

Leaving a Godly Legacy IV– The Legacy of Christ

I'm guessing most of you have seen the classic Christmas movie, It's a Wonderful Life with Jimmy Stewart. In the movie, Stewart plays George Bailey who has inherited the Bailey Building and Loan, and survives Black Tuesday in October 1929. Later his absentminded uncle misplaces \$8000 and George knows he will probably go to jail. On a snowy night he heads out in desperation, uncertain about what to do, and he comes to the bridge and considers committing suicide wishing he had never been born. Of course George is saved by Clarence Oddbody who we later discover is an angel, and he grants George's request. He shows George what the world would have looked like had he never been born. Through the rest of the movie we discover that George's life has made a significant impact on his family, his friends, his community, and had he never been born, other people's lives would have been worse off. The movie helps us realize the impact one person can make on those around us whether it is for good or for bad.

It got me to thinking about the Christmas story, and posing the question, what if Jesus was never born? What if the first Christmas never happened? No virgin birth. No baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. No shepherds receiving angelic news of the Christ child, and therefore no trip to the stable in Bethlehem. No wise men making a long journey from the East following a star in order to give gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the baby Jesus.

What kind of an impact has Jesus made on others over the last 2000 years? What are the legacies of Christ?

And what impact has Jesus made in our lives; is our life any different because Jesus was born?

Jesus has made an incredible impact on the world, it's estimated there are between 1 and 2 billion Christians on the planet, if Jesus hadn't come we wouldn't be in this room tonight.

If I were a historian I could probably take you back through the last 2000 years to demonstrate the difference Christ and his followers have made in the world.

I could talk about how world poverty has been stemmed because of non-profit organizations begun by Christians such as Red Cross and Salvation Army. Or how the Christian faith has held off the moral decay of nations. In America the first colleges were all begun by Christians.

These things are all the temporal benefits of the legacy of Christ. Let's look at some of the other legacies He left us:

If Jesus had never been born:

1. **We wouldn't know what God is really like**
 - a. A fifth grade teacher in a Christian school asked her class to look at TV commercials and see if they could use them in some way to communicate ideas about God. Here are some of the results:

- i. GOD is like a FORD ... He's got a better idea.
- ii. GOD is like COKE ... He's the real thing.
- iii. GOD is like HALLMARK CARDS ... He cares enough to send His very best.
- iv. GOD is like TIDE ... He gets the stains out that others leave behind.
- v. GOD is like GENERAL ELECTRIC ... He brings good things to life.
- vi. GOD is like SEARS ... He has everything.
- vii. GOD is like SCOTCH TAPE ... You can't see him, but you know He's there.
- viii. GOD is like DELTA He's ready when you are.
- ix. GOD is like ALLSTATE ... You're in good hands with Him.
- x. GOD is like VO-5 HAIR SPRAY ... He holds through all kinds of weather.
- xi. GOD is like DIAL SOAP ... Aren't you glad you have Him.

1. Don't you wish everybody did?

b. John 1:1, 14 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (14) The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

c. These verses tells us one of the most amazing truths that has ever happened.

i. God came to our little world and became one of us. God came in the flesh as the Son of God, who we know as Jesus.

ii. Billy Graham said, "If I want to know what God is like, I look at Jesus."

1. **Jesus made the invisible visible.**

2. "*Christ is the visible image of the invisible God* (Col. 1:15, NLT)."

d. Jesus also cleared up faulty images that people have about God.

i. For example: In Jesus' day non-Jews had messed up views of God.

ii. Some didn't believe there was one Creator God, they believed in multiple gods and goddesses (Zeus, Aphrodite) who they believed were simply more powerful version of themselves, which meant they were prideful, deceitful, full of lust, vengeful, . It's a pretty sad situation if the god or goddess you worship is morally just as bad as you are.

iii. Others had an image of God that was exacting, hard and vengeful. This led people who we know as the Pharisees to lead lives where they tried to live up to the letter of the law but as a result despised and mistreated anyone who didn't have their exacting level of devotion.

e. We don't have to wonder what God is like, because the Bible says Jesus is God come in the flesh.

i. Jesus himself even said, "*Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father* (John 14:9)."

ii. It's hard to imagine looking at a defenseless baby to think somehow this is the very presence and glory of God had come to earth, but that is what the Bible teaches us.

2. If Jesus had not come to earth... **We would not be able to have a personal relationship with God**

a. If Jesus was never born, we would never have been able to become one of God's children, or to have a personal relationship with God.

