

The Greatest Gift

December 2000



For many, Christmas is the most cheerful time of the year. It draws together family and friends, old and young, distant and near. Our senses fill and our emotions run high with the season's sights, sounds and smells, leading to the great day of giving that fills the home and heart with love and acceptance. For others, the Christmas season is an unhappy time. Perhaps there is no family or there are no friends, and the remembrances evoked during the holidays of loved ones long lost and days long past are too painful to endure. Perhaps the great cares of this world have sapped every bit of energy that might have been left to share in the season's festivities. Perhaps there is a feeling that the gifts received were obligatory rather than given from a generous heart. Loneliness and anxiety can come to characterize the season instead of joy and peace, resulting in an unthankful heart and a chilled spirit.

For most of us, Christmas falls someplace within this continuum; it's a mixture of joy and sorrow, of looking forward and looking back. But hope springs eternal in the idea of giving. Ideally it is giving freely, not based on the worthiness of the recipient and with no expectation of return. We rarely achieve this, however, and tend to give grudgingly. Santa is always checking his list twice to find out who has been naughty or nice and rewards them accordingly. But God is not like this.

God checks His list, but He gives only to the 'naughty,' a category that as sinners fits us all. He calls this grace—undeserved kindness and blessings to those who do not deserve them. It is the wholly generous act of God toward sinners. Grace exudes true love because in it God gave Himself for us. It is truly unselfish because there is no expectation of repayment. It is truly free because He paid the price completely, and now he offers the benefits to us in spite of our demerit. This is how God gives, and He does it perfectly. Appreciating this, we possess a joy that far

surpasses that of mere earthly giving, a joy that lasts forever, undimmed by even the most difficult conditions and circumstances.

So then, what is this gracious gift of God?

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH ON HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.

JOHN 3:16

GRACE BE TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, AND FROM OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR OUR SINS...TO WHOM BE GLORY FOR EVER AND EVER.

GAL. 1:3-5

Indeed, what is the greatest gift of all? God the Father gave His Son, and God the Son gave Himself. This two-faceted gift is the greatest and most costly one ever arranged. For us, it not only satisfies our desires, it satisfies our most basic needs. Prompted by the infinite love of the Creator for His creation and valued at the infinite price of God sacrificing Himself on our behalf, as our substitute, this free gift is truly incomparable. It meets all of our needs as sinners under God's judgement, condemned and set to perish, powerless to deliver ourselves. But then, like ones snatched from the rushing torrent, God came down in the Person of Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins and to rise again so that we might be perfectly right before Him, delivering us from the deluge of sin and death. Think how free it is! "Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Our only part in this gift is receiving it by believing it. Someone has said that believing is the only thing we can do without doing anything. It is the setting aside of all our own deadly doing, our own works and rightnesses, so that our only recourse is to solely trust in, rely on, and rest upon the work and rightness of another, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Where do you stand today? Have you accepted God's Grace Gift to you? Have you trusted in the Finished Work of Jesus Christ? If not, the Good News is that God is right now stretching out his

Accept and unwrap it by believing and see what a life-changing gift this is. As sinners we were enslaved to sin and powerless to free ourselves. On the Cross Jesus Christ paid the ransom with His own blood to free us from this inescapable despot. As sinners we were enemies of God, cut off from any relationship with Him. On the Cross Jesus Christ established the way back to God whereby He no longer holds sin against our account, changing our position before Him into one of intimate relationship. As sinners we offended God's justice, the penalty of which is death, and His justice must be satisfied. On the Cross Jesus Christ provided the full payment for the penalty of our sins, satisfying the just demands of a thrice-holy God. Jesus Christ is the complete answer to our sin problem! In Him we are redeemed from sin and reconciled to God. God is fully satisfied with Christ and the work He completed on our behalf (Rom. 3:23-26). Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

Those who received God's gift by trusting in Jesus Christ, have you finished unwrapping it? While saving us from our sin was great, God has done much more for those who are now believers. He has not left us on our own to fend for ourselves. He freely gives a *much-more* salvation that showers blessings on us continually, empowering us to live holy and blameless lives. We needed a new walk and eternal security; we have them in Christ. We needed the gift of righteousness unto eternal life; through Christ we have it. We needed the love of God; it is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. We have peace and access to God and His grace, and it comes through Christ (Rom. 5). In the gift of Christ we are accepted, chosen, predestined, set apart, forgiven (Eph 1), and on and on the list goes. The more we unwrap, the more there is to find. Have you lost your enthusiasm for salvation? Do you need encouragement? Motivation? Start unwrapping the Christ of the Bible because everything is wrapped up in Him. When we accept Him, we accept the Gift that includes all other gifts, a package of infinite proportions and riches that involves a lifetime of joyous exploitation. We are complete in Him. Our prayer in this Holiday Season is that all people everywhere might receive and know God's gracious gift in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ

