

12. The Greatest Gift with love

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Have you ever received a Christmas gift that showed you that the gift giver really didn't care much about you? It was one of those gifts, because he or she HAD to. But I am sure that you also remember a Christmas gift that was filled with the love of the giver, not necessarily because of its cost, because it came from the person's heart.

The greatest gift that ever was given to mankind was from our God. And the Gift was His only very begotten Son Jesus, the indescribable Gift. This Gift didn't come in a divine, holy glowing wrapping, nor did He come wrapped in a plush, gleaming royal robe, rather He came in the form of a humble and helpless human babe in swaddling cloths who had to be cared for, nursed, and protected by His earthly parents. He didn't even have a special name, rather a common name at that time – Jesus. Jesus could have been a "John" in America.

Let's unwrap our Lord's Greatest Gift, Jesus and see what He tells us.

A. JESUS AND THE BRONZE SERPENT

John 3:14-15 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

To those who are not familiar with the OT, this can be a puzzling illustration that the Lord Jesus brought to Nicodemus. Let's go to Numbers 21:5-9.

Numbers 21:5-9 And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." 6 So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. 7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

These Hebrew people had been wandering around in the wilderness for many years by now. They had manna from heaven every day as their food. In a way it is understandable that they got tired of the same food ingredient everyday for all that time. But saying, "our soul loathes this worthless bread," had crossed the line. That was a serious insult and challenge against the Lord who loved them.

In the Bible, serpent often represents 'men's sins'; and bronze represents 'God's judgment for men's sins.' With these concepts in mind, v6 tells us that their disobedient hearts and sins brought deadly consequences to themselves.

God told Moses to shape a serpent and set it on a pole in bronze. That represents "God's judgment on men's sins sets it on a pole." What does it remind you of? Of course, Jesus who took all of our sins onto Himself and was hung on the cross.

According to God's command to Moses, if anyone who had been bitten by a serpent, just looked at the bronze serpent with a simple faith, he lived. If anyone who was

riddled with sins in his life that applies to all humans, just looks at Jesus on the cross with a simple faith in Him as the Messiah, he would be saved. Truly, this is a simple illustration of the sin of man, the grace of God, and faith in Jesus.

If someone in the Israel camp thought, "This is too simple. I am sure that there must be something I can do to heal myself without looking at the bronze serpent." Guess what? They perished. Anyone who rejects God's invitation to salvation by putting faith in Jesus Christ because they think that can do something else, guess what? They also will perish to hell.

Why didn't God give up with human kind? Why didn't He let the earth spin off its axis? Even after generations of people spitting in His face, He still loved them. After a nation of chosen ones had stripped Him naked and ripped His incarnated flesh, He still died for them. And even today, after billions have chosen to prostitute themselves before the pimps of power, fame, and wealth, He still waits for them. It is inexplicable. It doesn't have a drop of human logic nor a shred of rationality. And yet, it is that very irrationality that gives the Gospel its greatest defense. For only God could love us like that.

B. FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Someone said that this verse is "the Bible in a nutshell". The Great Reformer Martin Luther said, "It's the Bible in miniature." Because it summarizes, encapsulates the most important truth of God's astounding and amazing love for mankind.

This v16 shows us the God-initiated-rescue plan for mankind. He didn't leave it up to us, because we were not able to do it.

1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

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

God's love is indiscriminate and perfect. Listen, we are loved by God, not because we are so lovable and so deserving, much surprise to some of you. In reality, we truly are filthy sinners without Jesus, but God is holy. Yet He still loves us. That is His nature and His decision.

The entire human race has a disease called sin from birth. Each one of us is SIN-positive. Because of our sins, our eternal destination is hell. But God wants to rescue us from it so much that He sent His very best Gift, His Son Jesus. When we come to Jesus with a simple faith in Him and admit that we are sinners and He is the only Savior for us, we get to have eternal life. It is that simple.

