

“God’s Gift”
John 3:16
(Preached at Trinity, Christmas, December 20, 2020)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. This Friday is December 25, Christmas Day. We’ve been in the Christmas season for several weeks, or for some, months. It means different things to different people. In our secular culture Christmas is our greatest holiday. It is a season for returning to family traditions and storing up new memories. It is full of images of garland and bows, of twinkling lights and Christmas desserts; of family gatherings to exchange gifts.
2. We place great significance on the tradition of gift-giving. We’ve spent weeks shopping and selecting the perfect gifts. We wrap them in festive paper and bows and look forward to watching those we love unwrap them.
3. The retail world puts its own significance upon the Christmas season. They begin decorating and planning for the holiday months in advance. Most retailers are dependent upon the Christmas season to end the year in the black. In fact, the first Friday after Thanksgiving is called Black Friday, the day that carries the retailer into profitability. Obviously, our tradition of gift-giving is of great importance to the retail world.
4. But why do we give gifts at Christmas? There are many suggestions.
 - A. Some think it finds its origin in antiquity as a pagan ritual. Gifts were exchanged during the winter solstice holiday of Saturnalia. As Christianity became widespread throughout the Roman Empire the practice was incorporated into the celebration of Christmas and gift-giving was tied to the wisemen bringing gifts to the baby Jesus.
 - There is the story of Saint Nicolas, the fourth century bishop who became known for his gift-giving. It was also around the fourth century that December 25 was established as the day of Jesus’ birth.
 - Sometime in the 16th century the custom of giving gifts to children became widespread in Europe. The holiday became increasingly a child-centered holiday.
 - B. The Christmas holiday as we know it in America largely began in the late 1800’s as the result of the recognition of its value to the economy. In 1867 Macy’s department store remained open until midnight on Christmas Eve. The first window displays began in 1874. In 1880 Woolworths sold the first manufactured tree ornaments. Gift giving as we know it became thoroughly entrenched by the late 1800’s. Since then, for many, Santa Claus has become the true symbol of Christmas – a symbol of greed and materialism.
 - C. Shopping and gift giving at Christmas has become a part of our culture.
5. This morning I want us to set our minds upon this topic of gift-giving.
 - A. Gifts are significant. A gift is often an expression of honor or respect. This characterizes the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh given by the wisemen. They were expressions of honor and praise to the Christ child. They are also expressions of celebration. We give them at birthdays and anniversaries.

- B. Gifts are most often unmerited and undeserved. This is true of the greatest of all gifts. This is the gift that should occupy our thoughts during the Christmas season. I'm talking about God's gift of His Son.
John 3:16 KJV - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."
6. There has never been a greater gift. There has never been a greater manifestation of love. I want to set it before you under two heads:
- I. It was Personal II. It was Particular
- I. It was a Personal gift
- A. There are elements of God's gift that are universal. The phrase "God so loved" has both general and particular application.
1. God is a good God who gives good gifts to men. The Garden of Eden was a display of God's goodness. It was a place of abundance. God looked upon all that He had created and declared it "very good."
 2. Every blessing enjoyed by fallen man is by God's grace and made possible through God's gift of love in the sending forth of Christ.
 3. God's redeeming grace has a benefit upon all mankind
 4. In addition, this gift is freely offered unto all – "Whosoever believes"
- B. But it is also a very personal gift
1. In eternity before the world was created God looked upon humanity and witnessed universal corruption.
Psalms 14:2-3 NAU - "The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. ³ They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one."
 2. It would have been consistent with God's perfect justice to consign all of mankind to the eternal punishment of hell. We would have been born, lived our life, and then we would have been cast forever into hell.
 3. This is what we have earned. It is what we deserve—justice served.
 4. God determined to show mercy upon a multitude of God despising sinners. The Father entered into an eternal covenant with His Son which we have labeled the Covenant of Redemption.
 - a. In this covenant God chose from among the fallen race of humanity a remnant of those He would adopt as His own children.
 - b. The Father pledged to give these elect people to His Son as His inheritance, and He determined to give His son to His elect people as their Redeemer.
- C. Instead of our just condemnation God chose to give the gift of eternal life through the gift of His Son.
Romans 6:23 NAU - "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
1. Eternal life is an act of grace
 We deserve death – that is what we have earned and justice demands that we receive our wage—our just due

