little baby had changed them into respectable men! It's a great story and if you want to read it, I've included a link to it on my blog (<http://fromthepasture.blogspot.com>).

Multiply the impact of that little baby on those miners by millions of people, and you begin to understand the earth-shattering impact that the birth of Jesus has had on the world. On that night 2,000 years ago God invaded planet earth in the person of a little baby. Jesus gave us a new way of measuring time; He gives us a new understanding of God—Immanuel; He offers us a new birth; and He changes us into a new person. If any person is in Christ, he or she is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come." We have a reason to rejoice! The new HAS come!

## OUTLINE

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### 2. JESUS GIVES US A NEW UNDERSTANDING ABOUT GOD

"The virgin shall be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him 'Immanuel' —which means, 'God with us.'" *Matthew 1:23*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes