

Checking It Twice: The Challenge

Reconnect – December 5, 2010

Text: Luke 9:23-25, 10:21-22; Philippians 3:7-9

Key Thought: A winning life is less about competing with others and more about humbly following Christ.

Then Jesus was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit and said, "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who think themselves so wise and clever, and for revealing it to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way. My Father has given me authority over everything. No one really knows the Son except for the Father, and no one really knows the Father except the Son and those whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Luke 10:21-22, NLT



Intro: The Perfect Christmas

- Those Target ads were great – they make you wish we had the store in Canada – come on Zellers!



- They've definitely developed a cult following in the US over the past two years now, promoting Black Friday as the beginning of the Christmas shopping season

Q: But tell me this: why those ads? What is Target trying to appeal to? Talk to me!

Q: Anyone here like this "Target lady"? Anyone want to confess?

Q: Does anyone have a good "I'm obsessed with Christmas" story, and this is why? On anyone ELSE?



- I only found them because I was looking for another Christmas ad that ran a few years ago – a woman looks around her home and is finally satisfied with all her Christmas preparations – everything is perfect and the guests are at the door, and she is oh-so satisfied
- But when she turns to answer the door, you see that she’s got her skirt tucked into her pantyhose
- Anyone remember that one?

Q: Best Christmas memories – what was the best Christmas you ever had? Why that one?

- For some people, Christmas is a nice holiday, but for others, Christmas is a seriously big deal – normally out of the desire to make it one of those “best Christmases” for all concerned
- Depending on your personality and the way you approach it, this can either lead to seeing Christmas as stressful (that’s next week – try not to be stressed until then) or as a challenge – something that if you work hard enough, if you’re smart enough, you can get through the holiday and come out a winner
- Sometimes that’s a challenge that isn’t won or lost until the wee small hours of the morning, just minutes before the kids get up

What does a “winning” Christmas look like? What’s your post-Christmas scorecard? What expectations of yourself do you have to meet/do at Christmas? Any Griswolds here?

The Challenge of Christmas

- It’s the challenge of Christmas – do it smarter, be further ahead, spend less – winners and losers at Christmas, and you’re going to be a winner
- As we said last week, we hear these messages – they are broadcast TO us, but what do they say ABOUT us? What about us are they describing or trying to evoke?
- The underlying message is that Christmas is really hard – everyone wants pleasing – your whiny kids, your lazy spouse, the community, your workplace – there are lots of obligations, you’ve got to go to parties and see friends and family – work work work work work (some of this goes to stress)
- But if you’re smart enough, if you’re together enough, you can WIN

- You've GOT to win – your neighbours are watching, your children are watching, your coworkers are watching to see how you “handle” Christmas – to see if you can keep it all together, to see if you can meet or exceed their expectations
- Stereotypically, this can put a lot of pressure on the female side of the species, but we men can be equally “in the game”, ready to pull out a credit card at a moment's notice, buy one more big present, have our ear to the ground for our child's slightest whim, or put up one more strand of lights
- The expectations – whether it's our own or the expectations of others, for whatever reason we have them – well, our expectations can be killing us – and they can make us miss the joy and wonder that we're supposed to be enjoying and creating for the rest of our families and friends
- We can work so hard to make Christmas so perfect, that we don't REALLY enjoy it
- One indication of this is when you're glad it's all done...!

Expectations: A dinner party

- Jesus was a part of a celebration once where there were a lot of expectations floating around, and it's instructive for us today to see what mattered and didn't matter so much to him: *(summarize the story)*

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.” Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said.

“Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Luke 7:36-50, NIV2010

- Who are we showing off for? Why does it matter, and why is this holiday another excuse to try to “one up” the neighbours? Or your mother? Or your father, for that matter? Or _insert person here_?
- I got a better deal / we had more fun / we’re doing more interesting things / my kids got better presents / my Santa Claus can beat up your Santa Claus
- Having to win something, having to earn something is the opposite of what Jesus offers, which is the gift of himself
- And this lady realized that what she really wanted, what she really needed, wasn’t the respect of society, wasn’t her place back in town, wasn’t more friends or better friends – it was the love and acceptance of God, and the forgiveness of her sins – the wiping clean of her slate
- If you want a challenge in your life, you’re aiming too low – this is something that will be mostly forgotten by next year, as opposed to something that can alter what’s eternal
- The result of Jesus entering into a life isn’t the desire to win or one-up or be driven by anything else than a motivation of love
- Look at the result of His coming on that very first Christmas day:

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.” **Luke 2:8-14, NLT**

- What do you see? Tidings of comfort and joy? Peace on earth, goodwill towards humanity?

TAKE IT HOME:

A winning life is less about competing with others and more about humbly following Christ.

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ... because of the surpassing worth of knowing

Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Philippians 3:7-9, NLT



Key Thought:

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Conclusion: Jesus on a collision course [advent conspiracy]

No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us. **John 1:18 NLT**

[play video here – advent conspiracy 2009 youtube]

- Advent Conspiracy movement – to take some of the materialism out of Christmas by Worship Fully, Spend Less, Give More, Love All – to redirect what we do and how we do it
- The spending season has just begun – unless you're Sandy, you probably don't have your Christmas shopping done, and maybe it's not too late to do something to differently shape your strategy this year
- What about this?

Get what you need, get a deal if you can, ask yourself if what you're buying is something you'll still have/be using/need a year from now (fruitcake is not the best example of this) – be choosy with what you get, and not only for yourself, but for others – then you can really make a difference this Christmas that will last

- if “everyone else” has been looked after... but truthfully, they haven't – so many needs in our world, and there are people in need – paradox of Christmas that so much is spent on people who already have everything – “What do you get the person who has everything?” – and unfortunately, we don't often answer that question with “nothing but good wishes”
 - all the charities that can be supported at this time of year, that ramp up what they do – breakfast clubs of Canada, Samaritan's Purse (shoeboxes), Worldvision, Snowsuit fund, Toy Mountain – all deserving, and all lacking – even Reconnect ;)
 - There are so many who have no voice, who are left behind in our organized greed of a holiday
 - Our children are watching – how do we spend or not spend our money at Christmas? – we teach our children about money and stuff by what they see us do, rather than what we say

Response: “Save Me” (band)