

Christmas at the Movies
The Santa Clause
December 23, 2018

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

Worship Songs – Awake My Soul / What a Beautiful Name / T&G
Announcements – Shannon
Feature – Santa Claus is Coming to Town

“Santa Claus is Coming to Town” ... what a great way to begin the final week of our Christmas at the Movies series. Today, as Shannon said, we are looking at *The Santa Clause* ... a smash hit which came out in 1994 and has become a true “Christmas classic.”

I’m curious – how many of you have seen this movie?

Not only does it deliver a lot of laughs and a good chunk of Christmas “cheese” – it has plenty of sappy moments – *The Santa Clause* provides yet another profound spiritual metaphor, just like our first three movies.

- In *National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation*, we saw a clever and satirical demonstration of how meaningless life becomes for those who do not “pay attention to the spiritual dimension” of their lives.
- In *A Christmas Carol*, we were treated to a stunning portrayal of the unimaginable grace of the shockingly kind God who longs to help the “scrooges” of this world (a.k.a. “you and me”).
- Then, last week, in *Elf*, we saw a vivid analogy of what it means that Jesus brought to earth the Kingdom of God and its unique (and better) way of perceiving the world and doing life.

And, today, through *The Santa Clause*, we’re going to see an amazing illustration of how the Holy Spirit of God works in the life of a person who says “yes” to Jesus; a person who becomes a believer in and a follower of Jesus and the Way of the Kingdom.

And I’m really excited about the opportunity to share this metaphor with you because one of the great misconceptions concerning Christ and Christianity is that, if you want to be part of the movement that Jesus started (otherwise known as “the church”) you first have to clean up your act.

Or, to put it another way, the church, Christianity, Jesus is only interested in perfect people; those who already have it all together and have it all figured out ...

A New Identity

... which certainly does *not* describe the main character of *The Santa Clause*.

As the movie begins, Scott Calvin (played by Tim Allen) is living “the good life.” He’s experiencing a great deal of success in his career as an executive at a toy-making company. He’s making a lot of money and he’s held in high regard by the people with whom he works.

But his success *there* has cost him everywhere else.

- His marriage has ended in divorce.
- His son, Charlie, is living with his ex-wife, Laura, and her new husband, Neil – a psychiatrist who Scott despises.
- And Scott constantly lies and makes excuses for his failures to be a good father and husband.

He’s a sharp guy and a funny guy but he’s really not a *good* guy ... a truth which is not lost on Charlie.

It’s Christmas Eve and Charlie is supposed to spend the night with Scott. Watch what happens when Laura drops him off.

Here we go.

Video Clip – 01 DO I HAVE TO STAY? (1.7 min)

(Begin) Laura: “Charlie came home from school ...”

(End) Charlie: “I love you too, mom.”

This is a kid who has gotten the message that his dad isn’t all that interested in being with him. And so he reciprocates the feeling: “do I have to stay?”

But things are about to change for everyone and dramatically so.

Later that night after Scott and Charlie had just settled down for “a long winter’s nap” ...

Up on the housetop
There arose such a clatter
They sprang from their beds
To see what was the matter.

Down the stairs Scott flew like a flash
Tore open the door ...

And here's what happened.

Video Clip – 02 UP ON THE ROOFTOP (1.9 min)

(Begin) Scott runs out of the house

(End) Sleigh and reindeer on the roof (fade)

And Scott *does* put on the suit. And the reindeer *do* know what to do.

They fly him – and Charlie – all over the world in one night, magically delivering toys to children everywhere – just like Santa would do.

And when that task is finished, the reindeer and the sleigh – along with Scott and Charlie – arrive back at the North Pole where Scott is informed by head elf Bernard that *he* is now the *new* Santa Claus.

Check it out.

Video Clip – 03 THE SANTA CLAUSE (1.3 min)

(Begin) Scott: “Look. I am NOT Santa Claus!”

(End) Bernard: “... now you're Santa. OK?”

Because he chose to put on the suit, all rights to any previous identity are waived. Scott Calvin now has a new one. He *is*, in every sense of the name, *Santa Claus*.

And this is where the metaphor begins because what has happened to Scott is remarkably similar to what happens to us the moment that we become a “Christian.”

And let's be real clear about that. There *is a moment* when you become a Christian. I'm not sure everyone understands that.

- You're not a Christian because you were born in a country which predominantly identifies itself as Christian and has a Christian heritage.
- You're not a Christian because your parents had you baptized or took you to Sunday School when you were a kid.

- You're not a Christian because you go to church or you read the Bible or listen to worship music.

Those are all wonderful things but none of them make you a Christian.

You become a Christian the moment you understand ...

