

## Coming Home for Christmas – Pt.4

2020-12-20 Sermon  
By Major Brian Coles

[slide 1] I'm not a mind reader, but my guess is there are 2 things true about most of you right now.

One, you're probably a little distracted. You're thinking of the 101 things you have to get done before Christmas.

Two, you're probably a little tired.

There's really only one word that can adequately describe all that we have to do leading up to Christmas – *Madness!*

Think about it – we decorate our homes, buy gifts, bake cookies, send cards, and consume more calories in 1 week than we normally do in 1 month.

And to top it off, the kids are out of school for two weeks. But it's no wonder we get a little frazzled at Christmas.

So, I want to begin this morning by asking you all to take a deep breath (inhale... exhale) and say, "God, help me to focus."

This morning we want to focus on coming home to God at Christmas; on being restored, reconciled to him.

[slide 2] Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 5.18 that God reconciles us to himself through Jesus.

We are meant to be reconciled, to live in a right r'ship with God our heavenly father through his Son, our Saviour Jesus.

[slide 3, blank] God wants us to come home to him this Christmas. That's been our theme for the last 3 weeks.

While it's true that, "there's no place like home," let's not forget two facts about home.

[slide 4] Fact 1: No home is perfect. When you read a story or see a movie about coming home for Christmas,

the impression given is that if we could just get home for Christmas everything would be perfect!

The reality of home for many people is not found in a Norman Rockwell painting or a Hallmark Christmas movie.

There is often conflict at home. Home for many can be a place of disappointment, heartache, or of unfulfilled expectations.

Do all your relatives get along together? Is everybody going to be perfectly happy with every gift they get this year?

I have a brother-in-law who gave my sister a shower cap for Christmas! She was not amused.

I read of a guy who bought his wife a chainsaw for Christmas. Fortunately for him it was not operational when she opened the box!

No home is perfect. That's fact 1. [slide 5] Fact 2: No home is permanent.

Your kids grow up and eventually move out. Loved ones die. Some of you have lost a loved one recently and this Christmas is particularly difficult because you're missing that person.

No home is perfect. No home is permanent. [slide 6] That's why this Christmas I'd like us to consider a different kind of homecoming –

a coming home to God your heavenly Father, the one who made you and who loves you.

You may ask, “Well, what can I expect when I come home to God this Christmas?”

There are 3 expectations I’d like for you to consider this morning.

(What then, is the 1<sup>st</sup> expectation you can have when coming home to God your heavenly father this Christmas?) [slide 7]

1. You can expect to receive God’s love and forgiveness.

American novelist Ernest Hemingway wrote a story about a young man named Paco who ran away from home and went to Madrid, Spain.

He was estranged from his father and his father was heartbroken and did everything he could to find his son.

Finally, in desperation he went to the newspaper in Madrid and took out an ad that said:

“Paco, all is forgiven. I want you to come home. Meet me tomorrow at 12 noon in front of the Grand hotel.”

The next day the father showed up at 12 noon in front of the hotel and was shocked,

shocked to find 800 young men who had responded to the ad - all named Paco – all who were estranged from their fathers.

Are you estranged from God your heavenly father? That’s what sin does – it alienates, it separates us from God.

But God your heavenly father has, in effect, taken out an ad – he’s written to you saying,

“You (your name) can be forgiven because I sent my Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for your sins. I want you to come home.”

It doesn’t matter what you’ve done, who you’ve done it with, or how long you’ve done it for.

Today you can repent of your sin and come home to him and expect to receive his love and forgiveness.

[slide 8] As John tells us in 1 Jn. 4.9-10: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” so that we can be forgiven.

That’s the first thing you can expect when you come home to God your heavenly father at Christmas.

You can expect to receive God’s love and forgiveness.

(What then, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> expectation you can have if you come home to God your heavenly father this Christmas?) [slide 9]

2. You can expect to receive God’s peace and strength.

Our economy isn’t recession proof, investments aren’t fool proof, jobs aren’t layoff proof, marriages aren’t affair proof, and our lives aren’t disease proof.

How do you handle life when you face an uncertain future, when you have to cope with tough times?

Where do you go for peace in the midst of life’s storms and for strength to carry on?

We can learn from Todd Beamer’s life where to go for peace and strength. Todd was on Flight 93 when terrorists took control of the plane.

Todd made a phone call from the plane and got hold of GTE supervisor Lisa Jefferson.

He told her about their situation and that he and a few other passengers were planning to jump the terrorists.

Then Todd asked Lisa to pray with him. They began to recite the Lord's Prayer together: "Our Father, who art in heaven..."

When they finished, Todd added "Jesus help me," then he led his fellow passengers in praying the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want... even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil."

After that were Todd's last words: "Are you guys ready? Let's roll!"

