

"Keep it simple, Stupid!"

Today, Friday 28th November, is "Black Friday"! Many shops in Britain and elsewhere are adopting the newly-established American habit of slashing their prices on the day after Thanksgiving Day. This is to "kick-start" the pre-Christmas spending frenzy on which so many retailers depend, and not surprisingly such price-slashing tends to "do the trick"! Extra police have been called in to various areas during the night to control the crowds; eye-watering sums of money are due to change hands - at the rate of £6000 per second throughout the day in Britain alone. (How anybody can calculate that figure is something of a mystery!)

So what is this all about? From His own perspective, what is Almighty God seeing? What is He thinking? And what is He saying, to anyone with the ears and the sense to listen?

Clearly, He is not seeing anything that could be called "a pretty sight". Millions of people in the so-called "developed" countries of the world, rush out to buy, buy and buy. A corporate madness takes over - and the flames of this madness are driven by powerful forces.

The cry has gone up for weeks already - "It's CHRISTMAS!". But it isn't nearly Christmas yet (and meanwhile there is the valuable season of Advent). What is more, sadly for 99% of the people, it isn't even Christmas when the time does finally arrive. For that old and outdated stuff about Jesus is too easily elbowed aside by cheery Santa Claus, the reindeer, the snow, the cosy family scenes round the twinkling tree and the glowing fire, and wide-eyed children opening their fabulous (and fabulously expensive) presents. The Lord is thoroughly used to this ostracism by now - "Away with the manger" sums it up. Whatever else He is thinking, He remains, for the time being, very, very longsuffering.

But there are other flames too in the corporate madness illustrated by Black Friday. "We all love a bargain!" - and will go to great lengths to get one, or many. "I got this first!" is the cry, as customers struggle over some fancy computer game, for the satisfaction of beating off the opposition is another powerful flame! "I'll do anything to make sure the kids have a great Christmas!" - whatever the cost, whatever the credit card blues that kick in in January for most of next year. "My kids deserve just what other kids in their class get"; "It's how I show I really love my kids". And of course this sorry list goes on.

From our Christian perspective we can see the madness, and downright wrongness, of this frenzied spending spree which people are enticed into each autumn. And by contrast, how completely refreshing is the realisation that we need not be involved. We don't have to go there. We have full permission in this matter to "walk by on the other side". The old catchphrase "Keep it simple, Stoopid!" comes straight from the Lord to His people.

Those who are seeking to be Christ's faithful sheep will mark the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ simply, warmly, gratefully, sincerely - and (there is no shame at all in adding to that list) "cheaply". Some of the money thus saved can be added to our usual Christian giving and sent to aid our fellow Christians in other parts of the world, where spending sprees and fancy presents sound like some cruel joke in the light of what their daily lives tend to be all about.

Joy at Christmas, and expressions of love, clearly have very, very little to do with how much money has been spent. A few modest treats to be shared, amidst a few family traditions to mark the occasion - these can more than suffice in a Christian home.

We finish this time with three "Keep it simple, Stoopid!"-type reminders from the Lord to His people: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.... Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content" (Matthew 5.5 / Matthew 6.19 / Philippians 4.11).

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