

## I. Introduction

- A. I want to thank you for joining our worship today. Christmas season is a great time to get caught up with God. Maybe He's especially generous this time of year—do you think? Okay, for all our visitors, I have this weird sense of humor, and sometimes I can't help myself, so stay tuned.
- B. I want to do a little audience participation, like we did last time. So I have another quiz for you and don't worry, because it's going to make sense in a minute why we're doing this quiz.
- C. This is a multiple choice quiz. I'm going to give you an animal, and you're going to tell me what kind of food it eats—multiple choice. Now, I know some of you are going to get super technical on me, so let's assume an animal in the wild, eating it's natural diet, not some man-made pelletized feed, okay?
  - 1. Rabbit...
    - a) Carnivore (eats meat only)
    - b) Herbivore (eats plants only)
    - c) Omnivore (eats everything)
    - (1) (Herbivore)
  - 2. Deer (herbivore)
  - 3. Bear (omnivore)
  - 4. Mountain lion (carnivore)
  - 5. Fly (omnivore)
  - 6. Falcon (carnivore)
  - 7. Frog (carnivore)
  - 8. Humans (omnivore, except my son who, if it weren't for ketchup, would be a carnivore)
- D. There's something really cool about the way God's creation works here. Because you might wonder how carnivores get their vitamins if they never eat broccoli. In God's wisdom, carnivores and omnivores get plenty of vitamins because they eat the animals that eat the vegetables.
- E. That is my introduction to the Christmas Story and here we go.

## II. Let's talk Christmas

- A. *And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. 8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" 15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. (Luke 2:1-16, NKJV).*
- B. *Twas the Night before Christmas* is 490 words long.
- C. *Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Clause* is 484 words long.
- D. And the whole *Christmas Story* in the gospel of Luke is 337 words. But it's the Christmas Story that has the power—three hundred thirty seven words that have the power to change your life.
- E. Authors write stories for different reasons. A lot of stories are written to entertain you, or to inform you, or to teach you, inspire you, scare you, or maybe to teach a moral lesson.
- F. But the Christmas Story is different. It's not like any other story, that you can read, learn a few things, and then put down. This story is in a league of its own, because what you do with this story determines the quality of your life now and forever. You don't own this story—this story owns you.
- G. Here's the big idea for today's message—are you ready for it?
  - 1. The Christmas Story is omnivorous.
- H. God told the Christmas Story over and over again, because God wants this story to consume every other story, including the story of your life.
- I. Here's what I mean.

## III. If Christmas is just:

- A. If Christmas is just a nice fable, or a moral fairy tale, then you are in control of the story. It gives you a good feeling, but it doesn't define very much about your life.
- B. You dust the story off once a year, pick and choose which parts to believe, and pack it up with all the ornaments for next year.
- C. You don't have Christmas spirit—you have Xmas spirit. And whether it's *Miracle on 34th Street* or *A Christmas Carol* or *Rudolph*, the Christmas Story gets transmogrified into a human story about bringing out the innate goodness in people.

- D. If Christmas is just a nice fable, then it is no different from the nice fables told in every village and culture all around the world all year long.
- E. If Christmas is just a nice fable, then like all nice fables, it's optional.
- F. But, what if Christmas is something else? What if Christmas is a crucial part of God's very own story—a story God has told and retold since the beginning of time?
- G. And what if God keeps telling this story because He wants you to own it, so that it can own you? The Christmas Story consumes everything, because nothing makes sense without it.
- H. And neither does your life.

