

Outline

Christmas Last! The Present

Have you lived like this is Christmas Last! for you? How has your perspective shifted this last week as you have tried to live this out in this last week? Has it shifted how you have viewed Christmas? How about how you have lived Christmas? For some of you, you do not know what I am talking about. Last Sunday we began a new series called *Christmas Last!* in which I challenged all of us to tackle this Christmas season with a bit of a different perspective. I challenged us all to live out the next couple of weeks until Christmas as if God had whispered into our ears that our last day on this earth was going to be December 26 – that we would die the day after Christmas, thus, Christmas Last! Christmas Last! is a sobering thought. So, I repeat my question, did your Christmas shift a little for you this week? Did your decision making change? I know for some it did. As a matter of fact, one person told me that he took the Christmas Ornament that we gave out in church last week and wore it on his shirt as a reminder to himself all week. It really came to be quite a conversation piece with everyone who asked him about it and gave him many chances to share his trust in Christ with them and even challenged others to engage in the same challenge. By the way, if you would like to participate in the challenge, we still have some ornaments on the trees down front. Feel free to grab one after the service and start living your Christmas Last! Perspective.

You see, the real trick is that this is not a mind game that I am playing with you. For in a real certainty, no one listening to me or playing this little game with me this Christmas is guaranteed that this is not Christmas Last! for you. The real twist to this game is that this is not a game. This could be Christmas Last! for any of us. No one is guaranteed the next breath, yet we all live like we have many Christmases and many days and months and years ahead of us. That is why we get in the ruts that cause us to truly begin to dread life or to get bored with life and not appreciate what is sitting well within our control, the great gift that God has given us as it is so aptly named – **The Present**. What are you doing with The Present? Is it sitting unwrapped under the tree of your rush-about life? Today as we continue to examine what it is to live a Christmas Last! Perspective this Christmas, let's unwrap that fantastic gift that God has wrapped for each of us and see how a Christmas Last! Perspective will allow us to enjoy His Present to us this Christmas and every day, the Present.

As we unwrap The Present that God has given us, it is one of the cool gifts we all like to get – a gift that has many other little gifts inside of it. I love a big box that when I open it all of a sudden has a bunch of other little gifts that I get to unwrap. It makes the surprise last a little longer. It makes the joy multiply. As you can see, I like gifts. Inside this wonderful gift that God gives us that I think I can only enjoy with a Christmas Last! Perspective are a bunch of little gifts that I begin to realize are there. Christmas Last! really allows me to enjoy The Present, for I have only a limited time with it.

What is inside this gigantic gift that is sitting in front of me all the time, yet I so easily and often overlook? **(I will pull out a wrapped portrait of my family and a picture of my friends)** In The Present is a great gift that I need to appreciate genuinely and unwrap daily and fully enjoy - the **Gift of Family and Friends**. God, in the present, gives me family, the one crew that I can indulge my time on, thus making that gift even more valuable with use. It is a fragile gift so I must unwrap it and handle it with great care. This is a unique gift for as I love it and spend time with it, it grows in value. I love gifts that appreciate with time and careful use – things like Corvettes, which I do not have; real estate, which right now seems only to be costing me and in this economy appears to only be depreciating; gold, which is rare and hard to come by. However, **The Ultimate gift in God's Present, is Family and Friends**. As I neglect it and choose to avoid it, it bruises, yet it never loses value.

As I try to live out a Christmas Last! Perspective, I may have to repair parts of my family that have not been handled carefully. However, the beautiful thing about this gift is that it honors humility and craves reconciliation. It can usually be restored with genuine confession, contrite repentance, and loving forgiveness. Among all other relationships in my life, truly the most easily accessible in God's gift of The Present is the family. Handle it in this Christmas Last! with Care and with Hope and Humility. This may mean that you let go of Christmas Past, give up on your dream of Christmas Future for that family member, for it may not be their dream or God's goal for them. A Christmas Last! Perspective loves without prejudice or perceived value. As you live Christmas Last! how will you handle this great gift in

December 14, 2008

The Present called family? Look what God says about the care of Family and Friends, these great gifts in His Present to us:

Jesus' Thoughts about the Present of Family and Friends

Do not murder. I'm telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother 'idiot!' and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell 'stupid!' at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill. Matthew 5:21,22 TM

God wants us to treat as precious the gift of relationship. Don't throw it away. Don't ignore it. Don't take it for granted. There are not other people in the world who can drive us more crazy or whom we treat with less care than those we know "have to accept us" or those who love us so almost unconditionally. And it is those relationships that we take for granted and feel will always be there. So we put off letting them know that we love them. We abuse their unconditional love by treating them with impatience and anger. We do not allow them to be different than us but chide them because they do not act or think or live in the same way we do. We fail to appreciate them for who they are and how God individually and uniquely created them. This week in a Christmas Last! Perspective, you must pause and truly appreciate and love your family and friends that God has so gifted you with in The Present. It means you might have to do what Jesus advises in the next verse of this passage:

Jesus' Counsel on Cherishing Family and Friends

This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God. Matthew 5:23,24 TM

This week in a Christmas Last! Perspective you may have to take the initiative and restore that relationship gone bad. Jesus tells us to take the first step, not wait on them to make the move in a tit-for-tat vengeful style of relating. Christmas Last! demands that you make the first move, for if you have not made the first move and done your part, you cannot even have a real relationship with God. Make your amends (even if you were not the one who was wrong) and then come back and work on your relationship with God!

