

Small Group Guide

CHRISTMAS PLEASURE AMIDST WORLDLY PAIN

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

December 25, 2011

Matthew 2:13-23

This guide is a tool to help you lead your group into spiritual transformation. Use it as a resource to train your group into potential disciple-makers and lead your group in discovering, owning, and applying the truths of God's Word. There may be aspects you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on an aspect of their relationship with God. Your role is to help facilitate this encounter with God in His Word with His Body, not just to complete the guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid group task list.

Relate . . .

Begin your group time by engaging in relational conversations and prayer that may include the following elements:

Welcome—a simple, brief time to greet one another (especially new friends), enjoy refreshments, and make announcements.

Review—a time to review the truths discussed last week and report on how members have had success or frustrations in applying those truths during the week. (The leader will want to provide encouragement and shepherding during this time.) Periodically, the leader will also want to review the gospel and allow members to share reports about opportunities they've had to share the gospel. Occasionally, the leader will want to review the vision for the group and discuss ways to accomplish that vision better.

Prayer—a time of general prayer with the whole group praying for struggles regarding the application of truths, for those with whom the group is sharing the gospel, and for understanding of today's truths.

Reflect . . .

Use the following summary and questions to review this week's message and reflect on its implications for our lives. (As a training tool, leaders might want to have various members summarize the teachings in their own words each week sharing how they think the Scripture applied to the original hearers and how the principles apply to us today.)

Message Outline

Three Reasons for Christmas Rejoicing...

- Jesus inaugurates the new exodus. (Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1)
 - The mercy of God in the Old Testament:
 - He saves His people by bringing miraculous deliverance from Egypt.
 - The mercy of God in the New Testament:
 - He saves His people by bringing the Messianic Deliverer from Egypt.
- Jesus ends the mournful exile. (Matthew 2:17-18; Jeremiah 31:15ff)
 - There is hope in the midst of hurt.
 - There is life in the midst of death.
 - A new king is born.
 - A new covenant is beginning.
- Jesus loves His fiercest enemies. (Matthew 2:23; Isaiah 53)
 - In our minds and in our hearts, we have rejected Him.
 - By His grace and for His glory, He has redeemed us.

Message Summary

The birth of Jesus was not an isolated event. God had promised to send the Messiah, and the Old Testament is full of the ancient prophecies that foretold how Christ would come. In this passage, Matthew noted three

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prophecies that were fulfilled through the coming of Jesus. This fulfillment not only shows how He specifically fulfilled Messianic prophecies but also how He came to redeem God's people from a fallen world and meet their deepest need for a Savior. Matthew first noted that Joseph fled to Egypt with his new family, which fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah would be called out of Egypt. This prophecy alludes to the mercy of God in delivering His people from slavery in Egypt. In an even greater display of mercy, God sent the Messianic Deliverer to save his people for eternity. When Matthew noted the great mourning that took place when Herod tragically killed the young boys in Bethlehem, he noted the prophecy of Jeremiah that first described the exile of Israelites by the Babylonians in the Old Testament. This prophecy was again fulfilled with the coming of Christ. Yet, Christ Himself brought a new covenant, full of hope and life, which Jeremiah prophesied in the same chapter (31). The last prophecy Matthew mentioned in this passage was that Jesus would be a Nazarene. Although he is not quoting a specific prophecy, the writer was referencing many Old Testament prophecies, such as Isaiah 53, which alluded to the fact that the Messiah would be despised and rejected, much like the town of Nazareth was. Like Herod, we have rejected Him, but by his grace He has come to redeem us in spite of our sinfulness.

Group Discussion

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- What do the miraculous nature of the exodus in the Old Testament and the miraculous nature of Christ's coming in the New Testament tell us about God?
- What does Christ's role as Deliverer indicate about our ability to provide for our own redemption?
- How does our knowledge about God's plan and fulfillment to provide deliverance affect our belief in His sovereignty and love for His people, including us?
- Why do we so often lose the wonder and awe of the coming of God in the flesh? Does that truth drive us to worship and praise on Christmas morning? Why or why not?
- How can we practically pass on the amazing and miraculous nature of the birth of our Deliverer? How can we make it the most exciting part of Christmas?
- In the Old Testament, when the Israelites were conquered by the Babylonians and exiled, they were receiving judgment for their corporate sin, particularly the sinful leading of their kings. In the New Testament, when Herod, the king, killed the young infant boys, those Jewish families were experiencing tragedy because of someone else's sin. In both cases, hurt and pain were great. How did the prophecy and coming of the new King bring hope in the midst of such pain?
- How does pain make us acutely aware of our need for and dependence on our true King, Jesus?
- While we do not desire pain and suffering, how can this suffering remind us to hope in the King who will return for us?
- What does it mean to have hope in the midst of worldly pain?
- How can we make the hope of our coming King a practical part of our Christmas celebration, particularly in the face of grief and suffering?
- Which person in the Christmas story would we like to most identify ourselves with?
- Like Herod, why does it scare us so much to relinquish control of our personalized and customized "kingdoms"?
- If we were to celebrate Christmas with our eyes and hearts looking to Easter, would it affect the magnitude of Christmas in our lives? If so, why?
- How can we practically incorporate the idea of redemption into our celebration of Christmas?
- How can we continue to carry the weight of redemption with us throughout the year?

Respond . . .

Encourage your group to break out into smaller, same-gender groups where they will respond to the truths of today's study. These groups will share with one another based on the following questions and then close in prayer:

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- What are some of the main truths that God wants you to know from this study?
- How do your thoughts need to adjust to align with these truths?
- According to the truths from this study, what does God want you to desire/value?
- How do your values need to change to align with His values?
- What actions does God want you to take according to the truths of this study?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?
- What is going to be the most difficult aspect of this study to personally apply?

Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength to apply these truths, for personal needs, for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel, and for our weekly prayer focus as a church..

Weekly Prayer Focus ... (from our worship guide)

- *Lives and Church: Pray that God would fill our hearts with a a proper perspective of Christmas, filled with the Christ-exalting gospel. Pray that in the midst of violence, pain, grief, and darkness God would fill us with confidence in his sovereignty over it all.*
- *Local: This week we are praying for I Can See, I Can Read Ministry whose vision is to provide eyeglasses for every man, woman, or child who can't afford them so they can attend school, get a job, read the Bible, and teach others. We are also praying for The Family Worship Center, Stephen Manyama, Pastor.*
- *Global: This week we are praying for our Brook Hills partner, Manny F., serving in Cuba.*