



Statement: Department Store Jesus Matt Litton

I can't help to think that we've got it backwards at Christmas.

I hit the store parking lot the other day in a mad rush to get in and find a last minute present for my wife. It was a mess; I drove around for 10 minutes and finally parked a country mile from the doors. Upon entering the store I was horrified to notice the check out line stretched all the way to the far recesses of the building. It was evening; the shelves of the store had been ravaged as far as the eye could see.

Not a sweater sat unruffled, nary a rack of pants lined up evenly, clothes were hung out of place everywhere, shoppers maneuvered uncomfortably between narrow aisles, and an impatient tension ornamented the faces of the people in that long procession. I stood for a moment taking in the scene, working out the best way to navigate toward my destination to avoid the mass of irritable humanity that stretched out before me like a gauntlet. I realized there was no way to circumvent it; I would have to get down and dirty, and so I excused myself through the first several people on my way to the jewelry department.

It was there, at the jewelry counter, experiencing the heights of irony, where God spoke to me. A petite, older woman, decked out in red and green, armed with a coupon, was berating the jewelry clerk. The louder and more angry the little customer became the more the clerk seemed to dig into her foxhole—this embattled employee had clearly had enough! Taking a verbal beating, like any good soldier, the clerk was not about to surrender her position to the enemy on the other side of the counter. It was then that I noticed the object lying on the counter, the metaphorical flag to capture in this intense skirmish. In the very middle of the exchange, glistening under the fluorescent lights was the symbol of something very absent from this scene. It was the cross, at least a silver necklace version of the cross with diamonds embedded on each point. For me, it was one of those moments where God used His word and all of creation to teach me something important.

"Joy to the World" floated softly down from the department store speakers, a baby cried not far away in the long checkout line, and I realized in that moment how much we needed that little baby to be born into our world, into scenes like this one. How much we needed that Jesus to grow up and say, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." Those words that I had read in my morning devotional swirled around my head, through the entire scene that night people seemed so obsessed with their rights as consumers and so focused on the righteousness of their buying power that they had lost sight of the reason for the whole Christmas celebration. It made me realize I wasn't just there to shop; I was there to spread peace, to share the Gospel.

This little moment has impacted the way I deal with people this Christmas season, and I hope it will affect you too. A big part of the good news that comes to us through Christmas is that Jesus brought an *eternal* reality, a *different* power structure to the world—one that says we don't have to finish first, that the person with the most toys doesn't win the prize, that we are not the clothes we wear, the car we drive, the service we get or the parking spot we don't. It is a message of peace for myself—one to be shared with other people. I realized that sharing the Gospel means to put aside my sense of personal entitlement—no matter how uncomfortable it may be—and put others first.

So this Christmas season I want to ask you to join me in sharing the grace of the gospel: tip someone well even when you don't get great service, let someone go ahead of you in line, let another shopper have that parking spot, smile and have kind word for the checkout lady (even if she won't take your coupon). In the words of Brennan Manning and many that have come before him "live the Gospel" with everything that you do.

