

**Theme:** **SLIDE** True Meaning of Christmas

**Object:** Calendar and Newspaper Ads

**Scripture:** “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and report to John what you hear and see: *the* BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised up, and *the* POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.’ ” (Matthew 11:4-5 NASB)

**SLIDE** Look at this calendar! Can you believe it? We are only a few days from Christmas! (Count the days remaining until Christmas.) Have you finished all of your Christmas shopping? **SLIDE** The newspaper will be full of ads for those who have some last minute shopping to do. I did some research on the Internet to see what the top-selling gifts are this year. Here are a few of the most popular gifts for kids:

**Big Hugs Elmo** - I know you probably think this is just for younger children, but it was on every "Top Ten Toy List" I found. There are many ways to play with the Big Hugs Elmo and it comes with more than fifty animated sounds and phrases!

**Furby Boom!** - Sorry parents, Furby is back, but it's not the same old Furby from past years. There is a whole new generation of Furby critters out there! You can even interact with the new Furby using an iPad, iPod, or iPhone!

**Doc McStuffins Check-Up Center** - Doc McStuffins follows the adventures of a veterinarian who operates on stuffed animals. Fans of the popular TV series will love this one.

**Nerf Rebelle Heartbreaker Bow** - This looks to be this year's hottest Nerf gun. It's a

nerf weapon that comes in pink and is being marketed to girls!

**Flutterbye Flying Fairy Doll** - Unlike other fairy dolls, this one actually flies.

Well, those may be some of the best-selling gift items that children will find under their Christmas tree this year, but they don't compare with the **SLIDE** gifts we receive from the Christ of Christmas.

In our Bible lesson today we learn that John, even though he was in prison, was hearing about all of the wonderful things that Jesus was doing. He sent a message to Jesus by some of his friends. "Ask Jesus if he is the Messiah we have been expecting, or should we continue to watch for someone else?"

When Jesus was asked the question, he answered, "Return to John and tell him what you have seen and heard. You have seen the blind receive their sight, the crippled and lame are able to walk, those with leprosy are being cured, the deaf are able to hear. Even the dead have been raised and the good news is being preached to the poor."

If you were blind, what better gift could you receive than to be able to see? If you were crippled, what better gift could you receive than to be able to walk? If you were dead, what better gift could you receive than the gift of life? Oh, by the way, that last gift I mentioned... the gift of life. That is the real meaning of Christmas. **SLIDE** Jesus came to earth to give us life -- eternal life! What a gift!

Father, every good gift we receive comes from you and the greatest gift is eternal life brought down to us through your Son. Father, we thank you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**Slide Find – Seek?**

It is by God's sovereign grace that we come to know Him. We are unable to seek after God until He has sought us. Paul when addressing the church in Rome said that the entire world is fallen because of sin. More specifically Paul said, **Slide** "We have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, 'THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD.'" (Romans 3:9-11 NASB) Paul explained to the Corinthians **Slide** "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." (1 Corinthians 2:14 NASB) By these writings of Paul we understand that a person is incapable of even one right thought about God and is completely unable to desire God until, until, God has enlightened and regenerated their darkened soul by means of His Holy Spirit. When God regenerates our souls then the natural outcome is our love of God, seeking Him, finding Jesus and accepting Him as our Lord and Savior. When a person seeks after God and God has not called that person, then they seek Him selfishly and if they are seeking God for selfish motives they are then seeking Him wrongly. This brings us to the question, "What is the motive of the people seeking Jesus in our passage of study scripture this morning?" **Blank**

Pray

**Slide** Please turn in your bibles to verse 22 of John chapter 6. This is the beginning of our study passage this morning. "The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but *that* His disciples had

gone away alone. <sup>23</sup> There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks.” The news of Jesus’ miracle of feeding thousands from 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish had spread quickly. This verse then implies that the number of people was increasing. Back to verse 24, “So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus.” Jesus had walked and sailed across the Sea of Galilee during the night in order to join the disciples. Now the 5000 plus people whom Jesus had fed dinner the night before from the 5 loaves and 2 fish are ready for breakfast. I am not big on having bread and fish for breakfast, but if one is hungry then you cannot be too choosy. They began to search for Jesus and could not find Him and I am sure the adults were grumpy having had no coffee, but they gradually woke up and figured out that Jesus had left and gone away. The Apostle John makes a point in verse 24 that many of the people got into small boats and sailed to find Jesus. They knew that the boat the disciples and Jesus had arrived in was gone. They knew that Jesus had not gone with the disciples. How they figured out that Jesus had left is not dealt with and how they figured out He had gone to Capernaum is not known. But they either made their way around or over the sea to find Jesus in Capernaum.

