

# Some of the Paradoxes of Christmas

*Topical Scriptures*

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## ***Introduction***

- We come now to our time for the study of the Word of God this morning on **this Pre-Christmas Sunday**.
  - Our **attention though**, naturally, is **drawn to Christmas**.
- As I was **thinking about what I might share** with you, I was **struck again with the dichotomy** between Christmas **for the Christian and Christmas for the world** sitting and was **looking at various, available** Christmas cards.
  - One of them had a **fat man with a white beard** on it and a **couple of little elves**, and it said, **“Ho, ho, ho.”**
  - The **other one had a manger**, with a **star and a baby**, and it said, **“Thou shalt call His name Emmanuel.”**
  - And I began to **think about the paradox** of Christmas.
    - **What is Christmas?**
- In the **ancient Church**, and **until rather recently**, people **genueflected at the two references to the incarnation in the Mass: at the Creed and at the Last Gospel** (John 1).
  - **Why did we do this?**
  - It was explained to me that **the mystery was so deep that one could only fall into silent reverence**.
- **As we think about the Paradoxes in the Biblical account of Christmas, remember first of all that the word paradox speaks of something that defies intuition or the common way of thinking**.
  - Please remember that **we are NOT** talking about things that are **actual contradictions**...
    - **Rather**, we are speaking **more about things that seem** to be such...
    - **God does not actually** contradict Himself.
    - It may seem to be so to our **human mind and feeble thinking processes**
    - **BUT**, they may seem such **nevertheless!**

- THAT is what we'll talk about when we discuss these "Paradoxes"!!
- It speaks of things that, to the human mind, do NOT seem to make sense!
- It unsettles or startles us to make us think more deeply.
- It comes from the Greek: *para-* + *dokein*.
- *Para* usually meaning "*beside, off to the side,*" sometimes "*above,*" and
  - *dokein* meaning "*to think or seem.*"
- Hence a paradox is something off to the side of the usual way of seeing things or thinking about them.
  - If you are going to relate to God you're going to deal with a lot of paradox,
    - for in God's ways and His thinking often defies and confounds human ways and thinking.
  - God is not irrational but He often acts in ways that do not conform with worldly standards and/or expectations.
- There are many paradoxes and seeming impossibilities in the incarnation.
  - As mysteries they cannot be fully solved, and yet they demonstrate (being Revelation of God) Truth so they claim our reverence.
  - Interestingly, People genuflected upon hearing them in the past, and even today they bow at the mention of the incarnation in the creed for it is a deep mystery.
- As we approach Christmas, I would like to list some of the paradoxes of Christmas.
  - For a lot of them I will say as little of them as possible, just enough to make the paradox clear.
  - This paucity of words, not common with me, is in reverence to the mystery and also to invite your own reflection.
- And as I thought further about the paradox of Christmas, I thought about the great paradox of Christmas who is Jesus Christ.

*There are actually a goodly Number of Paradoxes in the OT Prophecies Concerning the Coming Messiah*

- And I begin to look at some of the prophecies and I begin to say now...

*“I wonder what prophecies might be exciting for us to study and look at the birth of Christ?”*

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- And I came across the idea of the paradoxical prophecies.
  - Did you know that **the Old Testament is loaded with apparently contradictory prophecies** about Christ?
  - Did you know that?
- Did you ever think that there is **no way that Old Testament prophets could ever have understood the fullness** of the coming Messiah
  - **just on the virtue of the apparent contradiction in their own prophecies?**
- **For example**, a prophet would sit down, and the Holy Spirit would inspire him, and
  - he would write that there was coming a conqueror
  - who would rule the world,
  - who would be the Savior and the Deliverer of men.
- **And then That same prophet** would sit down later and write about a Man of Sorrow, who was lonely and rejected.
- The prophet would write that He would be...
  - a King of glory,
  - a King of heaven,
  - the eternal Savior,
  - the desire of all nations.
- And **then another prophet would sit down and write** that there would be **no beauty in him that men would desire Him;**
  - and that He would be a servant,
  - He would end up bloody, suffering, crucified, and dead.
    - **How do you resolve these things?**
- The prophet would write that He would come in flaming fire to take vengeance on His enemies.

