

# GOD'S GREATEST GIFT: WHAT GOD'S GIFT GIVES US

(John 1:16)

12.20.20

## INTRODUCTION

When it comes to Christmas gifts, no matter who we're shopping for, not only are we looking for the perfect gift, but we're also looking for the perfect bargain - a gift that not only puts a smile on the recipient, but also one that keeps a smile on our bank account as well. One of the gifts I remember giving our girls was a video game called "Super Mario 64" from Nintendo. Talk about "bang for the buck!" What was so cool about this game was that it actually was a sequence of some 120 games in completing the quest the game made its players perform. To me, that game was one of the greatest bargains of all time because I got so much game for the price. And of course, the best part - my girls wore that game out.

Today, as we continue looking at "God's Greatest Gift," we will be continuing on from last week's look at the gift itself to try and grasp some of what God's gift gives us - the incredible blessings we have to claim when we claim His greatest gift. When we unwrap this particular gift, we will find so much more that God is giving us than just a moment in time. So, as we begin, **let's start with a moment of prayer.**

## TEXT AND ANALYSIS

Our text this morning is just one verse, but it fits in so well with how we have been viewing God's greatest gift through the filter of His "amazing grace": ***For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace - John 1:16 (ESV).*** Yeah, just one verse, but oh how rich!

Let's look at what John says we have received in God's greatest gift:

- 1) First, we have received "from His fullness." That fullness is referenced by Paul in his letter to the Colossian believers when he said: ***For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell - Paul, Colossians 1:19 (ESV).*** In that little baby was gifted everything that God is, to accomplish a salvation that was everything that we needed. "From His fullness" simply means that, when it came to His greatest gift, God spared no expense and held nothing back.
- 2) Second, we have "all received." As Jesus Himself would later say: ***"For God so loved the world"- Jesus Christ, John 3:16a.*** What arrived in that manger all those centuries ago was, and is, intended for everybody. Nobody is overlooked; nobody is excluded - a point brought out over 500 years before Christ's birth, in fact, all the way back to God declaring through the OT prophet Joel: ***"[E]veryone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" - God speaking, Joel 2:32a,*** words so relevant to the purpose of the manger and the mission of the church that Peter quoted them in his Pentecost Day sermon (Acts 2:21) and Paul in his letter to Rome (Romans 10:13). And some seven centuries before Christ, the prophet Isaiah was told by God of His desire that His ***"salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" - God speaking, Isaiah 49:6b.*** That's why Jesus said: ***"[W]hoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" - Jesus Christ, John 3:16b.*** And Paul famously affirmed that "all received" God's great gift when he wrote to the church at Rome: ***I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes - Paul, Romans 1:16a.*** That is one of the most important presentations the church can make to our world, and one of the best representations we can make for our Lord - the inclusiveness

of the gospel. It is one of the Bible's most consistent themes: As Paul wrote to his pastoral protege Titus: *[T]he grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people - Paul, Titus 2:11*. And Peter said so clearly that the Lord is *not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance - II Peter 3:9b*.

- 3) And third, we have received "grace upon grace." So, what does that mean? In a sense, it is an exchange - in much the same way that one wave follows a previous wave onto the shore. What puts the "amazing" in God's grace is that grace given assures even more grace given. It is God's ever-flowing, never pausing, never stopped river pouring out from His infinitely deep love. As Christ would later say: *"Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance"- Jesus Christ, Matthew 13:12a*. What a great gift that is! As His kids, we receive a never-ending supply of His grace, as Paul said, *according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus - Paul, Philippians 4:19b*. And it was that promise of "grace upon grace" that caused Paul to write to the church at Corinth: *God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work - Paul, II Corinthians 9:8*.

## APPLICATION

So, what does that all mean? Well, one of the points we made last week was looking at the "wrapping paper," the presentation of this great gift. A great gift's wrapping should reflect the greatness of the gift, right? Well, just because that's what we might be thinking doesn't mean that that's the way God was thinking. His designed paths for greatness often follow incredibly confounding twists and unexpected turns. So, it was with Christ; His greatness would not be seen in anything that we might see as attractive or wish for ourselves. Quite the contrary; it's Luke who first clues us in, that shortly after Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem to comply with registering for the census Rome had declared, *the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them - Luke 2:6b-7*.

