

If we truly believe that December 25<sup>th</sup> has no special Biblical religious significance but *do* accept that it is a *very special secular* day, what better opportunity will we have to share the Gospel of Christ. Maybe we can resist the temptation to clarify to all the historical inaccuracy concerning the reality of Christ's birth — that it's *highly unlikely* Christ was actually born anywhere *near* the month of December — and instead use the time and energy to reach someone with the Gospel. Since the commercialization of this holiday has turned it into a season of gift giving, our good use of this opportunity can give the gift of eternity with God to anyone who will take the time to consider Jesus Christ as their Savior. Whether we ourselves or others consider the season to be religious or secular, it may very well provide opportunities for us that would otherwise never be present. To be sure, we may (and should) address the inaccuracy of celebrating Christ's birth on this one certain day with the new found brother or sister in Christ *when* the time becomes appropriate. But the fact that the date of this season is not based on Biblical truth does not take away the existing need souls have for a Savior.

If the apostle Paul were here today, would he take the same approach he did on Mars' Hill (Acts 17:22-23 KJV or "*meeting of the Areopagus*" NIV) as he stood among the many gods and declared to the people the existence of the True God? He used the "props" that they already had to take advantage of the opportunity to declare the Gospel to them. We must do no less today as we stand among the many gods established by secular beliefs. We must use all of the surroundings available to us to make a case for Jesus Christ.

We must not approach this season with a cynical attitude that will allow us to become blinded for a month every year because of commercialization based on inaccuracy and untruth. We must press on with our eyes focused on Christ and the need of those to whom we may be able to take the Gospel. To help us find the opening needed, we might ask questions like; "How do you celebrate the Christmas season?" or "What are some special things you're doing this year?" "Do you have a Nativity scene in your home?" "Don't you find it interesting that most people only think of Christ as a baby in a manger rather than as our Savior?"

We have an opportunity each and every day in a season filled with festivity and commercialization that may go beyond our personal choice. But, like Paul, let's resolve to make *every* opportunity placed before us work for the glory of God.



*Please note — there will not be a  
December 15<sup>th</sup> or January 1<sup>st</sup> issue of Diligence.  
We will resume publication on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2006.  
Have a joyous holiday season.*



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# DILIGENCE

*"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end,  
in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11*

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## Opportunity Happens

The title of this article is not only true but obvious to the point that you might say, — "so what?" The ability to recognize opportunity as such and the decision as to how we will respond to it is in fact, the fabric of history. Our very lives are a reflection of the choices we made when opportunity presented itself. How often do we reflect on the impact of the decisions that we have made throughout our lives and evaluate them in terms of the consequences that resulted from whatever we chose to do with the opportunities that were presented to us?

When we examine people of Scripture it's interesting to consider them in terms of their response to opportunities that were presented to them. Their actions are recorded for us to examine and consider as we shape our own history — one situation — one opportunity — and one day at a time.

Let's consider some of our favorite (or maybe not so favorite) Bible characters. Think of some of the opportunities presented to them, and the actions they chose to take or the decisions they chose to make. Keep in mind that it was their response to the opportunities and situations presented to them that *made* them noteworthy.

Some characters are so notable that many, if not all, non-believers know of them. For example, how many people have never heard of Adam and Eve? Whether or not they believe in the Biblical account, Adam and Eve are known by an act involving the eating of an apple (even though the Bible never says it was an apple). Nevertheless, for all of history they are credited with going against God's command and being responsible for bringing sin into the world. Another example — although many people reject the Biblical account of the flood, they do know of Noah. The same is true of Sodom and Gomorrah. Most people know of that story and that the cities were destroyed. An interesting aspect of the world's knowledge of that story is that even though they may reject the Bible, the reality of Sodom and Gomorrah is given enough credence that the world in general is finding it necessary to concoct revisions of that account so that it is more politically correct for today's society. A "new" reason for God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is now being taught. The politically *corrected* version claims that the cities were destroyed because they failed to show hospitality to strangers. Even though that is *obviously* not correct, the fact remains that the account of cities being destroyed because of the wrath of God is not lost in the minds of most people — even non-believers.

Most of us as Christians, are well aware of the story of David from our childhood. We repeatedly recited stories about the heroic deeds he accomplished. But we discounted the many treacherous acts he did. Now, as adults who are more familiar with David's treacherous deeds, we like the phrase. "*A man after (God's) own heart*" (Acts 13:22; I Samuel 13:14). We also realize however, that the deeds done were no less devastating to his victims at the time.

