

## Sermon for Christmas Eve – December 24, 2015

John 3:16 (NIV84)

Theme: **Celebrate a better Christmas. . .**

With a Better Christmas Gift: Jesus the Christ

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

What makes a Christmas gift great? Is it its usefulness? Is it the forethought that went into the gift? How about the cost?

Could you imagine receiving a present that combines all three of those attributes? What kind of gift would it be? An Xbox? A Car? A vacation? A new dress?

Who would you expect to give you such a present? Your parents? Your children? Your spouse?

This evening we are going to talk about a far greater gift than anything we can imagine: one that truly says, "I know and love you with my whole heart. I want to spend eternity with you." No, this is not the gift of an engagement ring given by a fiancé. It is the gift of a Savior, given by our loving God.

Let us learn to **celebrate a Better Christmas with a Better Christmas gift: the gift of Jesus Christ**. He is: *1) A gift we need 2) A gift given with greatest forethought. 3) An unimaginably costly gift*

Part One: A gift we need.

The best gifts are often practical – things we really need. Not only are they great to have, but they reveal that the giver knows us well and cares about us.

Jesus is the most useful and needful gift imaginable.

You might be thinking, "How can a baby born over 2000 years ago be something I need today?" To explain that, let me introduce you to the word "sin".

God created Adam and Eve perfect and holy. Sadly, all that changed one day when they disobeyed Him by doing the very thing He commanded them not to do. Ever since that day "sin" infected man's heart. What is sin? It is man's desire and will to do the opposite of what the LORD commands. It is breaking God's holy law which can be summarized by the word "love."

"Sin" is the reason there is so much crime, terror and evil on this earth. Because of sin there is death. Because of sin we deserve hell.

God is completely sinless. His holy nature cannot tolerate even the slightest speck of sin in his presence. Since we are anything but sinless, the question becomes: how do we get rid of our sin so we can be united with God? The answer is: we can't. And why not? Because, ever since sin entered the world, we can never be perfect.

But God could do something about our situation! This is why He sent His Son to be born into this world so that He could live, die and rise again in order to pay for our sins in full.

The whole point of Christmas can be summarized in this verse: *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

What practical value does God's gift of Jesus have for my day-to-day life? Much! If Jesus, the very Son of God, suffered and died in order to pay for my sins, then they are most certainly gone: paid for in full. Through faith in Jesus, I can live at peace with God – unafraid of Him and rejoicing in His great love for me.

Because God gave me Jesus, I know that, when I die, my soul will live on with the LORD in heaven. Not only is this true, but the Bible also promises that God will raise the dead on the last day, so that every believer can live with him in the eternal paradise he will create for us when He comes again in glory.

All these truths have a real practical application for my life. They fill me with such hope that they change the way I live: I no longer focus on myself; rather I focus on serving my God and helping my neighbor in love. The Gospel of Jesus gives me courage and power to say no to sin. And if I do fall into sin, then the gift of Jesus gives me the forgiveness I need to remain at peace with God and under his loving care.

Yes, the gift of Jesus is a great gift, a Gift we certainly need every day of our lives.

#### Part Two: A gift given with greatest forethought

Another mark of a great gift is that it is given out of love with great forethought and planning. I think of the sweaters my mom used to knit for me, which often took months to get ready.

Consider the forethought God gave your salvation. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin God repeated the promise that His Savior was coming. The Old Testament Scriptures are filled with such promises – some of which you will hear (or have heard) during the service this evening.

But do you know that these prophecies don't even scratch the surface of the loving preparations God made?

The LORD is not stupid: even before creation he knew that we would sin and that he would have to give up His Son in order to save us. And yet, in spite of knowing all the trouble we would cause him, he still planned out how he would save us.

And, don't imagine God's eternal planning merely as "global" in scale – thinking about how he would save the "mass" of humanity. His planning was also very personal. The Bible says that the LORD thought about each and every one of us individually as he prepared our salvation. Think about what this means: before the beginning of the world, you were personally on the mind of God. He loved you so much that, then and there, He decided to take on human flesh and blood in order to save you.

### Part Three: An unimaginably costly gift

And this leads us to my next point: the best Christmas gifts are costly. Now, before anyone gets mad at me for making such a statement, let me explain that I don't equate "cost" with "expense" - in the sense that \$1000 gifts are intrinsically better than \$10 ones. When I use the word "cost," I use it in the sense of the sacrifice a person has to make in order to procure the gift he wants to give.

Let me use an example: Compare a billionaire's gift of \$10,000 to charity to an impoverished person giving \$70 (all the money he earned in one day) to another person in need. When you think about it, the poor person's gift cost far more than the billionaire's because of the sacrifice he made.

But neither of these gifts even remotely compare to the sacrifice God made for us: He gave up His one and only Son! Let that statement sink in, for a moment. There is nothing that God loves more than his Son and yet, in love for us, God was willing to sacrifice Him so we could be saved.

Parents, could you ever imagine sending your children to be mocked, hurt and killed in order to save a person like me? Only if you were convinced that I was a person worth saving! But listen to what the Bible says about God: *Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:7-8, NIV84)*

Even if someone were able to give the whole universe as a gift, it still would not compare to the costliness of what God the Father did in giving us His Son. And because God has given us His Son, we can be sure that he will also provide everything we need for our body and life – graciously watching over us until He comes to take us home to himself in heaven.

And so, dear friends, I urge you all to celebrate a better Christmas this year by rejoicing in the great gift God has given you: the gift of his Son. Let the need, forethought and cost of this gift lead you to ever cling to Jesus in faith. Why? Because God does not want you to live apart from him and end up in hell. The LORD truly loves you. He wants you to spend eternity with Him in heaven. The birth of Jesus proves this fact beyond any shadow of a doubt.

Turn to Christ, then, in repentance and faith in order to receive this great gift of God's Son. Treasure Him your whole life and then, at its end, you will experience the full glory of God's love for you in Christ. Amen