

InstaChristmas

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Transcripts:

Merry Christmas to everybody! How are you guys doing? Anybody here into Instagram? Anybody here, you guys do Instagram? Yeah, a lot of people do. Some are going, what? Insta-what? Instagram. It's a social network of about 100 million people. You take a picture, boom! Like an instant. Bam! You take a picture, you post it for the world to see. It's fast and that's cool, we like things fast. It's free. Free-ninety-nine. Anybody can do it, even a technoidiot like me can do it. And on top of that it's simple. It really is. A couple of taps on the screen and you've got it. I thought I'd just do a quick Instagram photo of maybe some people right here. Who would like to do a photo with me? How you doing? What's your name? (Teresa) Hi Teresa, where are you from? (Carrolton) Carrolton! I like Carrolton. And you are? (I'm her better half.) You're her better half. Tell me your name, sir. (Frank Chumley). Frank, nice to see you. OK, let me show you. I hope I can do this under pressure. This is under pressure. Now this is my Instagram account right there. OK, they call it the profile, you know? OK. Here's what we're gonna do. Wouldn't you agree with this? Everybody I know you'll say yes. We've got to be the most photographed culture in the history of mankind. The most photographed generation in history. And I would say we're also the most self-photographed generation in history. You know, we love to take selfies, pictures of yourself. We do.

OK, I'm gonna do this. All right. Sir, I'm sorry. It's the back of his head. How you doing? Whoa. Whoa! OK, now this right here, when I push this button it's cool. It turns the camera – look at this – around. Look. Isn't that cool? That's the perspective. You can see up in the balcony, the lights, whatever. So here we are. OK, now I'm gonna get really close to you guys so let's just do this. OK, get real close, real, real close. 1-2-3- yo! I like that! Kind of the beams of light coming in! Look at that! That's a pretty cool effect!

So then what you do is, OK, it crops it for you. You can have different filters. These filters you can go black and white, old school like that. You can go here, you can go boom, right there. Boom. OK. Boom. All right. I just think it's a cool look. I do. So then I put that filter on it and then I'm gonna go next. OK, let me write something. Spell your first name Frank (F-R-A-N-K) and Teresa (T-E-R-E-S-A). OK, now see this right here? Hash tag. Boom. That quick. Hash tag. All right. My InstaChristmas. Frank and Teresa at my InstaChristmas. I love to do the exclamation point. Boom-boom... two of those. And then when I push that green button automatically it goes global. You ready? I like that, you go push it! OK, boom! There we go! That quick! Look there we are! Look at that! Awesome. Look at that! Thank you guys, Merry Christmas. Instagram! I like that jacket, man. That's cool.

Anyway, it's fast, as I told you. That quick. It's free, and it's simple. Even a technoidiot can do it. Why are you guys laughing at me. Yeah, my family's on the front row. They're going ... and laughing. Yeah, the technoidiot. That's right. That's right. So that's Instagram. And I challenge you to get involved because it's pretty cool. But we like things in an instant. I think that's what's so great about it. In an instant. 1-2-3- snap your fingers, boom! In an instant we want instant 6-pack abs, in an instant. We want instant wealth, in an instant. We want instant marital bliss. We want an instant soul mate. We want instant coffee! Everything we want in an instant. We have a need for speed. Everything is fast. I believe – and this might surprise you – I believe that instant gratification, this desire we have to have this instantaneous fun in life, is given to us by God. I really do. So on one hand we have this desire for instant gratification, like that. But on the other hand we also have this fascination with forever, like that. And here's what's so interesting about the juxtaposition of the two. On one hand I want things quick. I have a need for speed. Fast computers and fast cars and everything is fast, fast, fast. But on the other hand I'm thinking about living forever. It's strange. God has given us the desire forever, just like he's given us the desire for the instant. Everything we like today is an instant.

And here's what's really stunning to think about when you think about the word instant. Every instant that melts off the clock is history. The only thing we're guaranteed is the instant in which we're living.

Every instant that melts off the clock takes you and me one step closer to the grave, one step closer to the next life. Because we're all facing a forever. Every single one of us.

