

A Different Kind of Christmas
Jesus' Christmas List
Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 25:31-40

12/20/20

Video Introduction: "A *Very Special Christmas*"

So what gift are you planning to give Jesus? It is his birthday you know! Gift giving is such a huge part of Christmas. We are so focused on getting gifts that'll put a smile on our loved ones faces that we forget that Christmas is about Jesus and not about us. And we fail to consider to give him gifts in celebration of his birth, as did the Magi!

Most of my Christmases went this way. Christmas kicked off Thanksgiving... the newspaper... looked forward to... kids circle. Create a Christmas list. They still do – in their 20's!

Black Friday... 1st day of shopping.... Allow to listen to Christmas music (protested... on their own, they let me know when they began to listen and watch... Nov. 1st)

End the night with our first Christmas show... Christmas vacation – reminder what NOT to do.

Looking back it seemed odd that we kicked off our Christmas season by thinking of ourselves and focusing on shopping for gifts. I never questioned why we observed Jesus' birthday this way. It's how I was raised. It's what you did. A huge part of Christmas, perhaps the biggest part and the most time consuming, is the giving and receiving of gifts.

At first our kid's gifts were inexpensive. However as they got older their lists grew longer and more expensive. Walmart clothes were no longer good enough! They wanted name brand items.

They were no longer interested in toy, they wanted electronics: MP3 players, game consoles, and smart phones. The budget grew from \$175 per person to \$500 per person.

We fell into the same trap that most parents fall into. Our Christmases had become overly by materialism and consumerism. December was mostly a blurr. A mad dash to the end. I wrapped on average 90 presents a year! How stressful?

As listen to the TV, the popular Christmas songs, and the 25 Days to Christmas ...featuring non-stop Christmas movies, I realize that for many Christmas has

A Different Kind of Christmas
Jesus' Christmas List
Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 25:31-40

12/20/20

become nothing more than a focus on the giving and receiving of gifts from Santa, ...and/or, mom and dad.

As I preached the Christmas story every year I became increasingly aware of the disconnect between how I celebrated Christmas and the true meaning of Christmas.

I love Christmas and my traditions. They are loads of fun. I loved putting a smile on my kids' faces. We all do! I'm naturally a giver. It gives me great joy! Just as it gave God great joy in giving us the gift of Jesus through whom we would receive another gift, the gift of salvation.

What did not give me joy were: the bills, the lack of parking spaces at the mall, the crowds, checkout lines, and driving store to store to store, which is why God created Amazon!

Every year the same thing happened. ... stress over the bills... irritated.... Snapped over something unrelated... felt bad...

"Is this any way to celebrate Jesus' birth? Is this how God wants us to celebrate His coming? How does this honor him?"

It wasn't all about ourselves. We participated in all of the Church outreaches... Caroling... Angel Tree, Operation Christmas child, or hung mittens on the clothes. Bell for the Salvation Army. We sang as a family – teenager – too embarrassed to. My gift giving to God was...more of a tip than a sacrificial gift. God gave sacrificially. I gave my family 10-15X... gave to God.

Finally after much soul searching... needed to change that. Shift... more about him than about us....to narrow the gap between the meaning of Christmas and how I gave in response to God's gift of Jesus to us.

It sounded crazy to me.... And my kids. Initially. Over time, on their own, they made the same decision. Reduce the number of gifts to ourselves so we could give in a way that reflected the Christmas story.

Countercultural... a shift you can't do overnight. But in the end I found it helpful. It helped us slow down so we could focus more on Jesus. It reduced my stress level. We spent more time together and less time shopping!

A Different Kind of Christmas
Jesus' Christmas List
Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 25:31-40

12/20/20

We spent more on Jesus and less on ourselves.

Before I made the shift... Am I crazy or am I on to something.... How other cultures celebrated Christmas... lots of cool ideas... How much more Christ centered and less material. Children were blessed but not like what we do in the US.

History... shocked to discover... giving of gifts to ourselves/families.... Didn't start until the 1840's 1st 350 years they didn't even observe Christmas. Instead they celebrated Easter, Good Friday and Lent.

When they did observe it, the giving of gifts looked a lot different. They gave to: God...the church....(I don't say that as a way of fundraising for the church. Some of you may not know this FPC does not keep any of the money given CE. To charitable organization that cares for the poor.)

And they blessed the poor, widows and orphans. – vulnerable.

So what would it look like to celebrate Jesus's birth the way the majority of Christians do today... and historically? What would it look like to give Jesus gifts for his birthday?

Well, to answer.... "What does he want?" How do you give to God – Up in heaven! He's a spirit. Like my kids do every year... Has God filled out a Christmas list? Yes..

Matthew 25:31-40 and Luke 4:18-19. Let's look at the Luke 4 passage first. It's a partial quote from Isaiah 9:1-2.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Two observations.... For one, God gives to people exact what they need. The gift matches the need.

A Different Kind of Christmas
Jesus' Christmas List
Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 25:31-40

12/20/20

- the poor get good news ... usually bad news... rent is past due, car broke down, leaky facet, laid off, shut-off nitice.
- Prisoners receive parole.
- The blind receive sight.
- Those feeling stressed out, who feel a weight on their shoulders - relief.
- And grace is offered to all.