- Who Jesus is – that He is God in the flesh, the true King of our world
- And what He has accomplished through His death on the Cross and in His resurrection – which is to provide forgiveness for *all* sin past, present and future ...

You become a Christian the moment you understand who Jesus is, what He has done ... AND – and this is a very important “and” ...

You become a Christian the moment you understand who Jesus is, what He has done AND you *personally say “yes” to Him*, meaning that you decide to put yourself under His authority as *your* King and trust in Him as *your* savior.

You say to Him something like “Jesus, I believe you died and rose again to atone for my sin and I receive you as my savior. And I believe you are the King and I want to live as a loyal subject of your Kingdom. Please help me to do that.”

When you make *that* decision and *that* kind of declaration, *that* is the moment you become a Christian.

Now, as to how people *arrive at* that moment in their lives there are many ways.

- Some people hear the truth about Jesus (like I just explained it) and they immediately believe: “ohhhhh ... I get it.” That’s what happened to me when I was 14 years old and I became a Christian.
- Some people get to the point where they become overwhelmed with the guilt of their sin and realize “I have messed up and I really do need a savior.”
- Others are finally worn out by “the way of the world” and they realize that the Way of Jesus is far better and so they want to follow Him.
- Some are more skeptical and they need time to investigate until they’re convinced that it’s philosophically sound and historically rooted. And that’s OK because Christianity isn’t a cleverly devised fairytale.

However we get there, there is a “there” there. There is a *moment* when you cross the line of faith and become a Christian.

And, at that moment, something incredible happens to you that is remarkably similar to what has happened to Scott Calvin at this point in the story.

You become Santa Claus!

Just kidding.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away – what is new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NET)

The moment you become a Christian, you are “in Christ.” And you are a new creation. You’re not the same person you used to be. You have a new identity.

In fact, the language Paul repeatedly uses in many of his letters to describe this change of identity is, again, remarkably similar to what happens in this movie.

For example, to the Colossian Christians he wrote:

*You have put off the old man with its practices and have been clothed with the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the One who created it.
Colossians 3:9 (NET)*

In other words, in becoming a Christian you’ve “put on the suit” of a new identity in Christ, which is amazing.

But something even more amazing is about to happen. This new identity, Paul says, is being “renewed according to the image of the One who created it.”

That’s pretty dense language but what it means is this: it means that our new identity of “Rick in Christ” begins to grow *so that*, eventually, we look more and more like Jesus – the One who created it in us ...

We look more and more like Him in our character – in our attitudes, in our relationships, in our finances, our priorities ... in everything we are and do.

And the movie illustrates this idea so well.

After Scott is informed that he is, in fact, the new Santa, Bernard also tells him that he has 11 months to go back home and get his affairs in order because he will need to be back at the North Pole by Thanksgiving to assume his Santa duties.

And the rest of the story is what happens during that time; specifically, how Scott's new identity grows and literally begins to take over his everyday life.

Check it out.

Video Clip – 04 A NEW MAN (2.1 min)

(Begin) Scott walking into bathroom

(End) Scott: "I'm in big trouble."

We'll come back to why he's in trouble in just a bit but one more thing I want to point out before we move on.

Scott has done nothing to obtain his new identity. He didn't arrange for Santa to be on his roof at just the right time. He didn't have to prove he was "worthy" of being Santa.

Instead, the opportunity literally dropped into his life without any effort on his part. All he did was read the card and then take the step of faith of putting on the suit.

Furthermore, and not to be morbid, for Scott to have this new life, someone had to die – in this case, the old Santa.

Same thing is true in Christianity. You and I don't do a thing to merit a new life.

Instead, Jesus died on the cross in our place so that we can have it simply by taking the step of faith of receiving Him as our Savior and our King – putting on the suit, so to speak.

This is what Paul is describing when he writes:

*You have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. It was not the result of your own efforts [trying to clean up your act], so you cannot brag about it. God has made us what we are.
Ephesians 2:8-10 (NCV)*

And the phrase translated "what we are" in the original Greek language describes an artist's masterpiece or the handiwork of a tradesman. It means that God will use every tool at His disposal to shape us and form us so that our new identity in Christ begins to displace the old.

Three Challenges

Of course, that kind of process takes time which means that even as the new identity begins to take shape, the “old identity” is still very present and active.

And this, too, is so well-illustrated in this movie.

The minute Scott Calvin puts on the suit, he *is* fully Santa – legally so and even biologically so (as we’ve seen). However, the *old* Scott is still very much in him ... which is obvious as he makes his rounds on his very first Christmas Eve.

Check it out.

Video Clip – 05 BAD SANTA (1.4 min)

(Begin) Scott: “You have GOT to be kidding.”