- Then **another prophet** would write that He would come **preaching peace**.
  - And so even these great **prophets couldn't even understand what they themselves wrote** about "Christmas" -
    - It was a **"paradox", or mystery to them**.
- Fascinatingly, The **last of all the Old Testament prophets was also trapped in the greatest example of this OT/NT paradox**.
  - His name was **John the Baptist**.
  - In fact, **John was so confused that** when he was a prisoner, he **sent some of his disciples to Jesus**.
    - And the **record** of that encounter is in the **11th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew**.
- You see, we must remember that **everything that John had said about the Messiah, he received from God**.
  - Over in **Luke 3:2**, regarding John, says,

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*"The word of God came to John."*

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- Of course, that wasn't the only time!!
- So **when John proclaimed** the Messiah, it **wasn't his opinion, it was revelation**.
  - And as a **Prophet of God**, we have to believe that John **KNEW that it was from God!!**
    - And John was **declaring the Messiah**, and he was **saying certain things about the Messiah**.
    - You say, "*Well, what was he saying about the Messiah?*"
- Well, he was **saying that the Messiah was going to be a judge**;
  - that **when the Messiah came, terrible things would happen**.
- And so **John says**, for example, in **Luke 3:7**,

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*"O generation of snakes, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance."*

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- This was his message. John says **there's coming a Messiah and He is going to be a terrifying judge.**
- **In Matthew 3:7**, he said **virtually the same thing.**

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*<sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*

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- And **Then in verse 10**, he said,

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*"The axe is laid to the root of the trees. And every tree which brings forth evil fruit"*

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- or **doesn't bring forth good fruit** –

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*"is hewn down and cast into the fire."*

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- Then in **Verse 12**,

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*"His fan is in His hand. He'll thoroughly purge the floor, gather the wheat and the grainery, and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

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- **That was John's message** about the coming Messiah:
  - **foreboding, judgmental, damning.**
  - That's **the Messiah that John anticipated.**
  - And **then Jesus came.**
- And you **know what He did?**
  - Mostly deeds of **mercy.**
  - He **healed** the sick.
  - He gave **sight to the blind**, and **hearing** to the deaf, and **voices** to the dumb, and **life** to the dead.
- And so, **John didn't understand it, because John didn't understand that that was also a part of the prophecy**; or he had forgotten.
  - And **so he sends his disciples from his prison to inquire** of Jesus.
- He was **taken prisoner**, you'll remember, by **King Herod Antipas**,
  - locked in the gloomy **fortress of Machaerus**,

- which is, oh, about **5 miles east to the Dead Sea**, and **15 miles south** of the northernmost tip.
- It's in the **most bleak and desolate place imaginable**.
- It was originally **constructed as a Herodian fortress**.
- And **there was John**.
- And it **didn't seem to be going the way he had anticipated**,
  - because **Messiah was to come and to judge and set up His kingdom**.
  - **BUT there wasn't any judgment**, and
  - **there wasn't any kingdom**.
- And here he - **the last of the great prophets and the greatest who ever lived**, according to *Matthew 11:11* - was imprisoned.

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<sup>11</sup> *“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*”

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- Let's be sure we keep in mind here that **Jesus is not speaking any group OTHER THAN all men that had ever lived with an inclusion especially of all Prophets!**
- Verse 1 of Matthew 11:

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*“It came to pass when Jesus had ceased commanding His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities.*”

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- In verse 2 it says that

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*“when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, “Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?”*”

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- John says to himself, “Wait... are there really **TWO Messiahs?**”
  - **When John heard the things that Jesus did, he couldn't justify those with that he, himself had said Jesus would do.**
- John was **trapped in the paradox of prophecy**.

- He was **confused**.
- In one way, His **faith was growing thin**.
- He **failed to see how the resolution of such a conflict existed**.
- And **notice the reply of Jesus** to these messengers from John. **Jesus answered and said to them,**

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*“Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”*

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- Now, **why did He do that?**
  - **Why didn’t He give John some more specific answer?**
  - **Why did He say, “You go remind him”?**
- Now **watch**.
  - There in **verse 3-6 of Matt. 11:**

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<sup>3</sup> *and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”*

<sup>4</sup> *Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”*

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- Because **in the words that He used in verse 5**, they are **really a paraphrase of Isaiah 35:5 and 6, and Isaiah 61:1**.

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<sup>5</sup> *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.*

<sup>6</sup> *Then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
And the tongue of the dumb sing.  
For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,  
And streams in the desert.*

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- **Isaiah 61:1 - The Good News of Salvation**

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**61** *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,  
Because the LORD has anointed Me  
To preach good tidings to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives,  
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;”*

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- He’s saying,
  - “You go back and remind John of some other prophecies I have to fulfill first.
  - The **problem that John had** was the same problem that **all the Old Testament prophets had**,
  - **they didn’t see any specific distinction** between the **first coming and what?**
    - The **second**.
- So He essentially **says to these messengers**,

*“You tell him to hang in there, I’ve got some other things to do that are also fulfillment of recorded prophecies.”*

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- And **the very words** that He gave were **just almost right out of Isaiah**.
- And **verse 6 is a gentle rebuke**:

*“And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me,”*

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- - **or shall not stumble because of what I am doing**.
- **What is He saying?** Essentially

*“Hey, blessed is the man who trusts Me. You haven’t seen it all yet; trust Me.”*

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- So you see, **John had that problem**.
  - There is **no way that an Old Testament prophet could ever understand all of the resolution of these things**.
  - The **New Testament commentary makes sense out of all the paradox**.



