

Ugly Christmas Sweater: Ugly Motives

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[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, December 11th. Ready that Christmas is in two weeks? Two weeks. Yikes.

So my name is Kent Dixon. It's a joy to be the lead pastor here. So today we're continuing in our sermon series called, say it with me, Ugly Christmas Weather.

Oh, come on. This is audience participation. Really loud. Ugly Christmas Sweater. That was half-hearted, but I'll take it.

So we've been considering the cultural phenomenon of the ugly Christmas sweater. And people still think I'm nuts that this is a sermon series. I have pastor friends that are going, there are no ugly Christmas sweaters in the Bible.

And I just said, you just have no creativity, that's all. So during the Christmas season, too many of us find ourselves being as ugly as these kinds of Christmas sweaters that people wear to Christmas parties.

[1 : 05] And so far we've talked about how the Christmas season should be the most wonderful time of the year. But we've also recognized that many of us can wind up having ugly thoughts.

Ugly words. Things that can hurt other people around us. So today we want to talk about ugly motives. And how those motives, how things that we can do, can harm our witness in the world. Harm our relationships with other people. And each of us make decisions in our lives based on different motivations. I think we can recognize that. Have you considered that?

That the things that you do are motivated by something within you. So it's important for us to pay attention to our motives. Because they can result in us either being a blessing to other people. Or they can result in us only focusing on ourselves. As Christians, as followers of Jesus Christ, we should be people who are motivated by our love.

[2 : 14] Motivated to treat others better than we would be treated ourselves. Than we seek to be treated ourselves. And we're always tempted by our selfish nature, our sinful nature, to put ourselves first.

Right? We tend to do that. But through the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us, and the example of Jesus, we can rise above those selfish motivations.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus was particularly interested, and you can see this throughout scripture, in people's motives. He was interested in the reasons behind the things they did, the things they said.

Because Jesus knew better than anyone else that people's motives could really reflect the deep-seated issues in their heart.

We've talked about that a bit in this series. That our actions, our words, some of the things that appear outside in our interactions with other people, really speak to the nature of our heart, to the condition of our heart.

[3 : 26] So let's read Matthew 6, verses 1 and 2, and then verse 5. So there's a Bible in the pew in front of you, or if you have yours with you, you can turn with me to Matthew 6, verses 1 to 2, and then verse 5.

Where Jesus says, Jesus says, Jesus says, So here Jesus is speaking to a group of people who focused too much on living out the law, and trying to look righteous in front of other people, trying to put on an outward show.

Their passion to appear spiritual to others was more important to them than actually having a healthy spirituality.

So Jesus' issue here was not with the actions the individuals were taking in and of themselves. They were good actions. So of course, giving to people in need is a good thing.

Praying and fasting, as we've explored in the past, are also good things. They restore our focus. They recenter us on God and on the priorities that we should have.

[5 : 25] Jesus was actually interested here in the motive behind the action. So what we're really talking about here is doing the right thing for the wrong reason, if that makes sense.

Ugly motives can actually negatively impact our witness in the world. And I've said that a bit a moment ago. The Christmas season is full of opportunities for us to serve other people and to meet their needs.

But some people may perceive these opportunities to be a way to receive personal praise or attention of some kind for their generosity.

You ever thought of that? You pass one of the kettles in the shopping center and you go, I'm just going to put money in here and just see if anybody happens to notice that it was a 50.

Oh yeah. Right? Nice gesture. Where's the motivation? Where's the heart coming from? So maybe someone drops money in a donation box.

[6 : 36] And they're, like I said, looking out of their corner of their eye, hoping someone will see how generous they are. Maybe we even take it a step further, making sure that we tell people the story of, oh yeah, I went to help at a soup kitchen.

I do that every year. Ah, it's a pretty big part of what I do and who I am. In the hopes that other people will acknowledge how spiritual they are, right? I need credit.

I'm investing in this correct way and I want attention for it. I want credit for it. But as we just read, Jesus says these folks, people with that perspective, have received their reward in full.