What is an instant, anyway? An instant is a point of time that is now present. Have you ever paid for a cup of coffee with an app on your iPhone? Have you ever said, no, no, no. I don't want to sit down in the restaurant and eat dinner, I want to drive through. We like things quick. I would argue that one instant can change your forever. One moment can change forever and ever and ever! And I've made decisions in an instant that were poor.

Anybody made any dumb decisions? I have. In an instant it's like, what was I? That was crazy! On the other hand I've made some great decisions in an instant. In an instant a drunk driver running a stop sign can change your life. In an instant one germ can change your life. In an instant one heartbeat can change your life. In an instant your spouse comes to you and says, "Honey, we're pregnant." That instant can change your life. A lot of things can change our lives. One of the reasons we're in such massive debt in our world today is because in an instant, I want that. I don't care if I can afford that, I just want it now. In an instant. In an instant, in an instant.

I would say that Christmas is about an instant. Christmas is a lot like Instagram. Christmas is fast. First Christmas, immediate. That quick. Galatians 4:4, the Bible says, "In the fullness of time God sent (in an instant) Jesus." It was fast. It's also free. That's the thing that separates Christianity from all the other world religions. It's free. All the other world religions, I've studied them. I've gone to seminary, gone to Bible college, I've read books on them. It's all about, I've gotta do this and I can't do that and maybe – maybe- I can do good enough to make it into the next life at the next level. Well, Christianity says, you know what? It's not about doing this. It's not about working. It's been done. It's free.

So it's fast, it's free, it's also simple. Instagram. A couple of taps, it's everywhere! The gospel is simple. So what I'm saying is this. I'm saying it's free but it's not cheap. I'm saying it's fast but it's not in a hurry. I'm saying it's simple but it's not shallow. That's InstaChristmas.

If you have your Bibles turn to the book of Luke, the gospel of Luke, Luke chapter 2. Very interesting people converged during that first InstaChristmas because it happened like that. They were making decisions like that. Everything was quick. I think about Mary and Joseph. Mary and Joseph, they're engaged. Joseph's like, OK, I'm engaged to this gorgeous girl. We're gonna get married, have 2.3 kids, live the dream. All of a sudden Joseph finds out his fiancée is pregnant. With child! He's like, what? Say that with me. What??

Do you ever have situations you face? I do. I'm like, what? You know he was throwing doubts up at God. God, why? I mean, I'm Joseph. I've been sexually pure and now Mary comes up pregnant? What? God visited Joseph, delivered him a message, and even though he had doubts, even though he had questions, which we all have, he trusted God. He said yes to God in that InstaChristmas. So did Mary. You know, Mary was like, I'm pregnant? I'm a virgin! You talk about a mystery. You talk about ironic? I'm pregnant! But I've never been with a man! As God spoke to her you know she had questions and doubts. She was like... but in an instant she did what God told her to do.

And then I think about my boys the shepherds. You've got to love the shepherds. The shepherds, they were outcasts, blue-collar types. You know the shepherds could not do what a normal citizen could do. People were like, man they're shepherds! Stay away from the shepherds! Here these guys were, pulling an all-nighter, sipping strong coffee from 7-11, taking care of the sheep. And I often wonder, what sheep were they taking care of? They were taking care of the sheep used in the temple sacrifices, yet the angel is getting ready to announce to them in an instant that the Lamb of God has just been born. That's a whole 'nother thought. We'll come back later for that.

Luke 2:13, "Suddenly in an (do it again) instant (yeah, suddenly!) a great company of heavenly host appeared with the angel praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace to men on whom his favor rests.' When the angels had left them and gone into heaven the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go.' (they didn't say, 'yo!'). Let's go in an instant and see this thing that's happened which the Lord has told us about.'" So they hurried off in an instant and found Mary and Joseph, in an instant, and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him they, in an instant, spread the

word. They posted the image, right, for the world to see concerning what had been told them about this child. So we're on a roll here.

