

Christmas And the Cost of Our Ransom

Introduction

A Driving Desire

- A. Behind everything that you and I do is this driving, motivating desire, even longing, to be valued by someone.
1. This is why the woman spends hours in front of the mirror every morning before stepping out into the day. "I've got to get my face looking just right so maybe, just maybe, someone will notice, someone will value me."
 2. This is why the man spends 60 hours a week in the office, and even when he's home, he's got out the laptop and iPhone and he's working. "If I knock this project out of the park, upper management will have to recognize me. I'll get that promotion, I'll get that salary, I'll get that house or that car, that status. I'll finally be valued."
 - a. My dad was here for Thanksgiving and he was telling me about his early years working for a large, international company back when I was just a boy. He never stopped working. Day and night. Why?
 - i. Because every year the big wigs would gather every region together for a massive convention where the high performers would be celebrated and given accolades in the limelight on stage. My dad looked at me and He said: "I wanted to be on that stage. I wanted to be seen, to be heard . . . to be valued."
 3. This is why when you post something on Facebook you find yourself checking every couple of minutes to see if someone responded, if anyone liked it. "Okay, time to get online and see what all my fans have to say. What? Only one like? No comments? Does anyone out there value me at all?!"
 4. And, I'm sorry to get heavy with kids in the room, but this is even the hidden longing within those that take their own lives. They leave a note, or maybe they don't. But either way: "Maybe they'll value me now . . . that I'm gone."
- B. So again, behind everything that you and I do is this driving, motivating desire, even longing, to be valued by someone.
1. I don't know precisely how it shows up in your life, but I know it's there.
- C. And now here's the point: Christmas, while it means many things on many different levels, at least means this: You are unimaginably valuable to God. What you are desiring, longing for can at last be found in God through Christ!

1. Regarding this, I simply want to ask two questions and then conclude.

(1) How Do I Know I'm Valuable to God?

What God Was Willing to Pay

- A. For some of us the news might seem too good to be true. We have spent so much of our lives being abused, rejected, neglected, devalued by others—whether by a parent, a spouse, a boyfriend, a boss, even a pastor.

1. Whatever the case, many of us live with this underlying sense that, though we so desperately long to be valued, loved, cherished, we are all but certain we will never be. Deep down we agree with them, we're just trash.

- B. So what in the world would make me so confident that God could ever value you or me?

1. Well, again, in a word: Christmas.

- C. Think about it with me. How do you know if something is valuable to another person? Well, one of the ways you get at this is by looking at what he/she is willing to give to get it.

1. And in the case of you and I, brothers and sisters, God—the holy, almighty, Creator of all things—was willing to put forward His Son, His only beloved Son, that He might have us.

- a. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son . . .” (John 3:16a). I don't think He can communicate any more clearly than this. You are unimaginably valuable to God.

- i. That's one massive implication of the manger.

- D. And this truth will mark Jesus' whole earthly ministry.

1. We see it in His actions: When He eats with the tax collector, touches the leper, welcomes the prostitute, heals the sick, provides for the poor.

- a. He shows the outcasts that they mean something to God after all—that they may still be valuable to their heavenly Father, even if their fellow man has given up on them years ago.

2. We hear it in His teaching:

- a. “²⁶Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? . . . ^{31a}Therefore do not be anxious . . .” (Matt 6:26, 31a).

- b. “²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt 10:29–31).
 - c. “¹¹ Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good [to a man] on the Sabbath” [and He heals the man’s withered hand] (Matt 12:11–12).
 - d. Or we might think of those parables in Luke 15. “Listen I’m coming after you like a shepherd searching the hills for his lost sheep, or a woman searching the house for her lost coin. And when I find you, I’m going to call together all My friends and we’re going to celebrate through the night. Because you are so valuable to Me.”
- E. And, of course, the clearest view of this is granted to us when we follow Jesus from the manger all the way to the cross.
- 1. The transaction begun in Bethlehem is completed at Calvary. On the cross Jesus would declare with His last breath: (in Greek) “Tetelestai” (John 19:30)—meaning: “It is finished”; or (alternate translation): “Paid in full.”
 - a. This is why Peter would later write of the cross and our salvation like this: “¹⁸ [Y]ou were ransomed . . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ^{19a} but with the precious blood of Christ . . .” (1 Pet 1:18–19a). The Greek word translated “precious” here, *timios*, means: “costly; of great worth/value”.
- F. This means that, at the cross, it’s as if God opens up His wallet, as it were, and shows us just how much He is willing to pay to ransom us, to get us back. He’s not laying down mere silver or gold in these moments. He’s laying down His Son and signing the check in His own blood.
- 1. That’s how much God loves you. That’s how valuable you are to Him!
- G. And now you’re asking (at least I hope) the second question we’re going to deal with this morning: Why?! Why would God do that for me? Why would God so value me?

(2) Why Am I Valuable to God?

Intrinsic or Extrinsic Value

- A. Some of you might hear of God’s valuing you and think: “Finally, somebody gets it. I’m awesome. I’ve always known it. At least God sees it, even if no one else does.”
 - 1. But is that really why? Does He value me because of something I bring to the table? Is it something in me, or is it something in Him?
- B. There are things that are more valuable in and of themselves, right? To some degree, I suppose, this is one of the reasons people invest in gold. Cash, at the end of the day, is just paper. But gold has, at least in some sense, an intrinsic value—a value in and of itself as a precious metal.

C. But, paper money, other things have value not so much in and of themselves, but because of some outside influence, some external factor whereby value is ascribed to it.

