

A Different Kind of Christmas: Living and Giving Like Jesus

Session 1 - "Expect a Miracle"

Therefore, the Lord will give you a sign. The young woman is pregnant and is about to give birth to a son, and she will name him Immanuel. - Isaiah 7:14 (CEB)

- Jesus was not what most people expected. He did not possess worldly wealth or majestic power. In fact, he resisted the world's obsession with wealth, pleasure, power, recognition. In spite of this, we have allowed materialism and consumerism. We have created a Santa Claus Jesus who promises to fulfill all our earthly wants and wishes.
 - **CONSIDER** - What are some things you currently enjoy or love about the holiday season? What don't you like? Is there a common theme between what you like and don't like?
- The real meaning of Christmas is the celebration of a miracle - the birth of the Messiah. Jesus' mother, Mary, was an ordinary girl chosen to grow and deliver God's precious miracle. Today, God still works miracles through ordinary people. God plants the seeds of miracles in the hearts of available people who are willing to act on God's vision.
 - **READ - Luke 1:26-38.** Imagine how Mary felt after speaking with the angel.
 - Do you think that Mary felt qualified to for such an awesome responsibility? Why or why not?
 - What did she do to prepare for delivering God's miracle?
 - Why do you think God chooses to deliver miracles through ordinary people?
 - How can we prepare to deliver the miracle that God is growing in our heart?
- As Mary suffered the pains of childbirth in order to deliver God's miracle to Earth, we must suffer the pain of sacrifice if we are to deliver God's miracles to the world today. Most of us go to great extremes to avoid discomfort and sacrifice. When we do acknowledge pain and sacrifice, we tend to sanitize it.
 - What do you think the author means by the statement "Grace may be free, but it is never cheap?"
 - Do you think that God could actually work a miracle through your life?
 - What ideas do you have that could be seeds for a mission miracle?
- We often time paint a very sanitize picture of the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth. Let's look at the following hymns: Away in a Manger (#209), Silent Night (#211), O Holy Night (#201).
 - **CONSIDER** - How do each of these songs present a sanitized version of Jesus' birth? In what other ways do we promote a sanitized version of Jesus' birth?

Key Insights

1. The picture that you have of God has everything to do with the shaping of your faith and values. If your picture of God is distorted your life perspective will be skewed.
2. The real meaning of Christmas gets lost in shopping, spending, escalating debt, making exhausting preparations, and building stacks of gifts that are not needed or will not be used. In the chaos of the holiday season, we miss the true gift of Immanuel, God with us.
3. Debt driven by the spirit of materialism holds many Christians captive today. Jesus came to break the chains of oppression and bondage - even the chains of debt.
4. Debt creates incredible economic challenges for families. Statistics show that in 2005, for the first time in U.S. history, Americans reached a negative savings rate. Americans were spending \$1.22 for every \$1 earned.
5. It's time for Christians to focus on Jesus' birthday and celebrate Christmas in a way that honors the birth of the Messiah - concentrating their resources on the least and the lost.
6. Every work of God is conceived in the heart of a disciple, grows in conviction and clarity of vision, and then is delivered through God's intended action; more simply stated, God births miracles through ordinary people.
7. Throughout Scripture, God chose ordinary unqualified people through whom to do miracles - Moses, David, Elizabeth, Mary, and others.
8. The power of Immanuel is the power to create change in the world through God's action in your life.
9. Grace may be free, but it is never cheap. Miracles come at a cost.

Over the next week...

- List ways you can focus on the presence of Jesus rather than on the presents you expect to give and receive this Christmas.
- Are there other ways you can avoid consumerism this Christmas?
- Think of some ideas you've had recently. Could any of the be the seed of miracles that God has planted? What actions could you take to deliver God's miracle?

Prayer for this week: *Lord God, we celebrate you and the birth of your precious son, Jesus. This time of learning and sharing has made us aware of "God with us." We are grateful for your Word and the opportunity to study about the miracles that you perform. Prepare our hearts to conceive and deliver your miracles, and our feet to act on your vision. Amen.*