

## Christmas Sunday, "The Gifts of Christmas"

### Various Passages

Pastor John Eom

#### Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. I personally wish you a merry Christmas, and by the end of this sermon, I hope that our hearts will truly be merry as we look at what Christmas means for us.

#### Sermon Introduction

Today, we are looking at the gifts of Christmas from scripture. And the way we will be doing this is not necessarily going to a birth narrative in the gospels that describe the events of Jesus' birth, as we looked at Matthew 1 last Sunday. Today, we will be looking at a few other passages in the bible that describe the importance of Jesus' birth and the impact it has on our lives.

#### Show picture "Christmas Gifts.jpg"

So, let's get started. The Christmas season is marked as a season of giving gifts. And through gifts, there is a sparkle of wonder that we can feel. We see this in children with the gifts they have received. There are intense emotions as they open their gifts. There's excitement: "I can't wait to see what I got!" There's wonder: "Wow, look at this!" And there's gratitude: "Oh, thank you, thank you!" But the reality is that while we can truly cherish and adore such gifts, such feelings can quickly fade away. And year after year after year of receiving Christmas gifts, cherishing them and seeing those feelings fade, we can lose the sparkle of wonder. It could be a new car or a nice laptop or a shiny ring. But whatever they are, the gifts we once cherished, we can start to overlook or undervalue them: they don't catch our eye as they used to and we lose sight of their value. We might even take such gifts for granted and think we actually deserve more and better.

Sadly, this can be also true with the gifts God has given to us at Christmas. If the sparkle of Christmas has faded away; if we don't cherish Christmas as we should, and if

So take a closer look at some of the true gifts of Christmas God offered to us when Christ was born.

Take a closer look at the gifts to realize there is much more there than we thought. Realize how we have taken these gifts for granted. And remember to look to the wonderful Giver of the wonderful gifts of Christmas.

#### The One Thing

So, the One Thing for us today is this:

*Cherish the wonderful gifts of Christmas  
that God gives through the birth of Jesus.*

#### Overview

We'll look at two gifts of God that were opened in our broken world at the birth of Jesus Christ. I believe these two gifts need to catch our attention and our hearts as we celebrate Christmas today:

1. Gift of righteousness for the unrighteous
2. Gift of adoption for the enslaved

#### Prayer for the Preaching of the Word

- Help us to cherish Christmas deeply as we look to the gifts you have given to us in Christ.
- As we hear from Your Word, may our hearts be filled with awe and wonder of Christmas, either for the first time or the 50th time.

#### Sermon Outline

## I. Gift of righteousness for the unrighteous

- Through the birth of Jesus, God offers us His own perfect righteousness to redeem unrighteous sinners.
- This gift of God's righteousness for us is a very precious gift because the bible makes it clear that we are all unrighteous before God. Repeating what was said in the Old Testament (Psalm 14:3), it simply says in...

### Romans 3:10 (NIV)

<sup>10</sup> As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;

- As we unpackage this gift, let's make sure we understand the biblical concept of righteousness. Righteousness is about "doing what is right and doing what God requires."<sup>1</sup> So, in order to meet the requirements of God and be accepted by God, we need to have a "right standing or right record."
  - In order for a country to be accepted into the World Cup, there are two ways. The host country gets in automatically. But for every other country's team, they all need to have a right standing in the qualifying matches. If they don't meet the requirements, they will be rejected. For students to get accepted into the university of their choice, they must meet the requirements of the school. They need to have a right academic standing that is made up of a right record of grades and test scores. If they don't meet the requirements, they will be rejected. In the same way, for people to be accepted by God, we must meet God's requirements. If we meet God's requirements, it means that we are righteous. But the problem is that God has very high requirements. God's standard is moral perfection. So, a right moral standing and a right moral record for God means absolute "right-ness" without any stain of evil or sin.
- This is how we know we are unrighteous, simply because we do not meet God's requirements and moral standard. And how can we know what they are? One way is to know it through God's moral law, which is summed up in the Ten Commandments (you can revisit what those are later—we won't be going through them now). For unrighteous people like us, it is tempting to be self-righteous. It's tempting to use the moral law as a checklist to see how many we got right. But this is wrong. We can't use God's moral law like an online personality test to score ourselves or rate our "righteousness," like if we get 6/10, we're medium righteousness. And we feel better about ourselves when we compare ourselves to those who got a 3/10.
  - To correct this wrong way of approaching God's law, later in the New Testament, the moral standards were raised even higher. For example, the law of murder was extended to anger, that even when we hate someone in our hearts, we are guilty of judgment. The law of adultery was extended to lust, that even when we look lustfully at another person we are guilty of adultery in our hearts (cf. Matthew 5:21-30).
  - So, God's moral law shows us how deeply unrighteous we are. Because if we are guilty of breaking one part of God's requirements, we are guilty of breaking the whole law (James 2:10). Righteousness is not a matter of being better and more righteous compared to other people or being a better version of ourselves this year compared to last year. Because at the end of the day, we will be judged by the measure of God's righteousness.
  - Because God's righteousness is the standard, no one is righteous in God's eyes. Not even one person is righteous. So, then the righteousness that we need then must come from God himself. Apart from God, we only know unrighteousness.
    - We can think about this in terms of a spiritual bank account. Because of our sin, we are spiritually bankrupt, spiritually broke. We have a huge spiritual debt that we could never afford. But God sent his Son. Jesus was born to pay our debt for us with his own blood (Romans 8:3). This is our redemption. By faith in Jesus, our debt is paid for. Our record is clear of sin in the eyes of God. Praise God! But there's more. See what it says in...

