

Jesus Christ, Leave Me Alone

Matthew 1:18-25

One day a few years ago, as Sharon and I were doing a little Christmas shopping, I heard a cell phone ring. It wasn't my phone, but because it sounded very much like my own, I started paying attention. The ringing cell phone was in the purse of a woman standing nearby. She was by herself, and as her phone continued to ring and as she fumbled in her purse to find it, she muttered a few words to herself that I would like to repeat to you. I ask the Lord to forgive me, and I ask you to forgive me, as I repeat her words to you:

“Jesus Christ, leave me alone.”

Those were her exact words. They were spoken to no one in particular, since she was alone, but I could hear her frustration. Obviously her phone had been ringing a little too much recently, and she was enjoying a few moments of being by herself—until the phone rang.

“Jesus Christ, leave me alone.”

I understood, and you will understand, that she did not intend to literally address Jesus Christ. She wasn't speaking to Jesus. She was using the Name of our Lord in vain, and that's why I asked for your forgiveness. And I immediately thought to myself, “*That* is what Christmas is all about!”

I see the shocked looks on your faces. Let me explain. That woman was merely expressing in words what the human race by and large has been saying for centuries. “God, leave us alone. We don't want you interfering with us and our great big plans for living. We want to do what we want to do. God, leave us alone.” That was the very reason Jesus came into our world.

That's what the whole world was saying when God determined that the time was right for His Son to be born. The whole world, including the Chosen People, the Jews, had been saying through their actions that they didn't want the Lord God to tell them what to do. When Moses was preparing to leave the Hebrew people, when he knew he was going to die and they would continue on across the Jordan River into Canaan, he reminded them of the time he had come down from the mountain after receiving the Law of God. He said to them, “*You have been rebellious against the Lord ever since I have known you*” (Dt 9.24). That was their track record. And yet that was the very reason Jesus came into our world.

King Saul rebelled against the Lord. By his repeated actions of infidelity and rebellion, he was saying to God, “Leave me alone. I can handle this all by myself. I don't need You.” One day the word from God was this: “*Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you*”

as king” (1Sa 15.23). But Saul was not alone. The entire nation had rejected God. And yet that was the very reason Jesus came into our world.

During the time of the prophet Isaiah, a message from God was given regarding the disobedience of Israel: *“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’ All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—a people who continually provoke me to my very face....who say, ‘Keep away; don’t come near me, for I am too sacred for you!’ Such people are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that keeps burning all day”* (Isaiah 60.1-5).

And in the days of the prophet Jeremiah, the word of the Lord came, saying, *“Should you not fear me?” declares the Lord. “Should you not tremble in my presence? I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it. But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away”* (Jeremiah 5.22.23).

You see, God did not come into the world as a little baby because everything was warm and fuzzy here. He did not send His Son into the world because He knew it was finally safe here and that He would be protected, that He would be welcomed with open and loving arms. It was nothing like that at all. He came because world-wide and in all ages and through all generations, there have been people who have been saying, “Jesus Christ, leave me alone.”

And yet He would not leave us alone. It is not in His nature to leave us alone. It is foreign to His being to walk away from us just because we are obstinate and stiff-necked. He pursues us with a love that is everlasting and never-ending, a love that forgives and replaces desperation with hope and meaning.

So when we say that that woman’s words “Jesus Christ, leave me alone” are the epitome of what Christmas is all about, we are saying that *that* kind of attitude toward God is the very reason He came.

Some of God’s most faithful servants have at times said, “God, leave me alone.” When Job was just beginning his suffering, he reached a point very quickly where he was tired of all of it, and just wanted to die. He cried out to God with anguish and bitterness (Job 7:11-16). Job was sarcastic towards God, *“Am I the sea, or a sea serpent, that You set a guard over me?”* (Job 7:12) He was mocking God. Allow me to paraphrase: “Am I this little, crusty, sick, old man, so threatening to You (or anyone else) that You have to guard against me? You have dangerous sea monsters in the mighty oceans of this planet, so what in the world are You doing striking this insignificant old man? What have I done to deserve Your personal attention when You

could be doing so many more important things like ruling the universe? But no, even in bed at night, when I long for comfort and rest, You relentlessly trouble me. You scare me with horrible nightmares and terrify me with confusing visions. There is no place to escape from You.”

Because of the way his trouble had been heaped on him, his soul was so plagued that he preferred to be strangled to death rather than live. He loathed his life as it was turning out to be, and wished it all to end quickly! With all the anger and bitterness Job could muster, he protested to God, “Leave me alone! I no longer want to be special to you. I am tired of what it means to be special, troubling me with pain, suffering, and grief. Release me! Take down the hedge of protection around me! What am I to You?”

