

“Ehud & Shamgar”

Sermon Notes

- **This Advent let us long for the second coming of Christ, remembering that our greatest salvation is yet ahead**

**Till that day, the Scriptures remind us that when God rescues his people...*

1. ...the setbacks are strategic to humble us (vv.12-15a)

2. ...there's comedy amid the tragedy to hearten us (vv.15b-26)

3. ...he triumphs over his enemies to sober us (vv.27-31)

MEFC Community Group Study Guide

For the week of December 18th-24th

“Should I Use Christmas Dinner for Evangelism?”

This week, we’ve got an outstanding piece from the Ask Pastor John podcast.¹ Work through this article in your own personal devotions, family worship time, or alongside your Community Group. Whether in your home, at your relatives’, in the neighborhood, or at work...let’s live sent this Advent! (John 20:21)

It’s Christmas week. Christmas-celebration prep is in full tilt. And today we have an urgent planning question from a woman named Loni. “Dear Pastor John, my question came to mind as I was sitting with my husband’s family last Christmas at the dinner table. It’s a time for the family to gather, but many family members don’t understand Christmas. How do I evangelize at Christmas dinner with my unbelieving family? Is it the wrong time and place to try to proselytize people whom I only see a few times a year? Where’s the line of not ‘shoving the Bible down their throat,’ but sharing my love for Jesus with people who could be going to hell when it’s socially unacceptable to bring up something potentially controversial at a special time like Christmas dinner? And if you were to take this opportunity, what points would you stress?”

I think one of the biggest mistakes that most of us make in personal evangelism — or one of the biggest opportunities we miss — is that we are constantly hoping for some unusual, circumstantial turn of events or changes in situation or mood that will open everyone to a gospel conversation naturally, instead of simply asking for permission to a person or a group to share something that means a great deal to us, or asking if we could share what we see as the best news in all the world.

Best News in All the World

For example, in totally cold-turkey stranger situations, I might say — and I’ve done this many times in my jogging evangelism, for example — “Have you heard the best news in all the world?” That puts them a little bit on the spot, because then they feel like they’re going to be an idiot if they haven’t. Or less provocatively, I might say, “May I tell you what I think is the best news in all the world?” It’s very rare when somebody says to me, “No, I don’t want to hear what you think is the best news in all the world.” That almost never happens to me. If somebody can sniff out that I’m a religious guy, then they might say, “No, I don’t want to talk about that,” but not usually.

Now, when they say yes, I just tell them in a sentence or two that God, the Creator of the universe, sent Jesus Christ, his Son, into the world to bear the punishment for my sin, so that I could be forgiven and live forever in happiness with him — something like that. I see where it goes from there. Who knows? I mean, they may say, “Oh, yeah, yeah, I’ve heard of that. Blah, blah, blah.” Or they might say, “No, I’ve never heard that.” Then you might go further.

Prepare to Share

Now, closer to the question that Loni is asking, I’m thinking about a friend or a group of friends or family that you have, and you want to share the gospel with them. You keep waiting for a situation that’s natural and doesn’t come. What I’m suggesting is that you plan a lunch with your friend, or

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-i-use-christmas-dinner-for-evangelism> . Accessed 12/16/22 @ 5:30pm.

perhaps do this over a lunch you already have planned, and you ask, in all seriousness, either beforehand or in the lunch, if you can share with them something very precious in your own life, because this is what you love to do with good friends or family. This is the furthest thing from shoving the gospel down someone's throat. You're asking for permission.

Now, with regard to Christmas dinner, or all kinds of things that happen when families get together besides dinner, that's a principle I would commend. Of course, so much hangs on the nature of the relationships: What do they already know about your faith? Whose house is it that you're eating at? What's the spirit or mood of the day? How hostile are they? All those things will affect how you approach this.

If it's your house, and you're providing the hospitality, and you're providing most of the meal, then it's not at all presumptuous to pause at the beginning of the meal and say something about the meaning of Christmas for you. There are all kinds of things you can do. If it's just before the meal — it can't be long, of course; everything's going to get cold — you might sing a familiar carol that even unbelievers know, and maybe you print it out for everybody and lay it on their plate. Then you pray at the end, and you give thanks in your own prayer for what Christmas means for you, and that's it. You see whether it goes any further than that. A prayer is not that unusual over a meal at a holiday. Or there may be other possibilities in the day. I would stress that.

Hunger for Meaning

You could also try something on Christmas Eve. You might be surprised that people really would like to do something more meaningful than watch football. I mean, of course, they may want to watch football, but deep down, deep down, even those who are not Christian would like something significant to happen once or twice a year in their lives that has a little more meaning than what's on television. One possibility to suggest is that you maybe read a lighthearted story like *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. My wife read this every year for several years, when our boys were at a certain age. It's a funny story that takes a really serious twist and turn at the end. You can find it online. You can read it in twenty minutes, half an hour, maybe even less than that.

Another possibility would be to start a tradition in your home and maybe invite others to watch the movie [The Nativity Story](#). It's really well done. I mention it just because it's a tradition at our household. We just do it. My daughter for years said, "We're going to watch *The Nativity Story*, aren't we?" Because it's not at all lighthearted. It's very serious, and it's historically pretty accurate, I think — a reconstruction of the birth of the baby and Mary. It's very, very moving, very powerfully done. You can just invite people to watch it, because it's so well done that I think even unbelievers would learn a lot from it.

Or you might, as a family, read a collection of Advent devotions, starting in December 1, and then when you get to December 24 or 25, you just say to your guests, "We've been reading every night this month, and we'd like to just read ours tonight and include you in it." And whatever's next, you read that. We've got two or three of those at *Desiring God*, which you can download free anytime you want. Just type into the search engine "[Advent devotions](#)."

Pray, Plan, and Speak

So, of course we don't shove the gospel down anyone's throat, but if we love Christ, and if we love our family, we will pray and try to be proactive in our planning. God loves to honor the simplest, even the

most bumbling, efforts to share his news.

So, my encouragement is to pray, and plan, and give people as much of a heads-up as seems helpful, and then trust God to do more with our little efforts than may be humanly possible.