Mary, Joseph, yes, yes. God, we've got questions but we trust you. Here we've got the shepherds. Lord, we trust you. I'm gonna go. I'm gonna do the deal. Now we have the wise men. And ladies, these men were truly wise. You've got the blue collar people, barely making it, and now you've got the wise men. They're packing all of their gear in these Louis Vuitton trunks. They're putting them aboard their Bentley chariots and Lamborghinis and whooooo!! They're following the star. That's all they had, the star. Yeah they had their intellect, they were all ivy league educated. They had gone to seminary. They'd studied the stars. These guys were bright! And they were dressed and looking tight! So they followed the star. They didn't know where the star would lead them but they knew the star was pointing them somewhere. They stopped, ladies, on their way to find the Christ child. These men stopped and asked for directions. They were truly wise. Read it! I'm not making it up! Read your Bible!

They stopped at Herod's house and asked some of these people, "Hey, where's the Christ child? Where's the king of the Jews? Where's his house?"

"Down the road, man, down the road." Sure enough they got there. And when they got there the wise men, asking directions, again they were wise, they worshiped the Lord, gave him gifts. And then the Bible says – I love this text – "After worshipping they returned by another route." Any time we really worship we should return by a different route. That's my prayer in my life and that's my prayer in your life and in everybody's life. Whenever you have a corporate worship experience at Fellowship Church that you'll leave by another route. That's cool! The wise men. They had it together.

Well now we talk about Herod. Because the wise men said yes to the Lord, too. Mary said yes, Joseph said yes, shepherds said yes, wise men said yes, in an instant. Boom! They said yes. And yeah, there was a process that led up to the instant but they said yes. And once they said yes then they discovered the process after the instant. But Herod, oh Herod, man, the guy was whack! Crazy as a Betsy bug. Herod. Herod, power hungry. Herod was like, "I'm the man. I'm running the show. I've got all the horsepower. I've got everything I need." Study him. Right before Herod died he knew that no one would mourn his death so he had a bunch of religious people killed because at least he wanted some people crying when he died. I'm telling you the guys was nuts! Killed his family members because he thought, oh man, you've got your eye on my position! Killed them. Herod was crazy.

"What?" Herod said, "A king? Another king? I'm the king! I'm the man!" Now it's easy to say, oh, I'm not like Herod. I mean, I've said that before. I'm not like him. You kidding me? Comparing me to Herod. And you're saying the same thing. Oh man, that's horrendous. There's no way I'm like Herod. Hmm. Really?

I would argue that I am like Herod. I have a tendency to be like Herod. I have a hint of Herod in my heart and so do you. I want to run my life. I want to call the shots. I want to do what I want to do. I feel. I feel like I am best when I set the tone and the tenor and cast the dye for my life. I know. I know. I do, what's best for me. We're all that way. That's our nature. We're born with it. It's our nature. It's that southward, downward gravitational pull we're born with. We're born with great potential, no question. We're born with this desire for God and our life is gonna blow up. It's gonna go to a new level when we allow God to call the shots. But we have this tendency to grab the reins. Let me have the keys. You sit over there, God, and I'm gonna do life like I want to do life.

In an instant God spoke the Creation into existence. In an instant man chose to rebel against God and to do his own thing. In an instant this gap was caused by our behavior, by this I'll-take-control, it's-all-about-me mentality. But in an instant God began to prepare a plan to reconcile us back to himself. We don't deserve it! It's called grace.

Just the other day I was talking to a guy, a friend of mine. He's totally far away from God. He goes, "Ed, one word, describe Christianity. One word." I just threw up a microwave prayer – God give me the word to say! I said,

"Grace." He goes,

"What's that?" I said,

"Grace is something that we don't deserve." And you know the little acrostic – God's Riches At Christ's Expense. That's grace.

Think about it. We're made by grace, we're rescued by grace, we're sustained by grace, and we get to Heaven by grace. Again, let me go back to what I said earlier. It separates Christianity from all of the other world religions. Study them. If you're intellectually and emotionally and historically honest with yourself you'll go, whoa. This Christianity deal is totally different. It's by grace. It's by grace!