To the world, this is not acceptable and logical, even absurd, because it is too simple and there is no room for their own effort. They want to add their own two cents, so that they can boast about their own salvation with their own spiritual boot straps whatever they are.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

C. NOT TO CONDEMN, BUT TO SAVE THE ONES WHO BELIEVE

John 3:17-18 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

The Jews at the time of Jesus on earth thought that one of the first things the Messiah would do when He came was to wipe out all the heathens. To Nicodemus, this was a shock. They conveniently forgot the second half of what the Lord told their ancestor Abraham:

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The first visit of Jesus to earth was to save the people of earth, but the second visit after the Tribulation in the future will be the judgment.

The late great theologian Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse so eloquently and simply described about the men's choice for the salvation through Jesus Christ: "Everybody has the privilege of going to heaven God's way or going to hell their own way."

Many say, "I believe in God." What does it mean? Believe in God's existence? Believe that the Bible is the Word of God? Believe that Jesus is the Son of God? They would say, "Yes," but that is only head knowledge which has never come down to their hearts. The majority of people choose – 'Unbelief.' Unbelief is what causes ignorance.

I am sure that you've encountered the people who call themselves 'agnostics.' They have human intellect, yet they choose not to pursue the truth of God. They think that they are a special intelligent group of people because they are agnostics.

The origin of the English word 'agnostics' comes from 'agnotos' in Greek. But the translation of this Greek word to Latin is 'ignoramus' which means 'an extremely ignorant person.' I don't think that they would like that translation. They are the same type of people who would ask, "What is the truth?" like Pilate, the governor of Judea and walk away before they get the answer from God through the Bible.

D. OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS MARVELOUS LIGHT

John 3:19-21 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

These three verses are so powerful and clearly define the human sinful nature.

Somehow unbelievers think that they are extending some sort of distorted mercy toward God by including Jesus as a good teacher or a god among many others. Let's make this clear. Jesus is not on trial, but humans are. He is the Ultimate Judge.

Revelation 20:11-12 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before

God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

You might have noticed something among your relatives or coworkers who do not like you even though you have not done anything wrong to them. If you've been obnoxious to them or displaying contradicting lifestyle – while you proclaim to be a Christian with your mouth, but your actions are not, you probably deserve it. But if you've been a good witness of Jesus Christ and they don't like you, then it is not you whom they don't like. It is the light you shine through the Holy Spirit who lives in you.

Listen to me, please. One's morality and lifestyle influence one's theology. Is it a surprise to you that the liberal and immoral Hollywood people and the people who follow these celebrities are against Christianity? Are you surprised that gays and lesbians cannot stand how you embrace the truth of God in the Bible?

A person can say, "I don't believe, because I'm not convinced," or "I don't believe in Jesus as the Bible says, because it doesn't make sense to me," or "I don't like the way God insists that I accept His way." A couple of months ago, I was watching a CBS Nightly News with Scott Pelley. One of their reports was about the decline of Christianity in America. One young woman said, "I don't believe that a loving God would send anyone to hell." People can believe whatever they want, but their belief DOES NOT change the truth in the Bible.

In reality, the core reason most people reject the Lord is that they love darkness of their sin rather than the truth that comes through the light of God. I don't know how to say it more delicately than that, but it is a plain truth as the Bible just said.

If you are an unbeliever, not a born-again Christian, consider yourself that you just have been served with a warrant from God – the warrant of the Truth of God. You have to make a choice today and this very moment. Each time you reject His invitation that is extended to you now, your heart will become harder than before. You don't want to do that.

Hebrews 3:15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Salvation is a gift from God with NO strings attached.

Bloodstained Divinity. A God with tears. A Creator with a heart. God became earth's mockery to save His children. How absurd to think that such nobility would go to such poverty to share such a treasure with such thankless souls. But He did.

In fact, the only thing more absurd than the Gift from God is our stubborn unwillingness to receive it.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Natural life came by God's breath, but eternal life comes by Christ's death.

2) We always have two choices: follow God according to the Bible or stay in our own filthy sins.

3) Unbelievers should not complain that God will send them to hell. They choose hell over heaven because they want to continue in their sins by rejecting His invitations.