#### IV. Before God made the world...

- A. If Christmas is God's Story, that changes everything. Because this story didn't start 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, it started before God made the world, and before God made you.
- B. Before He made the world...
  - 1. God knew that He would love you, not because of who and what you are, but because of who and what HE is. God is love.
  - 2. God knew that we would sin—we would choose our own way over God's way, and fall short of His perfect standards.
  - 3. God knew that our sin would set up a conflict between His own love for us and His love for His own holiness.
  - 4. God knew that He would not make war in His own character in order to make peace with you and me.
- C. So, before God made the World, God made the plan of salvation too.
  - 1. God the Son volunteered to become our Savior
  - 2. And to enter our world
  - 3. And to become a human, and to live as a man without ceasing to be God
  - 4. And to absorb the condemnation our sins deserved.
- D. God couldn't pretend we had never sinned. A holy God must condemn unholiness. A righteous judge must judge sin. If God overlooked our sin, then we humans would have a stronger sense of justice than God who made us.
- E. God has to punish each and every sin, or He ceases being God.
- F. Enter Jesus, who would absorb our sins first, and then feel the full weight of the judgment of God for those sins, second.
- G. So the Bible calls Jesus **THE LAMB SLAIN FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD** (Rev 13:8).
- H. And, on the basis of that death alone, God would offer the human race a radically free gift called everlasting life. God would bestow immortality on mere mortals like us.

#### V. A Free Gift

- A. It is a free gift, because it was paid in full by Jesus, dying on the Cross. It is a free gift, because it is received without good works, and without moral merit badges, and without keeping the Ten Commandments, and without even one religious ritual on our record books.
- B. It is a free gift, because it is received by asking, by a faith so simple, even a child can do it.
- C. That is the plan of salvation.
- D. And on that first Christmas day, God shifted the implementation of that plan into high gear.
- E. Now, I've been theoretical so far, and now I want to get personal. I want to switch from teaching to preaching. I want to meddle with your thinking, okay?
- F. In that 337 word Christmas Story, I want you to notice how God blows the lid off of everyday thinking. You cannot cram the Christmas Story into a normal person's thinking, into the normal worldview that our culture has handed us.
- G. The Christmas Story devours our conventional thinking in three key areas.

#### VI. Conventional thinking

- A. Naturalism
  - 1. Naturalism says that the laws of nature can explain our universe and our lives.
  - 2. But everything that makes the Christmas Story so special is a direct challenge to naturalism.
    - a) Jesus comes from a realm bigger than creation, and longer than time itself. He comes from outside the natural realm and is born into it by choice, by plan, by love.
    - b) Jesus was born of a virgin.
    - c) His birth precisely fulfilled countless ancient prophecies.
    - d) Angels put on a fireworks show for shepherds.
    - e) And they told the shepherds where to find the baby, Jesus.
    - f) And God travelled from the heavenly dimension to earth to become the Savior of all who would believe.
  - 3. You will not find any of this in your physics textbook or your algebra class.
  - 4. The Christmas Story that the Bible tells blows the lid off of a naturalistic worldview. Without denying nature, it blows the lid off naturalism. Without denying science, it blows the lid off of science as a comprehensive explanation for our lives.
  - 5. And think about it, do you really want to think that you and your kids are just random matter-energy units drifting in a cosmos that has no point?
  - 6. Look, we're counting down the days to Christmas. I don't know what force in the universe brought you to church today. I do know that I didn't drag you here. Something, or let's say SOMEONE brought you here.
  - 7. What if God brought you here today just to listen to these words? What if God wanted to give your life the turning point it needs to finally make sense?

8. What if God wanted to write a “Come to Jesus” moment into the story of your life today? Will you be ready for that? In a few minutes I’m going to invite you to step into the Christmas Story and when that happens, you be ready. Okay? Stressed out yet?
9. Christmas blows the lid off of a conventional naturalistic worldview. We talked about that last time, so let me move on. The first convention that the Christmas Story devours is naturalism. Here’s the second one:

#### B. Religion

1. Human beings are hopelessly religious. That means that there’s a force inside us that is constantly reaching for something higher than ourselves.
2. We’re so religious that even when you take away the concept of God, you still find even atheists making a god out of something—out of atheism or environmentalism or sex or something. We are incurably religious.
3. But the story God told on Christmas day is the OPPOSITE of the story told by the religions of the world. Here are the two stories and let me ask you which story you see yourself living today.
4. **THE RELIGIOUS STORY**
  - a) Once upon a time, there were people like us who longed to know our Maker. So we got busy. First, we built a ladder. Then we leaned it against heaven. We started climbing the ladder.
    - (1) We tried to be good.
    - (2) And when we weren’t good, we punished ourselves or lied to cover it up.
    - (3) We invented new laws.
    - (4) And offered sacrifices.
    - (5) And even sacrificed ourselves.
  - b) We did anything we could think of to make God accept us; to make God like us.
    - (1) We went to church or worship or synagogue.
    - (2) We prayed harder.
    - (3) We heaped on guilt, and then more guilt.
    - (4) We gave. We served. We loved. We tried to be moral boy scouts, decent, thrifty and clean.
  - c) We climbed higher and higher up the ladder of good works. But there was a problem, because the higher we climbed, the higher the ladder stretched.
  - d) And we realized we could never climb a ladder of perfection to God.
  - e) That point was a turning point; a crossroads because in the religious story, we have two options:
    - (1) EITHER: Climb harder and climb faster.
    - (2) OR: Pull God down by inventing a handy dandy pocket sized deity of manageable proportion.
  - f) I guess there’s a third option too and that’s the one the Christmas Story leads to.
5. **THE CHRISTMAS STORY**
  - a) See, the Christmas Story suggests a ladder, too. But we don’t climb it. God does. And He climbs it down.
  - b) God became man without ceasing to be God.
  - c) He became the kind of man who was born into poverty and laid in a manger. He became the kind of man who didn’t seek out the high and mighty—He sought shepherds. The kind of man who didn’t come as a **TAKER**, but as **GIVER**.
  - d) The Christmas Story gobbles up the religious story. Instead of you reaching up to God, it has God reaching down to you.
  - e) I studied classical civilization and culture in college. I studied Roman and Greek gods and mythology. I’ve done a little reading in world religions, and here’s what I’ve discovered.
    - (1) **EVERY RELIGION OF THE WORLD HAS US CLIMBING A LADDER UP TO GOD.**
      - (a) But not Christianity, Jesus climbed the ladder down to us.
      - (b) *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”* (2 Corinthians 8:9, NKJV).
    - (2) **EVERY RELIGION OF THE WORLD MAKES US PAY A PRICE TO CONNECT WITH GOD.**
      - (a) But not Christianity, Jesus paid the price, and offers that connection free of charge.
      - (b) *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23, NKJV).
    - (3) **EVERY RELIGION OF THE WORLD SPOTLIGHTS HUMAN PERFORMANCE.**
      - (a) But not Christianity, Christianity spotlights God’s performance, through Jesus Christ: His work, His effort, His sacrifice, His death, His life, and His gift. It’s all Jesus.
      - (b) *“God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”* (2 Timothy 1:9, NKJV).
    - (4) **EVERY RELIGION OF THE WORLD MAKES SALVATION AN ACHIEVEMENT FOR A FEW.**
      - (a) But not Christianity, Christianity makes salvation a gift for whosoever wills.
      - (b) *“And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires let him take the water of life freely.”* (Revelation 22:17, NKJV).

- f) And when you've got a story in which...
    - (1) The Son of God climbed a ladder down from heaven to meet you on your own level, right where you're at today and...
    - (2) He paid the price, once for all, to connect you to God for time and eternity. And He paid it in full so much that you don't add one little bit to what He has done. And a story in which...
    - (3) Salvation is all about Jesus and His work instead of you and your work. And a story in which...
    - (4) Anybody, rich or poor, good or bad, red, yellow, black, or white, high and mighty or low and weak—ANYBODY WHO CHOOSES can come to God through Jesus as a simple act of childlike faith.
  - g) We have a word for that story—it's a word so messed up in our vocabulary that it almost has lost its meaning.
  - h) That word is GRACE.
  - i) The Christmas Story turns the plotline of cosmic history to the story of God's incomparable, unfathomable, incredible, perpetual, unchangeable, unfaltering, unwavering, unshaken, amazing grace.
6. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
- C. Does your story have room for Jesus? The Christmas Story is omnivorous.
  - D. He doesn't want to wreck your story.
  - E. He only wants to make your story make sense.
  - F. And to give you a happily ever after that is out of this world.
    - 1. There is no story like the Christmas Story because there is no Person like Jesus.
    - 2. There is no story like the Christmas Story because there is no salvation like the salvation He offers.
  - G. And He offers it to you right now, here, today, as you are. God says, COME! Bring yourself, just as you are, without any merit, any accomplishment, anything at all. Bring yourself to Jesus.
  - H. Right here.
  - I. Right now.
  - J. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.