

“Mary Christmas”

Luke 10:38-42

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December 24, 2023 • Sunday 5pm Christmas Eve Sermon

There's a phrase that I often hear repeated around Christmas time but now it seems to start pretty early now, like the day after Halloween. The phrase is this; 'It's not Christmas until...' and then the person will fill in whatever is the signifying event or practice that takes place. For example 'It's not Christmas until I hear Christmas music on the radio. It's not Christmas until I give a gift to someone.' One of my favorites I hear is 'It's not Christmas until I get a gift from someone.' I'm just being honest. We're going to have an honest time together this evening. 'It's not Christmas until the walk through Nativity.' I hear that a lot from people. 'It's not Christmas until the choir and the orchestra's Hallelujah program.' For me, it's not Christmas until I taste Sonya Stallings Sweet potato casserole. Some say 'It's not Christmas until we have those Christmas Eve services.'

Another one of mine is it's not Christmas until we watch our favorite Christmas movie. Now, in our family, no two people in our family agree on what the best Christmas movies are, so we end up having to watch some of the worst movies you can ever possibly imagine. We have a wide range of levels of everything in our family. We have some very contemporary children. They literally live on the cutting edge. They're trendsetters in every way. They throw in all their nominations until dad says, 'okay, here's the rule; They have to be accurate theologically.' Dad usually spoils all the fun with rules like that, although I do think that's a Godly rule, but that's a whole other topic for a whole other day.

I tend to win out because my two favorite movies are the most accurate theologically. Please don't suggest Miracle on 34th Street or It's a Wonderful Life because those are the worst theology. There are no angels' wings when bells ring. So those get ruled out immediately but the two movies that I think are the most accurate theologically and by far the best Christmas movies ever are one The Bells of Saint Mary starring Bing Crosby and Ingrid Bergman and they play a priest and a nun. At the end there's a big Christmas blessing that takes place. But two, the most theologically accurate movie that I nominate and select as the best Christian movie of all time is clearly How The Grinch Stole Christmas and it must have been written by a very smart theologian because it is a very theologically correct movie.

The story of the Grinch is about a Grinch who lives up on Mount Crumpet and he can't stand happiness or joy. Down in the valley below are the Whos who live in Whoville. The story also stars little Cindy Lou Who. As the story unfolds, the Grinch decides that he's going to steal Christmas from all of the Whos in Whoville. So, he dresses up like Santa Claus and he gets this little bitty puppy dog and dresses him up to look like a reindeer. That's a pretty fun sight in the movie. They go down into the town on Christmas Eve and the Grinch begins to steal all of the Who trimmings, Who decorations, Who presents and even the Who roast beast. He takes all of the stuff from Whoville, puts it in his sleigh, takes his dog and they head all the way back up Mount Crumpet to the very top. He waits for the next morning so that he can hear all of the crying that takes place down in Whoville because he has stolen their Christmas. As he wakes up he begins to hear down in the town, singing from the town of Whoville;

*Fah who foraze! Dah who doraze!*

*Welcome Christmas, come this way!*

*Fah who foraze! Dah who doraze!*  
*Welcome Christmas, Christmas Day!*

In the Greek that means 'Jesus Christ is Lord,' (no, I'm kidding). The Grinch can't believe what he's hearing and realizes that he has not stolen the Who's Christmas. He's actually just taken their stuff that somehow he thought Christmas was all about the stuff and he missed it completely. There is all this joy down in Whoville and it says, as I quote the narrator, 'That the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day.' Now, that is interpreted to mean he became a Christian. (I'm kidding). So it's a wonderful Christmas movie where the bad guy, the Grinch actually becomes a Christian at the end of the movie. It can't get any better than that. So please do not email me and tell me that you have a better movie than the How the Grinch Stole Christmas.