(End) Chimney transforms back into a wall

Talk about a snarky Santa!

Even though all the attributes and abilities of Santa are fully present in him, Scott’s old nature is clearly in control ... which is what sometimes happens in the life of a Christian. Sometimes our old self is in control and we don’t act anything like Jesus.

However – and this is critical to understand – who we are in Christ doesn’t change. Our new identity doesn’t go away just because we sin.

Martin Luther, one of the greatest theologians of all time and the founder of the Protestant Reformation, coined a phrase to describe this paradox of the Christian life.

He said that every Christian is “*simul eustis et peccator.*”

Would you repeat that with me? *Simul Eustis et peccator.*

Now you can tell people you speak Latin.

- Simul means “simultaneously”
- Eustis mean “righteous” (or justified)
- And peccator means “sinner.”

Taken together, it means that every Christian is, at the exact same time, 100% righteous in Christ (which is the new identity) and 100% sinner (which is the old).

This means that there is always a battle between our new identity and our old identity. It means it's normal for Christians to struggle at times to do the right thing and to keep from doing the wrong thing.

Paul puts it like this:

I want to do what is right, but I can't.

I want to do what is good, but I don't.

I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.

But if I do what I don't want to do, I [meaning my new identity in Jesus] am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me [my old identity] that does it. Romans 7:18-20 (NLT)

There's a battle and sometimes you win, sometimes you lose ... the point being: this is just one of the challenges of being a Christian.

So don't freak out when it happens! Just confess your failure to God and anyone you've hurt by your sin and then rejoice in the fact that you have already been forgiven of all your sin – past, present and future.

Or as Paul so wonderfully reminds us:

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 (NIV)

Now, before we move on to why Scott is in “big trouble,” I want to show you one more scene because it illustrates another challenge all Christians face in spite of our new identity.

- Scott is still at the North Pole having completed his first night of delivering toys.
- It's been made clear to him that he really *is* Santa.
- And he's ready to settle down for the night *but something else is bothering him.*

Let's watch.

Video Clip – 06 BELIEVING IS SEEING (1.0 min)

(Begin) Scott looking at Santa's Village

(End) Judy walks away

Even though Scott *sees* Santa's Village; even though Scott has actually *experienced* being Santa for a night, he still has doubts.

And that's part of being a Christian, too. Even though we remember the moment we put on the suit; even though we've experienced incredible blessings and answers to prayer, there are still times when we wonder if it's all real.

We wonder things like ...

- Did Jesus of Nazareth even exist?
- Did He really rise from the dead?
- If God is good, why do so many bad things happen in this world?

Add to that the fact that being a Christian doesn't mean your life is going to be easy and without pain. You don't get a "get out of trials and tribulations free" card just because you believe in Jesus!

- Everyone suffers in some way.
- Everyone has to walk through the valley of the shadow of death.
- Everyone's faith is challenged at some point.

And when those things happen, it's natural to doubt. It's just one of the challenges we face.

So don't freak out when it happens to you.

OK, now let's talk about Scott's "big trouble."

Scott realizes that more he *looks* like Santa, the harder it's going to be to go back to his former life. He's just too different and, quite frankly, too strange ... which is going to have an impact on his relationship with Charlie.

One day while watching Charlie's soccer game, it's obvious to everyone around him that Scott is "special." As we'll see, to some that's a very good thing. To others, not so much.

Check it out.

Video Clip – 07 DANGEROUS SANTA (2.0 min)

(Begin) Little girl walking towards Scott.

(End) Scott looks down

The kids see *Santa* in Scott. More importantly *Charlie* sees Santa in Scott.

But Laura and Neil can only see *danger* in Scott. And, eventually, they take him to court where a judge suspends Scott's visitation rights.

Scott's new identity – putting on the suit – is costing him dearly.

Jesus said the same thing would sometimes happen to those who believe in and follow Him.

Slide

*“Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’
Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you.”* John
15:20 (NLT)

The more we look like Jesus and less like ourselves and the rest of the world, the harder it will be to go back to our former life. Some of the people we've been running with are simply going to be uncomfortable with how we're changing and who we're becoming and they're going to shut us out – or worse.

But *knowing* that Jesus said that rejection and persecution might happen doesn't make it any easier when it does. But it does reassure us that it's normal and even to be expected.

More importantly, it confirms that the transformation from old to new truly is taking place in us.

Who You Are

So, at this point, Scott has had to face three challenges to his new identity as Santa.

- The battle between his old nature and his new one.
- Doubting the reality of what he has seen and experienced
- Rejection and injustice because of his new identity

... which, as we've seen, are three challenges that Christians often face ...

