TITLE: The Spirit of Christmas

TEXT: Ro. 8:9-10; Gal. 5:22-25; Mt. 25:34-40;

Mt. 5:43-48; Jn. 3:16-17

INTRODUCTION:   A four-year-old boy who was asked to return thanks before Christmas dinner. The family members bowed their heads in expectation. He began his prayer, thanking God for all his friends, naming them one by one. Then he thanked God for Mommy, Daddy, brother, sister, Grandma, Grandpa, and all his aunts and uncles. Then he began to thank God for the food.
    He gave thanks for the turkey, the dressing, the fruit salad, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, even the Cool Whip. Then he paused, and everyone waited ... and waited. After a long silence, the young fellow looked up at his mother and asked, "If I thank God for the broccoli, won't he know that I'm lying?"

 Christmas is a time of surprises. There was a lady who was preparing her Christmas cookies. There was a knock at the door. She went to find a man, his clothes poor, obviously looking for some Christmas odd jobs. He asked her if there was anything he could do. She said, "Can you paint?"

 "Yes," he said. "I'm a rather good painter."

 "Well," she said, "there are two gallons of green paint there and a brush, and there's a porch out back that needs to be painted. Please do a good job. I'll pay you what the job is worth."

 He said, "Fine. I'll be done quickly."

 She went back to her cookie making and didn't think much more about it until there was a knock at the door. She went, and the obviousness of his painting was evident: he had it all over his clothes.

 She said, "Did you finish the job?"

 He said, "Yes."

 She said, "Did you do a good job?"

 He said, "Yes. But lady, there's one thing I'd like to point out to you. That's not a Porsche back there. That's a Mercedes."

This time of year, we hear a lot about the spirit of Christmas.

 We may hear this phrase used at Church, hear it on special holiday television shows and hear it used in television commercials or on the radio and in the mall----it’s the spirit of Christmas!

Catchy phrases like this one, the spirit of Christmas, intrigue me. Just exactly what does that mean? What are we thinking when we say it or hear it?

Just exactly what is it that we mean when we talk about the spirit of Christmas?

If someone doesn’t put up a Christmas tree or decorate the outside of their house and we may say, that they don’t have the Spirit of Christmas.

 Maybe a person doesn’t buy gifts to exchange at work so we say that they don’t have the spirit of Christmas..

(at least those who sell gifts may say that)

If a person doesn’t watch “Miracle on 34th Street” or Charles Dickens classic “A Christmas Carol” at lease once during the month of December and we may say that person does not have the spirit of Christmas..

 What exactly is it that we mean when we use this phrase?

 As I was reading one of my daily devotionals, I came across this story.

 A man shares: One of my wealthiest neighbors who is a lawyer told me of the merriest Christmas he had ever experienced. He said, “One Christmas Eve I locked my office door and started home, feeling that the spirit of Christmas had snubbed me that year. As I left the building on that bitterly cold day, I saw on the usual street corner the usual little paper boy shouting the headlines. I slipped into my warm overcoat and noticed that he had no overcoat. The dirty jacket that he wore was much too large for his small frame. It was also so thin that he shivered with chill. On an impulse, I invited him to follow me into a nearby department store.

 To his surprise and delight I had him fitted with a fur lined leather coat. The shining eyes of this excited child excited me so much that I asked him if he owned a bicycle. Upon learning that he did not, I accompanied him to the bicycle department and invited him to select a bicycle of his choice. Overcome with gladness, he could hardly decide, but finally settled on one of the shiniest ones they had.

 When he saw me paying for it, he jumped for joy saying just what I have always wanted!

 Forgetting about his papers, the boy rode off into the thinning Christmas crowd shouting over his shoulder, Thanks! Thanks a lot, mister!

 The man said that the smile he had seen wreathed upon this Childs face filled his heart with the true Christmas spirit.

 He said: I believe that was the little boy’s best Christmas ever- I know it was my best one!

Such a story warms the heart and makes us feel good, no doubt…. But was its cause really the spirit of Christmas?

I have no way of knowing but let us just assume for the sake of argument, that this lawyer was an unbeliever, possibly even an atheist.

 Would this act of kindness on his part still be able to be attributed to the spirit of Christmas?

Stuart Briscoe in his book “Meet Him at the Manger” said this: “*The spirit of Christmas needs to be superseded by the Spirit of Christ. The spirit of Christmas is annual; the Spirit of Christ is eternal. The spirit of Christmas is sentimental; the Spirit of Christ is supernatural. The spirit of Christmas is a human product; the Spirit of Christ is a divine person. That makes all the difference in the world.”*

Not to disagree with Mr. Briscoe but in reality, shouldn’t the Spirit of Christmas and the Spirit of Christ be one and the same thing?

The word Christmas is a derivative of two words!

Christ and mass. Put them together and you get Christmas!

 Christ means the anointed one.

 Mass is defined as: A sacrament and the central act of worship in many Christian churches.

Christmas then means: a central act of worship, a celebration of the anointed one!

The spirit of Christmas then would be the spirit of celebration and worship of Jesus.