1. Christmas time often provides us with hilarious illustrations of this. Does anybody remember Beanie Babies? It's just stitched cloth stuffed with some beans. And people were going crazy for these things. They're selling out of this or that. Everyone's trying to get the rainbow colored bear, or the unicorn with the golden horn, or whatever. They're saying don't cut off the tags, don't you dare play with these things kids, because they're going to be worth even more later on. People are shelling out top dollar. Some collectors paid up to \$5000 to buy a toy that in and of itself was worth \$5.
2. We could talk about Tickle-Me-Elmos. I was reading stories of Wal-Mart employees being trampled and hospitalized because of crowds rushing on them to get these things. People were paying upwards of \$7000 to get one for their kid. It's insane. It's just a doll. But it was worth that much to some people.

D. Don't you see? The intrinsic value of the thing doesn't always correspond to what someone is willing to pay for it.

Not Addition But Subtraction

A. Now, here's where I'm going with all of this: In the end, we must face the fact that we are not valuable to God because of something we have to offer in and of ourselves. He's not investing in gold when He comes for Nick Weber. We don't, we can't, add anything to Him.

B. In fact, according to the Bible, the equation actually moves in precisely the opposite direction, does it not? We don't add anything to Him. In many ways, we actually subtract. We take. We break. We reject. We run.

1. Is that not the story of humanity since the garden of Eden? God creates the world, puts man over it, declares it all to be very good . . . and yet it wasn't quite good enough for us. "I don't want to obey God, I want to be God! I don't want God telling me what to do. I want to call my own shots, thank you." We take. We break. We reject. We run.
2. David describes the tragic situation well in Ps 14:2-3: "²The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who [act wisely], who seek after God. ³They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one."

- a. The picture is of God looking down from heaven and He sees no one seeking up after Him. So what does He do? He comes down after them!

C. In spite of humanity's collective rebellion against God, even from Eden He has been planning, promising, preparing for Bethlehem. Christmas.

1. The Son of God in a stable, because no one would make Him room. Angels singing overhead—God's love song to the world—but only a few shepherds paid it any mind.

Getting the Picture Right

- A. So let's make sure we have the picture right here.
1. We are not gold, or some other precious metal, and Jesus has come to make a wise investment in us. In our sin we have incurred an incalculable debt before God, and yet He comes and invests in us anyways.
 2. We are not damsels in distress, and our valiant Husband has come to rescue. We are adulterers, harlots—we've run from our Husband and we don't want Him back. But He's come for us anyways.
 3. We are not God's allies, held captive by enemy forces, and Jesus has come to break us out. We are the enemy. But He's come to break us out anyways.
 4. We are not model citizens, and Jesus has come to bestow on us some reward. We are criminals on death row, guilty of high treason, and Jesus has come to be executed in our place.
- B. Paul summarizes this well for us in [Rom 5:6-8](#): “⁶ while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

O Come Let Us Adore Him

- A. So we are not valuable to God in and of ourselves, and yet, in His love, because of His grace, we are, at the same time, unimaginably valuable to Him.
1. What we find at the end of the day is that the manger and the cross have more to say about the value of God—His glory and grace—then it does about me. Christmas, when truly seen for what it is, does not bend us inward with self-adoration but outward with adoration for the God who would sacrifice heaven's highest treasure to gain earth's lowest creature. “O come let us adore Him!”
- B. So, returning to our initial question: Why does God so value us that He would redeem us at the cost of His Son's life? At the bottom we must say: I don't know. But He does. Isn't it wonderful?! Isn't He wonderful?!

Conclusion

- A. Now, let me conclude by bringing this full circle back to where we began.
- B. Christmas and the cross hold together two seemingly paradoxical realities—namely, that I am so valued by God and yet, at the same time, so unworthy of it.
1. If you let this news settle a bit in your heart, without pushing it away as offensive or foolish, you come to find out it's actually just what you need.

- C. Think about it. When we try to prove ourselves valuable apart from God, apart from Christ, does it ever work? Does it ever satisfy? Does it ever last?
1. No! Because anyone we can get to value us out there, values us for something we can bring to the table. This might feel great for the moment but it soon becomes a slavery. Because we have to keep it up.
 - a. That woman spending hours in front of the mirror might find a guy to double-take or ask her out. But then she's got to maintain her looks or she knows she won't be valued.
 - i. So as time goes on you fall victim to some eating disorder or you turn to plastic surgery. Why do you think so many celebrities are getting all this work done on their faces and bodies? "If I stop looking like I did in my thirties, the world's just going to forget me and move on to the next bombshell hot on the scene. I've got to keep this going."
 - b. That guy spending all his time consumed with his work might get that promotion he was hoping for. But then he's got to keep that pace. He's got to keep those numbers or they'll just drop him back down.
 - i. So the tired man starts cutting corners, or popping pills to stay up, whatever it takes to maintain the edge.
- D. But, you see, here's what's so great about Christianity. God knows. He knows you're broken, weak, scared, even sinful. He knows you have nothing to give Him but your mess. So you can take off the mask. You can stop it with the act. It's safe.
1. You're not valuable to Him because of what you have to offer Him. You never were. You are valuable to Him because He made you and He loves you and that's it. And He expresses this value this love, in what He is willing to give to get you back: namely, His Son. It doesn't make any sense. But isn't that what makes this so amazing?
 - a. He's not going to leave you when you wake up thirty years from now and you're figure isn't as impressive as it once was. The Bible says it's His grace, His love that beautifies His bride. He doesn't love you because you're beautiful . . . His love makes you beautiful.
 - b. He's not going to kick you to the curb when you have an off month and you're not producing for Him like you once were. The Bible says it's His grace that makes you fruitful. He grabs hold of His enemies, and they become His workmanship where He's prepared good works for you to walk in. He doesn't love you because you're productive . . . His love makes you productive.
- E. Isn't this amazing?! Isn't that what you actually need?! This is not slavery. This is what Peter called "ransom" (1 Pet 1:18). This is the way out to freedom. This is Christmas!