

THE RIGHT RESPONSE

Christmas 2011 – What would the Lord desire of you today?

Christmas is our celebration of the birth of Christ—it is the “Christ Mass,” the celebration of Christ.

- In our culture and society we have set aside December 25th to celebrate the day God was born of the virgin Mary and dwelt among us as “Emmanuel” (God with us).
- This is our celebration of the day our Lord and Savior was born into this world to live the *sinless life* we could not live and to die the *sinner's death* that we all deserve.
- And yet it seems like the one thing farthest from the minds of most people is what Jesus would like on the day we celebrate His birth.

My point this morning is not to “bash” Christmas in our culture.

- Yes, there is a lot of consumerism and silliness that goes on and that has very little to do with Christ.
- But, frankly, most of what we do at this time of year is “neutral” (neither good nor bad).
 - ✓ We give gifts to one another. Is that bad? No. We all like getting stuff and we all like giving stuff. It's just something we do that is part of our culture.
 - ✓ And there are other things that we enjoy about this time of year: Vacation from work and school (a very good thing!), dinner with family, Charlie Brown's Christmas and the Grinch!
 - ✓ These things are just things we do and they form part of our culture. They are not the problem.
- I don't think the problem with Christmas in our society is so much what we do.
- I think the problem exists in what we do *not* do. And that is what I'd like to talk about this morning.

Think about it this way: Christmas is “Christ's Mass,” the celebration of Christ.

- It is the celebration of Christ coming into the world—the celebration of His birth (His birthday).
- Have you ever asked yourself what Jesus Christ would want on His day—His birthday?
- We make lists of the things we want (Amazon lists!), but have we taken the time to search Scripture prayerfully and find out what Jesus wants today for our “Celebration of Christ” (for Christ-mas).

I'd like to talk about one thing the Lord desires today: The right response.

- If you were going to give something to the Lord that He would like (something that would please Him, honor Him, and glorify Him), I think the *right response* would be right up there on top of the list.
- And I think we can see examples of the *right response* at Jesus' birth, and we can also see some examples of *wrong responses*, too. I'd like to start with the wrong ones so that we end today on a positive note...

I. Two Examples of the Wrong Response to the Birth of Christ

A. Herod: (Mat 2.1-16) Herod rejected Jesus and Jesus' authority as his King

1. (Mat 2.1) Herod was king; he ruled on the throne over his little piece of the world.
2. (Mat 2.2) When he heard of Jesus' birth, he heard of the birth of another King. What was his response to that situation (the birth of Christ, the King)?
3. (Mat 2.3, 7-8, 12, 16) Herod wanted Jesus dead. Herod wanted to remove all competition for the throne of his own little kingdom. Herod wanted to continue ruling as lord and king of his own life.

4. Herod's response is the wrong response: He chose to reject Jesus and rebel against Jesus' authority as King.
 - a) People do this very same thing when they refuse to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. They reject Jesus as King and stubbornly sit on the throne of their lives.
 - (1) (Acts 16.30-31) Remember: Salvation is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ..." That require a radical change of authority in your life (turning from self to the Lord).
 - (2) (Acts 17.30-31; 20.20-21) The crux of the matter is repentance, without which there is no salvation. It is a change of authority: I get off the throne, and Jesus takes over.
 - (3) That's why Jesus said that we could judge a tree by it's fruit: There is a visible change in the true Christian! There has been a radical change of authority (and direction) in his life.
 - b) Herod's response, although very common, is wrong. It's not what Jesus wants.

B. Chief Priests and Scribes: (Mat 2.4-6) Indifference to the Person of Jesus Christ

1. These are the religious leaders of Israel: They have the right religion, the right doctrine, and the right answers! But where do they go?
 - a) All of Jerusalem has seen or heard of the arrival of the contingent of ambassadors from east.
 - b) Herod calls them and is visibly upset, demanding they explain to him Jewish prophesies concerning the arrival of the Messiah, the King of the Jews.
2. The religious leaders know what the answers are—they have the right doctrine! But, they never go to see Jesus.
3. Their response to Jesus' birth is just as wrong as Herod's.
 - a) They responded with total and complete indifference to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - b) They had the right knowledge, but there was no desire for a personal relationship with the Savior (much like many religious leaders today in Christendom).
 - (1) And this is precisely why we are studying Ephesians on Sunday mornings.
 - (2) Ephesus was the church, in Revelation 2, that had all the right answer (the right doctrine); they were hard-working Christians in the ministry. But they left their first love.
 - (3) That's the wrong response to the coming of the Messiah!