- i. John 1:12 *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*
 - ii. God came to earth as a child so we could become a child of God.
 - iii. God became like one of us so we could become like him.
 - b. God isn't interested in religion, religion is following a set of rules and laws. God is interested in a relationship.
 - i. Being in God's family means we are in a relationship with God, like a mother or father to a child.
 - ii. You can be religious, go to church, you can pray, and read your Bible but if you don't have a relationship with Jesus you've missed the whole point
 - c. God made mankind for the specific purpose of a relationship. It has been mankind's disposition since our earliest ancestors rebelled in the garden of Eden to resist that relationship.
 - i. Instead, most of mankind seeks a god that they can appease, manipulate, rub a bottle and get a wish, earn his favor and earn his blessings.
 - ii. When people tell me that they don't believe in God I am tempted to ask them a follow up question. "What kind of god did you believe in?"
 - 1. For many people it is a god of their own imagination, of their ideals, one who more closely resembles Santa Claus than Jesus.
 - 2. They want someone who will grant them their wishes, let them do whatever they want without consequences, live as they see fit, and still have an eternity of happiness await them. In other words, they want to be gods themselves.
 - a. They blame God for not intervening when their own actions were destructive:
 - i. "When Princess Diana died in an automobile accident, a minister was interviewed and was asked the question "How can God allow such a terrible tragedy?" And I loved his response. He said, "Could it have had something to do with a drunk driver going ninety miles an hour in a narrow tunnel? Just How, exactly, was God involved."
 - ii. In a letter to Dr. Dobson, a young woman asked this anguished question, "Four years ago, I was dating a man and became pregnant. I was devastated. I asked God, "Why have you allowed this to happen to me?"
 - iii. The God of the bible is not like us.
 - 1. He is not made in our image (thank goodness). We are made in His.
 - 2. Our image is tarnished by sin, but He remains pure, holy and loving.
 - 3. He has required consequences to behaviors for each one of us but has also offered every one of us a way out.
 - 4. This leads us to our next point of what would we be like with out Jesus.

3. If Jesus had not been born... **We would be “dead in our sins.”**
 - a. Romans 6:23 *“The wages of sin is death.”*
 - b. God knows what we know...that we all have sinned. Romans 3:23 *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*
 - i. This is the one place that atheists and believers agree. “no one is perfect” (except God).
 - c. God doesn't want to send anyone to hell.
 - i. It is God's desire that all should have eternal life and that none should perish!
 - ii. That is why He sent His Son to take on flesh that Christmas day 2000 years ago.
 - iii. John 3:16-18 *“Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him (places their trust and full confidence in His provision for forgiveness) shall not perish, but have eternal life. “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”*”
 - d. Thank God He sent Jesus to take our punishment, to pay the price our sin deserves. The other half of Romans 6:23 says, *“the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord..”*
 - i. It is God's gift to you today! Eternal life and forgiveness!
 - ii. Can you imagine rejecting God's best gift?
 1. Imagine I give you an expensive and priceless gift but you do one of the following:
 - a. You try to pay me for it. (Duh...It's a gift dummy!)
 - b. You don't want it (You want to make your own or do it your way)
 - c. You say you aren't worthy of it. (Of course not! It's a gift dummy – a gift doesn't require worthiness)
 2. Ultimately, any of these reactions is a rejection of both the gift and the giver.
 3. This is what we do when God offers His free but costly and priceless gift of Jesus to us! We say, “I want it my way.” Folks, Jesus isn't served at Burger King.
 - iii. Jesus says *“I am the way the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except by me.”* (John 14:6)
 1. Without Jesus, we would have no way to approach God in heaven.
 2. We would have no forgiveness.
 3. We would have no savior, no atonement, no righteousness.
 4. We would be stuck in the impossible and hopeless prison of trying to earn God's favor.
 - e. In fact, **None of us even would exist today.**
 - i. God is both just and loving. When mankind sinned in the garden, God had a plan in the ready that promised that a Messiah, a Savior would come to save mankind from his sins, their effects, their power and their penalty.

- ii. If Jesus had refused to come to earth, then God would have been patently unrighteous and unjust in permitting mankind to perpetuate because to do so would be to consign the entire race of man to hell without hope.
 - iii. You see, there is no other way to pay for sin. The penalty for sin is death, and Jesus came to die in our place. That is the biggest reason He came to earth.
 - iv. If we had no sin payment we would be lost in our sins.
 - v. If Jesus was not to be born and to die in our place, God in His love and justice would have simply not allowed the human existence to continue
4. If Jesus had not been born... **We would never experience the light of hope.**

a. The Light of Hope:

- i. NRS John 1:4 *in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*
- ii. There is a story about how the Lewis and Clark Caverns north of Yellowstone National Park were discovered. As the story goes, one of the original explorers was walking along the top of that mountain and fell through a hole, and he dropped down several hundred feet into this cavern and was stuck in almost total darkness for over a week, no food, no water. He cried out every day, "Help me!" Hoping that somebody would hear his voice and figure out that he was down there. Sure enough a guy came along and heard this faint sound and looked around and found the hole. They dug him out and that's how they found this giant cavern. They asked him, "How did you hold on to hope day after day after day in the dark without giving up?" He said, "There was one little pinhole ray of light that was coming through and I just kept focused on that ray of light."
- iii. A light shining in the darkness has a way of drawing our attention. In the midst of darkness it has a way of giving hope. John's gospel tells us Jesus was the light shining in the darkness.
 - 1. The darkness is the darkness of our world evil, sin, hatred, violence, poverty, brokenness, disease, death, anything which goes against God's original plans for our world.
 - 2. Our world is a very dark place. It is a place that breeds hopelessness. It is a place where dreams are shattered, and hope is drained from our lives.
 - 3. It is why people seek to numb their pain in a bottle, in drugs, or even in work. They feel hopeless and cannot face the pain of that hopelessness. They feel that if they can numb the pain that they can make another day. Does that describe you?
- iv. Hope motivates us to keep going and not give up. Without hope we don't want to do anything.
 - 1. *Peanut's cartoon: Lucy and Linus were sitting in front of the television set when Lucy said to Linus, "Go get me a glass of water." Linus looked surprised, "Why should I do anything for you? You never do anything for me." "On your 75th birthday," Lucy promised, "I'll bake you a cake." Linus got up, headed to the*

kitchen and said, "Life is more pleasant when you have something to look forward to."

2. A little town named Flagstaff was to be flooded, as part of a large lake for which a dam was being built. In the months before it was to be flooded, all improvements and repairs in the whole town were stopped. What was the use of painting a house if it were to be covered with water in six months? Why repair anything when the whole village was to be wiped out? So, week by week, the whole town became more and more bedraggled, more gone to seed, more run down.
- a. This is the problem: "***Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present.***"
 3. Jesus came to shed light in our darkness, to bring hope into hopelessness. And He has given us eternal life – which is hope that is certain. He has also promised to return for us and take us home.
- v. A man sentenced to death obtained a reprieve by assuring the king he would teach his majesty's horse to fly within the year--on the condition that if he didn't succeed, he would be put to death at the end of the year. "Within a year," the man explained later, "the king may die, or I may die, or the horse may die. Furthermore, in a year, who knows? Maybe the horse will learn to fly." (Bernard M. Baruch) Isn't hope in this life often like this? We tend to rest our hope in things that are doomed to fail yet we are comfortable with the time we have as a reprieve. Even though that reprieve has its limits we would rather not think about it just now.
 1. God has a different plan for hope in our lives.
 2. He wants more for you and I than living from one fading hope to another. He wants to give each of us a hope that lasts. It is found in Jesus. It is why we celebrate Christmas.
- b. **Does the light draw you or repel you?**
 - i. John 3:19- 21 "*This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.*"
 - ii. That is the problem with light. It brings hope but it also illuminates not just the darkness in our world but in our own lives as well.
 1. Most of us are very comfortable condemning the darkness, the violence, the murder, crime and hatred "in the world."
 2. That is until that bright light shines on us as we have to face our own darkness, violence, hatred, prejudice, anger, lust, selfishness and callousness.
 - iii. But the light cannot save you unless you are willing to let it shine on your own life.
1. Will you do that today?

5. True story of an Englishman who, in his early years, had lived a sort of rags-to-riches life. By hard work, he had transformed himself from a poor kid growing up in the mean streets of London into a celebrated writer. At this particular time in his life, though, he found himself hard up against a sort of “writer’s block.” No longer did he feel inspired. It was as though his creativity had turned itself off. He was drowning in debt, and his publisher kept demanding the next, long-promised manuscript. The writer began to fear that maybe his life was coming full circle: that his own children might one day experience the sort of poverty he had known as a young man. The author took to walking the streets of London, and there he began to notice things. In particular he noticed the urban squalor, the poorhouses, the children working long hours as factory workers, street vendors and chimney sweeps. His thoughts turned to human greed, and the terrible damage a self-centered outlook on life can inflict on so many. At long last, a story began to emerge. When words finally found their way onto paper, the latest novel of Charles Dickens proved to be not nearly so long as most of his others: but it was destined to become his best-loved work. The little novel called A Christmas Carol tells the story of an old miser named Ebenezer Scrooge, who discovers – just before it’s too late for him – what a joy it is to leave a legacy.

Will you choose to experience the Legacy of Christ before it is too late for you? You can experience a brand new start, a new birth, a new beginning today. By placing your faith and trust in what Jesus did for you by coming to this earth and bearing your sin on the cross you can get that brand new start today. In a moment we will have a time of response, our altar will be open for prayer, Jennifer and I will be up here to pray with anyone who wants prayer, whether to commit your life to Christ, to recommit, or for any need you may have. I urge you, do not leave here the way you came in. Use this day to let Jesus Christ change your life. Let’s pray.