



Glenn Brown

December 2019

441 ½ Lark Drive

Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

telephone 970-434-1377

HOW CHRISTIANITY STOLE CHRISTMAS

It seems that Christians have always been concerned that Christmas and Easter have become secularized, paganized, and the world has turned a “holy day” into a “holiday.” Actually, worldly folks should complain that Christians have kidnapped two of their pagan celebrations. Neither Christmas nor Easter is mentioned in the Bible. The Christmas tree was a pagan symbol long before Santa and Rudolph came on the scene. Easter was the pagan vernal festival, and its name came from Ishtar, the Babylonian and Assyrian goddess of love and fertility. Easter eggs are connected to fertility and new life. Whoa!

That doesn't mean that there is anything wrong in celebrating Christ's birth and resurrection on those two occasions. We are to *transform the kingdoms of this world into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. Right? We are also to transform our times, our days and months, because they, too, are identified with pagan names; that is, with Roman, German, and Norse gods and goddesses. Following is a partial list:

Sunday – day of the sun. **Monday** – day of the moon. **Tuesday** – Tiu's day. Tiu was another name for Zeus, the god of the sky. **Wednesday** – Woden's day or Oden's day, which was the day of Mercury. **Thursday** – Thor's day, the god of thunder and war. **Friday** – Frigg's day, Frigg was the wife of Oden, and she was the goddess of heaven, of marriage and the home. **Saturday** - Saturn's day, the god of agriculture, connected with Saturnalia, the ancient Roman festival of Saturn. **January** – from Janus, the two-headed god that looked back toward the past year and forward to the new year. **March** – honoring Mars, the god of war.

Just thought I would give you something to think about. And have a good Frigg's day.

“CHRISTMAS TREE, O CHRISTMAS TREE”

Quite a few years ago on a Sunday evening in December, Ford Wilson and I were looking for a certain church in Mexico City where we had an invitation to speak and minister. It was pouring down rain, Ford got lost, and we drove up and down the endless streets looking for that church. Mexico City is vast and confusing and has more population (22 million) than the state of Florida. Ford had an amazing sense of direction, and we eventually found the church.

After my message and his translation, we met with folks at the altar who wanted prayer. A man asked prayer for God to heal his voice and the constriction in his throat that he could always feel. He said he had been a member of the choir in his church for many years and loved to sing songs of praise to God, but that three years before something happened to his larynx and he could no longer sing.

We prayed for him and asked if he had been healed, but apparently not. Since I had learned that sometimes unforgiveness blocks healing, I asked him if he had any unresolved resentments or anger toward anyone. No, he didn't. So we asked God to give us a word of knowledge (one of the gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Cor. 12). In a few moments a picture of a Christmas tree came into my mind. I thought that was weird, but I told Ford what I had seen. Ford said, “Well, that doesn't make sense. I can't tell him that.” I said, “That's what I got. It's probably my imagination. Ask him if it means anything to him.”

Ford told him what I had seen and asked if it had any meaning for him. He was very quiet for awhile. Then he said, “Yes. My children and my wife have always wanted to put up a Christmas tree at Christmas time, but I have never allowed them to have one because I don't think it is Biblical. Three years ago we got in a big argument about it and my wife and kids cried, but I still wouldn't let them have a Christmas tree. That was the year I lost my voice.”

Do you see what happened? Because this dear man got legalistic with his wife and kids, he lost his song. We led him to repent for the way he had been treating his family and encouraged him to ask them to forgive him, and he felt something release in his throat.

GOD'S HUMOR

“Come on, Glenn, God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. He is majestic, the mighty Creator of the cosmos. But where would you get the idea that He has a sense of humor?”

Well, if you just look in a mirror it might give you a clue.

I'm serious about that. If we are made in the image of God and we have a sense of humor, where did we get it? Certainly not from the devil who is totally humorless. Besides that, we can discern God's humor in many places, starting with His creation. Have you seen some of the ridiculous creatures He made? How about the sloth and its slow motion movements? It probably reminds you of your son when you ask him to take out the trash.

How about the playfulness and joy of children and seals and puppies? Have you ever tuned in to the “Puppy Super Bowl” that gives you a superior alternative on Super Bowl Sunday to watching grown men beat each other up while fighting over a pig.

