

Outline

Christmas Last! Paradise

There is something about the two bookends of life that cause us to pause and really focus on the meaning of life and appreciate life for what it is. I can remember that very moment from the drama when my first child was born. I had all those very same feelings and thoughts of hope and responsibility for my baby. I didn't struggle with the name for I had that picked out almost immediately and named her Amberlee, one of my favorite heroines in one of my favorite Fantasy Novels, *The Wishsong of Shannara* (yes, that's right, I am a proud card carrying member of the Nerd hall of Fame!) I loved the character and I loved the uniqueness of the name. And my daughter was also born right at a Holiday, albeit a little less significant one – Halloween – all the more reason for her to be named for an elven queen! Birth and Death do that for us – make us stop and appreciate the great gift of life that God has given us.

For those that don't know, we are engaged in a little challenge right now – I have challenged everyone to try and live this Christmas as if it was their last – **Christmas Last!** If God were to whisper in your ear and tell you that this Christmas was going to be your last one on this earth and that December 26 would be the day that you die, how would that affect you? It might cause you a little fear, which is ok, for we all fear death a little because the great unknown sits right on the other side of it. But when you got beyond the shock of such knowledge, how would your life change if you knew that news?

In the words of Tim McGraw and the song *Live Like You Were Dying*, would you take advantage of every last moment that you had? He would ride a bull named Fu Manchu – not sure that is how I would do it! I suggested last week that all of us should open the great gift that God gives us every day – The Present. And it is a great big gift with a lot of little gifts inside it. **The most tangible and reachable gift in The Present** is just like in the drama - *Relationships – Family and Friends*. If you knew that this was Christmas Last! for you, what would change about how you treat those relationships? Would you offer forgiveness you'd been denyin' like McGraw croons about in his song? Would you really see, really gaze on that beautiful mixture of blonde and brown and occasional black in the inter-weavings of your daughter's beautiful locks? Would you actually hear what your friend is actually saying and enjoy the pleasantness of that personality that drew you to her/him? Well that is how we ought to be approaching our Christmas Last! Perspective this Christmas.

The other gift was the gift of Time that God gives us. And I suggested that the voice of God is inside of us everyday urging us right on toward taking full advantage of that gift of Time that is inside His Present to us every day. Did you listen and act on those "fleeting thoughts" that casually enter your mind in the little moments of each day? I did. On Tuesday, I had just finished a bunch of work for the day and was taking a breather when the thought entered my mind that I should call over to the Rappahannock Regional Jail and ask if I could visit a friend of mine in there. I had been trying to visit him for weeks and had not been able to get in because the visiting slots were all filled in. That fleeting thought came into my mind that I should call over and see if I could get in. Immediately I came up with every reason not to do it. It was midday and surely all the slots were filled in. They would just tell me "no" again. However, in my Christmas Last! Spirit and to practice what I preach, I called, and they said that if I got there within 20 minutes, I would be able to see him! And not only that, when I got there, they had made a mistake and double booked the visit room for him, so they gave me a one-on-one visit privately – that's never happened and they assured me it would never happen again. I know that God spoke to me in my "fleeting thoughts," and because I obeyed, I was blessed and got to be a blessing to my friend! Keep obeying those fleeting thoughts! And remember why God gives them to you:

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

Taking advantage of God's gift of Time His Present also means that you STOP and take time to enjoy this Great Creation that He created for us. That means that you actually will see that one last leaf floating to the ground. That means you will Grab the present of a still night, a chill breeze, a squirrel scampering across the tops of your fence posts with ease. It means you simply slow down to enjoy living in this wonderful world that we live in with its smells and tastes and sights and feels. A Christmas Last!

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Perspective gives us just the idea that God commanded for us as He created us:

God created human beings; he created them godlike, reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female. God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Genesis 1:27-28 TM

We would be remiss if we were to skip by a Christmas Last! Perspective without thinking about what a Christmas Last perspective truly means. If I am to live as if this is Christmas Last! for me, I have to realize that it means The Present, as I know it, ends for me. Christmas Last means that death is imminent. It means that Time is truly a precious commodity and very precious.

Interview with Debbie McGee

Final Thoughts about Christmas Last! And a Call to Commit to Christmas Last! Relationship with Christ

However, Christmas Last! also means that Christmas Future is about to slam right into my Christmas Present and that I am about to meet in a very physical way the Maker of My Present, the one who gave me the ultimate gift that allows me to even consider His great gift of The Present, my Creator. Christmas Last! gets me thinking very much about God and His relationship with Me. He created me for a purpose and that purpose was because He loved me. He loved me so much that He gave me a Free Will. Without the gift of a Free Will, I cannot love or be loved, for within the definition of Love is the idea that I cannot be forced to accept something or made to cherish it. Love is love because it is freely given and freely accepted and freely returned. As I anticipate living Christmas Last!, I must contemplate the love that is offered me by a loving God who created me, and waits for me to accept Him in relationship. He will not force Himself upon me for that would not be love, but slavery.

God will credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Romans 4:24,25 NIV

Christmas Past shows me how much God loves me as He paid the price for His love by sacrificing Himself in Death to pay for my sins. He wanted to identify with me, His Creation, so much that He became human just like me and participated in a Christmas Last! just as I am appointed to attend to a Christmas Last! somewhere in Christmas Future. He died. Then He lived and became eternally Christmas Present. He banished Christmas Past and Christmas Future by conquering Christmas Last! in His own Eternal Life. And because of that, I can choose to conquer my inevitable Christmas Last! by choosing to accept his offer of Eternal Christmas Present with Him forever!

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us... For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Romans 5:8-11 NIV

As we continue to live our Christmas Last this month, have you stopped and considered that this very well could be actually Christmas Last! for you? What if it is? Have you accepted God's Christmas Eternal Present for you and if not what are you willing to do about it as you continue to live out Christmas Last!?!?

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