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The World Through Christmas-Colored Glasses - 1. This Place NEEDS a Savior 12.3.06 - Dennis Mullen – revised for 12.13.9

Nobody wants to be accused of looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. To do that is to be naïve, foolish, immature. It means that you don't see the harsh colors of things as they really are.

I had my rose-colored glasses removed this week as I read about Tiger Woods. It isn't just that he had an adulterous relationship, but apparently he is one of many athletes who pays tens of thousands of dollars a month so that a choice of women will be offered him wherever he goes. This, we read this week, is commonplace among stars, in athletes, in music and film and in politics. The rose-colored glasses come off and we see for a moment how far off course we really are.

I'd rather see things as they are though, and one problem with Christmas is the tendency to make everything rosy. You see it in the form of sentimentality, the warm-fuzzy thoughts that appear on Christmas specials on TV or in Christmas cards. This is the time of year, people say, when all of our problems could be solved if we would just be kinder to one another. If we would all commit ourselves to peace on earth, good will toward humankind, or if we could just capture a little bit of that Christmas spirit in a jar, or if we would just give a little more of ourselves through the year, this old world would be a much better place.

That's a pretty rosy outlook on the world because while it would be nice for us to be kinder, gentler, and more giving, the world's problems actually are much too deep to be solved by just a little Christmas spirit. There are things like sin and evil, not just out there in the world, but in here in our hearts too, that cause us to treat one another the way we do. The problems with this world, which begin with me, are much more serious than we like to admit, much more serious than we can see when we look at the world through rose-colored glasses. The selfishness, the cruelty, the prejudice, abuse, lying and greed go down to the root of who we are. Is a

little Christmas compassion enough to fix it? Hardly. Sometimes I marvel that given the way we are, we can muster up any Christmas kindness at all. And if you go Christmas shopping on a Saturday afternoon and fight the crowds, you may see just how hard it is!

No, we don't need rose-colored glasses. We need [Christmas-colored glasses](#)! To look at this world and the people who live here through Christmas-colored glasses is to see things as they are. I'm not talking about a gloomy outlook that leads to despair, because that isn't the truth of the matter either. I'm talking about seeing the world as God sees it, seeing it in all its glory and despair. I'm talking about seeing [a beautiful, cursed earth](#) which is at one-and-the-same-time God's marvelous Creation AND in need of radical surgery and rehabilitation. To see the world through Christmas-colored glasses is to see, among other things, that this place needs a Savior.

If I rely on my own feelings, this doesn't always seem true – that the world, and ME, are in desperate need of a Savior. Oh I sometimes beat myself up for my shortcomings, but beating myself up turns into a sort of penance, so when I'm done I feel much better, as if I have paid for my own sins. Besides that, I've got my virtues too. I'm generous! I (we) bought a bunch of stuff at the charity auction...we were actually more generous than I thought we should be! What else? I'm kind – I try to say Merry Christmas to cashiers. I pay my bills. I work hard. I try to say "I'm sorry" when I need to. I'm a pretty good guy, the more I think about it!

I suspect that most of us feel this way about ourselves, and it isn't because we're Christians and the Holy Spirit is making us better and more loving people. I trust that he IS doing that, but even before we became Christians we probably thought of ourselves much the same way because this is how middle-class Americans learn to think. Even if we acknowledge that sin is a problem "out-there", even if we believe in evil as a force that causes some of the dreadful things that we hear about on the news, we tend to not take all of this too personally. This is why most Americans, no matter how they live, believe that they are going to heaven when they die, even though going to live in the presence of a Holy God is the most unlikely thing in the universe to happen to anyone!

This is what happens when we look at ourselves through rose-colored glasses, which filter out our sin and depravity and show us only the good, and in a pleasingly-pink hue. Ah, but when we look at the world through Christmas colored glasses...

One of the early places we can do that is in the prophecies about Jesus in **Isaiah 53**...

**ISA 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.**

**ISA 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.**

And...

**ISA 53:10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to
suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering...(NIV)**

Just think about these very familiar prophecies about Jesus in light of what they say about US. "Transgressions", it says. "Iniquities". With much caution I did a Google-search on "iniquity" which I found to be the name of a Danish heavy-metal band and the name of several sleazy night clubs. Even the world knows that "iniquity" is a nasty word, yet the NIV translators decided that this was the best word to use in describing what Jesus did for us! We should be insulted! Except, in our more honest moments, when God pulls back the veneer of respectable dishonesty, we know this is exactly the right word to describe the sin we battle.

And "punishment", a punishment that we deserved but it brought us peace because he received it and freed us from having to receive it.

It talks about us as sheep wandering off from where we ought to be, and yet Christ being chosen to bear that sin as a guilt offering – and only the guilty need a guilt offering.

This is the world through Christmas-colored glasses; more than that, it's me and it's you through Christmas-colored glasses. These glasses reveal the third chapter of **Romans**, where for example Paul quotes from the OT (**Psalm 14, 53**) saying:

RO 3:11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

**RO 3:12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good, not even one." AND: 23 for all have
sinned and fall short of the glory of God...(NIV)**

When someone asked author G. K. Chesterton what was wrong with the world, he replied: "I am". We could all say that. What is wrong with the world at large is found in some measure in each of us.

But there's more to it than that, really. I may be partly what's wrong with the world, but if I were to die today, it wouldn't bring a peaceful end to the war. It wouldn't end terrorism. It wouldn't stop the starving in Africa or

child-abuse in Tennessee or racism in Roane County. We all play a part, but sometimes it seems that none of us is as bad as all of us. And in this world terrible things sometimes happen when people get together and think like a mob, or when individuals get too much power.

