

ADVENT CONSPIRACY #4: "GIVE MORE PRESENCE"

- We have been created to glorify God: To know (experience) and show (to others) the greatness of his love. So what has God given us as expressions of his love - because to love is to give?
 - ▶ *Genesis 1:29 "I give you every seed-bearing plant and fruit-bearing tree."* Genesis 2:9 – trees that were "pleasing to the eye".
- God made us to see, smell, touch, hear and taste his creation – and it is all a gift to us.
 - ▶ *Psalms 8:7 [humans have been] "made a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned with glory and honor."*
- We have been given a soul and a mind - we can love and dream and weep and create. "crowned with glory and honor": The greatest gift of our humanity is that we were created to be loved by God and to love him in return. We have been given the divine gifts of purpose and love from God.

Created for Relationship

- ▶ *Genesis 2:18. God gives man a woman to be a "helper" for him.*
- God's crowning creation gift was human relationships – not things.
- But there's an even deeper longing in the human soul – to be in relationship with God.
 - ▶ *Genesis 3:9 "Where are you?"*
- That's the call to relationship. It's the call of a God who pursues us – even when we're hiding from him. "I want to know you and be known by you. I love you."
- God continued to seek the people he created. He sought them through Abraham with the promise that he would bless them, and bless the world through them.
 - ◆ What kind of gifts did he have in mind in this blessing promise? Land; many offspring; health; abundant crops & livestock; victory over enemies (Genesis 12:1-3; Numbers 34; Deut. 28).
 - ◆ But the covenant had conditions for the blessings – the people had to obey God (Genesis 17:9; 18:19; 22:17-18; 26:4-5).
- God's purpose isn't just to shower humans with gifts they want - his purpose is to draw them into a relationship with himself. Some gifts will have no conditions, but some will – because of love.

The Gift of God's Presence in Jesus

- Jesus is called "Immanuel" which means "God with us."
 - ▶ *John 1:14 "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

- This is the ultimate gift. Presence Friendship. Help. Counsel. Partners in bring his rule in heaven to earth. Power. Grace.
- Jesus came among us: To show us how to live God's life in a human body. . . to teach us how to love and serve him under the new covenant – not the old one given to Abraham and Moses. . . . to absorb our sins on his body so we wouldn't have to be judged guilty.
- There's no more focus on physical gifts: No mention of the inheritance of a land – except the promised land of the new earth when Jesus returns. No mention of conquering enemies in battle – in fact now we are to love our enemies. No mention of promised health – in fact the apostle Paul was hungry, beaten and imprisoned, and he rejoiced. No mention of having financial prosperity – in fact, the apostle Paul described himself as poor, and Jesus said the poor and hungry are blessed because in their condition they need God more.
- But there is a flood of **relational gifts** that Jesus came to give:
 - ◆ E.g. forgiveness and acceptance.
 - ◆ Jesus presence tells us God is approachable.
 - ◆ Relationship brings blessing: "Come to me when you are burdened." "I am the light of the world." "My truth will set you free."
 - ◆ The cross – where the full extent of God's love hangs, etched into Jesus' bleeding back, and in the spikes in his wrists and feet, and in the crown of thorns sarcastically pushed into his head.
 - ◆ His resurrection shouted, "I will never leave you!!" (Mat. 28:20)
- ***If the greatest gift God gave was not stuff but himself, shouldn't that factor into how we give at Christmas?***

Christmas Application

- ➔ It's sometimes easier to buy physical gifts than to give ourselves.
 - If the parent is loving, compassionate and understanding, wise, and can smile at a child's mistakes and can cry with a child's fears, and can give advice that is life-giving to a child's soul – then personal presence is what a child most wants.
- ➔ Instead of giving gifts to one another and then separating to our own private worlds, how about staying together and doing things we enjoy together?
- ➔ Instead of imposing our preferences about what to do together, enter into another person's world like Jesus did when he came to this world – to our spouse's, a child's, a friend's (even when strange!)
- ➔ Before and after a Christmas meal, what does it mean to give someone the gift of your presence – especially around meal prep and clean-up?
- ➔ (Next week: Stories/applications about "Giving More – Relationally")

➔ Because God's love for us is relational, giving "presence" over presents isn't something to do just at Christmas time – it's part of what love does all the time.