

The Crisis of Christmas: Part II  
Pt 1: A Christmas Stove  
Matthew 25:34-40

As we did last year at this time, we are going to challenge you over the next couple of weeks, to do something radically different this year for Christmas.

We've again titled this "The Crisis of Christmas" because we have been programmed, we have been trained, we have been conditioned since childhood, to celebrate Christmas in the wrong way. It has become somewhat a Christmas crisis.

Introduction: The crisis of Christmas is that people spend more time and money celebrating the celebration than they do celebrating the Christ.

Every year we say that, "Jesus is the reason for the season," but shopping and decorating and giving gifts and going to parties and programs all conspire to push Jesus into the background, or off of the stage altogether.

What is Christmas supposed to be all about?  
Isn't it supposed to be all about Jesus?

You have all heard the Christmas story recorded in the gospel of Luke many times. But please listen to it again and pay very, very close attention, because I am going to give you a little quiz after I read it to you.

Luke 2:4-18

- 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.
- 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.
- 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,
- 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.
- 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.
- 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.
- 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.
- 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.
- 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
- 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
- 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."
- 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."
- 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17
- When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,
- 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

OK: Here's your quiz:  
How many Christmas trees were in the manger? None.  
How many Christmas lights decorated the manger? None.  
How many gifts did the shepherds give to each other? None.  
How many fruit cakes were in the manger? None. (Praise God!)  
How many reindeer were in the manger? None.

In light of all that, let me ask you one final question:  
Does YOUR Christmas celebration look ANYTHING like the first Christmas celebration?

I'm not saying that all these other things are evil, in and of themselves.  
I'm not even asking you to eliminate ANY of these things from your homes.  
But I've got to ask: What have we done to Jesus' birthday?!

The first Christmas is recorded in two places in the Bible, the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew tells us about the magi, or the wise men, who visited Jesus. Let's see how they celebrated his birth. Take a look at just one verse from the Matthew account.

Matthew 2:11 "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."

First of all, they worshiped Jesus.

1. A proper Christmas celebration begins with the worship of Jesus.

Other than at a Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion service, how much have you worshiped Jesus during the last several Christmases?

Conversely: How many parties have you attended, how many gifts have you purchased, how many decorations have you hung, how much time have you spent at the mall.....compare all of that to the amount of time you've spent just worshipping Jesus.

Hebrews 1:6 When God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

A proper Christmas celebration begins with the worship of Jesus.  
If for no other reason than He is deserving of our worship!

Philippians 2:9-11

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,  
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Are you bowing your knees to materialism?

Are you bowing your knees to the expectations of others?

Are you bowing your knees to a divergent celebration of Christmas?

When was the last time you bowed your knees in worship to Jesus?

A proper Christmas celebration begins with the worship of Jesus.

2. It's appropriate to give something to Jesus as a celebration of his birth.

That's what the magi, the wise men did. They began with worship.

Their worship included something very tangible.

Their spiritual worship included a physical gift. Look again at the Gospel of Matthew:

Matthew 2:11 "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."

But right away we run into a little bit of a problem, don't we.

You see, Jesus was there physically when they gave him these physical gifts.

But Jesus has since ascended back to heaven, where He remains at the right hand of the Father.

He is present in us through His Holy Spirit, but that's a spiritual presence, not a physical presence.

Does that mean we are off the hook as far as any physical presents?  
Does that mean we shouldn't bother with any material gifts for Jesus?  
I think the answer is found in Jesus' own teaching:

Matthew 25:34-40

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, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Read again that last verse: "...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Jesus considers that what we do to others who are in need, we do to Him.

So, according to Jesus Himself, if you want to give something to Jesus, you should give it to someone in need.

If you were here last year you will remember that this truth led us to giving \$38,000 to build water wells in Africa.

We are going a different direction this year.

Please watch this video. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xj44tOP9pL4>

Let's talk about these stoves for a minute.

Approximately 1/3 of the world's population cook their meals over open fires.\*

We use ovens and microwave ovens toaster ovens and electric or gas stoves.

But many in the world don't have that option. Their only option is to cook over an open fire.

1/3 of the people in the world cook over open fires.

Unfortunately, most of them do this cooking inside of their little one room shack.

And therein lies the problem!

Smoke from cooking over open fires kills approximately 1.5 million people every year.\*

And its' mostly women and children who are dying from this issue.

Because the women are traditionally doing the cooking, oftentimes with their infant strapped to their back.

