

life group study guide

December 13, 2015

Big Idea: Unwrapped

Santa is in Town

1 John 3:16-18 and Matthew 1: 20-33.

The Big Idea: When we give, we love like Jesus

History: St. Nicholas was a real man who lived in modern-day Turkey during the 3rd Century. His parents tragically died and left him a very wealthy man. He was a Bishop in the church and wanted to share that wealth with others in order to obey Jesus' words "sell what you own and give the money to the poor." He died on December 6th and the Church made that day an official holiday in honor of him.

Q: There are two ways to receive a gift - entitlement, as if it was owed to me, and humility, with gratefulness as if I was truly owed nothing. St. Nicholas seemed to have chosen the latter. Have you found this dichotomy to be true in your life? Can you share an experience where you received a gift in either the right or wrong way?

History: There is a legend of him giving dowries to three young girls by tossing money in through their window one night and the bags landed in their stockings/shoes by the fire. In the words of Buck Denver, "He was a man who loved like Jesus." The tradition of St. Nick evolved from this real man.

The tradition of gift-giving came from pagan festivals who gave gifts to each other and gods. Then wassailing became something lower class did in the winter when resources were scarce by going around knocking on the doors of upper class looking for warm drinks and monetary donations. Somewhere along the line this idea was shifted when middle class grew to make money by not giving to the poor but to kids.

Q: Can you think of other traditions that evolved from a real person?

Q: Can you think of other Christian traditions that redeemed "pagan" rituals?

READ: 1 John 3:16-18

"We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion - how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions."

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Q: According to this verse, why should we be “grateful givers?”

Q: One of the reasons we struggle with giving is because we sometimes see a sense of entitlement development in the recipient. What creates a sense of entitlement in our lives? Can you think of an example from your own life?

Q: Grace declares we don’t earn God’s favor by the things we do, so why are actions so important when it comes to loving others? How can our “transactional” hearts corrupt this truth?

READ: Matthew 1:18-23

“This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

-Matthew 1:18-23

Consider: Christmas has a “trajectory.” It’s the celebration of God moving in a particular direction - *toward us!* The gap between sinful man and a holy God was uncross-able from our side of the cavernous divide, so God did what we could not do. He *came* for us.

Q: When you step back to consider the actual meaning of the name “Emmanuel,” how does it make you feel? Why?

Q: How does this make Christianity different from every other religion?

Q: God gave a gift like this to us when we were arrogant, undeserving, and entitled. How does this reality impact your feelings about giving?

Q: What can you do differently this Christmas to love like Jesus? Share a story.

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