When you look at the world through rose-colored glasses, it can blind you to all of this. In the 1800s and into the early 1900s there were many people who thought that humankind was nearing a golden age of peace and prosperity where war would become a thing of the past. Advances in science and business and education would wipe out disease and make life easy and national leaders would realize that it didn't make sense to go to war. Even the founders of the Restoration Movement which produced churches like ours were caught up in this idea to some extent. They believed that Christ would soon begin his thousand-year reign here on earth and that every day humankind was inching closer and closer to this happy era.

This rosy outlook on the world was shattered by WW1, one of the most costly, most brutal wars ever. It's hard now to imagine how people could have been so naive. They were right that war doesn't make sense. Neither does murder or cruelty. Yet they keep happening. Looking at the world through rose-colored glasses hides this truth, at least for awhile.

But Christmas-colored glasses show the truth of our situation in all its dimensions, and we see that it is a world where fun, [where entertainment has its place](#), but it isn't everything.

And it is a world [where money has a role to play](#), but Christmas-colored glasses reveal that money isn't the solution to personal or political problems, no matter how much we are told it is.

Ultimately, Christmas-colored glasses will change [our outlook on Christmas itself](#). We'll see that it isn't about sentimentality, or about a rosy view of human nature. It's about a war; it's about God landing his forces in territory controlled by the enemy.

To see that, we can look at the Christmas story as **Matthew** tells it....

MT 2:1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

MT 2:3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed (King of the Jews was his title, after all, and despots always have to be looking behind them to see who might be the next one to try to stick a knife in their back and take their place), **and all Jerusalem with him.**

MT 2:7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."...

These magi made their visit, but didn't return to Herod, having been warned in a dream not to. **MT 2:13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."** I love that lyric from Rich Mullins' song My Deliverer: "*Joseph took his wife and her child and they went to Africa, to escape the rage of a deadly king...*"

MT 2:14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

MT 2:16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

**MT 2:18 "A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more."**

What a brutal, awful thing.

David Neff [writes about the movie The Nativity Story in Christianity Today](#), and he gives the film a generally positive review, but he says that it doesn't give as much significance to this slaughter of the innocents as he had hoped:

For the Gospel writers, then, the Jesus story does not climax in the stable. It climaxes in the Cross. Thus, the horrendous slaughter of Bethlehem's children is not out of place in Matthew. Nor is it primarily an atrocity perpetrated by a vain and unstable tyrant. It is, rather, an attack on God's anointed.

But since The Nativity Story of necessity focuses on the birth narratives alone, and because it chooses to explore the personal dynamics of two young adults caught up in the greatest moment in history, it cannot do what the Gospels do. It consequently shies away from giving full weight

to Herod's satanic massacre of Bethlehem's babies. Matthew responds to Herod's wickedness by quoting the weeping prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted. . . ." For the Gospel writer, there is no resolution: "She refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

I have no doubt that the historical Joseph and Mary lived with the specter of that bloodshed for the rest of their days.

It's a brutal, awful thing. Unfortunately, it isn't unique. When you look at the world through Christmas-colored glasses, you see that this world stands in desperate need of a Savior. Indeed the evil forces that inhabit this world naturally tried to eliminate him the first moment he entered.

In a way, the slaughter of those innocent children and the grief that it left behind – that is the REASON for the coming of Christ, the reason for Christmas. There is something deeply wrong, deeply sick about this world if things like that can happen and still DO happen. What we need goes deeper than merely being kinder or learning to tolerate each other. There is a cancer of evil in our world and in our hearts too that requires radical surgery. This place needs a Savior.

Which is what Christmas is all about. The really good news about Christmas is that it reveals that God thinks we are worth saving, which is a very understated way to say that he loves us. So far I have talked about some dark things – the truth of evil within me, within you and out there in the world. But there is another, better side to things and we can see it when we look at the world through Christmas-colored glasses...

I take the natural world as an illustration of the beauty of the human heart. Some of the most desolate places on the planet are also the most beautiful. Some of the wild landscapes that are least hospitable to human life also have the most-breathtaking beauty. This is the way it is with people too, as God sees us, and as we can see each other if we look through Christmas-colored glasses. Even in a heart that is arid with selfishness and sin, beauty can break through. The sentimental view is that this is enough to overcome the evil. It isn't. But what it IS is a sign of God's image upon each soul, an indication that we were meant for more than this.

When the angel first announced the coming of Jesus, he told Joseph: "**Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.**"

John said about his coming: **JN 1:10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.**

And John also wrote this down: **JN 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**

All of which is to say that this world not only needs a Savior – this world HAS a Savior. Jesus Christ is God’s answer to our sin; he is the one God has sent who can lift us up out of ourselves and put us back in the place where we can live like we were meant to live.

Let’s look at the world through Christmas-colored glasses once more...

Following Jesus as Savior and Lord means making a choice about [who is going to be in the driver’s seat](#). We want to believe that we can handle things just fine, maybe with just a little direction from God as sort of a spiritual “OnStar”. But following Him as Savior and Lord is as radical as giving him true control. In what ways do you need to do that today?

Or to look at it a little differently, following him means to [walk down the road](#) with HIM leading the way, waiting for his guidance about which road to choose, what speed to walk, what to carry on the way and what to lay aside.

**Prayer
Invitation**