Every 20 seconds someone in the world dies due to indoor air pollution.\*

\* Source - Pro World Service Corps

This is a huge problem! Obviously we can't solve the entire world's problems. But we CAN do something. And so we are going to focus on Peru, because of our ongoing involvement there.

Dr. Robert Tanaka, neumonologist of Peruvian Cayetano Heredia University, reports, "40% of Peru's population, approximately 9 million people, use open flame stoves to do their cooking. Respiratory illnesses are the most common illnesses among those who use this cooking method."

Dr. Homero Silva, Environmental Health Advisor, PAHO - Peru

"In these small homes where the open flame stoves are used, the ceiling and walls are covered with thick black soot. These conditions suggest that the housewives lungs resemble that of chain smokers. And not only do they spend several hours cooking, but they do so accompanied by their youngest children."

They are cooking over an open fire, in their homes. And they won't take their fire outside of their homes because this also serves as the heat for their homes.  
So, what can be done?

3. We can give the gift of stoves!

Open fire pits can be replaced with a simple, enclosed stove that has a chimney. We have a model of one right here on stage. Jon Barber was with our team this summer that went to Peru and he was involved in building some of these stoves. He built this model for us so that you can actually see what we're talking about.

First of all, these enclosed stoves are far more efficient than open fire pits. So much so that they burn 75% less fuel! That means that the women and children who have to collect the fuel for the fire pits have just had their work load reduced by 75%! Which frees them up for things like education!

It also minimizes issues such as deforestation which leads to flooding and mud slides and other related issues.

Secondly, and most importantly, with the added chimney, smoke and carbon dioxide in the home is reduced by 70% as it is routed out of the house.

That means a reduction in: -Cancer -Tuberculosis -Acute Respiratory Infections  
-Eye Infections -Low Birth Weight -Exacerbations of Asthma  
-Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease -and other related issues.....

Dr. Marlis Kees of GTZ Household Energy Program reported, "Where these more efficient stoves have been implemented, studies show a 'significant reduction' in the number of respiratory diseases."

One study showed that these more efficient stoves help extend the lives of those living in these homes by 10-15 years.

YOU can help us give people back their life!

YOU can help us give people a healthier life and a longer life!

YOU can help us give people a better quality of life! YOU can make a difference!

Let me ask you a question:

How many Christmas gifts do you suppose you have received in your life time?

On the other hand, how many Christmas gifts do you suppose you have given to Jesus over the years?

Jesus said, ".....whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

These stoves cost less than \$50 to construct...and that includes labor! Not only can we build these stoves, but we can provide some employment for some of the men in the barrios. We'll hire them and train them to build these stoves!

So, here is my challenge for you and for your family for this year's Christmas celebration. Put Christ back into Christmas. Not just as a nativity decoration. More than just a quick participation at a Christmas Eve service. More than lip service, Christian cliches and churchy slogans.

Put Christ back into Christmas in a profound way. In a significant way. In a radical way. In a way that literally changes lives.

We are going to encourage you to buy fewer gifts for each other so that you can invest more in a gift for Jesus.

We are going to encourage you to spend less on decorations and parties and gifts and fattening food so that you can give more to a life changing, life saving gift.

We are going to ask that you sit down with your children and your teens and discuss this whole issue with them. Pastor Chad is going to be sharing this same information with your children. Pastor Jared will be sharing this information with your teens.

We want you to discuss the possibility with your extended family that instead of doing a gift exchange, you pool your resources and give a significant gift to those who truly need it.

We are going to make certificates available to you so that you can send a certificate to your grandmother or your aunt or uncle or cousin and tell them that you have given a gift in their name to save the lives of others in the world.

On December 20th, instead of having a traditional Christmas program, we are going to come together as a church family and simply worship Jesus. In the midst of that worship, we are going come forward as families to kneel and pray and place a financial gift in this stove. A gift which will be used to fund the building of stoves in the barrios of Trujillo, Peru.

God gave you the gift of life. God also offers you the gift of eternal life.  
On December 20th, you can be a part of giving the gift of life to someone else.

2 Corinthians 9:15 "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

God has already given you the gift of life. He has given you the gift of His son. He offers you the gift of eternal life.

Will you reciprocate by giving your life to Him?

You do so when you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

For this and other sermons and for other church information  
please visit our church web site:

[www.ccfhaz.com](http://www.ccfhaz.com)

To give online for the Peru Stove Project please visit

[www.ccfhaz.com/crisisofchristmas.html](http://www.ccfhaz.com/crisisofchristmas.html)