

Where do we go from here?

Friends, a few years back Canadian Tire had an advertising campaign which said *“Where you end up... has a lot to do with where you started out”*

And this evening... our presentation of the Christmas story has ended up with the Wise men bowing down to Jesus and giving Him their gifts, as an act of worship

So I want to ask... where have you ended up tonight friends?

As we wrap up our Christmas Eve celebration – does its ending find you engaged in the worship of Jesus the Christ?

The answer to that question friends, is as Canadian Tire has said, has a lot to do with where you started out.

If we started out feeling stressed out about how this whole celebration was going to come together and anxious that someone might forget their part or make a glaring mistake –

then right now we end up feeling relieved and grateful that it all went off without a hitch... but that’s not really worship.

Or If we started out looking for that special something to do for Christmas Eve, something that gets at what Christmas is all about – then right now we may be feeling satisfied that we’ve had the candles, carols and the Christmas story and it feels fitting and appropriate, we end up feeling sentimental... but that’s not really worship either.

And if we started out with a sense of obligation or duty - that we must do what we must do because its Christmas, and certain people are expecting me to be here because this is what we do every year, so let’s just put up with it and get through it... then you end up feeling impatient for me to just get on with the evening and wrap it up - and well... you and I both know that is definitely not worship.

Now I have to admit that every Christmas season I struggle with that sense of duty and obligation to give the people what they expect – carols and candles and the Christmas story...

And at the same time I understand the desire for that sentiment, because it's what I grew up with and I know it feels good to celebrate Christmas with familiar traditions.

And there's just no escaping the stress and anxiety that comes from planning and organizing and practicing for a celebration like we have had tonight – and hoping that it all somehow comes together.

But is that where I really want to end up at Christmas - just feeling relieved and satisfied and glad that this is all over and done with for another year?

Is that where you want to end up this Christmas?

To say nothing of the other places we typically end up in after Christmas is finished, when the credit card bills come in, when holiday guests overstay their welcome, when we have to celebrate without loved ones...

When we know that after this current feeling of being *“relieved or satisfied or glad it is all over”* that we will just be

going back to whatever trials and challenges that have defined the past year for us.

Is this where you want to end up this Christmas? Shouldn't Christmas leave us somewhere better than this?

Well friends, as I said, that depends a great deal on where you started out – and I think we can all see how that works.

Now the logic in what I've been presenting to you thus far is that if we want to end up in a good place at Christmas then somehow we must make sure that we are starting from the right place.

And I'm also assuming that you would agree with me that where we want to end up at Christmas is worshipping Jesus... or at least you would agree that is the appropriate place to end up... after all it is Christ's birthday we're celebrating, so worshipping Him seems right.

Even if you're not “feeling” it at this point.

So what starting point will have us end up worshipping Jesus?
Where do we need to start out?

Well – I hope you took note of what was said in the opening video tonight... we started our celebration with a reminder that the lights and the decorations that come around each season are reminders of an old story – the Christmas story...

And then the video finished by focusing on an open bible and saying *“it all starts here”*

So friends, the starting point is scripture, the bible, the Word of God – the only place where you will find the story of Christmas.

If you want to end up worshipping Jesus, if you want to end up in a good place at Christmas it will largely depend on if you are willing to start with the bible as the Word of God.

After all, the bible makes the claim about itself that *“the Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”* (2 Tim 3:15)

Which is a great reason to worship Him, but only if we understand why we need salvation and a savior? And the same principle of “endings and beginnings” applies here as well.

To end up with faith in Jesus as our savior from the story of Christmas as we find it in the scriptures depends on where we start in the scriptures.

We can’t just start reading at Matthew 1:18 or Luke 2:1... not even Matthew and Luke start their gospel stories about Jesus with the birth of Jesus – they start much farther back than that.

In fact Matthew starts his story about Jesus with these words *“The book of the Genesis of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham”* (Matt 1:1)

In other words Matthew starts his gospel story about Jesus by saying we have to start at the beginning of scripture, with the book of Genesis, and that we need to continue on through the Old Testament with the stories of Abraham and King David.