So God said to Jesus, basically, "Hey Jesus!"

And Jesus said, "Yes! I'll go!" So Jesus became one of us so we can become like him. Jesus was born. He was framed in a manger, maimed on a cross. He reclaimed us in the resurrection, and one day he said, "I'll be back and I'm gonna rule and reign." Jesus did that. So he lived perfectly.

People say, oh man, that's righteous! You heard that back in the day? Oh that's righteous, man! Well righteous is perfectly. Jesus became one of us but he lived righteously. He performed perfectly. He died sacrificially, and rose bodily. That's grace. Because on my best day, guess what? Good isn't good enough. And on your best day good isn't good enough. We all fall short. We're not perfect. I'm not perfect. But what do we do? Oh I'll take a picture – boom – a selfie! I don't like that. I'll delete it. I don't like that one, I'll delete that. I don't like that, I'll delete that. OK, that's all right. Now I'm gonna crop out the crap in my life and I'll put a filter on it and man, I'll put the filter like I did over there and I'll make myself look really good! Good isn't good enough. That picture ain't working for you. It ain't working for me. God is holy. He's perfect. He can't look at that junk!

So what happens? God said, all right. I sent Jesus. He lived righteously, died sacrificially, rose bodily. And if you receive him into your life, if you relinquish control of your life – and again it's the mystery of Christianity – let me say this over and over. When we give up control that's when we gain control. It's the upside-down kingdom. When we give up control here's what happens. We receive Christ and now – boom! The image is taken. It's fast. And when God sees me and God sees you, if you've appropriated him into your life he sees Jesus. How awesome is that!? He's cropped all the sin and the crap out of your life and mine, that is off the chain! The filter of forgiveness and grace. And now it's posted for everybody to see. That's good news, man! That's Christmas! That's InstaChristmas. So it's free, not cheap. It's fast, not hurried. It's simple, not shallow. It's grace.

Herod. I've gotta go back to Herod because Herod said no. And maybe you're here or maybe you're at one of our different locations and you're like, Ed, that's cool and all that. I didn't realize the depth of grace but it is what it is. I'm just running the show in my life. Well seriously, how is that working for you? I mean, how is that going for you? Because if you're totally honest with yourself – I mean, when I've been totally honest with myself before I became a believer it was all about darkness. I would have moments of light. I'd be all right, OK. I've made this decision myself but after a while it turned dark. And most of us are walking around, stumbling through life. We're walking in darkness. Have you ever thought about? I mean, I don't want to give you, like, a negative message or a doggie downer, but have you ever thought about the darkness in our world?

I had the opportunity over the last several years to do a lot of traveling and talk to leaders. I've been to South America. I've seen the darkness. I've been to Central America. I've seen the darkness. I've been to Australia, Asia, Europe, darkness. As we've seen recently even our kids aren't safe! Darkness right here! Why the evil? Is it a damaged chromosome? Did someone put someone else's diapers on too tight? Oh come on, you're not that shallow. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out there's a dark, sinister, evil force wreaking havoc in our world today. We live in a dark place. But also in my travels and in my interaction with people I've seen the light of Jesus. I've seen the difference that he makes. In marriages and families and in the lives of students and in the lives of children at all of these different places. I've seen it with my own eyes. I've seen it in Haiti. I've seen it in Switzerland. I've seen it in Sydney. I've seen the difference that Jesus makes.

But Herod, man, Herod, he killed. He slaughtered children. Killed children because he was trying to kill the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. So 2,000 years ago darkness just like the darkness has enveloped our land just a few days ago in Connecticut.

'Twas 11 days before Christmas around 9:38 when 20 beautiful children stormed through Heaven's gate. Their smiles were contagious, their laughter filled the air. They could hardly believe all the beauty they saw there. They were filled with such joy, they didn't know what to say. They remembered nothing of what happened earlier that day.

"Where are we?" asked a little girl, as quiet as a mouse.

"This is Heaven!" declared a small boy. "We're spending Christmas at God's house!"