2. God has provided a gift – **John 3:16**
Romans 5:15 NAU - "But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many."
 3. This was the free choice of God to put His love and mercy on display. It was unconditional—in other words, we did nothing to earn it. The nature of a gift is there is no merit in it
 - a. If you tried to purchase a gift it would no longer be a gift but a purchase or a transaction.
 - b. If you tried to earn a gift it would no longer be a gift but a wage
 - c. A gift is something that is voluntarily given without any expectation of payment in return
- D. And who are the objects of this gift? **John 3:16** tells us it is reserved for those who believe
1. But who are they who believe? This is an important element of this gift. Fallen man has no interest in it.
 - a. The nature of a gift implies that it is something of value, something that one would be willing to receive.
 - b. The problem with fallen humanity is they see no value in the gift. In fact, they are offended at the very thought of it. They despise the gift.
 - c. God has to enable us to receive it.
 2. This makes it very personal.
John 6:44 NAU - "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."
John 6:65 NAU - "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."
 δίδωμι- "to give"
KJV - "no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father."
 3. God has granted this grace to His elect people
Ephesians 2:8 NAU - "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;"
 4. What comfort! God has chosen me unto salvation.
- II. It was Particular Gift, of a particular sort – there is only one way of salvation.
- A. God has given His people eternal life but only through the gift of His Son
John 3:16 NAU - "He gave His only begotten Son"
1 John 5:11 NAU - "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."
Acts 4:12 NAU - "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."
1. As an infinite display of His love God chose to send forth His Son. You can't appreciate the love of God in **John 3:16** without comprehending the love between the Father and the Son in eternity. It is truly beyond comprehension. The love God has for us is a reflection of the love He has for His Son and His love for us through His Son.

2. The Father and Son shared in perfect, infinite, eternal love
 - a. On one hand God is immutable—He is unchanging. He remains unchanged by anything outside Himself. God’s love is not affected by anything outside Himself. It is hard for us to understand this. Our love is largely reactionary. God’s love is a sovereign determination. In other words, God’s love is not an involuntary expression of emotion but a voluntary sovereign display of Himself upon a particular people He has chosen to love.
 - b. We must understand that God’s gift of His Son was voluntary. His love is voluntary. It is a sovereign act of the divine will.
 - c. God is not reactive. There is nothing that happens that He has not ordained. Nothing takes Him by surprise. His wrath is simply an expression of God’s holiness, His Divine justice, and His righteous judgment. It is not an uncontrolled outburst. Likewise, His love is an expression of His divine attribute of love. He sovereignly chooses to love whom He wills.
 - d. When we say God’s love is not an emotion we are not diminishing the extent of His love. It is infinite. You might say it is of infinite passion, but it is a sovereign passion. The Love between the Father and the Son was infinite. God’s love for us is a reflection of His love for His Son.
John 17:22-23 NAU - "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."
3. The love between the Father and the Son was in harmony with their perfect union and harmony with each other. There was perfect fellowship. There was a perfect filial relationship between the Father and Son.
 - a. It was a transaction that involved the Father looking upon His beloved Son, the Son of His infinite love and declaring to Him, “You must lay down your life for the people I have chosen to love.”
 - b. God the Father gave what was most precious to Him in order to save His people from their sin.
Leon Morris – “His love is not a vague, sentimental feeling, but a love that costs. God gave what was most dear to him.”¹
 - c. The Father declares of His Son—this is the One in whom I take delight. This is my beloved Son.
Matthew 3:17 NAU - "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."
 - d. If you fail to understand the eternal love of the Father and the Son you won’t fully understand or appreciate the richness of the Covenant of Redemption. And you won’t understand the cross.

¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 203–204.

e The fullest measure of God's wrath at the cross was the breach of the eternal fellowship of love between the Father and the Son. The Cross was an infinite curse upon sin as the Father turned away from the Son. Only when you understand this can you comprehend the words of our Savior.

Matthew 27:46 NAU - "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

f It was a cry of eternal love and union being breached.

B. This is God's ultimate purpose in history

1. He has sent forth His beloved Son – the Son of His infinite love, to redeem His elect people from their sin.

2. The prophets saw His day and foretold it

Isaiah 9:6 – “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 7:14 NAU - "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."

Conclusion:

1. So how can a person obtain this gift of eternal life? What must I do? On one hand, you can do nothing. A gift cannot be earned. It can only be received.

John 1:12 NAU - "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right (the legal authority) to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,"

2. We must receive Him by faith, but even our faith is a gift. The entirety of our redemption is a gift from God.

Ephesians 2:8 NAU - "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;"

3. The question before you this morning is do you see this as the greatest of all gifts, the greatest of all treasures? You can't earn it, but you have to desire it.

The bottom line is this. If you have the least desire for forgiveness of sin; if you have the least desire to abandon your life of sin and desire to follow Christ, then look to Him.

God says, come, receive this gift.

Isaiah 45:22 KJV – “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else.”

4. God offers this gift of grace to sinners today.

John 3:16 NAU - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Revelation 22:17 NAU - "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

5. Jesus was sent forth as God's love gift to accomplish all that the Father sent Him to accomplish—to save His people from their sin. This is the Christmas story.

Matthew 1:21 NAU - "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

6. He came and accomplished redemption for all who will trust Him. He went to the cross as our perfect substitute. Have you trusted Him? Do you see Him as the greatest of all gifts?