

Present Value

Working on Wanting Jesus

December 10, 2023

Today we're developing our desire for the greatest gift ever given! Cuz as much as we *want* to want what *God* wants to *give*, the *truth is*, it's *not* usually at the *top* of our list. And to *flip* that script, we're gonna have to *honestly* answer some *hard* questions like: **What do you want more than Jesus?** Cuz aint none of us *living* like we want Jesus *most!* So, **what's really at the top of your list?**



Well, while you think about *that* – remember *this*: **some of the presents we love most aren't the ones we wanted most.** We get these a lot from people who *love* us; like *parents*. They give things like socks you *learn* to love, tools you *grow* happy to have after a moment of need, and the BBQ you *won't* fully appreciate *until* summer's in swing.



And as we *mature*, we *also* all learn that **some of the presents we need most are the ones that hurt most!** At a certain point we start quietly craving things like cologne, gym-memberships, and Rogaine. *But*, when someone actually *buys* them for us, our excitement is *offset* by the fact everyone's *acknowledging*, we're *bald*, *fat*, and *smelly!*



And **these principles are important to remember once we receive God's Son as our greatest gift**, cuz once He's in *our* life, **Jesus can feel undesirable and unpleasant.** And it's important for us to *admit* that *honestly* as we work to *change* it *earnestly!* We have to take an *inward* look at how we *really* feel about Jesus, so we can *work* on wanting Him more. Cuz truth is, most of *us* feel like world-renown philosopher and author, Aldous Huxley, who said *this* about *his* thoughts on God:



"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able, without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption..."

An *agnostic*, Huxley at least had the *courage* to admit his *self-serving* reason to hope *against* God; **a real God means the things we want could carry consequences we don't want!** And above all, Huxley desired freedom to do *whatever* he wanted without *worrying* whether it was *right* or *wrong*. So, because of that *bias*, he unsurprisingly *found* reasons to *believe* what he *wanted*. And that's the way it *always* goes when the truth *goes against* what we want – like Jesus said to the Pharisees:

Because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me! – John 8:45 NIV

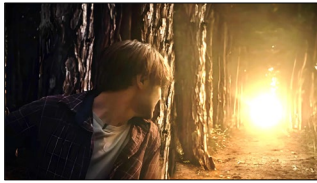
And we're all *guilty* of this when the TRUTH *He* brings, brings the truth about *us* into light. Cuz

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. – John 3:19-20 NIV

This is indeed a dark world full of every *awful* thing we've *all* ever done – and we're too *helpless* to help *ourselves* out of the mess we made. So even though it's *embarrassing*, at a certain point we *must* admit **the present we need most may not be the one we want most, cuz it might hurt most!**



And only after we start to see *that's* how Jesus works will we'll *ask for*, *accept*, and *appreciate* His presence in *our* lives. But, to have *that* heart, it's *essential* that we explore how we *see* *three* of His *key* *qualities*. Because **Jesus is Challenging, Jesus is Surprising, and Jesus is Fulfilling!**



So first, let's look at how **Jesus is challenging**. Well, He's the *light* that came into the darkness! And that means His mere *presence* shakes things up and *challenges* the status quo! So consequently, **if we want comfort more than construction, we'll see Him as a threat!** Remember, Jesus was very upfront about His *purpose* in coming here:



Do not suppose that I have come to bring *peace* to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. – Matthew 10:34 NIV

Contrary to popular opinion, Jesus' presence *doesn't* mean the war is over, it means the battle has *begun*. And **Christmas day was D-day in the battle between light and dark!** It *marked* the moment when those *opposed* to truth *couldn't* run and hide, but *had* to *decide* whether to *fight* the light or *surrender* and submit. Like Herod, when the Magi said:



"Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him." [So,] When King Herod heard this he was *disturbed* ... [And fearing a *challenge* to his *throne*] he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under [just because he *felt* threatened!] – Matthew 2:2-3, 16 NIV



And every time we read this story, we all say, **"Oh that Herod! What a monster!"** But when we stop and think about it; are we really so *different*? Well, apart from the actual *genocide* that is...

[Because] The mind governed by the *flesh* is hostile to God. – Romans 8:7 NIV

Do you realize that's our default human setting; hating God?! Cuz our *flesh* inherited control of our *life* the moment we were *born* and doesn't *want* to *surrender*! So we all see *threats* as *enemies*! Ever felt threatened by a *new* cool kid at school, a *new* hot shot at work, or a *new* stud in your *small* group who makes your spouse *laugh out loud*? *Me too!* And what do you want to *do*? *Go get 'em!*

Any threat to the *power* or *plans* we have must be *stopped* at all cost! And if you were a *king* who found out *another* king might edge you *out* – well you'd get *mad*, push *back*, and *go get them!*

So, **every one of us has a little Herod in our heart**. Cuz every one of *us* starts off comfortably in control as the *king* of our *lives* and we're *not* real keen on some *stranger* coming in to call the shots! So, we gotta *expect*, **when our heart starts surrendering, we're gonna feel some hostility!**

And if you're here this morning and *you're still struggling with believing*, I can understand why *surrender* is such a big *barrier* to your faith – but I hope you *realize the struggle to surrender is what makes it impossible to be impartial*. That is, we can't *trust* ourselves to make a *rational* decision about God, because we have a *conflict* of interests. **If God exists, we lose control, and we know we don't want that.** So in the same way a *judge* can't hear a case against a company *he* owns, we can't judge the case for a King whose very *existence* threatens *our throne!*

Just like Aldous Huxley, **if we are invested in anything from this world, we're already unconsciously hoping against God** – cuz *He's* the biggest threat to the life we know!