(I will pull out another wrapped present out of the gift – a clock wrapped in Christmas Paper) The Present, God's great gift to us in a Christmas Last! Perspective also gives us another gift called **Time**. Christmas Past constantly leaves us lamenting time lost and Christmas Future often makes us live life so fast trying to achieve it that we fly right past all the wonderful gifts of The Present. **A Christmas Last! Perspective calls us to enjoy this wonderful gift of The Present - Time**. Christmas Last calls for you to STOP... accept the gift of Time. Take advantage of this fantastic gift and stop TIME for just a few moments. Jesus said that is exactly why He came, so you could enjoy the Time of your Life.

Jesus' Gift to You – The Time of Your Life

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10 NIV

Jesus wants us to live life to the full. That is living in The Present that God so freely gives us. Christmas Past and Christmas Future rob us and choose to destroy us. They are the chief weapons of The Enemy, who desires our destruction. Our very real enemy in this world, the Devil, would choose to rob us of The Present life that God wants for us and cause us to grieve over the mistakes of the past and lust over the future we do not yet have. God calls for us to enjoy The Present life that He has given us now. Now is eternity. Now is where God lives. Now is what we must discipline ourselves to enjoy. For Now is where God Is!

But the question is **How do I take advantage and really come to make effective use of Time so that I can live life to the full in The Present that God gives me?**

December 14, 2008

That is a lesson that I learned recently from a gift that I pulled out of The Present from God, my friend Randy Lacey, a member of my Wednesday Morning LIFE Group.

Randy will emerge from the Gift on the Stage and share his thoughts on taking advantage of the Holy Spirit who talks to us in our **Fleeting Thoughts.**

Randy and I had that very conversation about *Fleeting Thoughts* and how God inhabits the content of our fleeting thoughts. God promises that He will give us His voice, His friendship, His thoughts, if we will just listen to Him. His voice is constantly urging us forward to act in His will on a daily basis. We just choose to ignore it or push it aside or procrastinate on its urgings in our spirits. What does His voice sound like? In my spirit and mind, it sounds like my own voice, in your spirit and mind, the Holy Spirit will speak to you in a voice that you are very familiar with – your own voice.

How do I know that it is God's voice that is talking to me with my voice and not my own or the Devil's? That is a great question. And Jesus gives us a great answer to it:

The Holy Spirit's Voice Will Never Sound Destructive

Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.** I am the good shepherd." John 10:7-11 NIV

Both the Holy Spirit and the Devil are spirits, one bent on salvation of our lives and one bent on the destruction of our lives. Both will use our own voices to speak to us. How do I tell the difference – God's voice will always encourage growth and love. The Devil's voice will always encourage hatred and destruction.

You heard Randy say that he is striving to listen to those "fleeting thoughts" that enter his mind and to obey them, from the simple friendship calls to the seemingly silly and mundane like picking one vitamin water over another. Both of those thoughts led to life, not destruction. Both of those thoughts were positive and not negative. That is how much the Good Shepherd loves us. That is how close He wants to be with us in The Present!

However, as soon as the Good Shepherd's voice directs us, there will be a spiritual assault on us to destroy both the voice of the Good Shepherd and our very lives. There will be ridicule that we are thinking foolish thoughts and are absurd. There will be shame that we are imposing or that we will be rejected in some way. There will be temptation to procrastinate and check into it later. The Devil desires destruction and that often happens as procrastination destroys the moment into the nothingness of Christmas Future!

God speaks to us in the moment of His great gift The Present. When He speaks to us, He expects us to act in obedience immediately. Waiting will kill us and the opportunity to bless the friend, the family, the stranger, the boss, the co-worker, the enemy, the agency, the opportunity, or the ministry. In the Spirit of living out our challenge of Christmas Last! this week, let's take on the challenge of obeying the voice of God in the fleeting thoughts of our minds and spirits this week.

Would you continue to live out Christmas Last! by living in The Present this week? Do that in the two ways that Jesus has taught us today:

Christmas Last! Perspective Assignment

Honor Your Friends and Family by Loving Them in Truth and Action.

Obey the "Fleeting Thoughts" of the Holy Spirit's Voice in Your Mind Every Time.

Let's pray and ask God to guide our thoughts and to give us the faith and courage to obey His Voice in our Hearts and Minds and Fleeting Thoughts!

December 14, 2008