II. Two Examples of the Right Response to the Birth of Christ

A. The Wise Men from the East: (Mat 2.1-12) Submission and Obedience—they took God's Word seriously, literally, and followed it in very practical ways.

1. Who are these guys? Where did they come from? How did they know the exact time of the birth of the Jewish Messiah who would be King of Israel? (They saw his star in the east, but that does not tell us how they knew about the Messiah, the King, etc.)
 - a) All you have to do is look at a map and trace a line due east from Jerusalem: Babylon.
 - b) These wise men, arrived as ambassadors from (more than likely), Babylon.
2. There was a prophet in Babylon that wrote specifically about the time of the coming of the Jewish Messiah, the King. That prophet was Daniel.
 - a) (Dan 1.1) Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon and Daniel was a Jew taken captive to Babylon during the Babylonia captivity.
 - b) (Dan 9.24-25) Daniel wrote a very specific prophecy about the time of the arrival of the Messiah, who would be the King of the Jews.

- c) The wise men that showed up in Jerusalem were simply following Scripture in a very practical way—they read it, studied it, took it literally, and followed it.
 - d) That is the right response that Jesus is looking for! But there's more...
3. The wise men are also following Nebuchadnezzar's good example.
- a) If you have read Daniel, you know that Nebuchadnezzar certainly had some “personality quirks” that lead him to make some pretty poor decisions.
 - b) But, you should have also noticed that when God intervened in his life, Nebuchadnezzar always responded well (he had the right response to God intervening in his life!).
 - c) Here are two quick examples (for the sake of time):
 - (1) (Dan 3) The Fiery Furnace
 - (a) Nebuchadnezzar makes a bad decision: He commands everyone to worship an idol.
 - (b) He makes another bad decision: Kill Daniel and his friends for not worshiping the idol.
 - (c) (Dan 3.24-25) God intervenes: Nebuchadnezzar sees the Son of God miraculously saving the three Hebrew men from certain death in the fiery furnace.
 - (d) (Dan 3.28-30) Nebuchadnezzar has the right response! Submission to God! He recognizes Who God is and glorifies Him!
 - (2) (Dan 4) The Seven Years of Insanity
 - (a) (Dan 4.28-30) Nebuchadnezzar make a very bad decision: “It's all about me!”
 - (b) (Dan 4.31-33) God intervenes in his life with a little correction: Insanity.
 - (c) (Dan 4.34-37) When the discipline is over, Nebuchadnezzar has the right response!
4. The wise men that show up looking for the new-born Messiah who is the King of the Jews are a good example of the right response Jesus would like to see in all of us!
- a) Their right response was submission and obedience, and it manifests in two clear areas...
 - b) First and foremost, they took God's Word (Scripture) seriously. They took what was written literally and they made decisions to follow Scripture in very practical ways.
 - They never would have followed the “star” had they not read the Scripture first.
 - c) Additionally, they followed the good example of another sinner in his right responses to God: Nebuchadnezzar (who, when disciplined by the Lord, responded in submission and obedience).

B. The Shepherds in Field: (Luke 2.8-20) Submission and Obedience—they responded to God's revealed will and Word with urgency.

1. Obviously these Shepherd's, like the wise men, took God's Word (as given to them by the Angel) seriously and literally, and then acted on it practically.
 - But what is unique in this passage that speaks of the Shepherd's response to Jesus' birth is the urgency with which they responded.
2. (Luke 2.8-14) They received God's Word: The Gospel Message (peace with God through the new-born Christ, the Saviour of all men). Now, look at their response...!
3. (Luke 2.15) “...let us now go...”: That Gospel message moved these men with a sense of urgency!
 - They heard the message and wanted to draw near to Christ now, to go see Him now, to worship Him now, to respond to God's Word... now!