We know from the cockpit voice recorder that Todd and other passengers wrestled with the terrorists

and forced the plane to crash into the ground killing themselves but foiling the terrorist plans to fly the plane into the Capitol Building or the White House.

Todd found the peace and strength he needed, in the midst of an extraordinary crisis, in his Saviour, Jesus.

Where do you go to find that kind of peace and strength in times of chaos and crisis

in your marriage, in your job situation, with regards to your health concerns, and your r'ships with others?

[slide 10] In Jn. 14.27 Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

And in Phil. 4.7 Paul writes, "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding [or exceeds anything we can understand,]

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

And in Col. 3.15 he says: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

In other words, let the peace that Christ gives control your decisions and actions.”

In Col. 1.11 (NCV) Paul pens these words, “God will strengthen you with his own great power so that you will not give up when troubles come.”

In Isa. 40.29 we read that “God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.”

When you come home to God your heavenly father, the 2<sup>nd</sup> expectation you can have is that you will receive his peace and strength.

(What then, is the 3<sup>rd</sup> expectation you can have if you come home to God your heavenly father this Christmas?) [slide 11]

3. You can expect to receive God’s hope and joy.

In Rms. 15.13 Paul writes, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,

so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

- ◆ God’s love and forgiveness takes care of my past.
- ◆ God’s peace and strength gives me help in the present.
- ◆ God’s plan for my life gives me hope and joy for my future.

[slide 12, blank] The prophet Jeremiah writes “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,

“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” 29.11

And in Ps. 16.11 David says: “You will fill me with joy in your presence.”

When you come home to God your heavenly father you can expect to receive joy and hope.

The sad thing is some people don't want to come home to God for Christmas because home for them is not a nice place.

For some people home is a place of anger, violence or abuse, a place of shame, guilt, or resentment.

It was that way for Chuck. He writes: "I grew up in an abusive home and I counted the days until I could walk out the door and leave all that painful past behind. I hated home and never wanted to go back.

They say home is where the heart is, and that was my problem. While physically I lived in that home my heart was somewhere else.

Now that I've come home to God my heavenly father, I have the home I've always wanted but never had.

At home with God I have a place of love and forgiveness, of peace and strength, of hope and joy."

When I read that, I thought of Ps. 27.10 (ESV): "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me in."

And Ps. 68.6 (NASB) the songwriter, David, tells us that "God makes a home for the lonely."

Whether you grew up in a dysfunctional family or not, there are some needs in your life that your family will never be able to meet. Only God can meet those needs.

That's why God your heavenly father sent his one and only Son, Jesus, so that you can come home to him

and have your need for his love and forgiveness, his peace and strength, his hope and joy, fulfilled in your life.

Are you ready to take that next step and cross the line of faith this Christmas and come home to God your heavenly father, or,

are you going to let another year pass by and continue to celebrate the birth of a person you have no personal relationship with?

Your heavenly father stands ready to welcome you home. [slide 13] Paul writes in Rms. 5.2 (MSG):

“We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us.”

God your heavenly father is ready to welcome you home. Are you ready to come home to him?

[slide 14, blank] Does it make sense to say, “God, I don’t need your love and forgiveness? I’ve got plenty of peace and strength. I don’t need yours.

And I certainly don’t need any hope or joy that you could give. Does that make any sense?

Just before his death, former Beatles guitarist, George Harrison, was interviewed by Rolling Stone magazine.

In that interview he said something very profound. He said, “The most important thing in life

is to figure out why we’re here and what we’re here for. Everything else in life can wait but the search for God cannot wait.”

I could not agree more. It cannot wait. [slide 15] In fact, the Bible says in 2 Cor. 6.2 (LB):



“Right now God is ready to welcome you [the doors of welcome are wide open]. Today he is ready to save you.”

It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done, you can say to God,

“Lord I want to come home to you and I want you to make your home in my heart.”

And the Bible says that every time one person comes home to God the angels in heaven throw a party for you!

The angels are waiting to have a party for you. Will you come home?

OSB 992. Before we sing it, I'd like the privilege of leading you in a prayer;

a pray for you to come home to God your heavenly father through Jesus his Son, our Saviour.

Let's pray: Our Father in heaven, there are people here who know of you but who don't know you personally.

I pray that you would grant them the courage to repent of their sins and come home to you this Christmas, finding in you love and forgiveness, peace and strength, hope and joy.

Now if you're ready to take that next step and cross the line of faith and come home to God you pray with me.

“Father in heaven, I'm tired wandering through life without you.

- ◆ I want to come home and receive from you your love and forgiveness.
- ◆ I need your peace and strength today.

◆ Grant to me a sure sense of hope and joy for my future.

Thank you for sending Jesus whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, the one you sent to be our Saviour.

As much as I know how, I come home to you and ask you to make your home in my heart.

Help me to continue to trust you and follow you from this day forward. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Sing OSB 992.