

## The Advertisements of Advent: Reduced Price!!

“The Wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.”

See this watch? I bought this about 2 months ago. It keeps almost as good time as the Atomic Watch I have that gets a signal several times a day from the Cesium Clock in Colorado. This watch? \$5 bucks! 75% off at Walgreen's in Chester.

The Sunday following Thanksgiving my wife, Bonnie, and our son, Seth, got on the internet and found a new Dell all-in-one computer for us at a really good price.

And, of course, Black Friday – which now actually starts Thanksgiving night, -- saw stores reduce prices to the point where you had to wonder how much profit they were making in an attempt to lure people into stores in the middle of the night.

Reduced price!! You don't have to look far in today's economy to see that sign, do you? With people being much more cautious in their spending, stores are desperate to make sales, so they are willing to cut their profit margins to the bone in the hope of ending the year in the black.

We all like to get a bargain. My wife is such an excellent shopper I honestly believe that most of what she has purchased in our life together has been below full price – usually at a very reduced price – not a bad gift for a pastor’s wife and the mother of 4. I know our children always dressed a lot better and we ate a lot better than my young pastor’s salary warranted in those years because of her skills in finding reduced prices.

Yes, we all like to get a bargain. That’s why it has always been something of a mystery to me that more people don’t flock to God’s reduced price offer. I subscribe to an internet service called Groupon which offers reduced prices on all kinds of things. We’ve enjoyed half-price meals at restaurants, there are reduced price deals for golfing, and quite a few offers for reduced price vacations at luxurious places like the Bahamas.

People, I’m sure, jump on those deals. Who would’t’ like to spend a few days in Bermuda for half price? Virgin Airlines was offering \$1 flights to the Bahamas if you purchased a hotel package. What a deal! That barely pays for the peanuts!

And yet God offers a one-way ticket to the best place you can imagine – actually, it’s so good we can’t imagine it! – and people turn up their nose at it. Imagine someone considering that Virgin Airlines offer, then rejecting it because they thought they could do better getting to the Bahamas on their own in a rowboat.

Ridiculous? Absolutely! Yet, everyday, people snub God's offer of eternal life as a free gift simply by trusting in Jesus, and say, "No thanks, I'm just going to work hard and make it on my own." Amazing!

If Tiffany's offered a 2 carat perfect diamond necklace for \$100 dollars people would line up around the block – around the world! – to buy one – or six. God offers the most priceless gift in the universe – eternity with Him – as a free gift, and people walk away.

There is no end to the perversity of the human heart.

All over the world stores are offering great deals and reduced prices on their merchandise and people are enduring traffic jams and crowds and charging money they don't have to buy just the right gifts for the people on their lists. God offers the perfect gift for everyone, the one thing everyone on earth needs, and He offers it free.

This is no mere reduced price; it is free. We couldn't purchase it if it were not. It has been purchased for us. And its cost was higher than anything else in history. The price was the life of Jesus.

Stores, internet websites, and suppliers spend billions on advertising their merchandise and their reduced prices. God has only us. If people are to know about God's reduced price sale, His gift of eternal life, it is only going to be because those who know about it tell others.

Even then, it's a tough sell. You wouldn't think so, would you? It's so incredibly ironic. I heard on the radio today that a man was just beaten up because he agreed to meet another man in an alley who had told him he would sell him a Rolex watch. This guy is ready to believe that he's going to get an incredible deal on an outlandishly expensive watch by meeting some guy he's never seen before in an alley. And people reject the promise of almighty God.

Sin is so deeply entrenched within peoples' hearts that it takes an incredible amount of time and effort for God's Holy Spirit to break through and overcome it. People don't generally come to faith and receive God's offer of life the first time they hear the Gospel message. They have to hear it over and over again, usually from more than one person before it takes hold. Honestly, our natural skepticism plays a part here. We're told from the time we're little that "you don't get something for nothing" and "there's no such thing as a free lunch." Then, too, if we accept God's offer of eternal life through faith alone, we can't take any of the credit. It requires that we humble ourselves before God,

admit our unworthiness, our sinfulness and our powerlessness, and that's not easy for people to do.

So, even though it seems patently simple and transparently obvious to us what a good deal this is, remember that most people won't see it that way at first. Don't give up on them. I know that you have people in your life who don't get the real meaning of Christmas, who don't understand what God has done for them through that manger-cradled Baby, people, maybe in your own family, as in mine, who have not received God's gift of life by faith because they won't let go of their pride, or it doesn't make sense to them.

Don't give up on them. Keep telling them the story; keep sharing what Jesus means to you. Take the opportunities that this season offers to help those you carry about understand what an unbelievable offer God is making to them, the deal of a lifetime, the reduced price, free, deal of eternity, through faith in Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem. Help them to see this Christmas story for what it means to them, the best deal, the most incredible bargain they will ever be offered.