

What to Do With This Stuff: Lessons from Lil Jon's Crunk Christmas

I'm telling you right now, whenever I get bored during the Christmas season, I'm clicking on "All I Really Want for Christmas!" Overplayed traditional songs are dumped down the drain as Lil Jon empties the eggnog in the sink and replaces it with Kool-Aid. His "carol" is energetic. It's hilarious. It's got kids dancing and laughing. It's got gifts galore and an overflowing buffet. Kool-Aid Man and DJ Santa throwing a party with Lil Jon in someone else's house!

Most of all, it's got honesty.

There's no pretense of spirituality. There's no allusion to the birth of Jesus. Not a hint of contentment, gratitude, or humility. There's nothing suggestive of it being more blessed to give than to receive. Instead, there's the contagious chorus:



*All I really want, really want for Christmas
All I really want, really want for Christmas
All I really want, really want for Christmas
Is everything on my list, baby, yeah!*

Bearing Gifts, We've Traveled So Far

Lil Jon freely admits that he's been planting seeds all year about what people should buy him. Something about that is religiously refreshing, even if detrimental. To be shamelessly selfish isn't a virtue. However, to cloak our selfishness in spiritual garb is a much more dangerous vice. Just ask King Hezekiah (you can read about him in 2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 36-39).

Hezekiah wasn't one of the many bad kings of Judah. He was one of the few good ones! He cut down idols, refurbished God's temple, brought reformation to the priesthood, restored people's faith in the "church" of his day, and his prayer for Judah's protection was answered with the swift, supernatural defeat of an enemy army. Hezekiah was doing so well, until...

Hezekiah became deathly ill. After humbly praying for healing, the prophet Isaiah promised that God would restore the king's health and lengthen his life by 15 years. The king asked for a heavenly sign to confirm the prediction would come true. The sign God sent was to move back time—to turn

back the sun (2 Kings 20:8-11).

Neighbors Who Notice

A prince in the neighboring kingdom of Babylon heard about Hezekiah's sickness and healing (2 Kings 20:12). Since Babylonians were known for studying the stars (Dan. 2:2), the timing of the healing and the seemingly backward movement of the sun got Berodach-baladan's attention. He sent messengers with gifts and a letter in order to find out if there was a link between Hezekiah's new lease on life and the disruption of heavenly bodies.



Hundreds of years before the star of Bethlehem, wise men noticed a sign in the sun.

It was at this moment, God did a strange thing: "Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chronicles 32:31). Did God abandon the king? No, he just allowed him space without the intervention of prophets or voices from heaven to specifically guide his thoughts and actions. God wanted to know how deeply His grace in Hezekiah's life had penetrated the king's heart. How would Hezekiah respond when the Babylonians came from the East to Jerusalem after seeing a sign from the heavens?

From Showrooms to Stocking Stuffers

Hezekiah got caught up in the moment. Pride blinded him from seeing the opportunity to share his faith. Instead, he showed off his stuff—all his stuff (Isaiah 39:2-4). He turned their minds from the supernatural to the natural. Isaiah announced that the king's mistake of showing off his riches would lead to the Babylonians returning to plunder those riches and march his people into captivity. The Babylonians were shown someone's house that seemed to have everything on their carnal Christmas list.

These visitors already had material riches, but thought Hezekiah's spiritual riches exceeded theirs. It wasn't Babylonian gods that moved the heavens to save their king, it was the God whose temple was in Jerusalem. They left spiritually unimpressed. Rather than learning more about God, they learned where they could get more gold. How might history have been different if

Hezekiah had emphasized the things of God during that show and tell tour?

Greatest Gift of All

Fast forward a few hundred years. A couple with a baby played show and tell when some astrologers from the East came to Jerusalem after seeing a unique movement in the heavens. This sign was a mysterious light that was neither a fixed star, nor a planet. It seemed to urge them to play follow the leader, until they ended up in Bethlehem. The show and tell Mary and Joseph played was a humble game. There were no palaces to tour or delicacies to sample. There was only one main attraction: a baby wrapped in very plain blankets. God chose where His Son would be born and ordained that there would be nothing about the surroundings that would overshadow His glory. When they saw Jesus, the wise men showed their wisdom by offering their earthly treasures at the feet of the heavenly treasure. For as one author wrote, "In giving up His Son, He [God the Father] has poured out to us all heaven in one gift" (E.G. White, *Our Father Cares*, 65). The wisdom of the wise men was that they recognized their stuff was nothing compared to Jesus.

Jesus' parents were regular working class folks without the means to jump up and move to another country to start a new life. However, God richly rewarded them when they shared the one thing on their visitors' that couldn't be bought or sold. The material gifts from the Magi of the East enabled Jesus and his parents to seek asylum in Egypt, thus escaping Herod's murderous rampage (Matthew 2:11-18).

Good Gifts All from God

The lessons from Lil Jon's Crunk Christmas remind me that it's easy, whether a rapper or a biblical king like Hezekiah, to lose focus on what's important. Stuff can crowd Christ out of Christmas. Yet, stuff can be a blessing—depending on how we use it and share it. And we will share it more readily when we remember our stuff really isn't ours. Just like the house Lil Jon, Kool-Aid Man, and DJ Santa were partying in wasn't theirs, we have to remember that every good and perfect gift we receive comes from our Father above.