While I'm sure that God had to be really careful about displaying his humor in Scripture, it seems to be there in a very subtle fashion. God used many puns and riddles with the prophets. (Google “Puns in the Bible”) One of the funniest to me is what some of the prophets said about idols. Some scholars speculate that one of the Hebrew words for “idol,” *gillulim*, comes from the Hebrew word for “dung, manure,” so an idol is like a little dung ball. If this is a legitimate understanding, then the prophets are being very sarcastic and earthy in their ridicule of those who worship anything before the one, true God. How about God telling a 90-year-old woman that she was going to have a baby by a 100-year-old man? She laughed, and I think God laughed, because He named the baby “Isaac” – “Laughter.”

God's humor is also demonstrated through an experience called “holy laughter.” In the past 47 years, I have attended innumerable church meetings, conferences and seminars, and during that time I have probably seen this phenomena a dozen times. I was personally blessed to become a part of it four or five times. It was a regular experience during the ministry of Rodney Howard-Brown and during the “Toronto blessing.” When it happens, a spontaneous spirit of joy overtakes one person and quickly spreads throughout the congregation. People start laughing, and they laugh so hard that tears run down their faces. This is not an experience that you can find in the Bible, and nay-sayers condemn it as an expression of emotionalism that marks us Charismatics. They may be right, but I believe it is a beautiful gift from God. I wish that God would do it again with me regularly. I wish and pray it would come to our churches and even to you, especially if you are sitting there with a skeptical frown on your face. (You Grinch!) And if I can say this without being too mean, religious people have no sense of humor. They are too full of self-righteousness and judgmentalism for that. And, frankly, I don't trust people, and especially preachers, if they don't have a sense of humor.

Finally, and most importantly, consider the personality of God in heaven. Does God have a personality? Is He a Person? If He is just a power or a force, then He is less than a person, because for humans personality is the highest order in the cosmos. But how can we know anything about God's personality? Obviously, we can start by studying His revelation in the Bible. Above all, we can study and reflect on the life of Jesus Christ. Remember that Jesus said, *When you have seen me, you have seen the Father.*

So what kind of personality did Jesus have? It was multi-faceted, the same as with you and me. He had the most serious assignment that anyone ever had in all of history, and He was single-minded about it. He lived a life of love and sacrifice and “*set His face like flint*” as he headed inexorably toward His destiny to die on the cross for our sins. He would not be deterred by the devil, the Pharisees, Romans, or even by His own disciples (*Get thee behind me, Satan!*) He was “*A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*”

Then again, He was a man of joy and lightness and winsomeness that drew people to him, even “sinners” and children. Kids are not drawn to sour people, right? Can you imagine him picking up a little one, sniffing with disgust, and saying, “Thou shalt not mess thy pants!” then shaking the infant a time or two and pushing him back into his mother's arms? I don't think so.

Reflect on some of the stories of Jesus' encounters with people and consider the possibility that He had a twinkle in His eye. How about His conversation with the woman at the well when he told her, “*You have had five husbands, and the man*

you are living with now is not your husband.” What was His attitude, His demeanor, the tone of His voice? It was certainly not heavy or condemning, nor did He in any way trivialize the woman’s situation. But can’t we see the humor in what He said to the woman and in the way she tried to steer the conversation in another direction? (John 4)

How about the time Jesus told Peter to go and catch a fish and he would find a shekel in its mouth to pay their taxes? (Matthew 17) Of course, we can find a theological point in all these stories, but aren’t they also kind of humorous?

And the time the resurrected Jesus fell in with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and somehow hid Himself so they couldn’t recognize Him. (Luke 24) Of course, there was a deep truth in this story, but can’t we also see a lightness, even a sense of humor hidden in them?

In every encounter I have had with God, I have perceived an amazing personality: joyful, loving, kind....and a seriousness that took my breath. Let’s set our hearts to pursue Him and to get to know Him better and deeper.

JAMES ROBISON

Many years ago, a 40 year old single woman worked as a nurse-practitioner in a small west Texas town. She had a job taking care of an elderly man in his home. One evening the old man’s alcoholic son came into the house and raped her. She became pregnant. She went to a doctor and tried to get an abortion. He refused. While she was trying to figure out what to do, she had an impression that God wanted her to have the baby. In that time and place and with the prevailing attitude toward out-of-wedlock pregnancies, we can imagine the struggle she had in obeying that impression. She named the baby James and ran an ad in the paper asking if someone would take the baby. A pastor and his wife took the baby into their family.

