

Receiving the Greatest Gift

We are at that time of year where many of us have bought many gifts. For our family I have given that task to my wife Kari. Almost every year her sisters will open a gift and say, "Isaiah, thank you for this wonderful item and I'll say your welcome", but I have know I idea as to what they just opened.

Paul Yoder told me about 80 percent of married men have no idea about the gifts their wives have purchased and I believe that's true.

When we think about gifts in the Bible, our minds usually go back to the wise men who went to see the baby Jesus. According to the gospel of Matthew, they presented to him three gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. One of the facts that I noticed about chapter 2 is that there is nothing mentioned about wrapping paper.

There are many things that you can say I'm not good at and wrapping presents is one of them. There was one year when I tried and no one had to ask which gift did Isaiah wrap? Because parts were sticking out.

You don't have to guess what the present is, just read the corner of the box coming out of the wrapping paper. I don't know much about wrapping gifts, but what I do know is that God is in the gift giving business.

In the early chapters of Genesis, God said, It is not good for man to be alone and gave Adam a great gift. From Adam's side God created a beautiful, wonderful companion to be his wife.

When we get to the story of Noah, mankind was so evil that only one man who was faithful. So what did God do? He gave Noah a plan on how to build an ark to save his family from the destruction to come. That was a gift.

After the flood, many years had passed and once again mankind became evil, until God found a loving couple named Abraham and Sara. She desperately wanted a child and God gave her a precious miracle named Isaac.

Then in the book Joshua God gave the Israelites possession of the land flowing with milk and honey. He even gave them prophets to plead with His people to follow the commandments given by Moses. Through those prophets God gave them the Scriptures that foretold the coming of a Savior who would deliver the world from sin. After the last O.T. book was written, 400 years later God would give to us the greatest gift in human history. I want to spend some time to speak about this great gift.

I. God gave a Universal gift:

Some of the things we buy won't fit. Last year I bought Kari a shirt then I had to take it back 3 times. Sometimes we get the wrong color.

Many of the things we buy will be returned or exchanged. But there's one gift that

meets everyone's needs. It's a gift that will never need to be returned. It's a gift that will never wear out, break or ever to be repaired. It's a gift that is suitable for every child, teenager, adult and senior citizens. Boy or girl, man or woman, it makes no difference. The gift we all need was announced by the angles to the Shepherds. Luke 2:11 says,

"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."

I believe it was Paul who said it best. "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift (2 Cor 9:15). God gave us the gift of His own Son, Son, Jesus Christ, so that through faith in Him we could be forgiven of our sins and have eternal life. God's gift is universal.

II. God gave us an unwrapped gift:

Aren't you glad that the gift of Christianity does not come in wrapping paper? God does not give us a gift that is hidden from view and labeled only for a select few? The gift of Christianity was ushered in by a loving God in plain view for everyone to enjoy.

Rom 5:15 says, "This gift is not like the offence. By one sin many died, but the gift of God is grace. By the death of one man, Jesus, we can be justified, righteous and have life."

When we read this verse someone might say, "That sounds too good to be true." Sometimes we buy things we quickly find out "This is not what I thought it was." The advertising was false. In Romans 5:5, Paul says, "You see, at the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Hardly ever will anyone die for a righteous man, maybe they might, but God demonstrates his love for us by this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us."

Grace might seem too good to be true, but it's true. We didn't deserve it and we cannot earn it, yet God gave it to us anyway. Sometimes we hear about last minute gift ideas. We have so many people to buy for and get in a hurry. When God decided to make it possible for us to have eternal life, it wasn't something He took lightly. This was not a last minute gift idea. This was something God had planned for a long time. Long before God created the earth, long before he made Adam and Eve, long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Even before the world rejected him as the Messiah, God decided to give this great and glorious gift.

