

The Crises of Christmas
Part 1: The Advent Conspiracy
Matthew 25:34-40

We are going to challenge you over the next couple of weeks, to do something radically different this year for Christmas. And I want to start talking about this now even though it is only the middle of November. Because, as we all know, the biggest Christmas shopping day of the year is the day after Thanksgiving, and that's less than two weeks away.

I want you to have a chance to think about this and pray about this and hopefully, come to some conclusions about this before wearing out your credit cards on November 28th.

I've titled this "The Crises of Christmas" because we have been programmed, we have been conditioned since childhood, to celebrate Christmas in the wrong way. And I believe that this truly is a crises.

Introduction: The crises 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.

And it's the same thing year after year after year. We do a lot of talking about it, we do a lot of preaching about it, many of us even do a lot of complaining about it....but nothing changes. We continue with the extreme extravagance about the celebration, and barely squeeze in any true and life changing worship about Jesus Christ.

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 2:4-21

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.
19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.
20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.
21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

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 things are evil, in and of themselves.
I'm not even asking you to eliminate ANY of these things from your homes.
I'm not trying to play the role of scrooge and throw a wet blanket bah-humbug over your Christmas celebration.
But I've got to ask: What have we done to Jesus' birthday?!

I say these things are not evil in and of themselves, but they are indeed evil if they conspire together to overshadow or to obscure the birth of the Savior of the world.
The conspiracy to divert the focus away from Jesus is alive and well everywhere you look.

I'm afraid that the church is complicit in it's own unique way.
And this is how I think our complicity is manifest:
We have sounded this warning in the past, but we haven't given some profound, viable options to help get the focus back to where it should be.
We've told you what to do, but we haven't always told you HOW to do it.

We haven't give you alternatives. That's about to change!

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.....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.'

These verses are the key verses for this sermon.
These verses are the key verses for this entire sermon series.

These verses are the key verses for my challenge to you and your family for your Christmas celebration this year.

Jesus considers that what we do to others who are in need, we do to Him. He feels so strongly about this, that He says in these verses that the way we treat others in need will play a role in our judgement.

My challenge for you comes from just one of His statements found in verse 35: Matthew 25:35, "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink."

I want to talk about drinking water for a minute. (Thus this well that is on our stage) It is reported that the number one cause of diseases in the entire world is directly related to a lack of clean drinking water. Something that we take for granted, millions and millions around the world do without. Infant mortality rates are extremely high in these areas that lack clean drinking water. 3,900 babies around the world die every day for a lack of clean water.

1.8 million people die every year from water born illnesses. Millions and millions of others live their entire lives in sickly conditions for lack of clean drinking water.

Living Water International reports, "Water, the stuff of life and a basic human right, is at the heart of a daily crises faced by more than one billion of the world's most vulnerable people - a crises that threatens life and consigns large segments of humanity to chronic disease, poverty and insecurity.

Water related disease is the single largest killer of infants in developing countries and access to safe water is the most important factor in the survival of children under the age of five. Nearly half of all people in developing countries are suffering from water related health problems. The annual number of deaths from water related diseases is six times greater than the number of deaths from armed violence."

The world suffers for lack of clean drinking water. Jesus said, Matthew 25:35, "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink."

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, "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink."

It has been reported that it would cost approximately 10 billion dollars to solve the entire world's clean drinking water problem. 10 billion dollars. That's a lot of money! None of us have that kind of money. You may be thinking, "Any gift that I could give toward this problem wouldn't even be a drop in the bucket, on a world wide scale."

10 billion dollars. It seems insurmountable. But think about this for a second: It is estimated that Americans spend 450 billion dollars every year on Christmas!

What would happen if we took just 10 billion of that 450 billion and used it to solve the world's clean drinking water problem? There are many who are already going in that direction. Please watch this video: www.adventconspiracy.org

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.

I feel that if I'm going to ask you to do something radically different, I should be willing that the church does something radically different, too.

Here's what we're going to do.

We're going to talk about this three more times leading up to December 21st.

We are going to encourage you to buy fewer gifts for others 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 has already been sharing this information with your teens.

We want to encourage you as a family to decide to get fewer gifts for each other so that you can give more to Jesus.

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.

(What if, instead of everyone buying a \$10 gift, everyone gave that same \$10 to Jesus)

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.

Because Jesus said, "I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink."

On December 21st, instead of having a traditional Christmas program, we are going to come together as a church family and worship Jesus. In the midst of that worship, we are going to come forward as families to kneel and pray and place a financial gift in this well. A gift which will be used to fund the drilling of water wells in impoverished communities in Rwanda, Africa.

God gave you the gift of life. God also offers you the gift of eternal life.

On December 21st, 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 reciprocate by giving your life to Him? You do so when you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.