And then who can forget about Daniel and the lion's den? There's another story that even many non-believers know *something* about. When Daniel was given the opportunity to interpret the writing on the wall for King Belshazzar, his decision to do so eventually landed him in the den of lions. And as a result, the God of Daniel was proclaimed throughout that kingdom (Daniel 5 and 6).

Now that you are thinking, take a few seconds to reflect on what comes to mind when the following names are mentioned — Joseph, Cain and Able, Jonah, Bathsheba, Jezebel, Ruth, Deborah, Joshua, Lot's wife, Jacob, Esau, Samuel, Saul, John the Baptist. Every one of these individuals is notable because of the way an opportunity was handled at the time it was presented. Some are noteworthy because a great good resulted and others for great evil that resulted.

Without any doubt however, the most notable and most important person in all of history is Jesus Christ. He is recognized and known of by a very large majority of the world's population. Recognized, but often misunderstood. Unfortunately, many see Him as only a historical figure. There is a major difference in the history of Jesus Christ and all other historical characters of whom we know. As His life's story is revealed, believers make the distinction between a mere historical existence of Jesus Christ and the faith based belief that He not only lived the life described in Scripture, but continues to live as the Savior of mankind and the *only* way to rescue us from eternal punishment.

As Christians, we are well aware that even Jesus had the opportunity to accept or reject doing God's will with His life (Luke 22:41-44). We are the benefactors of His willingness to exercise opportunity at the expense of His own physical life.

A profound thought —the fact that Jesus Christ did the will of the Father resulted in His own resurrection and return to His heavenly Father. Silly question, but did it ever occur to us that had He *not* chosen to do the will of the Father, would we have ever known about Him? There would certainly be no salvation for us.

There is an immense impact that results from our reaction to the opportunities presented to us. The actions we take and decisions we make have effect on the lives of others for generations to come, whether it be for good or for ill. Our daily handling of the opportunities given to us is of great importance.

Perhaps as we approach this holiday season, it would be well to consider that there might be opportunities presented to us, as Christians *because* of the

commercialization of this season. It's a well known fact that for many people this is a busy season that results in a financial windfall for merchants as well as a time for families to get together and exchange gifts. But for some people it may be the *only* time they even *consider* the possibility that Jesus Christ is the Son of God as Truth rather than just a story for children.

There is an irony about Christmas. It is not uncommon for those of us who were raised in the church to resist recognizing the Christmas holiday as having anything to do with Christ's birth. The facts simply do not support the historical accuracy that December 25<sup>th</sup> was anywhere near to the time of the year He was born. At the same time however, we can certainly enjoy the fact that for a short time each year, people in general seem to accept the reality that Jesus Christ exists and that He is the Son of God. The acceptance of that reality is a short passing moment in the lives of too many people. Therefore, it is our challenge each year to decide how to best enjoy the moment and take advantage of the opportunity. It just might be the only chance we have to tell the whole truth about a baby Jesus who grew up to become the only person capable of being the Savior of the world.

Perhaps the only other time of the year that affords a similar opportunity for us as Christians to take advantage of the slightly more open-mindedness of non-believers is at Easter. Even when the minds of non-believers may be slightly more open to the message of a Savior during those seasons, at Christmas there is still an ever present effort made to keep Him confined to December 25<sup>th</sup> and therefore to a baby in a manger rather than a Savior who died for our sins. So it behooves each of us to understand and accept that the *resistance* to the message of the Gospel may for a moment be slightly lessened at Christmas and at Easter. The reality for Christians is that we have a gift to share with all who will take it 365 days a year but willingness to accept it may be greater at certain times.

It is a fact that the Christmas season will come this year as it has every year of our lives. So as this holiday season gets into full swing let's consider our individual opportunities. Perhaps we'll have opportunities in our workplace, at stores, among family members, at restaurants, at schools or wherever we find ourselves around other people whose resistance to hearing the Gospel may just be a bit lessened because of the season.

Like the opportunities presented to those we recognized at the beginning of this article, we can respond in various ways to the opportunities presented to *us* during this season. We *could* make it our responsibility to clarify to the world that the season is over-commercialized and misses the mark by concentrating more on gift giving than on properly recognizing Jesus Christ. Or, we *could* allow the season to make us bitter because of the arrogance displayed even by so many *churches* that contribute to the over-commercialization by creating their own production to celebrate the season. We *could* also go to the extreme of making our *lack* of observance our focus. Or, perhaps we *could* consider yet another possibility.