They found Jesus and the first thing they do or say is, “Rabbi, when did You get here?” Jesus does not answer their question; He ignores the question and deals with the motive of their seeking Him. Jesus responds, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.” Jesus is saying you do not seek Me because the “signs” show that I am the long awaited Messiah, but because you want your physical needs met. I am God and yet you want me to serve you instead of you worshipping Me. He rebukes their short sightedness and continues, “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for

the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.” In these two sentences Jesus reveals the truth of the crowd’s unworthy motives in seeking Him. Hopefully this is not true of our own lives – seeking God for what He can provide materially. I remember the song from my youth by Janis Joplin that began, **Slide** “Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz? My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends. Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends, so Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz? This is exactly how the people who were following Jesus were treating God the Father and God the Son. People have not changed, technology has changed, the hearts of people have not changed – they are still fallen, sinful, self-centered and spiritually dead because of the fall of man in the Garden. Many are always asking, “What has God done for me, lately?” My beloved we must be careful all year long, but especially at this time of the year when the motto that it is promoted is “better to give than receive” but in truth behind the motto is it is about getting more, more stuff. **Blank** Are we seeking the Jesus of the Bible; the saving Jesus, the healing Jesus, the Jesus who have given all mankind salvation if they come to Him not for stuff of this world, but come to Him as their Lord and Savior and become His slave dedicated to worshipping Him, glorifying Him and spending their life’s energy in both worship and serving others in Jesus’ name for their spiritual lives? What good is it if a person’s stomach is filled, but they are starving spiritually? Jesus said, **Slide** “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26 NASB) Were these people willing to exchange their souls for bread? Are people today willing to exchange their souls for a Mercedes Benz or Porsche? The sad answer for some - is yes. At the time of Jesus and today many are willing to exchange material wealth for their eternal souls. I was in this group, like so very, very, many. I thought I knew

God as a Mormon, but I did not. I thought because I worked hard and provided for my family materially that made me a good person, a good husband and a good father. The truth was I was none of these. What I believed in, what I trusted was false just like the people following some kind of Jesus, but not the Jesus of the Bible and just like Janis and just like the majority of the people I knew for we were the “walking dead” – physically alive but spiritually dead. If the Bible is true, and I believe it is and history shows it is true - then there is only one road to salvation. Jesus made this clear in chapter 14 of the Gospel According to John, saying, **Slide** “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.**” (John 14:6 NASB) No one, no one comes to God except through the saving grace of our Lord Jesus. The Bible has been attacked over the centuries and has always proven to be true. Other religious books have been shown to be filled with errors because the writers were seeking after God for their own selfish motives and these books are written by men who were not inspired by God and therefore they can easily be shown to be full of errors. The Bible is the only book, the only one, that has stood up to attack and examination and continues to be proven to be true, accurate and to be inspired by God and given to mankind so that we can learn what we need to know about God and live holy lives. “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me**” is a wonderful statement for those who believe, but it is a sobering and condemning statement for those who are perishing.

**Slide** Those seeking Jesus that morning were seeking Him with selfish motives, some may have called Him the Messiah, but for Jesus to be the Messiah one has to believe in Him on God’s terms – not mans. Those who call themselves Christian, those who say they believe in Jesus, but they believe in a Jesus who is the god of this planet and there are gods of many planets, those who believe in Jesus as a prophet who taught

of the true God but He is not God, those who believe in Jesus as a social reformer bringing better change for the people – these people are eternally lost. Jesus wanted the people that morning to understand He could feed them physically, but He came to feed peoples souls spiritually and change them eternally beginning during their mortal lives here on earth. They needed to seek Jesus as the Christ not as the miracle man who feeds people physically. It was then and is today not about our physical needs but our spiritual life.

Even for those of us here who believe in Jesus as the Christ one of the major steps to achieve good spiritual health is getting our minds off of ourselves – we must focus on the Lord. Jesus rebuked the people because their focus was on material things. Things have not changed, as Americans we are very materialistic people – every ad and we are exposed to hundreds of ads every day, is designed to make you want stuff – often stuff the ads tell us we cannot live without, but once you get it you find you don't need it and don't use it and it sits on shelf. In America our problem with having to own more and more stuff is clearly evident in the storage unit business.