And why the New Testament is filled with exhortations for Christians to encourage one another not to give up; to keep believing and to remain faithful in spite of the challenges.

After all he's been through, just when Scott is about to give up, encouragement comes from an unlikely source.

Let's watch.

Video Clip – 08 REMEMBER (1.5 min)

(Begin) Scott: "Hey Neil."

(End) Charlie: "I love you Dad."

Charlie knows who his dad really is and he reminds him – *strongly*.

And, if you're a Christian, sometimes you need that same kind of reminder, too. That's why we're always encouraging people to get in one of our small groups here at NHCC.

We need to be connected with other believers who remind us who we are in Christ; who help us remember that ...

- In spite of the times we lose the battle with our old nature ...
- In spite of our doubts ...
- In spite of the fact that we don't fit in with the world ...

God has begun a work of transformation in us and that work will not be denied *but* we have to work at it, too.

Paul wrote:

Continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, for the One bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God. Philippians 2:12-13 (NET)

God's doing something – God is providing the power – but we need to act, too.

As one commentator puts it:

The Divine Artist works in the living medium of human souls, which, unlike all other artistic media, is capable of *collaborating* with the Artist or of *resisting* His efforts.ⁱ

For us to become the person God wants us to become, we need to collaborate. We need to keep saying "yes" to His work in our lives – just like we did when we crossed the line of faith.

Following Charlie's exhortation, Scott *does* remember who he is. He returns to the North Pole to

prepare for Christmas.

And when he comes back on Christmas Eve, it's apparent that he truly is a different man.

Watch what happens when Charlie wants to go with him on his worldwide journey.

Video Clip – 09 DOING THE RIGHT THING (2.3 min)

(Begin) Scott: "I think it's a much better idea ..."

(End) Scott: "And your parents thought I'd never amount to anything."

Scott *really is* Santa Claus and not just legally or biologically.

In nature and in character, he has become more Santa than Scott. He's not perfect and he will still have his struggles but his new identity is shining through for all to see.

As John Newton, the author of "Amazing Grace," once wrote:

I am not what I ought to be
I am not what I want to be
I am not what I hope to be in another world;

But *still* I am not what I once used to be.
By the grace of God I am what I am."ⁱⁱ

So What?

Of course, the question at this point is – as always – so what? What does this mean to you and me?

The most practical answer I can give to that question is this:

You were made for more ... and you can be more.

Whoever you are right now, whatever you're like ...

- You can be different.
- You can change.
- You can be better.

That's what God wants *for* you and will do *in* you if you let Him.

Specifically ...

- You can be more loving.
- You can be more joyous.
- You can be more peaceful.
- You can be more patient.
- You can be kinder and gentler.
- You can be more responsible and faithful.
- You can be more self-controlled.
- You can be more courageous.
- You can be more generous.
- You can be more gracious and forgiving.

You can become the best possible version of yourself as you become more like Jesus ... who shows us what it means to be fully human, fully awake and fully alive.

Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher and theologian once put it like this: “and now, with God’s help I will become myself.” I will become who I was meant to be.

God is the great Master Sculptor. We are his masterpiece. He is chipping away at our rough edges and making us into something beautiful, something that will both satisfy *us* and bring glory to *Him*.ⁱⁱⁱ

You were made for more and you can be more.

At the beginning of this message I said that one of the great misconceptions about Christianity is that to join up – to be part of the movement that Jesus started – you first have to clean up your act.

The truth is exactly the opposite. The truth is you just need come to Jesus just as you are; to receive Him as your King and your savior. You just need to put on the suit. Just give him what you are and he will give you a new identity in exchange. He will make you into a new creation.

And eventually, He will begin to change you as you cooperate with Him.

You were made for more and, in Christ and through Christ, you can be more.

Stand with me for closing prayer.

<prayer>

Some of us today need to make that initial decision where we say “Jesus, I believe you died and

rose again to atone for my sin and I receive you as my savior. And I believe you are the King and I want to live as a loyal subject of your Kingdom. Please help me to do that.”

Some of us are facing one of the three challenges ...

- The battle between our old nature and our new one.
- Doubts about our faith and experience
- Rejection and injustice because of our new identity

CLOSING COMMENT

1. Tomorrow – Christmas Eve services 3 & 4:30,
 - a. 45 mins, family friendly
 - b. Great music, short message, candles
 - c. Awesome time to bring fam and friends
2. Next Sunday – Pancakes & Praise
 - a. Pancakes 9:30
 - b. Praise 11

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://shaynelooper.com/2013/07/16/now-with-gods-help-i-shall-become-myself/>

ⁱⁱ https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/John_Newton

ⁱⁱⁱ Great insight from <https://bit.ly/2QI47Uy>