When what to their wondering eyes did appear but Jesus the Savior, the children gathered near. He looked at them and smiled, and they smiled just the same. Then he opened his arms and he called them by name. And in that moment was joy that only Heaven can bring. Those children all flew into the arms of their King. And as they lingered in the warmth of his embrace one small girl turned and looked at Jesus' face. And as if he could read all the questions she had, he gently whispered,

"I'll take care of Mom and Dad." Then he looked down on Earth, the world far below. He saw all of the hurt, the sorrow and woe. Then he closed his eyes and he outstretched his hands. "Let my power and presence reenter this land. May this country be delivered from the hands of fools. I'm taking back my nation, I'm taking back my schools." Then he and all the children stood up without a word. "Come now, my children, let me show you around." Excitement filled the space. Some skipped and some ran, all displaying enthusiasm that only a small child can. And I heard him proclaim as he walked out of sight, "In the midst of this darkness I'm still the Light."

So many of us here need the Light that only Jesus can bring. That's what Jesus said. Jesus said, "I am the light." Light penetrates a darkened world. And I've got to ask you, do you have the light?

"Well, Ed, I've got questions, man. I've got doubts!" How about our boy, Joseph? How about Mary? You know the wise men, you know the shepherds did. You know Herod did and those doubts dominated his life and caused his destruction.

I read about a plane, an experimental aircraft that was at an FBO. A couple of pilots who were qualified to fly this experimental aircraft walked up to it and they were like, whoa! They were looking at it. It looked cool. One pilot was like, "I've got some doubts about it but I'm gonna go for it." So this pilot jumped aboard this experimental aircraft with doubts and all, questions and all. Flew this thing. Man he was doing all this cool stuff. Then he landed the plane safely, jumped out of the plane. He was like, "Wow! Unbelievable! I'm so glad I flew that plane!"

The other pilot was qualified, had his arms crossed. He was like, "I'm not doing that. I've got too many questions, too many doubts. I'm not gonna do that." Jesus says,

"I am the Light. I've given you free will. I am the Light. Doubts and all, questions and all, receive it!" Receive it, and Jesus is gonna take you and he will take me places we never thought possible. And when we clock out of here our hash tag will be #Heaven, not #Hell. And Heaven begins when we make this choice.

So are you gonna board the plane with doubts and all? With questions and all? Are you gonna trust it? Or are you gonna let your doubts and questions dog you and dominate you and miss this instant, this immediacy, this opportunity to seal your forever? Again, that's your call. God's not gonna override your free will like he doesn't override mine. It's our choice. But I pray that you receive the Light of this InstaChristmas.

Now, for 22 years at Fellowship we've been having a candle-lighting time. And when you walked in every single person received a candle. I'm gonna ask you to do one thing. Do not, I beg you please, do not light the candle yet! Do not light the candle yet. Because we're gonna have two candle-lighters at all of our different campuses. Two here and two at all of our other locations.

I want you to look at this light. This light penetrates the darkness. I received this Light years ago when I made a decision, by my own choice, my own free will, to receive the Light. I was in darkness and I moved from darkness to Light, because Jesus is the Light. I believe many of you are here and you've never received the Light. You never have. The good news of Christmas is that in an instant you can receive it. In an instant you can make a decision that will change your forever. In an instant the Light will come on in your life as you receive Christ. The work has been done. Christ has already paid the price. He's lived righteously, performed perfectly. He died sacrificially and rose bodily, and now he offers us, by his grace,

life. God is bigger than your doubt. He's bigger than your question. He wants you to say yes to him, like Joseph, like Mary, like the shepherds, like the wise men. Yes, yes, yes.

So right now I want to lead everybody in a prayer. And I want you to pray this prayer out loud even if you've prayed this prayer before. I want you to pray it out loud because you're giving people leadership, you're showing them how to pray the prayer, the prayer of the Light that they've never prayed before. So at all of our campuses here, I want you to pray this prayer with me. I want to lead you in it. Everybody pray this prayer. But if you don't want to pray it, hey, that's between you and God. But let's pray.

[Ed leads in closing prayer.]