John wrote that Jesus is "The lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (Rev 13:8) Peter calls it "God's set purpose and foreknowledge (Acts 2:23). I like to call it the gift of Christianity and no wrapping paper was required. Like Jason said wed night, this was plan A.

III. God gave us a personal Gift:

When I shop one of the greatest challenges is finding gifts that are personal. That's why my wife does most of the shopping. Now if you were to ask her why she does all the

shopping Kari would say “Shopping with me is like hunting with the game warden” I don’t like buy stuff unless I need it, but another reason is because she is really good at finding gifts that will fit the person we’re shopping for.

By sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins, God gave us a personal gift. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave.” This was a personal gift. Jesus didn’t come just for the rich or the poor. He didn’t come just for the people who live in the United States. Jesus came for every single person and died for you personally. Through that sacrifice our relationship with God was immediately changed.

In John 15 Jesus said to his disciples, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

Before we were enemies, but now we are a friend of God, we have fellowship with God and are reconciled to God. In John 17 Jesus prayed, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

The Apostle John in his letter said, “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.” – 1 John 1:3 People sometimes think of Christianity as nothing but a set of burdens. I can’t this and I can’t do that. Instead of saying home and relaxing I have to go to church, read my Bible and pray.

Some people see the Christian life for the benefits it brings. Improved relationships, stronger marriages, guidance for raising children; emotional strength to deal with difficulties. All of those things are true, but even this misses the mark. The essence of Christianity isn’t rules, or even blessings. The essence of Christianity is that through Jesus we now have a personal relationship with God.

Think about what Jesus did. When living on this earth He was completely human as well as Divine. He felt heartache, He knew loneliness, He faced temptation, He felt hunger and thirst. The nails that pierced His hands would hurt like it would ours. Why did He do it? Jesus left the throne of heaven because he looked across time and saw that we needed a Savior. So he gave the gift of himself. You can’t get a gift that’s more personal than that.

4. God gave us a Practical Gift.

One thing you’ll learn about me is that I am not what you call a handyman. If one of you bought me a power tool I would say “Thank you for the gift, it looks real nice, I can see something spins on it”, but I do not how to use tools. Once in a while I might use a screwdriver to put a battery in a tool, but that’s about it. For me, getting a set of tools is not a practical gift unless you teach me how to use it.

One story is told about two young boys were discussing what they might receive during the holiday season. One kid explained to the other, “Money can’t buy happiness, you know. To be happy, you have to convert the money into toys.” I’m sure you know what

it's like to get a gift that you really don't want or can't use. Stores are full of junk gifts.

God has given us the most practical gift in the history of the world, eternal life for those who obey Him. It is something all of us need and it's something all of us must have. Without eternal life, we die and live in eternal darkness. But with it, we live eternally with God forever and ever. How much more practical could you get?

5. God gave us a purchased gift:

It's always a good idea to purchase the gift your going to buy isn't it? So make sure you pay for your gifts!! The gift of salvation came with a great price. In Acts chapter 20, Paul gave his farewell speech to the church in Ephesus. In verse 28 he reminded the Elders, "Guard the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

In Heb 9, we're told that our salvation did not come from the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Many people today 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 9 describes Him. They don't see anything special at all. Just an ordinary human being. The Bible wants us to understand that the cost of the church and our salvation could only be paid by the son of God dying on splintered rugged cross.

In Matt 13 Jesus said, "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."

To be in Christ's church is a treasure. How thankful we should be that God loves us so much, that through Jesus we have found a priceless pearl.

The price that Jesus paid in order for us to have these gifts is worth more than anything we could ever possess. This wonderful gift of God had a great price and Jesus paid for it with his blood.

Close: I want to close with one last thought. The gift of God must be received.

I told my girls they can open a few of their presents after we get home. I'm pretty that none of them will say "Dad, we don't want them, just give those presents to somebody else. Can you imagine someone wanting to give you a gift and in response you say, "You go ahead and keep it, I don't want it." Wouldn't that be insulting? God has given us the ultimate gift. It is a Universal, unwrapped, personal, practical gift that Jesus purchased with his blood.