We're not here tonight to talk about how the Grinch Stole Christmas or me to try to convince you that it is the best movie, which it is, but my question for you is one that is related to that, and it's do you have a Christmas that can be stolen? Is it possible for your Christmas to be stolen? In other words, the who's in Whoville had a Christmas that couldn't possibly be stolen but unfortunately, I'm here to tell you, that there are present day Grinches. You may have them in your family. They could be at your dinner table. We're not trying to identify the Grinches, I'm just acknowledging that there still are some present day Grinches and even unintentionally and sometimes unknowingly, they can kind of rob you of your Christmas. They can steal your Christmas, but it doesn't have to be a Grinch. Sometimes our Christmases can be stolen or Christmas can be robbed simply by our expectations is not being met. Maybe you didn't get the Christmas gift that you always wanted. Maybe I have wanted a motorcycle since I was 12 years old and every Christmas maybe I look under the tree to see if there's a box that big. I've looked this year. There will be no motorcycle under my tree but I'm okay with that. I'm making progress in dealing with that. Maybe the person you gave the gift to or that you give a gift to didn't appreciate it or respond to it the way you thought they would and that robbed you of that Christmas joy. Maybe you're just not appreciated in all that you've done. When our expectations are not met our Christmas can be stolen.

Sometimes circumstances can cause our Christmas to be stolen from us. Circumstances that are completely out of our control. Maybe you're not getting to be with those that you would want to be with this Christmas. Maybe you can't travel to them or they can't travel to you or maybe the Lord has taken them from you and you can't be with them at Christmas. These are very valid circumstances that create tremendous challenges and struggles for us to be able to process. But even then, I believe there's a Christmas that cannot be stolen, that not even those valid, difficult, Godly, sovereign circumstances could steal our Christmas.

How can you guarantee that you can have a Christmas that cannot be stolen? I can only think of two ways. One, you could move to Whoville and become a Who. The problem with that application is it's never been found because it's not real. The second option, which comes from the Bible, is the better option. Let's look at Luke 10. Now, those of you that are real studios on the Christmas story are probably thinking, "Bruce, you must mean Luke 2, not Luke 10." No, I do mean Luke 10. I realize that the Christmas story most are familiar with is in Luke 1 and 2 and Matthew 1 and 2, but we're going to look at Luke 10 because I believe it's a story that can guide us through a view of Christmas.

Luke 10:38-42 says [38] *Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. [39] And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. [40] But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to*

*serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” [41] But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, [42] but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”*

This is a story that you may be able to relate to if you'll just stop and step back for a moment. Have you ever had an unexpected guest? I've done the last second phone call to my wife and said, 'by the way, so-and-so is coming to our house.' I know what my wife would want to deliver and what would take place with all the scurrying to make sure that it's the best possible thing, but we've never had Jesus as the Man come into our house. I can't even imagine calling her and saying, 'Hey, by the way, Jesus is coming over for dinner' so you can understand when Martha realizes that Jesus is coming. He's been healing, teaching and preaching. He's the most talked about person in the entire community and people are unbelievably amazed at Him. We find out later that Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus have a very unique and close and personal relationship with Jesus so they know who Jesus is and so she wants it to be just right when Jesus comes into her house. Martha's not ignoring Jesus as a matter of fact, everything she does is driven to serve Him so all of the stuff that she does is driven so that it would be about Jesus, or at least so that she thinks that all of her hard work is about Jesus. So Martha gets busy doing all of what she thinks is the necessary stuff in order to welcome Jesus into your home.

Jesus is now there at their home, Martha is working hard and she gets frustrated. What frustrates her is that Mary, her sister, is not helping. So, Mary is just sitting at the feet of Jesus and Martha is taking care of all the stuff that she thinks absolutely has to be done when Jesus comes to your house. But in Martha's frustration, she does an interesting thing in this story. Instead of rebuking and correcting Mary, she actually challenges Jesus. She doesn't turn to Mary and say, 'Mary, get busy now' but maybe she had already done it, although it's not recorded in Scripture that she did this. Martha actually turns to Jesus and says to Jesus, 'Do you not care, can you not see that Mary is not helping me to serve You? Would you tell her to help me?' Jesus doesn't tell Mary this which is what Martha wanted Jesus to do. Martha was trying to instruct Jesus to rebuke and instruct Mary on what she ought to be doing. Instead, Jesus replies to Martha saying, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion and it will not be taken away from her.'

Now, why would I call that a Christmas passage? It reminds me of Christmas because at Christmas time we celebrate the birth of Jesus, Jesus coming into the world, coming to us as Emmanuel, God with us and I think that as I look at this story and try to understand it, I could put myself in somewhat of a flip flop kind of way into one of two categories. I'm either embracing a 'Martha' Christmas or I'm embracing a 'Mary' Christmas. I'm experiencing either a 'Martha' Christmas which would be focused on all the details, or A 'Mary' Christmas which would be focused upon Christ Himself.

If we were to have a 'Martha' Christmas, it's not a bad Christmas. It's not terrible because a Martha Christmas was going to be a great experience with Jesus in her house. But we realize and Jesus points out to her, 'you're missing the point.' You have Jesus, the Son of God in your home. You are seizing the opportunity, but you're missing the blessing. You can focus upon a celebration of Christmas that can absolutely acknowledge Jesus and that He's the Son of God, born to this earth to do what God sent Him to do and yet actually miss Jesus Himself. Can you imagine what would happen the day after Jesus visits the house when Martha goes to the beauty parlor? I am convinced that she would do that, not that her hair needed to be done, but she needed to talk to everybody right?

Martha would need to get out in the public square and share this story with other people as others would ask her, “We heard Jesus came to your house. What was it like?” She would say, ‘It was awesome. I had the best leg of lamb and I made my favorite salad.’ And I bet she would have acknowledged, ‘Now you need to know Mary did not help me one bit.’ Then maybe somebody in the beauty parlor looks at her and says, “What was He like?” ‘Who?’ “Jesus.” I don’t know what she would have said then. ‘I don’t know. I was too busy serving Him. I was too busy taking care of all the stuff. I’m not sure what He actually said. I wasn’t in the room. I wasn’t listening for that particular part.’ Wow, so close and yet so far away – right there in the midst of an experience with Jesus and yet so far away.

As a matter of fact, Martha lost her perspective to the point, as I mentioned a second ago, she makes a statement that at first I just kind of cringe and go, ‘Martha, you have lost it, sister for you looked at Jesus and said, ‘Do you not care?’’ Think about that for a second. Can you imagine saying that to Jesus in your own home? I have said something similar to that before to Jesus. Saying things like ‘Do You not care about my present circumstances? Do You not care that this is working out in a way that's not good for me? Do You not care, Jesus, that my life is not playing out the way that it's supposed to play out so that I can be honored and I can be appreciated? Jesus, do You not care that that my relationships have been broken? Do You not care that a loved one has been taken from me? Do You not care that I've lost my job? Do You not care that that these issues are happening in my life?’ Do You not care, then fill in the blank. It's supposed to be a different way. Tell somebody, tell the president, tell the governor, tell my family members, to fix my life – that was Martha's perspective. Somehow with Jesus in her house, the focus shifted and became about her to the point that she actually would communicate to Jesus, ‘Do You not care?’

What about a ‘Mary’ Christmas? How would we contrast Martha's perspective and missing the point of Jesus being there to a ‘Mary’ Christmas? We're really only told about one thing that Mary did. She sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to Him. Stop and think about. I think, ‘Wow, we love to sing to the Lord, O come let us adore Him’ and it's one of my favorite carols and I have to ask myself a question. Is it over when the song's over because it’s just a good line in a carol or is my Christmas defined by adoring Christ, worshiping Christ? Worshiping Christ would be what Mary did. It's not just that Mary listened to Jesus but she also humbled herself at His feet. Nothing else in the world mattered except sitting at the feet of Jesus and actually listening to what He said. A ‘Mary’ Christmas is a Christmas that cannot be stolen.

What did Jesus say? Jesus said that Mary had chosen the good portion. The good portion is Jesus. Mary chose Jesus over everything else. They might not even eat a meal, but she sat at the feet of Jesus and she listened to Him as she humbled herself before Him. A ‘Mary’ Christmas will move us to love others with the hope of the Gospel, even the Grinches in our life, that we get moved by focusing upon Jesus and understanding who He is and how He has loved us. A “Mary” Christmas reminds us that God has exceeded all our expectations, instead of focusing upon the others who haven't met our expectations.

Phil Tuttle preached our 10:00 service this morning, did a wonderful job, and one of the things that he communicated to us was that his father-in-law was called home to be with the Lord during the night last night. His wife had shared a statement to him as they were talking through it and the timing she felt was so difficult on Phil because he was preaching this morning. She said that death had interrupted Christmas and Phil made a profound statement where he actually acknowledged to himself it was a profound statement, which was odd. He and I talked about that later but the statement he made was “no, actually Christmas interrupted death.” That perspective

doesn't just come to you from being busy doing things, like Martha did. That perspective comes from sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to Him, believing Him, submitting yourself to Him and submitting all your circumstances to Him, so that your default reasoning and your default perspective is to respond the way Jesus would respond.

I want to give you just a handful of statements that Jesus made. What would it be like for us to take just a few moments today and sit at the feet of Jesus and actually hear Him speak about Himself? What would you ask Him? Perhaps we'd ask Jesus why questions, like why did You leave heaven and come to Earth? The day after Jesus did this miraculous feeding of the 5000 with just five loaves and two fish as He goes to Capernaum as the crowd finds Him there and He declares to them, "For I have come down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." So when Jesus was asked, "Why would you come down to earth? Why would you leave heaven?" He came down not to do His own will, but to do the will of the Father. He was completely submissive to the will of the Father. What an incredible model for us as believers to embrace and understand that's our calling – to completely submit ourselves, not to convince God of what He's supposed to do in our situation, but to completely yield ourself and submit ourself to the Father's will.

Secondly, it's the will of the Father for Jesus to come seek and save the lost. We see this in the account of a man named Zacchaeus for he went to great lengths to listen to Jesus. He went to great lengths to be able to sit at His feet, to listen and to learn from Him. Jesus said in Luke 19:9-10, [9] *And Jesus said to him (Zacchaeus), "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. [10] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* So we can conclude that it's the will of the Father for Jesus, the Son to come to seek and to save the lost.

That's different than where my thoughts start and begin. As I think and process, I think about lost people seeking Jesus because I have a bit of a man centered perspective. The reality is it's Jesus seeking the lost and He came because He was sent by God the Father, to go seek and save the lost. We're told in Matthew what Jesus's view of the lost is. Why would you refer to people who aren't believers as the lost? In Matthew 9:36 it says [36] *When he saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* They were lost.

If you're reading this and you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and you're wanting to know what His view of you is, the world would tell you a lot of things but let me tell you right from Jesus's mouth, as if you were sitting at His feet and listening to Him. He would first of all, communicate the compassion that He has for you. He doesn't see you as a mean and an evil adversary. He says, "I look at you and see you as harassed and helpless. The world has their embraces upon you." Then He would refer to you as a sheep without a shepherd who desires to be your Shepherd because He comes not only to seek the lost, to find them, to identify them, to love them, but also to shepherd them, to save them.

How would He save them? When the disciples were sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His teaching, He instructed them in Mark 10:45, [45] *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* How would He save the lost? He would do it by literally giving of His life. He was born to die – His purpose in being born was to die, to willingly die, to do the will of the Father, to seek and to save the lost. The lost cannot be saved unless there is a payment for their sins. Scripture tells us in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. In other words, what we have earned or what we deserve – wage, of sin – anything we've done that violates God's law, that is wrong, deserves death. Yet Jesus says that

He came to give His life as a ransom, a payment to rescue, to free the captives. We're captive in our sin and Jesus gives up His perfect life as a ransom for that sin.

He says also that He came to give eternal life. Jesus says in John 6:40, [40] *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.* Romans 6:23 says [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The last one is He came to call sinners to repentance. He says in Luke 5:32, [32] *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* Romans 3:23 says, [32] *All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.* He came to call us to repentance to turn away from our sins. So if you're reading this and you don't know the Lord, then I would suggest to you that you need to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen not to what the world says, but listen to what Jesus actually says, who came out of the love of the Father, who has compassion upon you as one that does not know Him. He wants you to place your trust in Him unto salvation, to repent, to turn away from your sins, and to believe in Him.

If you are a child of God, have a 'Mary' Christmas, and sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to Him and be reminded, it's not Christmas until I sit at the feet of Jesus. It's not Christmas until I truly submit myself to His will. It's not Christmas until I listen to Him above everything else in the world and yield my life yet again giving complete lordship to Him. I pray each and every person reading this will have a 'Mary' Christmas. Let's pray together.

Prayer:

Dear heavenly Father, I do thank You so much for the love with which You loved us. Lord, thank You for the way that You have given to us all that we need in Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Lord, thank You for Christ who was born to do Your will, who was sent to seek and to save the lost. Thank You for seeking us, even when we did not want to be found. Thank You for saving us from the just penalty of our sins. Lord, would You forgive us when we have a 'Martha' perspective, when we question if You truly care for us. Lord, would You lead us by Your Spirit to have a 'Mary' Christmas, a Christmas of listening to You, a Christmas of worshiping You, of Christmas of yielding ourselves to You and to Your will above all else? And we do ask all of this in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.