And we did that tonight as well – we read some selected scripture verses; starting with Genesis 1:1 and continued throughout the Old Testament to try to summarize the story which leads up to the Christmas story.

Because that story starts us off with the correct understanding of who we are as humans – made as male and female in God’s image to take care of God’s creation...

It starts us off with the correct understanding of what went wrong in this world - Adam and Eve disobeyed God and went beyond the limits and boundaries that God set for them...

It starts us off with the right explanation for why there is suffering and death and hardship in this world - the consequences for Adam and Eve’s sin...

And it allows us to see what God has been doing ever since to make sure that His world, His creation ends up better than what it started as – and saved from what it looks like now.

That’s why God revealed Himself to Abraham, to make a promise to him – that would have implications for All the nations of the world.

That’s why God set aside Israel as His chosen people - to be a light unto the nations, to show us how to live according to God’s laws.

That’s why God gave Israel King David – to lead God’s people in obedience and faithfulness and in the true worship of God.

But in the end – it wasn’t enough because Abraham, the nation of Israel, King David and his successors were all affected by Adam and Eve’s sin and it made them unfaithful to God and incapable of fulfilling their purpose as a light to the nations.

And that is why we have Christmas – because God sent Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit born of the virgin Mary – fully human and fully God, and thus able to overcome how sin affects our human nature right from conception.

Jesus is just like us – except He was conceived and born in a way that overcomes how sin is a part of our human nature since Adam and Eve’s disobedience - That’s why Mary says “*I am the Lord’s servant, may your word to me be fulfilled.*” (Mat 1:38)

So that Jesus can be what Israel could not be – A light to the nations... That’s why the shepherds go and tell everyone they can about the birth of the Messiah.

So that Jesus can be what King David and his successors could not be – An everlasting King to lead people obey God. That’s why Joseph needed to stick around as Jesus’ adoptive father and why Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

So that Jesus is the one, descended from Abraham who will bless ALL nations... this is why the Wise Men from other nations come to worship Him and give him gifts.

So that Jesus can be a new Adam, a second Adam, humanity remade in the image of God to take care of God’s creation in the way God intended.

But friends, if you want to end up worshiping Jesus on Christmas, with faith in Him as your savior and salvation, understanding what that means as it is explained to us from the beginning of scripture... there is one more place that you need to start from.

You need to start from where you ended up tonight.

Whether that be a place of relief that this all came off without any problems, whether that be a place of sentimentality that this was just so nice, whether that be a place of impatience that we just hurry up and get this wrapped up, and also –

perhaps maybe most importantly so if you are in a place of worship.

Why? Because friends where you ended up tonight will show you where you need to start from in order to embrace Jesus as your savior.

Where you ended up tonight friends shows you that you too are linked to Adam and Eve's sin that affects every human being from birth.

Sin is so much more insidious and deeper than the usual list of moral failings that we associate with it – and when it comes to our relationship with God... sin has us end up in a place of ignoring that He is in control of things and we're worried about doing stuff ourselves,

Or we treat God sentimentally instead of the terrifyingly all-powerful Creator who holds our very lives in his hands and could do with us as He pleases...

Or we dutifully put up with God – doing what he expects us to do so that we can get it over and done with and get on to what we want to do with our lives.

Or most dangerously and subtly deceptive of all – we worship God through our own actions and gifts and in our own ways and we believe that this pleases God and He accepts us as we are.

Friends – the birth of Jesus is ultimately about the birth of the only human being who is a faithful obedient worshipper of God.

We are not – but through Jesus we can be.

So that is why ending up worshipping Jesus on Christmas largely depends on where you start out.

It is through worshipping Jesus that we admit we can't worship God on our own, we can't get past being dutiful towards God on our own, that we can't honor God with much more than

sentimentality on our own, and that we won't give up trying to control our lives on our own.

But in Jesus – literally in and through Jesus - we can.

That's why He's our savior and that's why we end up worshipping Him at Christmas.

So now that you know, let us pray that the Holy Spirit would conceive faith in Jesus in our hearts and minds, that we would be strengthened in this faith, and that we would live by this faith...

And let us truly worship God through Jesus now as we end our Christmas Eve celebration.

Amen.