

## **Gospel From a Christmas Perspective**

Matthew 25:31-40

PW Emerson – 12/22/2013 – Ten:27 Ministries

### **ASK**

What is a typical Christmas like for you or your family?

- Who joins us for our Christmas celebration?

So is Christmas about us? Or about Christ?

I read a number of pieces from the Gospels, the whole time asking myself, what if I looked at these pieces from a Christmas perspective?

Often our perspective is very important.

#### *Illustration - Perspective*

There's a cartoon I found several months ago that I thought was worth keeping. A couple is being welcomed into eternity with these words: "Welcome to eternity. Please note our super wide screen television that plays non-stop football, pro wrestling and Chuck Norris action flicks."

The husband pumps his fist in the air and says, "Yahoo! I made it to heaven!" His wife standing next to him thinks to herself, "Yikes, I ended up in hell."

It's all a matter of perspective, isn't it?

God laid this on my heart because although we have great Christmas celebrations

- Choir specials
- Children's Pageants

- Decorations
- Parties                      And much more.

The Christmas story in the bible doesn't tell us to "DO" anything.

- As opposed to throughout Jesus' life when he told us to do all sorts of things
- Or closer to the end of Jesus' life on earth when he told his disciples to "Go, make disciples of all nations ...."

We don't have such grand celebrations for Pentecost.

Matthew 25:31-40

<sup>31</sup>"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup>"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. <sup>35</sup>For 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, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

<sup>37</sup>"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

<sup>40</sup>"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Someone said to me,

You know, we all get a bit weary at the Christmas season. We all get a bit weary buying gifts, waiting in the lines, cleaning the house, decorating the house, bringing a live tree into the house so we can have a bigger mess to clean later, so we can step on pine needles in March. We all get a bit tired of the baking, cooking and it's so hard, it's just too hard, to squeeze in time for so many things. We'll do outreach next month – right now we're busy celebrating Christmas, Jesus' birth.

Matthew 25:37-40

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

<sup>40</sup>“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

That’s why I’m so excited that we focus on helping other people.

Last month was the effort to give out Thanksgiving Baskets.

If you know anyone that could use such a basket for Christmas, let me know! We’ve got lots to give!

The end of the year is when I work with a number of people from the church to put together the calendar for the new year, and we start by plugging in outreach events, events when we focus on loving our neighbor!

THAT’S living out what Jesus tells us to do!

We can't look at Easter without looking at Christmas.

We can't look at Christmas without looking at Easter.

Perspective is important.

Does your Christmas perspective include any room for those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, shut-ins, in prison etc?

*Illustration - Lyle Schaller, Activating the Passive Church, p. 19*

A young couple rented a vacation cottage for a week. One afternoon the husband looked out a window at the swimming pool and exclaimed, "Let's change our clothes and go get some exercise!" His wife, who was washing the dishes in the kitchen and looking out the window watching some people play tennis, quickly agreed. While she dressed for a tennis match, he put on his swimming trunks.

The window a person chooses to look out at the world often determines that individual's perception of reality.

Matthew 25:40

<sup>40</sup> "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

When I read that working on this message I couldn't help but think of Luke 6:32-33, from the sermon on the mount:

<sup>32</sup> "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.

What if we looked at our holidays & celebrations from the Gospel's perspective?

Pastor delivers Thanksgiving sermon to homeless under a bridge

A Pastor based in Augusta, Ga. is taking his sermon outside and he is not only feeding the soul, he is also serving a Thanksgiving dinner.

Pastor Roger Gardner from the New Hope Worship Center → goes straight to those in need and meets them in an unlikely place – under a bridge.

"They [the homeless] live in small communities under the bridges and downtown in the abandoned buildings and homes," Gardner told Fox News' Lauren Green.

Gardner says their Bridge Ministry has gained a lot of traction in Augusta.

"It started out very, very small with 50 people and a few volunteers and just a very small meal ... a minister [preached] the Gospel to them ... it just really grew to a large service," said Gardner.

Gardner meets his parishioners under the 15th Street Bridge in Augusta every Saturday. On average "300 to 350" people come to meet with the Bridge Ministry. For the past several years they have volunteered their Saturdays before Thanksgiving to help less fortunate families by giving out food and clothing.

That would be exciting!

You know what holds us back from doing such as ministry effort? Only us.

