

Christmas Is An Altar of Remembrance

Altars of remembrance have many purposes. Today we are discussing the importance of celebrating Christmas as an altar of remembrance.

We are sharing a series of messages centered around celebrating Christmas. We want everyone to understand the importance and purpose of celebrating this holiday and how it fits into the Christian's life.

We are separating the world's celebration, which has been commercialized, from the celebration the Church has each year. The world is very good at adopting things from the Church and then changing them enough to remove what was special about them. This happens most with holidays. We need to look no further than the commercialization of Christmas and Easter to see this.

The Church celebrates Christmas for entirely different reasons than the world. The world is trying to capitalize on what God has given the Church. Today we are talking about Christmas as an altar of remembrance.

Altars of remembrance remind us where we were

There is a real purpose for altars of remembrance. These can be statues, plaques, monuments, and other things that last a long time. These can also be holidays. Their purpose is to remind people of something that happened in history or remind us of a person who did something. They do not necessarily need to be a good reminder. Sometimes we need to be reminded of something terrible that happened in the past so we never repeat it. The buildings at the Auschwitz Concentration Camp are an example of this. This terrible place where Nazi Germany killed millions of Jews in the 1940s has been left standing to remind the world of the terrible atrocities that took place there and as a warning to prevent something like that from ever happening again.

We often forget the condition we were in before the Lord takes action in our lives. We like to live in the present or even look to the future, but to enjoy the present and look forward to the future, we must remember where we came from. Remembering what we endured in the past is critical in celebrating what the Lord is doing now and will do in the future.

Celebrating Christmas allows us to remember that mankind needs a savior. It also allows us to remember and tell the story of the fall of man. We can share about the system of laws and sacrifices that had to be made to atone for our sins. Our children learn where we were as a society and as mankind separated from God. Christmas allows us to remember our need for a savior, starting with the original sin and every day since.

Altars of remembrance remind us of what the Lord has done for us in the past

Let's read Joshua 4:1-7

Joshua 4:1-7

(1) When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, (2) "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, (3) and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you



and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." (4) So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, (5) and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, (6) to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' (7) tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

The Lord knew that Israel could easily forget what He had done for them by stopping up the Jordan River and allowing them to cross over it on dry land. He knew they would need a constant reminder of his protection and provision. God instructed Israel to build altars of remembrance many times throughout the Old Testament. They all served a chief purpose and it is found in verse 6. They are to serve as a sign among us so our children will ask, "What does this mean?" and we can tell the story.

Celebrating Christmas allows us to remember what the Lord has done in providing a savior to atone for our sins once and for all. The moment Adam and Eve invited sin into the world through their disobedience to God, the Lord put a plan into place to save mankind. He knew it would be a process. He also knew He couldn't just wave his hand and dismiss their sin. There had to be some payment. The ultimate payment, though, needed to wait. Mankind had to learn. Mankind had to understand their place and their need for God in their lives. The birth of our savior, Jesus Christ, God's own son, and the beginning of the implementation of God's plan of salvation is what we celebrate on Christmas.

God provided the final and ultimate sacrifice for our sin. He provided a deliverer for mankind so that we would not be separated from Him for eternity. This sacrifice came as a baby, birthed in a stable, as helpless and vulnerable as anyone could be. This is what we celebrate when we celebrate Christmas.

Altars of remembrance help us tell a story

When we have altars of remembrance, whether they be holidays, statues, plaques, or monuments, it allows us to tell the story. In our living room, we have a large picture frame with 5 pictures from one of our trips to Kenya. The caption reads, "Pray for Kenya". There is a picture of children carrying water, a group meeting in a pole building without any walls, and prayer hut, smiling children, and a dear sister singing and leading us in worship. These all serve to remind us of the ministry in Kenya, but also allows us to share the story of the church in Kenya.

We can share about the need for clean water. We can share the need for food and shelter for the children. It prompts us to share the beautiful stories of faith and worship with our friends and ministry partners in Kenya. Everyone who comes to our home and sees those pictures gets to hear our stories and this prompts them to pray for Kenya and to help provide for the children of Kenya. This would be more difficult if we did not have that picture frame on the wall with those pictures.

The Christmas holiday is the same thing. It is an opportunity to tell the story of the miraculous birth of Jesus. That is what we are celebrating. We can tell of God's provision to save us from our own sins. God's story of redemption can be told all as a part of the Christmas story. This then gives us hope.



Altars of remembrance give us hope

Hope is a powerful thing and we cannot survive without it. Remembering where we once were, how God was there with us, and then how He delivered us or provided for us brings us hope as we face the next challenge.

When we read from Joshua 4 we said they built an altar of 12 stones taken from the middle of the Jordan River to remind the people of the challenge they faced and how God met that challenge and provided them a path where no path could be made.

We need hope. The year 2020 has been very difficult, yet God is still on the throne. Jesus is still seated at the right hand of God interceding for all who have made Him their Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit is still working in and through God's people around the world.

Even the concept of Santa Claus comes from the middle ages bishop, Saint Nicholas, who provided treats and necessities to children in secret. Nicholas wanted to bring hope to children and this was how he did it. This was how he ministered to them. This is also an example of how the world will take something the Church or someone in the Church does in the name of God and then changes it and commercializes it. This is why it is all the more important to tell the real and full Christmas story.

Christmas is not about giving gifts, though there is nothing wrong with that when they are given as a commemoration of the wise men from the East bringing gifts to the newly born Jesus. Christmas is not about time off at the end of the year, though there is nothing wrong with taking time away from work and school and coming together as families and communities to relax and celebrate and focus on God.

Celebrating Christmas and telling the story of the virgin birth opens up the opportunity for a conversation about the need for hope and when we need it most, God has already provided it. Christmas is also a free pass, so to speak, to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people.

Conclusion

As we celebrate Christmas this year, let's remember where mankind was and what God did for us to bring us back to him. Let us tell the story of God's redemption of mankind by giving us His own Son to be born of a virgin in a stable 2000 years ago. This Son would then go on to teach us and then give up His life for us so that our sins could be atoned for, once and for all.