 Isn’t this the purpose of the Holy Spirit of Christ in our life?

 To bring us into celebration and worship of Christ.

 So how is it that we truly celebrate and worship Christ in our life? ….

**Romans 8:9 - 10 (NIV) And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.****10But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.**

Isn’t the primary way that we celebrate the spirit of Christ in our life through surrender and obedience to Him.

 Surrender to the place that our body becomes dead to sin and our spirit becomes alive because of the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit in our life.

In speaking about the spirit of Christ within us, Paul says this in…

**Galatians 5:22- 25 (NIV)**

**22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,****23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.****24Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.****25Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.**

The fruit, the by-product of a Christ centered, Spirit filled life will be: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control.**

Shouldn’t these things also then be central in the manifestation of the Spirit of Christmas?

**Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control.**

Is this what we most often see with what the world defines as the spirit of Christmas?

Consumer spending and consumer debt will be at an all-time high this month. For most retailers December is the hottest month of the year. For a lot of retailers, the spirit of Christmas is dependent upon how much money comes in during the Christmas season.

Have a good month then everyone had the spirit of Christmas this year….Have a bad month and the spirit of Christmas was lacking…

For me the mall is not a place to go to find the true spirit of Christmas if the spirit of Christmas and the spirit of Christ are to be one and the same thing.

I remember a few years ago we went to Valley West Mall one evening around Christmas to do some last minute Christmas shopping.

The parking lot was totally full... I mean there wasn’t a parking place to be found anywhere!

After circling the entire lot a couple of times, I just dropped Pam off at the door and said I would try to find a parking place and meet her inside. I drove around for 35-40 minutes before I finally found a place to park and then it was about ½ mile or more from the mall entrance!

 It was dog-eat-dog in that parking lot! Let me tell you by the time I got parked **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control** is not what I was feeling! Regardless of how much money I may have spent that night or how many gifts I bought it wasn’t done in the true spirit of Christmas..

Again, many people will go so far into debt just over the Christmas season that it will take them the entirety of the next year just to pay everything off and they will do it all in the name of keeping the Spirit of Christmas!

If the Spirit of Christmas and the Spirit of Christ are to be one and the same thing then what about the fruit of the spirit called self-control?

Here is a good test---If we don’t have the same love, joy, peace and patience in January when we start to pay for what we may have charged in December then was what we did in December a product of the spirit of Christmas? Or was it something else?

 Norman Vincent Peale tells a story of the early days of his ministry. He was in Brooklyn, New York. One Christmas Eve he was out visiting some families, and he walked by a doorway. He noticed that on the door was the red ribbon of Christmas and a black wreath of mourning.

 While the people who lived there were not parishioners of his Church, he decided he would call on the family anyway.

 So, he knocked on the door, and the father of the family came to answer. Dr. Peale introduced himself and was invited in. He sought to give condolences to the family, and he saw in the sitting room a small casket where a 6-year-old girl was lying in state. He expressed his sympathy to the father, and this father said, "Dr. Peale, its' going to be all right, for we know she is with God."

 While they were talking, Dr. Peale could hear the mother of the family reading the Bible to two little boys of the family, and he heard her reading these words: "Because I live, you shall live also."

Now that is the real Spirit of Christmas! That was a manifestation of the Spirit of Christ being displayed within that family!

-- Roy L. Smith once said:

He who has not Christmas in his heart will never find it under a tree.

The true spirit of Christmas is found in manifesting the Spirit of Christ.

Jesus tells us how we become a manifesting presence of His Spirit in:

**Matthew 25:34-40 (NIV) 34“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.****35For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,****36I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’**

**37“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?****39When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’**

**40“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’**

This is manifesting the Spirit of Christmas because it is manifesting the Spirit of Christ..

When we reach out beyond our homes, family gatherings and office parties to help meet the needs of others, then we are truly manifesting the Spirit of Christmas because we will be manifesting the Spirit of Christ.

**Matthew 5:43 - 48 (NIV)**

**43“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’****44But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,****45that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.****46If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?**

**47And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?****48Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

How is it that we become perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect? By showing love, kindness, and generosity, not just to those that we feel that we want to, but to even love those who we may not.

Example: I came out of Grocery retail. I can remember all the years working through the Christmas holidays as a retailer. There were many years I felt like the wealthy lawyer…not like I was wealthy but like the spirit of Christmas had snubbed me.

Have you ever gone grocery shopping on the 24th of December? At Dahl’s, where I worked, it was usually the busiest day of the year. It is totally chaotic! We closed the doors early on Christmas Eve, 6:00 pm. I used to think the company was just being nice to its employees by closing early on that day but then I came to realize that the reason that they closed 4 hours early was because 4 more hours of over-demanding customers would have done most employees in. Even management could be found in a back rooms banging their head against a wall by 4:30.

Many times when you left the store on that evening you would find yourself feeling totally physically and mentally exhausted.

Many years I would leave work and go directly to where the family was gathering for our Christmas Eve celebration. By the time that I got there I was completely Christmas-ed out! I just wanted to say bah-hum-bug and go vegetate somewhere!

