



Pastor Tom NEWTON

God's Word Will Not Return Void

Somewhere in a California city lived a young man named Shane. Not much is known about Shane. He went to a Christian high school, so someone in his family must have cared about his spiritual well-being. Someone must have been praying for him. He learned some of the Word of God in his studies.

But Shane did not seem to appreciate this Christian influence. He began hanging out with the wrong crowd. He learned to drink, and to do drugs. He enjoyed the "party" atmosphere and made friends with members of a new rock band called "Society's Child."

They spent their spare time sitting around smoking dope, popping pills, and drinking. But they had ambition: Society's Child was just about to cut their first album, and they wanted to be the next Black Sabbath.

The music writer for the band was a troubled young man in his early twenties. He wrote about death and destruction--the sun falling from the sky, and "now it's our turn to die." Shane was intrigued by these words, and one evening he spoke to the writer.

"You know, the things you write about sound like they come right out of the Book of Revelation in the Bible."

The writer thought this was a big joke, and they all got a laugh out of it.

But the writer could not get that statement out of his mind. The next week, he went to a bookstore and bought a New Testament. He wanted to know more about this "Revelation." It made absolutely no sense to him, so he started reading Matthew. Somewhere in the gospels God got a hold of his heart, convicted him of sin, and made him a new creature.

And Shane? We don't know what happened to him. We hope that God got a hold of his heart, too. We do know that God's Word does not return void, even when spoken in jest by a kid high on drugs. For the rock and roller who once wrote of death and despair now preaches God's amazing grace. He is Pastor Tom Newton, of Calvary Baptist Church in Cornwall, Ontario.

A Real Christmas Carol

As we approach another Christmas, I would like to reflect on Christmas before and after becoming a Christian. For Christmas *before* becoming a Christian was a day; to most of us it meant very little. This year, Christmas will come and go, and it may have little or no impact on your life. Christmas to many is the most depressing time of the year. Often, we live in the past, hoping Christmas will never end, thinking somehow life would be better, or have some meaning, if the Christmases when we were children could be revisited. Those are the best times to remember, we think. But as quickly as the decorations go up, they are taken down and boxed away for another year; so likewise our hopes and memories of Christmas past are revived for a moment, but then we are forced to wake up and face life in a New Year ahead. Not much has changed! But I am here to write about myself, and not others: when it comes to Christmas, things have really changed since I have become a Christian. How so?

You would think that after becoming a Christian a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christmas would have even greater meaning, but in fact, it does not! What was Christmas like before I became a Christian? I must now pull down the box of Christmas past, and behold it is filled with many sad memories. What made Christmas so bad? Sin! Are you surprised?

My Christmas pasts were not much different from any of yours, *per se*. I remember the presents under the tree, the abundance of food, the time off from school. I remember when the whole family gathered together---Wait, that's not true, I don't remember a time when we were all gathered together, for by then, Ma and Dad had already divorced because of Dad's drunkenness. My older brothers and sister could tell me about such times, but I don't recall them. Then my mother remarried, and my step-Dad moved in, which was not so bad, for he was a good man, a good provider, for a family of eight. But Christmas did not change much. It was still without Christ!

As years went by, the drunkenness continued, for my whole family were heavy drinkers. But now I was old enough to enjoy and really get into the Christmas spirit. Things had really changed by the time I got out of high school. In what way? For one, My Dad had died with a beer can in his hand, and my only sister was killed during my first year of college; they called it domestic violence. It happened just after American Thanksgiving. Christmas came that year as usual, but I can say one thing for sure, my poor mother was never the same. An early Christmas present, huh? It was sin that ruined Christmas--my sin, my parent's sin, all the way back to Adam's sin. Enough of Christmas past!

What about Christmas present? What has changed? Christmas has not, but I have! How so? The light of the glorious gospel of Christ lit my sin-darkened heart. That's grace! It is not true that wise men still seek Him, for the Word of God says, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (Romans 3:10-11). The Christ of the Bible found me in Los Angeles, California, trying to start a rock-roll band, deep in sin: in drugs, drunkenness, witchcraft and astrology, and

immorality. Christmas then was just another day to get high, to party, and to jam, but all that would change. How so?

It was not Christmas that changed my life, nor pardoned my sins, nor gave me a new life. It was knowing Christ--The Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the World--by a miracle of grace! When I think of the incarnation, the virgin birth, and the accounts of Christ's birth as faithfully recorded in the Bible for all to read, I do not think of Christmas. I think of God's unspeakable gift given to humanity, in the person of His Eternal Son: *"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief"* (1 Timothy 1:15).

No one really wants to talk about being a sinner and being in need of salvation at Christmas time. It is "peace on earth, and good will towards men." Many say, "Christmas brings out the best in mankind." But, in fact, one must not forget that Christ was born to die, and to die at the hands of sinners. Sinners like you and me! "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

Christmas? I can take it or leave it. The observance of a day means nothing compared to knowing, loving and worshipping the True and Living God. You might ask, "Preacher, why be such a grinch?" You see it is not I that has stolen Christmas, but sin! I hope you come to see this, and by God's grace to call upon the only Name "under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

I ask you not to pity me, or feel sorry for me, as I have opened up my box of Christmas past before you all. If all that you have is Christmas, and with it just a bunch of boxes of memories of Christmas past and that's all, you are most miserable. One's future can only be changed as one comes to trust in the Christ of the Bible. Not the Christ of Christmas past, present, or future, but in the risen, exalted Son of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ or Christmas? Which one do you have? Which one do you love and value more? I pray, as I can say by God's grace, "It is Christ and Christ alone. He is my all and all." It is not what Christmas means to me it is what Christ means to me!

Best wishes during this holiday season to all of you from the Newton family, and from Calvary Baptist Church.