- **One of the greatest verifications** of the Christian faith, I think, are **the diverse and what are apparently contradictory prophecies**.
  - You see, they **could never be reproduced**.
  - They **could never be counterfeited**.
  - They **could never be falsified**.
    - Such **amazing and detailed prophecies** prevent **wicked men or overzealous disciples from falsely fulfilling them**.
- For instance, look over at **1 Peter 1:10**.
  - It says there, *“Of which salvation,”*
  - - and of course **this is the salvation that Christ brought –**

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*“of which salvation **the prophets have enquired** and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what person,”*

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- - you should **write that in probably** if it isn't there –
 

*“...searching what person or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.”*
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- Now **notice it also says in verse 10**, *“the prophets enquired and the prophets searched diligently.”*
  - It tells us what **they looked for there in verse 11**, *“The prophets searched.”*

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*<sup>11</sup> searching **what, or what manner of time**, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.*

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- **What** were they searching?
  - They were **searching the things they prophesied in verse 10** and the **things they testified of in verse 11** from the Holy Spirit.
  - They were **searching their own writings to figure them out**.

- The **paradoxes** were so obvious that even they couldn't resolve the **sufferings** of Christ **with the glory** that should follow.
- They **couldn't figure out** what **person** or what **time** these things **could come together**, what person **could fulfill all** this, and **in what time could this be done**.
- And so they **searched diligently** for a **clear understanding of the very things** which they themselves **had written down** **under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit**.
  - You see, there is **no way to falsify such things**.
  - **One of the great proofs** was that they didn't just write their own minds,

**but that they wrote the mind of God,**

- **was the contradictions which they wrote**.
- **Men wouldn't do that.**
  - God did it, because **He knew the resolution would come in birth, life, ministry and death of Christ**.
- **They couldn't see that.**
  - **Not even John understand it, and**
    - **John thought there must be two messiahs.**
- **In Matthew 13:17**, Jesus said,

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*“Verily I say unto you that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which you see and haven't seen them, and to hear the things which you hear and haven't heard them.”*

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- **Backing one verse to verse 16,**

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*“Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. Why, you have the benefit of knowing the things they desperately wanted to see resolved.”*

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- Let's **look at some of the paradoxes**.
  - What are they?
  - What are the **paradoxes the prophets had a hard time with?**
  - **The first one** is the paradox of the God-man.

- Point one, **the paradox of the God-man.**

## 1) The Infinite One becomes an infant – **God Becomes a Man**

- But you **know what?**
  - **No one really understands it and Christ knew it was a difficult problem.**
  - And remember, **He posed it in Matt. 22:41-46.**

*While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David." He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool' " ?*

*If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.*

- **The key idea to suggest the issue was...**

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*"Whose Son is He?"*

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- **They said, "The Son of David."**
- **Christ then put forth this great Paradox...**

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*"He said unto them, 'How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying in Psalm 110,*

*"The Lord said unto my Lord, 'Sit thou at My right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.' " ?*

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- The point is that **if He is the Son of David, how come David calls Him his Lord in Psalm 110?**
  - **If David call Him Lord, how is He his son?' Jesus said."**
  - **You know what their reaction was?**

- “And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither dared any man from that day forth ask Him anymore questions.”
- The Paradoxical question is ‘**How can He be the Son of David and the God of David He is?**’
  - That passage proves that Jesus is saying He is both Son of David, human; He is God of David, divine.
    - It is **absolute satanic blasphemy** to say that Jesus is anything less.
- And Paul prayed in **Colossians 2:2 and 3** that Christians would **have all the riches of a full assurance and understanding** of the mystery.

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*<sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

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- **What was the mystery of God?** even the Father, and Christ.

*How can God be both, and yet He is?*

*I don't know how He's both, I don't care how He is, I **just believe He is.***

***He can solve that problem, I can't handle it.***

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- But I know Jesus said this: **John 14:9**,
  - “He that hath seen Me” – **has what?** - “has seen the Father.”
- **That's a paradox**, friends.
- That's **the paradox of Christmas**.
- The babe was **God and AT THE SAME TIME** from conception onward...**wrapped in the flesh of a human being with all of that weakness (except, of course for sin)**