

Love BIG
Loving Like God: Christmas Series
Revolutionary
Isaiah 9:6-7
December 16, 2018

Welcome and intro to series...

Christmas is all about traditions. We go places year after year because it's a family tradition. We decorate on a certain day or begin playing Christmas music on a particular day because it's tradition. We bake a specific cookie(s) each year because it's our tradition. We do live tree or artificial because of traditions. We go to grandma's each year because it's tradition. And those traditions grow in our families and they create memories and those things become associated with Christmas...so much so that if we don't do them, it doesn't feel like Christmas. There are tastes and smells and sounds and places that when they happen, it's like magic – poof, and it's Christmas, right. Am I right? It's true. So, let me ask; is it pinwheels, or tollhouse cookies. Is it the smell of a real tree or is it those ornaments that have been passed down through the generations? Is it a trip to Radio City Music Hall or Colonial Williamsburg or Sweet Lights for you and your family?

And if you want to experience an all-out revolt, then suggest that the family do something different this year. It might be that you're going to cut something out or you're going to do something we've never done before. Am I right? Things get ugly when you start messing with traditions. We say things like: "it's just not Christmas unless we..." or "it's just not the same if we don't watch that movie or hear that song or go to that show." Or better yet, "if we don't do that thing, it just won't be Christmas" as if Christmas was dependent on that tradition happening. There are some who need snow, there are others who need a palm tree with Christmas lights all over it. There are some who need to travel, there are others who just need to stay home. There are some who look forward to eggnog all year long and others who can't wait for their first fruit cake. I know, but it takes all kinds and for every person and every family there are just as many traditions. And while your traditions seem normal to you - they may seem wacky to someone else.

When I'm doing prewedding counseling, family of origin traditions is one of the things we always talk about. Traditions can create all kinds of tension for a newly wed couple. There can all out, knock down arguments over where the stocking get hung or when it's okay to turn to the "all Christmas music" radio station in the car. So, just imagine what takes place when a wrench gets thrown into the mix and every tradition goes haywire. Maybe it's a sickness or a car problem or a deployment or the loss of a job or a (God forbid) loss in the family. Suddenly, the value of the traditions change. In certain circumstances those tradition just don't hold the same weight as they used to. In other circumstances the traditions we hold dear get elevated to a whole new level.

Traditions are powerful things. So, imagine what happened when Jesus disrupted all of the traditions that ever existed and came blasting in to that small family, that small town of Bethlehem, and into a world that was fine just the way they were...or so they thought. When Jesus came to the earth, the world was a mess. People, who were a lot like us, were doing things that were completely out of touch with God. And like our present generation, there were those who were chasing after other gods. They were caught up in systems and traditions that they thought were working just fine. And we all know the phrase: "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" right. Many of our hopes and dreams, our expectations and anticipations are wrapped up in those traditions of ours and if they aren't broke...! We get warm fuzzies and a sense that all is right in the world when those traditions we love are maintained.

So, when Jesus is born into our world, into your life and mine, there is a cosmic shift in the world as we knew it and things are never the same. There's a new way of doing things because the way we've been living was off track from what God had intended and the time has come to finally set things right. It is nothing shy of a revolution that Jesus would usher into the world over 2000 years ago and He showed God's love in BIG ways. Things would not be like they were, ever again...traditions gone. No wonder King Herod wanted him dead. No wonder the religious people in his day wanted to be rid of him. He didn't fit neatly into their traditions and their ways of doing things.

Everything would be different, that's what revolutions do.

No wonder people today don't want Jesus, because if we're honest, He just might bring a revolution to our lives and go changing everything...and for the most part, we like who we are and the traditions we have – even if they are a bit odd or dysfunctional. But things do change. Take for example those milestone birthdays we all have. Things change in revolutionary ways when we turn 16 and are able to drive. Life changes again at 18 when we are considered by many to be an adult. Parents have to get our approval for health information, you can do things without the co-signature of a

parent or guardian, and we can make life altering decisions all by ourselves. Or how about the revolutionary changes that happen as we're educated. Once we know a thing, we can't go back...it's in there and we can't undo the knowledge of it.

