

# God's Gift for the hurting

December 24, 2009

Christmas, for mostly children, is the happiest time of the year since they get to have toys or things they wanted. But, for some people, it can be one of the hardest times of the year.

Maybe it is because they have false expectations. Or maybe it just reminds them of a loved one who has died, or a divorce or separation they have been through. Maybe they are without families. It seems that all these holidays are for families and they feel like they don't fit in. Or even though they are married, they feel lonely because their spouses' hearts are far from them due to alcohol, gambling, adultery and so on. Or their family is going through a horrendous financial difficulty due to job loss or something else. Whatever the reason, Christmas can be the most dreaded time of the year for those who are lonely and hurting.

## A. THE ESSENTIAL MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

*Matthew 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."*

What is the essential message of Christmas? It is that Immanuel has come to us. "Immanuel" means "God is with us."

Christmas is all about undoing loneliness. The message of Christmas is that you are not alone, because God came to be with us. There is absolutely no other religion in the world that their gods come to the followers to be like them, to carry the followers' difficulties, then ultimately die for them all alone.

Jesus knew what it was to be lonely. He was probably the loneliest man who ever lived. Yes, He always had throngs of people around Him, but on that final day, those shallow multitudes were gone. Even His own hand-picked disciples deserted Him. And as He hung on the cross, even God the Father momentarily turned away, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Jesus knows what it is like to be lonely. But He also says to us, "I am with you. I will never leave you or forsake you." That is the promise to the child of God: we are never alone.

Before we think about how much comfort our "God with us" brings to us, we must think about three things.

## B. THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

It really is an amazing thing to think about the mystery of the Incarnation – that mysterious moment when God became a man. Jesus Christ – God the Son – was born in a manger. He went from the throne of heaven to a feeding trough. He went from the presence of angels to a cave filled with animals. He who is larger than the universe became an embryo. He who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young virgin.

Some people have a hard time believing in the Virgin Birth. If anyone claims to believe the Bible, that person must believe in the Virgin Birth. The Bible teaches that God Almighty was supernaturally conceived in the womb of a virgin.

This makes sense if you think about it. If God had chosen to, He could have sent Jesus to this earth as a fully grown, yet sinless human being. A shaft of light could have come out from heaven with Jesus descending to the ground as an adult man. But if Jesus came to us in that way, who could have related to Him as a person, as a part of the human race?

God also could have had Jesus come into the world through two ordinary human beings – but still with a divine nature. But then most of us would have doubted His divinity. That's why the Incarnation makes sense.

The event of the Incarnation is the reason for the Christmas season. Christmas is the opportunity to worship God, to bow down and pay homage to Him for humbling Himself and appearing in human form. That stands as the true mystery of the Incarnation – and the reason we celebrate Christmas.

*Philippians 2:5-10 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 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, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

### **C. ABOUT GOD'S ULTIMATE GIFT**

*Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*

I don't think that we fully understand how great this Gift of God is to mankind. If we did, there wouldn't be one human being who would reject Jesus – knowing who He is reveals how sinful we are and how desperately we need Him.

All the other religions essentially demand, "DO" something for their gods. Do this, and maybe you will be spiritual enough to get closer to his god; do that, and you might achieve next level to subside her god's anger. They do this to appease their god from getting angry with them.

But Christianity could be summed up in one word: Done. Why? Because God is with us. It is not us doing something through God; it is God living His life through us. It is Immanuel, God is with us.

Still, the real message of Christmas is not the gifts that we give to each other. Rather, it is a reminder of the Gift that God has given to each of us. It is the only Gift that truly keeps on giving, so I want to point out four things about it.

#### **1) It is surprising.**

When Christmas rolls around, you often try to figure out if certain people have bought that gift you've really wanted. Maybe you already know what they bought, because they didn't hide it very well. Or maybe you uncovered it by accident – or maybe not. But when the day comes and you open the present, you have to pretend you're surprised. Yet all along, you knew what it was.

Sometimes, you thought you were going to get the gift you've been wanting all this time, but when you open it, it is not. What do you, how do you react? So you say, "You shouldn't have..." You mean it every letter. Don't feel bad, you can give it to someone else later or next year like the fruit cake that gets passed around every year.

God's Gift to us, however, was a complete surprise. It was not expected, and as you examine it more carefully, you realize how great a Gift it actually was.

## **2) God's Gift came to us in the humblest of wrappings.**

What would you think if you saw a gift under your Christmas tree that was wrapped in newspaper and taped up real bad? At first, you would probably assume that a guy wrapped it.

But think about God's Gift to us. Jesus was not born in a palace of gold; He was born in a stable. He was clothed with rags. He was laid in a feeding trough.

Yet these things do not, in any way, diminish the story of Christ's birth. If anything, they help us realize the great sacrifice God made for us. God's Gift to humanity, the ultimate gift of eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ, came in the simplest and humblest of wrappings.

## **3) We don't deserve this gift.**

At Christmas, we give gifts to those whom we care about, who have been kind to us over the past year, or who have given us a gift first – some, to our surprise, totally unexpected. We don't give gifts to the person who has been slandering our name or to the angry neighbor who never has a kind word to say.

Yet God gave us His Gift when we were His enemies. He didn't give this Gift to us because we deserved it. In fact, it was just the opposite. The Bible tells us differently.

*Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*

## **4) The Gift tells us something about the Giver.**

When you want to give someone a gift, you start thinking about it ahead of time. Hopefully, you try to find what that person wants or needs.

When God decided to give us the Gift of eternal life, it wasn't something that He just thought of on the fly. Long before there was a town called Bethlehem, a garden called Eden, and a planet called Earth, a decision was made in eternity that God would send forth His Son, born of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those that are under the law. The Bible says that He was slain from the foundation of the world.

*Revelation 13:8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

Make no mistake about it: this Gift that God has given to us was the most sacrificial thing He possibly could have offered.

## **D. GOD'S GIFT FOR THE HURTING**

My wife Karen used to wrap each gift with love and care for her grand kids until wee hour in the morning of Christmas day. Within a few hours from then, they ravaged through the gifts like four cyclones and tore the papers without admiring how she

coordinated colors and looks. Do you know what they say after they finish opening all the presents?: "Is there any more?"  
Now, she just puts the presents in bags and off she goes.

So Christmas isn't about those gifts that you have under your tree right now. All of those things will be gone one day. In the end, all that will be left after this life is the human soul, and that will live forever. We will put so much stock in what we have, but this is all going to pass away.

*2 Corinthians 4:18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

Life is about what happens beyond the grave. Life is about knowing the God who made us and who gave us the greatest Gift we will ever receive.

Christian author Philip Yancey says in his fine book, "Where is God when it hurts?": "Christians don't really know how to interpret pain. If you pinned them against the wall, in a dark secret moment, many Christians would probably admit that pain was God's one mistake. He really should have worked a little harder and invented a better way of coping with the world's dangers."

While God uses difficult trials and tests to draw us closer to Him, satan uses them as levers to pry us away from Him.

Jesus is NOT one of those so-called gods who might tell their followers, "Suck it up." But He already had gone through His own sufferings and difficulties to let us know that He understands what we go through. If that is not good enough, He reminds us that He is with us.

Whatever gifts you may have waiting for you this Christmas, they pale in comparison to God's Gift for you. It is better than anything the Neiman Marcus catalog can offer. It is the only Gift that truly keeps on giving: the Gift of eternal life.

If you put your trust in any human solution to save you, then you will be disillusioned. And even if you put your trust in religion, you only will be let down.

Our only hope is Jesus, Immanuel: God with us and God in us. He is God's Ultimate Gift for a hurting humanity.

*2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*