4. (Luke 2.16) And they did just that “*with haste.*”
- a) Now we all understand that there are times when we need to exercise patience and wait on God, do we not? Obviously.
 - b) But it seems to me that more often than not, “Christians” today use that (“waiting on God”) as an excuse for apathy, inactivity, and (frankly) disobedience to God's commands.
 - c) Patience is “exercised”: It takes *effort* to be patient and wait on God.
 - (1) You *want* to do something... You feel the *urgency* to do something... you understand the *pressing need* that exists...
 - (2) But, you have to wait. And that requires effort. You have to “exercise” patience.
 - (3) Therefore, the person who is “comfortable” waiting on God (it requires no effort at all, he would prefer it that way—to wait), is more than likely not waiting on God at all.
 - (a) More than likely he is using the phrase “waiting on God” and the poorly understood concept of “patience” to spiritualize his apathy, indifference, and inactivity.
 - (b) The person like that is perfectly content *not* doing the revealed will of God.
 - d) You see, when God revealed His will and Word to the Shepherds, they moved! And they moved *now*, with *haste*!
5. (Luke 2.17-20) And then, after their urgent and immediate submission and obedience to God's will and Word had drawn them near to Jesus... they went away preaching Christ to every creature!
6. The Shepherds, like the wise men, shows us the *right response* Jesus would like today, as we celebrate His birth (and every day after).
- a) The right response is *submission and obedience* to God's will as revealed through His Word.
 - b) And that right response will come with a sense of *urgency*.
 - (1) There is an *urgency* in the call to draw near to Jesus Christ and *know Him*.
 - (2) Then there is an *urgency* in the call to go forth out of the presence of the Lord and *make Him known* (to preach Him—preach the Gospel message—to every creature).
 - (3) If we are content with inactivity... if we do not feel a sense of urgency in our relationship with Christ and our duty to preach the Gospel to every creature... we need correction.

Conclusion:

What does Christ want today, the day we celebrate His birth?

- We go through a lot (!) of worry and preparation and effort to give to others what we think they want.
- What about Jesus on the His birth day? What would please Him today (and every day!)?

I would like to say that at the top of the list is the *right response* to His revealed will and Word.

- Christianity is not so much about our *intellect*, although there is a lot to learn (and it is very enjoyable to do so; the Bible is a miraculous Book that will intrigue our minds for all eternity).
- Christianity is not so much about our *emotions*, although true Christianity will always stir us emotionally (and sadly, this is where most “Christians” live today: they measure the spirituality of a thing by the how they feel—by the emotional experience they get out of it).
- Christianity is primarily (first and foremost) *volitional*: It hinges on our *will*, on our *choices*—on our *response* to God, His Word, and His will revealed in His Word.

Take some time today (Christmas Day, the day we celebrate Christ's birth—His birth day) to reflect on giving Him, the Lord, something that would please Him: The right response.

- Herod refused and stubbornly hung onto the rule and reign over his little kingdom and world. Wrong response.
- The religious leaders had the all the right knowledge (good doctrine, sound academics), but they had no desire whatsoever to know Jesus Christ personally. Wrong response.
- But they wise men had the right response: Submission and obedience to God by taking His Word seriously and following good examples of men who did the same.
- And the shepherds are similar in that they had the right response, too: Submission and obedience to God and His Word... and they did so with a sense of urgency. We need that!

If you are lost and do not know if you would go to heaven or hell today if you died, then your right response to the Lord Jesus Christ is repentance and faith.

- Turn from your sin to the Lord Jesus Christ. Stop following sin and follow the Lord.
- Take the message of the Gospel seriously and repent and turn to Christ with urgency!

If you are saved, then your right response to the Lord Jesus Christ is submission and obedience.

- Take God's Word seriously. Take God's will (as revealed in His Word) seriously.
- And live with a sense of urgency! It is urgent that you draw near to Christ to know Him personally because it is urgent that you take the knowledge of Him out into the world to preach Christ to the lost.