I go over to Fairway on December 24th each year about ½ hour before they close just to look at the dazed looks on the employees faces just for a taste of nostalgia!

When the Christmas Spirit starts to fade within a retail employee, they all have the same look…glassy eyed-vacant stare. A smile that seems painted on their face or not smiling at all…

But I must say that I had a rather pleasant experience at Wal-Mart one time. I went through an express checkout lane and the young lady who was running the cash register kind of looked like an un-made bed. (I would have sent her home)

 Her shirt was wrinkled, looked kind of dirty actually, and not to be rude or judgmental but didn’t seem like she was all that smart.

 As I was standing in line I kind of questioned the management’s wisdom in putting this girl on a cash register…

When it came time for her to ring up my purchase, she did so well enough but what really impressed me was what happened when I went to pay. My purchase came to something like $10.08. I gave her a $10.00 bill and went to my pocket for some spare change only to find that I had put my last 2 quarters in the “win the stuffed toy machine” on my way in.

No problem, I got into my billfold and got out a $1.00 bill for her to take the 8 cents out of it. I tried to give it to her and she said no, I think I have it, and she started digging in her pocket. I said no that’s ok go ahead and take it out of my dollar. She wouldn’t hear of it! She was counting through the change she pulled out of her pocket--- 5-6-7-8..

I started to argue some more but she just had such a pleased look on her face as she said Merry Christmas sir, That I just said Well thank you and left…

I don’t know for sure, but I would dare to say that I witnessed the true spirit of Christmas because what I had witnessed was a manifestation of the Spirit of Christ…

 Isn’t that something that Jesus would do if he was working at the checkout lane at Wal-Mart. Maybe He was….

 A man had an uncle who was given to many rash statements, and one of the little things he said was, "There ain't nothing as over as Christmas." What he meant was that when all the presents have been unwrapped and all the poinsettias are removed and all the candles are put up and the tree is taken down, there is a kind of emptiness, because our feelings are accentuated.

Have you ever got through the holidays with all the hustle and bustle and business and just thought man, Am I glad that’s all over! Found that there ain’t nothing as over as Christmas?

 Children who were on their best behavior the weeks before in fear of not making Santa’s good list are now fighting each other over the toys that they received…

 Moms & Dads all of a sudden are starting to feel the stress as the master card & visa bills arrive and they just can’t believe what the spirit of Christmas has cost them..

 Christmas carols playing softly in the background at the mall have been replaced with the usual soft rock as you are waiting in an endless line to return some of those Christmas treasures that someone so thoughtfully gave you that you really didn’t want…

 And on December 26th when you step on the bathroom scales and find that now you won’t be able to eat for the next month or two because of all of your over-indulgences of the Holidays ….

All done in the name of the Spirit of Christmas! Or was it?

 If we truly have the spirit of Christmas, then we should have it 365 days a year….

If the spirit of Christmas and the Spirit of Christ are one in the same thing in our life then the fruit of the spirit should be manifest in our life every day of the year..

 The fruit of **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control!**

The true Spirit of Christmas is best illustrated to us in:

**John 3:16 - 17 (NIV) 16“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.****17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**

This is not just the first but the greatest manifestation ever of the Spirit of Christmas**---For God so loved that He gave!**

And it is in this act of giving that we see the true Spirit of Christmas displayed…Because God Loved -God gave! And He gave to those who had nothing to give back!

God gave His son to die on a cross for our sake, in our stead, so that we may find real life in Him.

The Spirit of Christmas was just as much present on Calvary’s cross as it was in a Bethlehem’s manger!

The Spirit of Christmas is best displayed within us by our simply allowing the Spirit of Christ to rule and reign in our hearts and lives..

 We do that through Lordship. By simply surrendering our life to Christ and giving Jesus control.

The Spirit of Christmas isn’t something that is to just be manifest within us a few days or weeks of the year, but the Spirit of Christmas is the Spirit of Christ and we should manifest that presence within us every day of every year..

Do you have the Spirit of Christ in your heart this morning? If so then you do have the Spirit of Christmas!

 The question is: are we allowing that Spirit to manifest itself, not just through the holiday season, but will we allow it to manifest itself within us in all of our seasons of life?

Another catchy phrase that we may hear a lot this time of year is: Jesus is the reason for the season!

 In all the hustle and bustle of the next several hours will we truly make Jesus the reason for the season?

 Will love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control be evidences of the Spirit of Christmas that is alive within us?

Will we reach out beyond our circle of family and friends and feed those who may be hungry, give drink to those who are thirsty, especially those who are hungering and thirsting to know Jesus? Will we be hospitable to the stranger, especially those estranged from Christ and invite them into fellowship with Him and us?Will we look for an opportunity to provide the needs of those who are truly in need? Will we open our hearts to the sick and afflicted and imprisoned of this world and tell them of the great healer and deliverer who came to redeem and save them?

Will we truly manifest the Spirit of Christmas by manifesting The Spirit of Christ allowing others to see that Jesus is truly the reason for the season---and not just this Christmas season but He is the reason for all the seasons of our life?