**Slide** We rent a storage unit to put stuff in that we do not need or use, but we do not want anyone else to use and then pay a monthly fee to keep it there. **Blank** The world has taken this time of year that was meant for people to focus on the birth of the Savior and warped it into a season of spending and getting more stuff. There is nothing wrong with owning things, what is wrong is the seeking of material things or stuff to the exclusion of seeking after God or seeking material stuff more than God. This bring me to the question, “Do your possessions own you?” **Slide** For the people Jesus was speaking to that morning and for us here today in which Jesus is speaking to us through His holy word – Jesus is asking each person, “Who or what is in control of your life?” **Blank**

**Slide** Abraham was old and a man with material wealth – he had lots of stuff, lots of servants and power. Even with all his stuff Abraham lacked what he most wanted – children, an heir. It was not until he was old that this changed. First he grew impatient and took things into own hands. He sought God wrongly and on his own terms instead of God’s terms. The result was a child, but not the child of promise from God. God then sent the child of promise through Abraham and his wife Sarah. Abraham finally had the promised heir. The question again is, was Abraham serving God or was he owned by his possessions – namely his pride and joy Isaac? God tested Abraham, not because God did not know what would happen, the testing of Abraham was for Abraham to grow spiritually. In Genesis chapter 22 God asked Abraham to take Isaac, the son of promise, Abraham’s most precious possession, a possession given by God and to be obedient as God told Abraham, **Slide** “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.” (Genesis 22:2 NASB) **Slide** You see Isaac had begun to replace God as Abraham’s focus and love. God could not allow Abraham to become the father of those who would follow God to have something or someone take his focus off of God. **Blank** How about you do you have things that take your focus off of God? Your spouse, your children, your house, your job, your hobbies, your sports – what is it in your life that keeps you from being focused on and serving Jesus? Do you understand? It is not our possessions that are wrong but our single-minded possession of our possessions. Do you seek after things, or even people or do you seek for God? What things in your life of great value have not come to you without a great effort and struggle? God’s gift of salvation was given to you freely, but for one to keep their focus on God and to not let the world overshadow their heart – to stay spiritually pure and to serve God in this fallen world and with our sin nature is a



constant struggle. Keeping focused on Jesus, and God's Word, the Bible, prepares us for this struggle and the power given by God through the Holy Spirit enables us to win the battle.

Earlier in this passage the disciples were struggling in the storm and Jesus came to them. Is this not symbolic of the struggle of living in this world and all its turmoil? What happened when Jesus arrived and Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat? The storm was calmed and the disciples responded as the scripture tells us **Slide** "those in the boat worshiped Jesus, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" (Matthew 14:33 ESV) The disciples response was to worship Jesus as the Son of God. **Blank** The crowd sought Jesus for material needs, for breakfast. After Jesus rebukes the crowd for wrongly seeking Him for their desires they ask in verse 28, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" They are still filtering Jesus' words through their fallen minds and are thinking they need to perform some set of works to earn eternal life. Salvation by works is easier for man to understand because it allows him to have some control of his destiny. Most religions are focused on salvation by works for this reason and this is one of the first signs that a religion is false and man-made. We flatter ourselves when we do something for God or we can do "good works" and then we think we are due and have earned a reward. We are not capable of adding anything to the value or work of God. He blesses us by allowing us to be involved with His plan for this world and mankind. It is simple – it is not what we can do for God but rather what God has already done for us through Jesus. It is a matter of heart – the crowd wanted to know what works they must do. In Acts chapter 16 the Philippian jailer asked Paul, **Slide** "What must I do to be saved?" Paul answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:30 and 31 NASB) Paul is echoing the very words of Jesus to the crowd in here John chapter 6, **Slide** "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him

whom He has sent.” Jesus is the One whom God the Father has sent to meet the deepest need of all mankind – spiritual life. How is this need met? By believing in Jesus. We cannot earn salvation by works; we deserve no reward - for we are sinners. What God requires of us is that we give up trying hopelessly to please Him by our own efforts and instead commit ourselves into His hands, into the hands of the Savior – Jesus. So very simple and yet, so very hard for fallen people to understand and it is impossible for fallen people to do.

So, now that you understand - you cannot not save yourself. What are you going to do? Stop striving with God, give up your desire to control and be in charge and **Slide** let God into your heart, let Him take over control of your life. Believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior and know the peace the disciples did when Jesus climbed into the boat and brought calm in the midst of the storm. My prayer is that as I read the closing scriptures for this morning you will open your heart and let Jesus come into your life. If you will do that the greatest adventure of all will begin – having a relationship with the living God – the Creator of all. Jesus, God the Son, said, **Slide** “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.” My brothers and sisters place Jesus above all else in this world. Know His peace and the peace, joy and love of serving, worshipping and having a relationship with the living God. Then Jesus continued telling us that if we love Him with all our heart then a natural result will be **Slide** “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” (Mark 12:30-31 NASB) We were created to serve and worship the holy living God and to serve others in Christ’s name. I pray for you, and for me as well, that we will **Slide** “Fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your (our) heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.” (1 Samuel 12:24 NASB) For this is the true meaning of Christmas.