Can you imagine how God must feel when a person says to him, "I don't want it. I don't need your grace, I don't want your forgiveness." I don't need your love. What an

insult that would be, but that's exactly what happens when you're not right with God and refuse to respond to the song of invitation. God's gift must be received. How do we receive it?

Believe with all of your heart that Jesus is the son of God. Repent of your sins (change the direction you are going). Then be baptized and have your sins washed away. This is how we receive the greatest gift that the world has ever seen.

III. The gift must be received

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

anyone. We have to receive it.

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

2. "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." – John 1:12

3. Not all who heard about him, or agreed with his teachings. Not all who attended church. Not all who tried to follow the golden rule. But all who received him.

4. 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.

5. But a gift you have to pay for is no gift at all. [Imagine your wife or children trying to pay for their gifts.]

B. Now, maybe you opened that gift years ago, but lately it's been sitting on the shelf.

1. You've been too busy, or too distracted, or too hurting to give Jesus the time and attention you know He deserves.

2. Or maybe for you that gift is still wrapped and ready to be opened.
3. My appeal to you this morning is this: Don't leave Christ on the shelf;
don't leave Him
under the tree.
4. Take him into your heart and into your life today. That gift from God
has a tag with
your name on it.
5. What better day than the holiday season to renew your commitment to
Christ; or what
better day than now to begin a new life of fellowship
with Jesus Christ, a new life of
joy and peace and love?

Conclusion: Jesus is the greatest gift. There is no-one like Him.

A. There never was another Who was a human child and also a divine Son. Who was
wounded by Satan
and Who, at the same time crushed Satan;

1. Who was appointed the Savior of men, yet was crucified by men; Who
was Judge of
men; yet was led as a felon from one trial to another.
2. There never was another Who died, was buried and yet lived; Who
saved others and
Himself could not save.
3. Who had no sin in Him, yet all sin on Him; Who was the King of
Glory, yet wore no
crown but a crown of thorns.
4. Who, in the glory He had with God before the world was, had the
angelic hails of
heaven and yet, on earth, gave Himself to the
murderous nails of men!
5. There never was another Who was the Prince of life, yet died on
Calvary; Who was as
old as His heavenly Father and ages older than His
earthly mother.

B. There never was another Who was the victim of a Roman cross and victor at a Jewish
grave.

1. There never was another Who poured all seas, all lakes, all rivers out of the crystal chalices of eternity, yet on a cross said with a mouth hot like a parched desert that cries for rain, 'I thirst'".

2. Phil 2 :9 says that God has given Him a name far above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth, and of those under the earth. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

3. The Lord Jesus whom we exalt at Christmas is not just a baby in a manger. He is not a character in a children's story. He is far more.

4. The first time he came, a star marked his arrival. The next time he comes, the whole heaven will roll up like a scroll, and all the stars will fall out of the sky.

Will you be ready?

C. The first time he came, wise men and shepherds brought him gifts. The next time he comes, he will bring gifts, and rewards for his own. Will you be one of them?

1. The first time he came, only a few attended his arrival-some shepherds and some wise men. The next time he comes, every eye shall see him.

2. The first time he came as a baby. Soon he will come as a Sovereign King and Lord. Is Jesus king over life today?

3. Jesus is indeed a gift. He'll be a friend, we can have fellowship and relationship with Him through all eternity.

4. Jesus is a gift of great value. Knowing Christ is the greater than everything else in the world. But in order for Jesus to be a great gift, it is up to you for the gift to be received.

5. By believing in Him, Confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, repenting of your sins and being buried with Him in baptism, He will give you the greatest gift that you'll ever receive this year.

6. Forgiveness of sins, a loving Father who give to you freely every spiritual blessing. Don't let

Jesus unwrapped this year, open Him up and let Him into your heart.