They'll get the applause, maybe, and recognition that they deserve, they think they deserve or they desired from others, but that is ultimately all they will receive.

We should be able to recognize in these words of Jesus that we just read, it seems that he's implying there's a greater reward that we can receive when we focus on being willing to serve others without needing all that recognition, without looking for attention, without receiving or even worse, taking all the credit for ourselves.

[7 : 55] So rather than just getting the applause and instant selfish gratification of some kind, someone who serves in humility develops a personal character.

And that character they're developing is worth far more than the praise of people. Doing the right thing for the wrong reason can ultimately cost us.

It can actually even sacrifice our ability to grow into the person that God wants us to be. Can you see that? Does that make sense? If we're seeking an example of the kind of selflessness we should be seeking here, the way Jesus is calling us to be as Christians this Christmas, it should inspire us to live our lives with the correct motives.

So turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 2, verse 1 to 7. This will likely be very familiar. So you can turn Luke 2, verses 1 to 7 or listen as I read.

In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was the governor of Syria.

[9 : 18] And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Familiar story, right? If anyone deserved praise for their actions, could we not agree that it would be the God of the universe becoming human in order to rescue us?

What could be more praiseworthy than that? But don't miss the specific way in which Jesus came. He didn't come to a castle as a king.

He could have. He didn't come to a holy temple in the middle of a huge city like Corinth as a priest and demand attention or accolades for his holiness or his power.

[10 : 43] The God of the universe came in the form of a baby in a stinky manger filled with farm animals.

Clearly, Jesus' motives were not recognition or praise. His motivation was love.

The very reason we celebrate during Christmas is because of a divine act of humility in the birth of Jesus Christ.

Jesus set the example, and then he has invited us to follow his lead. Friends, Jesus is our example, and he is, he should be, our motivation.

So at any Christmas party, an ugly Christmas sweater, such as you see before you, such as many of you have been brave enough to wear, an ugly Christmas sweater is really meant to do one thing. [11:47] It's meant to make people chuckle. Obviously, I love Marx, the Grinch. So it's mainly meant to make people laugh, but it's also meant to draw attention to ourselves, right?

Can you recognize that? You walk into a room with a silly Christmas sweater to draw attention.

Now, I'll tell you, last Sunday, we went to Tim Hortons on the way home, and you want to feel awkward, wear an ugly Christmas sweater in a place where no one else is.

It was awkward. It was weird. But when we're seeking the attention, we want it, right? We want the attention to be on us. But when Jesus is our motivation, the deep desire within us should be to draw attention to him.

See the difference? When we serve other people, when we put them first, it becomes easy to say that we're doing this only because Jesus first did that for us.

When we love others around us, it's easy to say we're doing this because Jesus first loved us. We love because he loved us first. We take the spotlight off of us and place it onto our Savior because he is the true hero of the story.

[13:16] Jesus is, Jesus must be, our true motive. The one, the thing, the action, the intention that motivates, that lies beneath everything we do.

There's a powerful story of motivation from the world of college football. So everybody knows I'm a hockey person, not a football person.

But you may know this story. Notre Dame football star George Gipp, and this is him, could do it all. He was an immense athlete.

He could run. He could pass. He could punt with unparalleled skill. And the 1920 season established Gipp as a football star. But on December 14th, 1920, young George Gipp died of pneumonia.

But thanks to college football stories and a movie in which actor and now former U.S. president, Ronald Reagan, portrayed Gipp in the movie, the story of George Gipp lives on.

[14:26] On November 10th, 1928, when Gipp was playing, Notre Dame, sorry, no, this was after he passed. Notre Dame and Army, so the military, the Army football team, they were playing in a match and they were tied at halftime in a struggle for victory.

So Notre Dame coach, Newt Rockne, maybe you've heard that name, he's quite famous as well. He's a legend himself. He told of being at George Gipp's bedside as he was passing away a few years before.

So Rockne recalled how Gipp feebly said, sometimes Rock, when the team is up against it, when things are going wrong and the brakes are beating the boys, tell them to go in there with all they've got and win one, just one, for the Gipper.

