



## Christmas on Purpose - Worship

December 5, 2004

Blessed Lord Christ, we rejoice that You are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. What you did to heal the minds, bodies and souls of people in Your earthly ministry so long ago, do now in us and in those for whom we pray.

In this quiet moment of prayer, we surrender to You all our problems and perplexities, our physical pain and emotional disturbance, our confused thinking and distorted attitudes, our anxious worry and strained relationships, and our lack of faith and trust in Your power to heal our needs. Stretch forth Your tender, strong, uplifting hand and make us whole.

-December 3 (Quiet Moments with God)

### Skipping Christmas

One of the movies out for the holiday season is, "Christmas with the Kranks". It stars Tim Allen as Luther Krank and is based on John Grisham's book, *Skipping Christmas*. Luther Krank has had it up to here with Christmas. So much so that one night after battling crowds all day he came home and went through all his receipts from the year before. He determined that his family had spent \$6,100 on last year Christmas past and had nothing – NOTHING – to show for it! The cards, the parties, the gifts, the tree, the new clothes they had to buy to go to the parties, the ham, the cookies, the cheese balls, the gifts, the postage for the cards, the giant "Frosty" for the roof, the gifts – over \$6,000! Luther is so tired of all of it that he talks his wife into skipping Christmas for a year – especially since their daughter just left for a year with the Peace Corp in Peru. His leverage with Nora, his wife, was a 10-day Caribbean cruise. It sounded so perfect!

But they soon find out that skipping Christmas, especially when you live on Hemlock Lane, is not as easy as it sounds and...comes with some unexpected consequences!

I think all of us can identify with Luther Krank. There are some parts of this season that we could just as soon do without. And I think we're right in thinking that way. There are certain elements of Christmas that could be skipped! Now I'm not going to mention any specific elements because I no doubt mention your favorite part of Christmas, but I will say specifically that Worship is not one of them! Worship, especially at Christmas, and especially to the Christian, is at the core and the essence of what this holiday season is all about. **To celebrate Christmas is to worship!**

Singing the carols, hearing again the words of the angels, imagining the shepherds on the hillside, remembering the young mother and the worried

father and the baby born in a animal shelter...it all serves to bring things that get fuzzy during the week into sharp focus. But in saying that we must also remember that worship is not just "church". If I learned anything from our "40 Days of Purpose" it was that **"worship is a lifestyle."** Remember these ideas? (Book)

### **"Worship is not a part of your life; it is your life."**

"Every activity can be transformed into an act of worship when you do it for the praise, glory and pleasure of God. The Bible says, *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*"

"How is it possible to do everything for the glory of God? By doing everything as if you were doing it for Jesus and by carrying on a continual conversation with him while you do it."

If you've forgotten what worship is all about go back and read that section over again. It's rich! And it refocuses things so well!

The Bible is a book of promises. It is an instruction manual. It is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. But it's also a book of warnings. It warns us about consequences that are connected to a refusal to conform our lives to God's standards for life. One of those warnings is that when you're here for a purpose there are consequences to ignoring that purpose!

It's from one of those warning areas that we learn about an ancient promise that came true in Bethlehem. In Jeremiah 23 we just read about "bad shepherds" or leaders who weren't carrying out their purpose. Instead of taking care of the sheep (the people) they had been given responsibility over they were driving them away and ignoring their care. They were serving their own interests and ignoring the problems of the people. They were refusing to carry out their purpose! So God says, ***"Because you have scattered***

***my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done.***" (23:2) That's a serious consequence!

In the place of the destructive shepherds God promised that he would provide other shepherds who would care for the nation so it would become healthy and productive. They would no longer be afraid or terrified, and no one would be neglected. It's a promise of peace and protection! And it sounds like something we hear in the gospel of John....