[And that's why] Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the *world* becomes an enemy of *God*. – James 4:4 NIV



And as for confessing Christians, don't think that just because you *believed* and got *baptized* the battle is *over!* It doesn't matter *where* you're *at* in your belief – **until the enemy is completely defeated, you're still at war.** There's *still* a small faction *fighting* to hold on to *control* of your heart. That's why it's *still* hard for you to *forgive*. And to *give*. And to *pray*. **You haven't surrendered everything to the new King if following His orders ever feels unappealing.**



Problem is, **we really like the way familiar feels**, but our new King *isn't* a fan of '*business as usual*'. Because *whoever* had control *wasn't* Him and therefore, *wasn't* leading us to *life!* So, as He takes the wheel and pulls a full 180, we start to see *why Jesus is surprising!*



It's not *just* that He challenges and *changes* things, **He does things that we can't possibly anticipate or understand!** Like when He warned Habakkuk how He would *fix Israel* by *helping* their *enemies*:

I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. – Habakkuk 1:5 NIV

Everything He offers is *new* and *improved*, so if we've *only* worked with *old* and *broken*, we have to *expect* the *unexpected*. Because **life feels foreign if all we've known is death.** *Perfect* feels *impossible* if all we've known is *flawed*. And *true love* feels *false* if all we've known are *frauds*.

When we've become accustomed to a *sub-par* standard, we're shocked and *shaken* by a *superior* experience – but **if we want safety more than solutions, we'll find Him frightening!** Unknown things are *scary* and scary things are *unwanted*. So we're not naturally *thrilled* when He says:

The *greatest* among you will be your *servant*. [Cuz that's *not* the way we expect Kings to come. And we were severely shaken when He said] – Matthew 23:11 NIV

I did *not* come to bring *peace*, but a *sword*. [Cuz that's *not* the stuff we'd hoped He'd bring. And it's downright terrifying to hear Him say] – Matthew 10:34 NIV

Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will save it. [Cuz that's *not* the path we'd ever expect to lead to *life!*] – Luke 9:24 NIV

But God *chose* the *foolish* things of the world to *shame* the *wise*; God chose the *weak* things of the world to *shame* the *strong*. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things *that are not*—to nullify the things *that are*, so that no one may boast before Him. – 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 NIV

Our #1 problem has always been believing we're #1, so we've always *expected* our *Savior* would have a *strength* and *wisdom* similar to *ours*. But **we're not just wrong, we're completely backward!** *Down here*, our idea of *strength* is *weakness*, our idea of *wealth* is *poverty*, and our idea of *life* is *death!* And if we're all *upside-down* and *backward*, of course our *Savior's* gonna be *surprising*, too!

So, knowing *that* – if we still *want* our aim to stay the *same*, **by living a predictable pattern, we're declaring we want counterfeit comfort and safety more than Jesus.** But here's where Jesus is *most* surprising – **real comfort and safety only come from Him!** And the more we come to *know* Him and His *heart*, the more we see He *isn't* *threatening* and *frightening* cuz He's *challenging* and *surprising*; Jesus is *challenging* and *surprising* because **Jesus is fulfilling.**



He's a pair of warm socks, a set of tools, and a BBQ **that we're surprised to love so much.** And – He's the cologne, gym-membership, and **Rogaine that are challenging to admit we need!** So

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, – James 1:16-17 NIV



For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. – John 3:17 NIV



[And since] [God] gave Him up for *us all* – how will He not *also*, along with Him, graciously give us all things? – Romans 8:32 NIV



For it is *God* who works in *you* to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose. – Philippians 2:13 NIV

Y'see, God *won't* accept *less* than *perfect*, and we're *His* handiwork. So **fulfilling His purpose means making us perfect.** And *that* means *giving* us what we *need* to be *complete*. Which is what He did with the *first* Christmas present ever *given*. Because it's only *through Jesus* that we get to *receive* all *other* gifts and *achieve* all of *God's* purpose.

So, **to have everything we've ever wanted, all we have to do is want Him first and foremost.** And *that* means erasing the fear and *hostility* from our *heart*. And *that* only happens when we understand *His heart*. And **that's what Christmas is all about; God putting His heart on display.**

Because He *humbled* Himself and came into this world as a human, knowing His very presence would be met with *violent* hostility the day He was *born*. He *knew* **He would be hurt and hated by a dark world that wanted no part of the light.** But He *also knew* that **if He could endure the agony of this world, He could save the love of His life.** Because giving this world a glimpse of His heart does *challenge* and *surprise* us, but it also *softens* and *changes* us to *want* Him most.

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.