

The Greatest Gift

2 Corinthians 9:15, 2 Chronicles 1:9, 2 Chronicles 1:9-9:9

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Christmas is a time of giving. Which means Christmas is a time of shopping.

Ever since the wise men from the east showed up at the stable carrying gold, frankincense, and myrrh, people have been exchanging gifts at Christmas.

Of course, it's more complicated today than it was for the wise men. For one thing, they didn't have to contend with shopping malls, or in today's environment, online stores with product descriptions followed by the words, "Sold Out" or "Out of Stock."

The magi didn't have to worry about sizes, colors, or return policies. Just plain old gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Well, this year, just like every year, millions of people, both children and adults, will open millions of gifts. Some won't fit. Some will be the wrong color. Many will be returned or exchanged.

But there's one gift that meets everyone's need, one gift that'll never wear out, never break or need repairing. A gift that's appropriate for a small child, a teenager, an adult or a senior adult.

Boy or girl, man or woman, it makes no difference. The gift we all need, the most valuable gift of all, is that baby in the manger.

On Christmas, we celebrate the fact that God gave us the gift of His own Son, Jesus Christ, so that through faith in Him we could be forgiven of our sins and have eternal life.

So, this morning I'd like to make three points about this gift, this incredible, priceless gift.

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First, the gift is Jesus Christ Himself. The gift God offers us is to know Christ.

To know Him as a friend, to have fellowship with Him, to have a relationship with Him. The gift God offers us is to be known and loved by Christ.

John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

Have you received this gift? Do you have this kind of relationship with Jesus Christ? Do you know Him as a friend? Is He someone you can talk with, confide in, seek counsel from?

Do you feel at ease in His presence, like you would with a close friend, or do you feel like you have to rush around cleaning up your spiritual "house" before you can welcome Him?

If the answer is "no," if you don't have this kind of relationship with Christ, the good news is that you can. All you have to do is ask.

Come to Him in prayer; confess your sins, ask His forgiveness, ask Him into your heart. That's all you have to do. Maybe you've never heard the Christian life described this way before.

Perhaps it sounds a little strange to talk about spending time with Jesus as if He were a flesh and blood person, someone you can see and hear and touch.

Well, no it isn't like that. We don't claim to see visions or hear voices. But that doesn't make our fellowship with Him any less real.

Christ is present with us. His Spirit lives in us. He speaks to us through the Bible, and we speak with Him through prayer.

1 John 1:3, *“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”*

People sometimes think of Christianity as nothing but a set of burdensome responsibilities; a lot of rules, some “do’s” and more “don’ts.”

Or, if they view Christianity more positively, they see it in terms of the benefits it can bring – improved relationships; stronger marriages; guidance in raising children; emotional strength to deal with difficult circumstances.

That’s true, but even this misses the mark. The essence of Christianity isn’t rules, or “do’s and don’ts,” or even blessings.

The essence of Christianity is a relationship with Jesus. The Christian life brings many benefits – joy, peace, hope and they all come through Christ. They all flow from our relationship with Him.

Your greatest gift to your children isn’t a few boxes wrapped in colored paper, on Christmas or their birthday.

The most valuable thing you can offer them is a relationship; your love and care, your time and attention, your commitment to always be there when they need you.

Everything else flows from that. In the same way, God’s greatest gift to us is a relationship with Jesus and a relationship with Him through Jesus.

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The second point I want to make is that this gift has great value. Although there's truly nothing more desirable than knowing Christ, many people just can't see it.

Their eyes haven't been opened. They look into the manger, and they don't see a king.

They don't see the Savior of the World. They don't see "the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace," as Isaiah puts it.

They don't see anything special because they don't have eyes of faith. All they see is an ordinary human being.

And so, they pass by the child in the manger and seek after the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh sitting at the side.

They don't want the baby; they want the presents. Which do you value more, the toys and trinkets of this life that will eventually crumble into dust, or a relationship with Jesus Christ that'll last forever?

Matthew 13:44-46, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

Knowing Christ is worth more than anything else in this world; in fact, knowing Christ is worth more than everything else in this world.

We'll never be disappointed by Him. He's that treasure; He's that pearl of great value. He's God's gift to us. This child in the manger is worth more than anything else we could ever possess.

Does your life reflect that truth? Do you know Him? Are you seeking Him? 2 Corinthians 9:15, *“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”*

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Finally, the gift must be received. It's available to everyone, but God doesn't force it on anyone. We have to receive it.

We have to take the package, open the box, and accept it as our own. We each have to make the decision to receive Jesus Christ into our lives.

John 1:12, *“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”*

Not all who hear about Him. Not all who agree with his teachings. Not all who attend church. Not all who try to follow the golden rule. But all who received Him.

Some people imagine that God's love has to be earned; that we have to do something to deserve His forgiveness; that we have to somehow be good enough to merit His acceptance. But a gift you have to pay for is no gift at all.

Now, maybe you opened that gift years ago, but lately it's been sitting on the shelf. You've been too busy, too distracted, or too hurting to give Christ the time and attention you know He deserves.

Or maybe that gift is still under the tree, wrapped and ready to be opened. My appeal to you this morning is this: Don't leave Christ on the shelf; don't leave Him under the tree.

Take Him into your heart and into your life. That gift from God has a tag with your name on it. What better day than Christmas to renew your commitment to Jesus.

What better day than Christmas to begin a new life of fellowship with Jesus; a new life of joy and peace and love.

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Conclusion

Yes, the greatest gift came in Jesus's purpose to bring salvation and redemption of sin to us. This was always the plan.

Going all the way back to Eden, the plan was for God to come down so He could stomp on the serpent and undo the damage done that day.

We see this through the name given to the Son of God in Matthew 1:21 and Luke 1:31-33 when Mary and Joseph received the divine call to name this promised child Jesus.

Now, Jesus is the English form of the name. The angels spoke a different one.

Luke records the name given being the Greek name Iesous.

Luke 1:31-33, "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus (Iesous). He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

While Matthew records Joseph receiving the name Yeshua.

Matthew 1:21, *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus (Yeshua), because he will save his people from their sins.”*

The name given to Jesus literally means “savior,” or the LORD delivers/is salvation/is my savior.

A name to ancient Jews was seen as a window into a person’s life, and especially when God or an angel provided the name.

From the beginning we see that the name we know as Jesus isn’t just a title, but a name with a deep and glorious meaning.

When we say Jesus is coming, in our minds we think *“a man named Jesus is coming this way.”*

While to those in the first century it wasn’t “Jesus is coming” but YHWH our savior and deliverer is coming.” We associate names with letters, but those ancient Hebrews associated names with meanings.

From the beginning we see that Jesus’s purpose was set, He was Immanuel, *“God among us,”* and He was Yeshua, *“YHWH is salvation.”* God’s presence and God’s salvation are fully seen through Jesus.

On what we know today as Christmas, that salvation and presence came into our world. That revelation alone justifies all the celebrations we can come up with for this time of year.

The purpose of Christmas is to remind us of the day that everything changed.

The day which marked God coming down, not to judge us, but to give us an opportunity to repent, receive forgiveness and become part of His family.

Therefore, when you turn on a light, remember the one who is the light of the world. When you open a gift, remember the one who gave you the greatest gift.

When you meet with family this Christmas, remember the family you've been adopted into and when you burst a button gorging on food remember the one who broke His body like bread to bring you salvation, redemption, and eternal life.

Luke 2:10-11, *“Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*