***"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*** (10:11)

So who do you think God is referring to back in Jeremiah 23 when he says, ***"The days are coming...when I will raise up to David a righteous branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land...This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness."*** (23:5,6)

This is an out-of-the-way Christmas passage. A promise is given of the King who would be coming! And it describes him for who he became...a shepherd and a source of righteousness! This is why Jesus came to this earth. He didn't stay a little baby. He grew up and he became our Shepherd. He died on the cross to provide us Righteousness. This week as you "Worship Christ the newborn King" I encourage you to focus on these two names. He is your Shepherd and he is your Righteousness.

As your shepherd he wants to protect you, provide for you, ***"make you lie down in green pastures...lead you beside quiet waters...restore your soul."*** He offers to restore your soul and that may be just what you need! Take some time one morning this week and read over the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Maybe

even make it your meditation all week. It's not just for kids and funerals! And as you hunt for a parking spot and fight your way through the crowded stores listen as that small voice reminds you, "Walk in the paths of my righteousness."

Who is Righteous? Not one of us! The Bible says, "***There is no one righteous, not even one...there is no one who does good (all the time), not even one.***" (Romans 3:10, 12) We just talked about consequences a moment ago. Does this fact have consequences? Are there consequences for trying to keep the commands but not keeping all the commands? Yes. "***For the wages of sin is death... (eternal death)***" (Romans 6:23)

What's the second word to think about this week? Righteousness! But it's not your righteousness because you and I don't have enough. We can do some good things but we also do plenty of things that aren't so good. The message of Christmas is that one of the names of Jesus is "The Lord Our Righteousness." He can be our righteousness. He offers His perfection and good name before God to you and me. Let me finish that dark verse from Romans 6, "***For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.***"

The gift of God! He offers it to all of us. Christmas is all about the Gift! Have you received that gift from God? How do you receive it? Thankfully you don't have to be Ken Jennings to answer that one! A man in the Bible asked that question, "***What must I do to be saved?***" ***And they answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..."*** (Acts 16:31-32)

Maybe this is the year for the big gift for you. If you've never "believed in the Lord Jesus" this may be the year to make that choice. "But doesn't most everybody have righteousness?" Not in the way the Bible talks about it. You can have a Bible, go to church and believe that Jesus lived a long time ago and not believe in Jesus like this is talking about. In the book of James it says, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder." (2:19)

"What's the difference?" The Bible says, "***Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.***" (John 1:12) The kind of believing that leads to righteousness – to becoming a part of God's family – is

a believing that involves receiving. It involves "receiving Jesus" as your own. Picture a wedding. Before us we have the bride and the groom. Out in the audience there are many people who look at this couple and think, "She is very pretty." "He is very handsome." But just because they think that are they entering into a relationship of marriage? Of course not! Marriage involves the commitment of one person to another. When I perform a ceremony the vows I use include the word "receive." "I receive you to be my wedding husband/wife." I used to use, "I take you..." But I explain to the couple that the choice of words is purposeful. One of the commitments couples must make to one another is to receive each other as a gift from God. When you believe that God has led you to this person you receive that person. You don't evaluate them and discard them if they don't perform. It has nothing to do with performance. It has everything to do with trusting God!

Let me put it this way, Some people date Jesus but never get around to making a commitment. They never say, "Jesus I receive you to be my Savior and Lord." Until they do they aren't part of God's family. They have been looking at the gift but they've never made the choice to open it for themselves! If that describes you, "Make that choice!" Invite him into your life to be your Lord and your Savior. He is the gift of righteousness!

Prayer – "Jesus, I receive you today to be my Savior and Shepherd. I promise to follow you and love you. I want to stay with you through good times and hard times. I want to be your faithful follower as long as I shall live. Thank you for loving me."

Soon we'll head out the door back to the frenzy and chaos of the season – Let me say it again. It's OK to skip a few things, it will actually make Christmas better. But remember not to skip worship. Worship your Shepherd and your Lord of Righteousness.

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This message was given at Immanuel Church of Forest Lake by Pastor Mark Coughlin on December 5, 2004

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