In fact, his actual words were, *“Let me alone; my days have no meaning....Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant?”* (Job 7:16, 19). And that is the kind of world to which God sent His one and only Son. Here at Christmastime, we must remind ourselves that things are pretty much the same in our day.

At one time a few years ago Mike Huckabee was the the Republican presidential frontrunner. His campaign aired a “Merry Christmas” ad for the Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina primaries. The ad showed Huckabee standing in front of a Christmas tree and a white bookshelf. As Huckabee wished everyone a Merry Christmas, only a portion of the white bookshelf behind him could be seen—so that it looked like a white cross just over his shoulder. That led many in the mainstream media to say that Huckabee was trying to send a subliminal message, and impose his evangelical Christian beliefs on America. Yes, he is a Christian, but sometimes a bookshelf is just a bookshelf. The mainstream media, and many in our country, were saying, “Jesus Christ, leave us alone.” And *that* is the very reason Jesus was born.

Here’s another example. The stores known as Old Navy, Gap and Banana Republic are owned by the same company. According to the American Family Association, these stores, along with Bath & Body Works, Hancock Fabrics and Starbucks “marginalize Christmas. In other words, they will be happy to take your money, but don’t expect much mention at all of Christmas if you shop in those stores. And these are the stores that have completely eliminated any reference to Christmas this year: Barnes & Noble, CVS Pharmacy, Office Depot, and Radio Shack. They don’t allow Christmas because a handful of non-Christians might be offended. But they sure don’t worry about offending Christians.

So you need to understand that these stores don’t sell Christmas gifts. They sell “holiday” gifts. They don’t close their stores on Christmas. They close on “holiday.” They don’t wish customers a “Merry Christmas.” They wish them a “happy holiday.”

On the other hand, here are a few of the stores who still believe in Christmas: Bass Pro Shops, Bed Bath & Beyond, Best Buy, Belk, Dollar Tree, Family Dollar, JC Penney, Hobby Lobby, Kroger, Lowe's, PetSmart, Pier One Imports, Sears, Super D Drug Stores, Target, Walgreens, Wal-Mart and Sam's Club.

I think that Old Navy, Gap and Banana Republic and others like them are just symptomatic of the society that we live in. It should not surprise us that people of the world, who do not know Christ, are saying through their own personal lives as well as their corporate policies, "Jesus Christ, leave us alone." **That** is the very reason Jesus was born!

There are many other examples we could point to, that emphasize the attitude of the world that says, "Jesus Christ, leave me alone." In that context, the name of our Lord is not being used in vain. He is being addressed personally. "Jesus Christ, leave me alone." And some of us are saying the same thing by our actions and our attitudes. "Jesus Christ, leave me alone."

But here is the Good News of Christmas. Listen to 1 Timothy 1:15—"*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*" Jesus Himself said in Mark 2:17, "*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" He also said, "*The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*"

The Apostle Paul was thinking about this one day, and he wrote in his letter to the Roman Christians: "*At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:6,8). Our great loving Heavenly Father sent His Son because left to ourselves, we and everyone else in the world have been shaking our fists in hatred toward God, and we have been saying, "Jesus Christ, leave me alone."

But you say, "Wait just a minute, pastor. I don't **hate** God. I just want Him to leave me alone. I want to do my own thing." For you there is a promise. Nothing that ever happens in your life, no matter how good it is, is ever going to work out for good. The Word of God is clear: "*The soul that sins it shall die.*" "*The wages of sin is death.*" What death means in the Bible is not that you cease to exist. It means separation. Separation from good. Separation from God. Separation from one another. There will be plenty of people in hell, but if company is good, you will not have company. You will be absolutely alone. You once and for all will get your way: "God, leave me alone!" And He will. Forever.

You see, God sent His one and only Son to be born as a little baby, to grow up and one day to die a horrible death for our sins. That is what Christmas is about. "The word [Christmas] originates in the Roman Catholic Church and actually means a celebration of the death of Christ. I believe the Catholics are right in that instance. Christmas is exactly the right time to

remember the suffering of Christ that began with His incarnation. The truth is that the world needed a savior then, and still does. Christmas is really about God's greatest gift to us and how we can share it with others. Let's stop to remember the difference Christ makes in our lives and think about how we can share that with our families and friends. How sad it would be for them to go to hell while owning the latest I-pod or some other gadget or toy. Christmas is all about Jesus and His incredible love for the world. There is a cross in the cradle and a Savior in the straw." (Material within quote marks in this paragraph paraphrased from Bobby Sanderson, FBC, Columbus, Mississippi.)

"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."