Almost 700 years before Jesus' birth, a guy – a prophet names Isaiah – tells us that Jesus was going to start a revolution that would; bring peace, not war; fairness, not inequality; justice, not chaotic craziness. His way of being a "love BIG" God was to set the systems of this world on their heads and shows us what the Kingdom of God could look like...*on earth as it is in heaven*. Isaiah is talking about one who is coming that will change everything. The systems that were in place had been corrupted by imperfect people...some of whom were trying to do the best they could, others who were trying to manipulate the system to work to their advantage. Governments and legal systems had gone off the rails and the only way it was going to change was through a revolution that called everyone back to God. Isaiah was given a Word from God to proclaim to all the people...if we keep living this way, if we keep trying to do it all ourselves, if we keep looking after ourselves and what we want, if we keep existing God out of our lives and our traditions then God will intervein.

And when God intervenes, we're told that God will take the weight of governing off of our backs and He will carry it. But it will not look like we expect. He will turn our ideas upside down like a child does when they come into our families – disrupting everything and creating new traditions and doing away with the old ones. That's what God does. God comes into our lives with a revolutionary plan that can change everything. The question is, are we ready? Are we ready for that kind of change? Are we ready to give up what was for what can be?

**Are we ready to give up what we see as good – our traditions and our ways of doing things
- so that God can bring what is great into our lives?**

I know that's a scary question. We love all the stuff we have and we tend to hold on to what we are comfortable with instead of being willing to let go so that something great can come into our lives. It's like the child who reaches into the jar to pull out a piece of candy only to discover that they cannot retrieve the candy unless they let go of it because their fist will not fit back out through the opening of the jar. The Declaration of Independence includes a sentence that basically says: we should not change things for just any old reason but, the problem with humanity is that we will put up with all kinds of evils instead of taking the steps we need to get rid of the things we're used to...even when they harm us. (*Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly, all experience hath shewn, that mankind is more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.*) During election season we say: better to stay with the wrong we know than to make a change to what we don't know.

If we are willing to surrender our lives to Jesus – God makes two important promises.

The *first* one is that **life will get dicey at times**.

We might be led to think that God will just make everything better. Every revolution in your life and mine and almost every revolution that has happened in our world made things more difficult at first. The American Revolution is a perfect example. Several of the signers of the Declaration of Independence lost everything, including family members. They believed that revolution was the only way to bring about the changes that were necessary. But life got more challenging instead of easier. The women's suffragette movement came at a great price. The freedom to vote was just the beginning of a revolution that is still going on today. A can we talk about slavery and the pain it has caused to an unknown number of people and the war it took to end that evil. And we're still fighting that war today. Revolutionary change is difficult. There are many people who choose to follow the baby, born in a manger...but, when Jesus grows up and begins to change our world – we put out a hand and yell, "that's enough." Thank God those first followers of Jesus didn't surrender in times of struggle, persecution and the fear of death.

The *second* promise God makes is that God will be a wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, and our prince of peace. God's promise is that He will be there to guide and direct us. As our wonderful counselor God will walk along side of us through the challenges this life changing revolution brings. In doing so God brings all the power of the One who created the universe with a word. The one who holds all things in balance has promised to bring that mighty strength into our lives. God has also promised to be everlasting, to never leave us, to always be with us and that there will be no end to the peace He brings.

We are never alone

when we choose to follow Jesus...even though it may challenge everything about us. We may have to surrender some things in our lives. Some traditions may have to end that are good so that we can start living the great life God has for all of us in Jesus. What can you do differently this year that would allow Jesus to shine through your life and into the lives of those around you?

So, as we get all so close to December 25th and the celebration of the birth of Jesus, remember...following Him may completely change your world but, it will be so worth it.