What about forgiveness. We know we're supposed to forgive. Do we do that well during Christmas?

It's even more important at Christmas time

- People feel lonely & depressed
- People feel isolated and unloved
- We get frustrated with family issues that seem to arise when the family gets together for the holidays

Some people wonder if anyone would really notice if they weren't there .....

When it comes to forgiveness, it is really hard but during the Christmas season I think it's a little bit easier ...

- People are in a giving mood
- People want to do something MORE than normal

Is there someone you need to forgive? What a gift to Jesus that would be! To just say, Lord, I don't know how I can do this but in faith I'll trust you if you will help me to forgive this person.

#### *Real Forgiveness*

On Dec. 7th, 2001, survivors of the attack on Pearl Harbor, from both sides, met and shook hands. A Japanese pilot was there - who knows how many Americans he killed but 60 years later, he shook hands with some of those he had once fought against.

How meaningful Christmas would be to Christ if we forgave from the heart - a note, a phone call, a prayer, a visit to say, "Hey, let's put this old quarrel to rest."

So close to 9/11, these people were intentional to take time to forgive – from great hurts

Have you ever got Christmas gifts that you had no idea who they came from??

Probably not – people always tell who they came from.

Matthew 6:1-4

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

<sup>2</sup>“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup>But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

What if all the Christmas gifts we got, we gave to total strangers, and we did so without telling who they came from?

I could read the story from Luke 14 where the master invited in total strangers to the banquet

Luke 14:23-24

<sup>23</sup>“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. <sup>24</sup>I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

God is doing that for us, opening the kingdom of God for us.

*Article – Elf & Mrs. Santa*

Several police cars roared up to the Detroit bus stop, with sirens flashing, and slammed on their brakes.

The four people waiting for the bus quickly sat up straight at attention as cops flooded their little enclosure.

Out stepped the police chief from one of the unmarked black cars.

To make things even crazier, he started handing out \$100 bills to the people waiting.

A woman started to cry. A man started gushing. An elderly woman couldn't believe her eyes and actually asked the city's police chief whether the money was counterfeit.

Standing behind him, beaming, was the woman who provided the money. For five years now, she and her husband, after living well-to-do lives, have given out \$100 bills to about 100 random people on the street as a Christmas present. All they ask in exchange is that the recipients do something nice for someone else.

She recruited Detroit Police Chief James Craig to help out this year.

It's not as easy as just handing out cash, though. They try to find places in low-income areas where truly needy people might be, such as thrift shops and bus stops.

They need police to escort them, because someone standing there with a wad of \$100 bills can quickly become a target.

And they insist on remaining anonymous. Even the couple's family members don't know what they do. Instead, he calls himself Elf, she calls herself Mrs. Santa.

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And by the end of the day, Mrs. Santa and her husband, Elf, had given out \$17,000 of their money, after making two bank stops to restock their cash.

"It was a home run," said Mrs. Santa. "We gave out more money today than ever before. When you pull over a bus with 50 people in it, and hear the personal stories from people who say their kids would not have had a Christmas without us showing up, the energy you get from it is amazing."

Doesn't that sound like a great Christmas celebration?!?

This past week when I was chatting with a few people about ways to help people in need, I was told it's a lot like coming up with great dates:

- When you're not dating, you can come up with LOTS of interesting dates that almost any couple would be excited to do.
- But when you have a significant other and are trying to think of a good or exciting date, it's a lot harder to do.

So let's come up with different ways/places to help people in need: (make list on butcher block paper)

- LRT downtown
- Lake street
- Bridge in Uptown
- Second hand stores
- Food shelves
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In the Denver zoo some years ago they were undergoing a major renovation. The polar bear enclosure was being changed to a natural environment. A polar bear arrived before renovation was completed so the new bear was enclosed in a small cage that allowed it to take three, nice swinging steps in one direction, whirl around and take three steps back in the other direction. Back and forth it went, month in, month out till the renovations were complete. The bear was then let loose in its new environment and do you know what it did? Three steps in one direction, whirled around and back the other way. Three steps in one direction, whirled around and back the other way. Over and over without stopping, the polar continued as if the cage was still there.

Let's not get stuck in a Christmas rut.

Let's have a Christmas that reflects that we are celebrating Jesus' birthday.

Let's remember that as disciples for Christ we want to take this opportunity to SHOW God's love to others. Because God says to us:

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.