When James was five years old, his mother demanded to have him back, and she carried him around in a vagabond existence for the next nine years. She then returned him to the pastor and his wife. When he was 14, James accepted Christ as his Savior and a few years later he became an evangelist and pastor. James says that by God’s grace over 20 million people have become Christians through his ministry. This is one of those God stories that stretch our souls.

There have been about 60 million legal abortions in the United States since Roe vs. Wade, and it is reported that abortion rates have recently dropped to a historic low.

I didn’t share James Robison’s story to suggest that every woman who becomes pregnant through rape or incest should carry the baby to term. Nor do I hold a judgment against any woman who has had an abortion. During the course of my years of ministry (starting just after Noah let me off the boat), I have heard the most terrible stories you can imagine. But I’m sure you know a lot of those stories yourself.

I have ministered to a great many ladies who have had abortions for a great number of reasons, and it is a terribly painful reality for every one of them. There are probably some women who are blasé about having had an abortion, but I have never met any of them.

There are two things I’m sure of: our nation’s gross immorality and low sexual standards have awful consequences that are coming under the judgment of a righteous God, and we in the church need to be compassionate toward women, and men, who are caught in a web of deception and destruction.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Matthew 13:45-46

Reuven lived in a hard land at a hard time. To live in a small country that had been overrun and occupied by a ruthless oppressor like Rome was bitter for everyone. The working people were ground down by the occupying army, by the never-ending list of punitive laws handed down from the distant emperor, by the ever-increasing taxes imposed by the Quislings among their own people, and by the outrageous burden of religious rules enforced by the vassals of the High Priest, all of which made daily life frustrating and almost impossible.

Reuven's uncle had been an influential man because of his wealth and political connections, and since he was childless he had taken his nephew, Reuven, into the business as an apprentice pearl-merchant. The uncle was delighted when Reuven showed such an aptitude for the trade. In time he could glance at a handful of pearls spread on a table and instantly assess their value. And if one or two pearls were of unusual quality he could pick them out unerringly, although as a shrewd dealer he was careful not to tip his hand.

The uncle was long deceased and the business was now Reuven's, but because of the Romans, the taxes, the bandits on the highways, and the periodic uprisings among his kinsmen against the hated invaders, business was uncertain and difficult.

Then that day, that very special day, came along. A caravan came down from the distant Chaldees on its way to Egypt. The master of the caravan sought out Reuven and led him to a secluded place. He said, "I want to show you something." He reached into an inner pocket for a pouch, extracted a small bundle of soft, black cloth, slowly and dramatically opened his hand, and nestled in the midst was a single, lustrous pearl. In spite of himself, Reuven's breath caught in his throat and his heart stopped. Pearls were not only his business, but they had become his passion. He had seen hundreds, thousands of pearls, but he had never seen one like this. It was simply perfect. It glowed with an inner fire. It was... priceless!

The old trader grunted with satisfaction when he saw the effect the pearl had on Reuven. He already knew from his past experience and from talking to experts that he was holding a very special treasure. But Reuven's reaction was an added confirmation. "Very nice," Reuven said. "What will you take for it?" "Oh, no!" responded the old trader. "You can't afford this pearl. I'm taking it to a certain dealer in the city who can pay my price." Reuven quietly persisted: "What is your price?" The old man quoted a price that was, as he had said, far more than Reuven could afford. And the old man was adamant: "That's my price and I will not take one shekel less!"

Reuven was conflicted. The price was out of his reach, but he knew something the old trader did not know. Reuven was a master pearl merchant, and evaluating pearls was not only his business but his special gift. He had an intuitive genius when it came to analyzing pearls. And while the old trader knew that this was a valuable pearl, he had no idea of its real worth. This pearl was the find of a lifetime. It deserved to be placed in the tiara of a queen or in the crown of a monarch. It was worth a fortune, a literal fortune.

Reuven's heart was beating wildly. "Give me two or three days," he said in a voice as calm as he could make it, "and I will find the money to buy it." "Really?" the old man replied. "You can raise that kind of money?" "Yes," Reuven said, "I can do it."

He hurried to his shop and immediately started liquidating his stock, all of it. He discounted his pearls and other jewels and the silver and gold necklaces and rings. He ran to his neighbor who had been trying to buy his shop in order to expand his business and made a deal with him for his shop and furnishings. He ran to his home and started removing some of the inherited furniture and valuables that had been in his family for generations. His wife became alarmed. "What are you doing? Have you gone crazy?" He told his wife that he was also going to make a quick sale of their home. She nearly fainted. He whispered to her conspiratorially, "Don't worry! I will soon buy you the villa down at the coast that you have always wanted." Reuven had a strange look on his face, fevered, intense, and Miriam became convinced that her husband had lost his mind.

He was like a man possessed. He had to have that pearl! He had to have it! He sacrificed all that he had saved, everything that he owned, things that had always been supremely precious to him suddenly seemed like straw, if only he could get that pearl! And he bought that pearl, and he knew that he was the one blessed beyond measure in giving everything for it.

When I was 30 years old I had a beautiful wife and three children, with a fourth soon to be born. I had been in the Navy for a brief time at the end of World War 2, had graduated from university with a business degree, had a good job, a nice brick home, and seemingly a secure future. But I was empty inside and lived with an unfocused anxiety. I used alcohol and other things to fill up the emptiness, but it wasn't working.

And then a certain pearl merchant came through my neighborhood, called me aside to tell me about something valuable he was carrying, but to me at that time it did not appear to have any value at all. He persisted and invited me to attend his young adult Sunday School class, which certainly seemed to be a pointless thing for a grown man to do. But Doris and I had been feeling guilty for not taking our kids to Sunday School, so we decided to start taking them while we would attend

Wendell's class. We found that we enjoyed the fellowship, the every-Sunday volleyball games and the group picnics. And I started listening to his spiel as he shared the gospel with an intensity that I had never heard before.

I didn't get it for a long time, but after several months something started to happen. The scales gradually fell from my eyes. Then came a day when it became clear to me that Christ was the Pearl of Great Price! He was what I had been yearning for all of my life. What He offered was a treasure beyond comprehension. I invited Him into my heart and life, and I wept almost constantly for 3 days and nights. The reality of what I had been given kept growing in ever-widening dimensions. In a few years Doris and I decided to go for it. For me at that time, that meant going into the Methodist ministry. We sold our house and bought that pearl. There were many among family and friends who said that I was bonkers, "Oh, Glenn has got religion and has gone overboard. He will get over it after awhile." They did not, could not, understand. And I never have gotten over it.

In the early history of western expansion of our country, God's kingdom was expressed through several streams of faith, and one of the most vibrant was Methodism. Hundreds of young men became converted to Christ and offered their lives as "itinerant preachers," traveling preachers, who went into the wilderness on horseback to preach Christ to the early pioneers. They suffered desperate privation, often going hungry, often sleeping on the ground in all kinds of weather. There were no doctors or hospitals. They were ravaged by sickness and accidents and violence. The average lifespan of one of those preachers after entering into that ministry was four years. And the gospel took root in early America.

In many parts of the world today the experience of those early Methodist preachers is being replicated: in Muslim lands, Hindu lands, Communist China, Cuba, Chiapas in Mexico. Rolland and Heidi Baker did their PhD's at King's College, University of London, in 1992, and at the same time planted a church among the homeless, the drug addicts, and the alcoholics on the streets of central London. They have lived and served in the poorest slums of Asia and Indonesia and then were called to Mozambique, which at that time was the poorest nation on earth. Heidi says that she has been shot at five times, beaten, thrown in jail, and fasted one-third of her life, so she knows a bit about suffering and anguish. But she says she counts it all as joy. "If I am not in love, then I want to quit!" God has used the Bakers to start 10,000 churches in Mozambique and the surrounding nations. This is, of course, a God-thing, and He is free to do this kind of nation-changing work because of the love and sacrifice of two of His kids.

We dare not compare our lives and our dedication to these noble ones. Their secret is in seeing, perceiving, discovering, the Pearl of Great Price. When I have grown cold and fallen away from my commitment, and there have been many of those times, it has been when I have gotten my eyes off of Him and onto something else. I forgot who He is and the great, inexpressible gift He has brought to me.

Has that Pearl been revealed to the eyes of your heart? "*When you seek Me with your whole heart, then I will be found by you.*" God will never, never, never be satisfied with a half-hearted, luke-warm commitment from you and me. He loves us passionately, emotionally, desperately, to the extent of the Cross. What He wants, what He holds out as an expectation, is that we will return His love with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.....and that we will demonstrate that love by laying down our lives for Him and for our neighbors.

God Bless

Glenn

e-mail address casabrn441@gmail.com

WEBSITE: www.glennbrownministries.com

I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry.

If any of you want to receive tax credit for your financial contributions, you may send them to:

CANYON VIEW VINEYARD CHURCH

736 24 ½ Road Grand Junction, Co. 81505