So what's a great way that honors Christ at his birth? By matching our time, talent and treasures to the needs that surround us.

That's not how we typically give gifts. We give gifts to those who neither need... may not appreciate them, or may never use them.

So what are the unmet needs in this community?

- A family unable to purchase gifts for their kids? Instead of giving them your kid's used toys, treat them as you'd treat your own kids. Buy them gifts drop them off at their home secretly. Perhaps write a note stating them why they are receiving the gift. You are doing it in honor of Jesus' birth.
- See someone in need of warmth or food? Provide a warm blanket, a meal, or help them find shelter.
- Know someone experiencing financial stress? Give a significant gift that helps relieve the burden.
- Know a business owner who is struggling to remain solvent? Consider blessing the business owner and his/.her employees with your business, give an extra generous tip to your server, or write the owner a check without getting anything in return. Again, match the need with the corresponding gift.
- Not all giving is financial because not all needs are financial.
- Sometimes what a person needs is a listening ear
- A warm embrace, or a word of encouragement.

A Different Kind of Christmas
Jesus' Christmas List
Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 25:31-40

12/20/20

- At other times what a person need is helping hand transportation to... w borrow a tool. Be a good neighbor and let people now they are welcome to come to your house and ask for something as small as a cup of sugar.
- Look for ways to give of your time, talents and treasure to those in need of them this Christmas.

You can't give what you don't have. And God isn't asking you to. All God asks of you is to give what you have.

Ex. Moses.... Feeding of the 5000

Let's look at another passage that contains Jesus' Christmas List. I'm reading from Matthew 25:31-40.

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² 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. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

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. ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ 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.'

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? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ "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.'

So do you want to give Jesus a few gifts in honor of his birth. Consider giving a few of these gifts:

**A Different Kind of Christmas
Jesus' Christmas List
Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 25:31-40**

12/20/20

- Feed the hungry – or support a ministry that does
- Offer a cup of cold water to the thirsty – some of the best cups of refreshing water comes from our lips. Speak life into. Offer a cold cup of hope, laughter, song. Refresh someone's soul.
- Expand your social circle. Look for someone who needs a friend and invite him/her into your life or home.
- Clothe those who need clothes but can't afford them.
- Visit the sick and those incarcerated. ...Why? Places where you can really get down, experience fear, loneliness, and depress.

Places where, once you are there... easy to be forgotten or abandoned.

Go out of your way to visit or at least call – gather as a group... carol outside the widow.

Detroit, Michigan. – Granny Dumping”

What is “Granny Dumpling.”

“I’m sorry if I offended you with a term you find inflammatory but the practice is way more offensive than the term. You should be more morally outraged by the practice and not by the way I refer to it. That’s what should upset you and not my language..... I didn’t get the job!

Christmas is not our birthday. It’s His. Let’s get back to how Christmas is supposed to be celebrated. Let’s take back Christmas from our secular and materialistic culture that has turned Jesus’ birth into a self-indulgent holiday in worship of Santa and his eight tiny reindeer.

Let’s add him to our gift list this year.... Maybe...if you can...maybe too late this year.. match what you give to your family and give it to a person who needs it.... Lift a weight!

Take Christ’s Christmas List ... and give him a couple of gifts. You may already have!

Prime the pump.

A Different Kind of Christmas
Jesus' Christmas List
Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 25:31-40

12/20/20

Ex, Small Group – adopted a single mom. Ongoing support until she can get on her feet. Enabled her to go back to school and get a degree that will get her a good paying job!

Adopt a Family – If every church adopted one family, used its benevolence to move one family from poverty to independence – be no one left on the welfare rolls. – I have a person, another girl, left her family – all doing drugs who wants to break free. She has a job, and mode of transportation... she needs a group to walk with her until she is on her feet.

Bless those who serve you – Mail carrier, package deliverer, sanitary engineer, waiter/waitress, a cashier. Focus on those making the minimal wage...

Bless a local business that is struggling. Not all are. Pandemic has been good for certain sectors of the economy.... Walmart, Amazon, delivery business, real estate, financial institutions, investors.

Hurt – small locally owned businesses.

Support a ministry – does a good job working with the poor, homeless.. Mission, Foodbank, Thrive.

Volunteer - for those who need a helping hand. You may even want to call these places up and ask them if they need volunteer help.

Mission Groups: Gift Catalogs. Frontier Fellowship..Samaritan's Purse, The Heifer Project. Meaningful ways.

Church partner with an area of the world that needs it most...focus

Give to the Christmas Eve Offering – The Challenge. Hope 10X

Now I'm guessing that may be impossible for you to do this year

My kids expect gifts. It's been a longstanding tradition. Our family loves to give gifts. Takes time and explaining why.

**A Different Kind of Christmas
Jesus' Christmas List
Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 25:31-40**

12/20/20

Include your kids in mission projects... know the joy of helping those who need it most.

15 gifts to 3. \$500 - \$250-300. So we have made progress.

And we have upped our giving to Jesus.

We give monetarily but also of our time and talents, whatever is needed.

Let's honor Christ this year and celebrate his birth by including him on our Christmas list.

Let's give gifts that he wants. That'll put a smile on his face as well as on those we bless with our time, talents and treasures.

Have a very Merry Christmas. Just 5 more days to Christmas!