Wow - pretty humble beginning. Barely enough room to even come into this world, eventually spending His first few moments of newborn life in a feeding trough for animals. But eventually, so one might think, shouldn't greatness somehow look like greatness? John F. Kennedy was known for the magnetism of his appearance. Ronald Reagan had movie-star looks. And the Bible does include some snapshots of some of its heroes. As a for-instance, when Joseph was a slave in Egypt, working in the house of Pharaoh's captain of the guard, we are told that he *was well-built and handsome - Genesis 39:6b*, on his way to becoming second-in-command to Pharaoh himself and rescuing Egypt and neighboring nations (not to mention his own family) from a cruel famine. Also, David, when he was first seen by Samuel, *was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features - I Samuel 16:12a*. And he became arguably Israel's greatest ruler. So great looks and great accomplishments - all tied together in one great-looking package. Perfect!

But for all the greatness that the "Messiah" was predicted to bring, looks were not part of the deal. In fact, quite the opposite; as Isaiah prophesied: *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him - Isaiah 53:2b*. In fact, the closest we get to a description of Christ in any of the gospels is two very brief statements from Luke: *[T]he child grew and became strong; He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of*

***God was on Him...And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man - Luke 2:40, 52.*** That's it! So there had to be more to this gift than looks or physical attraction.

OK; so what about listing great accomplishments? Now when any of us try to promote ourselves, particularly in a professional setting, we will show off our resume - a list of our accomplishments and education - with the hopes of landing a position from somebody we've convinced just can't move forward without us. However, if we were to take a look at Christ's "resume," we would find very little that would impress anybody - at least through an earthly lens. In fact, an early 20th century American pastor named James Allan suggested the following regarding Jesus in words he published in 1926:

*[H]e worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. He never wrote a book, he never held an office, he never went to college, he never visited a big city, he never traveled more than two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things usually associated with greatness. He had no credentials but himself.*

Doesn't sound like much, does it? So there had to be more to this gift than commonly praised earthly accomplishments. But what? Allan's essay ends with words that begin to give us a hint:

*All the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, all the kings that have [ever] reigned [all] put together have not affected the life of mankind on earth as powerfully as that one solitary life.*

Great words and, some twenty centuries after that earthly life, still completely true. The gospels, from first word to last, proclaim His greatness as the representative and foundation of an eternal, spiritual kingdom that will never end - and, miraculously, as the personal means by which we can gain entry into that kingdom. We've looked at that greatness over the last few weeks. But today we're looking at what the gift gives us. So where do we find that greatness? In one place - relationship with Jesus Christ. And I've tried to summarize that relationship and all it gives us in three words, all starting with the letter "F." Now when we're in school, "F's" are the last thing we want connected with us. But these "F's" by contrast are everything to what God wants our lives to be. Let's look at them now.

**Forgiveness:** God's gift offers us forgiveness. What Jesus promised to do was to become all our sins on our behalf. The Bible makes that very transparent: ***God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God - Paul, II Corinthians 5:21.*** So what does that mean? It means that Jesus and I traded places - He became clothed in my sins while I became clothed in His perfection.

It is a perfect place to see "amazing grace" - the undeserved favor God showered on all mankind. You see, there is nothing any of us could do in any way, shape, or form to somehow deserve having somebody take our place. We were rightly deserving of God's wrath. His wrath, in fact, was absolutely perfect justice for our sin-filled lives. But "amazing grace" gave us something else - something we didn't deserve.

Starting at Bethlehem, God grants mankind the blessing of a life that pleased Him in every way - fulfilling every one of God's laws without exception - with the eventual outcome of offering His perfect life for my imperfect one. If my life has been surrendered to God through

Jesus Christ, an absolutely complete forgiveness of every sin in my life - big, little, remembered, forgotten - takes place. In that moment, I have become as perfect as Jesus Himself because, in that moment, when God looks at me, He sees me wrapped inside the perfect life of His Son. But the wrath I deserved for sin is not somehow blocked by my being wrapped in Christ. The wrath I deserve has been completely removed by Christ. Jesus by taking my place and taking my sins took my wrath - wrath that should have been leveled at me. In other words, He literally directed God's wrath from me to Himself. And as He took God's wrath for my sins, I (and everybody else on the planet) was offered an amazingly graced proposition: Surrendering my life to God through what His Son had accomplished. When that surrender, that moment in conscious time, occurred, my life experienced Christ's perfect life wrapping itself around me. So, what happened? My sins are gone; they are washed away by the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ - God's sacrificial Lamb. And now - I no longer deserve wrath for my sins because Jesus took away my sins. So those sins, in God's eyes, no longer exist. God Himself said so: **"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more" - God speaking, Isaiah 43:25.** My guilt in front of an all-seeing, all-knowing God has been erased. That's why God's gift is so great.

And that's exactly what Paul talked about; in his letter to the Ephesian believers, he said: ***In [Jesus] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us - Paul, Ephesians 1:7-8a.*** In other words, He paid the price for my being clothed in His perfection; in fact, according to Paul, Bethlehem is just the beginning of God ***sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering - Paul, Romans 8:3b.*** His blood purchased my life and, consequently, the cost of my sins as well. And even though we obviously still fall into sin even as we are seeking to live pleasing to God, forgiveness is an ongoing activity of our heavenly Father; as John wrote: ***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness - I John 1:9.*** That's why a Christian's life should literally never be parted from joy due to the awesome greatness of the forgiveness we have been so graciously granted by surrendering to His life; as David wrote of God as he reveled in what God had done for him: ***[M]y heart rejoices in Your salvation - David, Psalm 13:5b.***

**Foundation:** God's gift offers us foundation - that starts with the fact that, as Jesus promised, ***"[Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age]" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:20b.*** That's one of my favorite promises of Christ because He is assuring me of His accompaniment in the present-tense. It's not something I have to look forward to or earn in some way. As a child of the King, He - present tense - is with me. And what makes that verse really cool is that it is just an extension of what His Father promised through Moses (and that the writer of Hebrews referenced as well): ***"[T]he Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you" - Moses, Deuteronomy 31:6b.***

Wow! Talk about having powerful friends. Every Christian can make that claim, that we are daily, moment-to-moment, in the company of "the Lord our God." So, what does that mean? Well, how about these - as just a sample:

- 1) Surrounded by His love: ***I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of***

**God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord - Paul, Romans 8:38-39.**

- 2) Shown His direction: ***Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths - Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV).***
- 3) Schooled in His priorities: ***"[S]eek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" - Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:33 (NKJV).***
- 4) Sustained by His joy: ***"[T]he joy of the Lord is your strength" - Nehemiah, Nehemiah 8:10b.***
- 5) Strengthened by His protection: ***Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me - David, Psalm 23:4a.***
- 6) Consoled by His tenderness: ***He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young - Isaiah 40:11.***
- 7) Soothed by His peace: ***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus - Paul, Philippians 4:6-7.*** Simply put: Be anxious for nothing: pray for everything!
- 8) Supplied by His abundance: ***The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing - David, Psalm 23:1.*** And then -

**Forever:** God's gift offers us forever. What an amazing thought that is - to spend eternity with the Author of the gift given us in Bethlehem. But before anything else, one thing needs to be made clear right from the onset of this part of the conversation: Nobody dies! We lose our earthly bodies but our souls - that which we really are - will go on forever. In other words, everybody who has ever lived will exist forever.

The question is: What "forever" lies in wait? For the Christian, an eternity alongside of and in the presence of God the Father and Jesus the Son. For an unbeliever, just as long an eternity, but an eternity forever apart from God and His Son. Heaven will be eternal fellowship and community. Hell will be eternal loneliness and separation. Heaven will be pleasure; hell will be torment. In fact, the difference between heaven and hell is so stark and vivid that the Bible most often describes them in terms of "life" and "death." That's the point Jesus was making when He said: ***"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life" - Jesus Christ, John 5:24.***

And why will hell be so horrific? The disciple John explained it this way in his gospel: ***Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them - John 3:36.*** God's wrath remains because their sin remains. Jesus died to wash away those sins, but they chose to say, "No." And, if Jesus - is life and is sacrifice - is rejected, an unbeliever is declaring that they would rather live with God's wrath; that is the "forever" they are choosing - and that is the "forever" they will receive.

## **CONCLUSION**

The perpetual question coming up in a few days will be: "So, what did you get for Christmas?" As Christians, we have a very special answer to share with anybody who asks: "I got Jesus for Christmas." God's amazingly gracious plan of salvation was prepared and presented for everybody. And it's God's passion for everybody that should be reflected in our passion for everybody. Think about it - all the blessings that we have come to know because of Christmas. But we need to go farther than that. Many of us have loved ones that we passionately desire to come to Christ, that they would know and experience what we've known and experienced. But we need to go even farther than that. Think about our Heavenly Father. He understands our feelings for our loved ones because He has billions of loved ones Himself that He even more passionately desires for His Kingdom. And He's the one that gave the gift we celebrate each year. Folks, His desire - His passionate, personal desire - must be ours as well.

Everything we have in relationship with God, everything that allows us to know God as "Father," is because of what began in that manger in Bethlehem. Let's take that celebration to the world. That's what can make this the best Christmas ever. Let's pray!