And so they did. The Notre Dame football team was motivated to honor the Gipp. It inspired them to fight and to win that game.

As Christians, our motivation for living a life of loving service and a life that is focused on others is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[15:53] That's it. His sacrifice should motivate us to sacrifice for others as well because Jesus is our motivation. It's like Paul states in Colossians 3, verse 23.

Paul says, whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord. We're not to seek to impress other people when we live righteous lives.

Our goal should be to honor Jesus. Jesus should be our ultimate motive and our reward for doing the right thing. What greater reward than to be in relationship with Jesus Christ and to have our hope and eternity secured in Him.

Jesus should be our ultimate reward and our ultimate motive for doing the right thing, for making the right choices. no more ugly motives.

This Christmas, we need to ask Jesus to guide our words, guide our actions, and allow Him to take control, no matter how tempted we are to be self-serving.

[17:13] And you know what? It's not a competition. One of the reasons we find ourselves fighting against ugly motives is because many times we find ourselves or we feel that we are in competition with other people for attention and accolades.

Do you ever feel like that? Rivalry is a mentality of the world. Absolutely it is. And we need to remember to recognize that it has no place in the heart of a Christian.

But it can still creep in as a core motivation for us. And Paul speaks to this mentality in a passage that gives context to a section of Scripture where Paul lifts up Jesus' humble and sacrificial life as our model to follow.

So let's take a look at Philippians 2, verse 3. And we've got one verse there, so if you can't get there right away, don't worry. Just listen. Paul says, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. But in humility, consider others better than yourself. Apparently, rivalry and competition within the church is not some kind of new issue.

[18:36] If Paul was talking about it then, it finds its roots all the way back in the early church. And Paul knew then that the desire for followers of Jesus to seek to one-up each other was a real thing.

The desire to be first. That desire had the potential to undermine all that Jesus had come to build and establish. And Paul was warning the early church of that risk.

friends, the same is true for us today. We are not in a competition with one another. Not at all. Instead, we should be cheering one another on.

Do you see that difference in that great opportunity? Pushing each other forward out of love.

Encouraging one another as we continue this journey. I talked to someone the other day and she said, not someone connected to our church, nobody panic.

I talked to somebody the other day and she's a Christian and she said, I'm finding I can connect with church online and I can get, church for me is in here, she said.

[19:51] And I said, can I challenge you on that? I've just met you but can I challenge you? And she said, sure. You're a pastor, I guess you can challenge me. I said, if church is only in here, I said, you are robbing other believers in community of your gifts, of your heart, of your journey, of your experience, of all the ways that God has worked in your life.

You don't get that online. And, you are missing out as one person that could be in a body of believers, missing out on all the gifts of other people, all the ways they can encourage you and you can learn from them.

I said, the Christian journey is not a solo journey. It's never meant to be. So when we choose to be Christians in isolation from other Christians, we're missing out.

When I'm motivated to honor Jesus first and honor then those around me second, that's the only way that we all win, that we all benefit and that we all recognize the value of the Christian journey as a shared one and the way Jesus always intended it to be.

So let's stop living as ugly Christmas sweaters, as with people with ugly motives that are focused on ourselves. ourselves. So this week, I want to give you a challenge.

[21:26] I want to challenge you to be, here's some alliteration, a secret service agent. This week, I want to invite you to choose one person to do something for as a way of honoring Jesus and a way of honoring them.

And here is the key. This won't surprise you. We need to do this anonymously. Whatever you choose, whatever way you choose to bless another person, do not let them know it was you.

Can you do that? Allow your motivation for service to be Jesus rather than recognition. So maybe this means sending an anonymous letter of encouragement, a card, an anonymous gift card, maybe, an anonymous something on someone's doorstep or in their mailbox, or meeting a need that you know they may have anonymously.

So as you're doing that, remember the words of Jesus who said in Acts 20 verse 35, he was quoted there, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

challenge your selfish motivations with selfless acts. This Christmas, our reward is becoming more like the person God intended for us to be, God designed us to be.

[23:04] Will you accept this challenge? Amen.