### 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 743.

<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- The first half of this verse highlights that Jesus, though he was human, knew no sin. This means he did not sin, yet he became sin for us as he died in our place. The second half of the verse says, “so that in him, in Jesus, we might become God’s righteousness.” This describes the ultimate exchange that God has with man.
  - You probably have been part of gift exchanges like White Elephant where the gift you put in is a really thoughtful, useful gift. But the gift you end up with is pretty much useless to you. It’s not even good enough to bring to the next gift exchange party you’re going to. But this is still nothing compared to what Jesus exchanges with us.
  - In the exchange we see in this verse [doctrine of double imputation], Jesus, the Son of God, gets our sin, and in turn, we get his righteousness, the righteousness of God. This gift of Christmas is an unbelievable, wonderful exchange: “the righteous for the unrighteous” (1 Peter 3:18)
  - When Jesus Christ was born as one of us, he filled up his account with perfect obedience to God—something that no other human being could accomplish. So, not only did Jesus die the death that we should have died, he lived the life we should have lived.
    - (i) By faith in Jesus, his death pays for our spiritual debt and his life of righteousness covers us.
- How precious is this Christmas gift that God gives us His own righteousness to us in Christ! Christmas points to God’s great love and abundant grace in our desperate situation. While we were still sinners, God offered to us the free gift of his righteousness through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17).
  - For those of us who do believe in Jesus, we may be realizing that this wonderful gift of righteousness has lost some of its sparkle; if we don’t find ourselves cherishing this gift as we should, it may be that we have been trying to work for or earn our righteousness rather than receiving it by faith.
    - It’s when we are confident in our own abilities to be righteous. And if we add in the element of comparing ourselves with others and seeing they are not as righteous as us, we have self-righteousness.
    - One writer describes it this way (Marshall Segal): *“We learned how to earn before we learned how to speak or even walk: starting from earning praise and affirmation from parents, to earning grades from teachers. Then, earning playing time from coaches, earning attention from boys or girls, and eventually earning paychecks from employers. We’ve been conditioned to earn for as long as we can remember.”* And so, it doesn’t feel safe or it doesn’t feel right letting Jesus do all the work for us and we just receive it all as a gift. We feel like we need to help and do some of the work. It gives us a sense of purpose and control when we can contribute. But with righteousness, we must believe Jesus has done all the work for us—we simply believe by faith and receive his gifts. Gifts cannot be earned or merited. We cannot work for righteousness. We cannot produce the righteousness we need to be accepted by God. Self-righteousness is our sinful efforts trying to persuade ourselves, others and God that we deserve to be in heaven. We receive the gift of righteousness, believing that Jesus has paid for the punishment of my sin and he has given me his righteousness that we put on like a fresh, clean robe.
  - From this entire past year, do you feel tired and weary? I’m not talking about the tiredness we naturally feel from going to work or taking care of family or ministering to friends. We should feel tired from doing the good things God calls us to do. But I’m asking if your soul feels tired and weary and burdened by the pressures you face in life.
    - Do you live with unshakeable guilt or regret? Are you trying to make up for your sins you have committed against God and the wrongs you have done to others? Do you feel pressured to perform a certain way in order to earn a right standing? Do you feel you have to earn your acceptance with God and with people?
    - Then Jesus is speaking to you. He says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” He says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me... and you will

find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28). So come to Jesus. Come and lay down your burdens of self-righteousness. Receive and cherish this gift of righteousness by faith because the work has already been done. You are free from God’s wrath because your sin has been paid for. So come and cherish him.

- So, the first gift was the gift of righteousness. And the benefits of receiving God’s righteousness will become clearer as we look at the second gift of Christmas, which is the gift of adoption.

## II. Gift of adoption for the enslaved

- Through the birth of Jesus, God offers us adoption into His own family, freeing us from slavery to sin and welcoming us as His sons.
- God’s Christmas gift of adoption is a beautiful gift that he offers to spiritual orphans. It says in Galatians 4...

### Galatians 4:4-5, 7 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. <sup>6</sup> Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba, Father.*” <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

- The story of adoption starts with a sad, desperate story of a helpless orphan who has nothing without parents and without a family. Children can become orphans in various ways. But especially for young orphans, like babies, they become orphans not because of anything they did, but because of what happened to their parents or what their parents did. Their earthly parents may have passed away unexpectedly or for whatever heartbreaking reason, they abandon their own child. But the story of adoption transforms it into a beautiful story of hope. Suddenly, the orphan who once had nothing is accepted by new earthly parents into a new earthly family. They start a new life with newfound love and protection and future.
  - This is one way we can understand our spiritual status as orphans. We were helpless in our problem of sin. We had nothing of spiritual value. As unrighteous sinners, we had no protection from facing the horrors of hell and judgment for our sins. But in our spiritual adoption that we receive by faith, God gives us the right to become his children according to his will (John 1:12-13). God makes us born again by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3). And, though we come with nothing, we receive a newfound love, protection and a future. Because, in God’s family, we can enter the kingdom of God in heaven (John 3:5).
- The verses here in Galatians 4 adds to this story of adoption. It says that as spiritual orphans, we were also slaves. We were slaves to sin, meaning that it’s not exactly like a baby who didn’t play a part in becoming an orphan. In a way, as slaves to sin, we are responsible for our own status of orphans as runaways. There are stories like this where children rebelliously run away from their families. One example is the story that Jesus teaches in the parable of the prodigal son. Prodigal means fancy and extravagant, and it describes someone who recklessly and wastefully spends his money and resources.
  - We know in that story of the prodigal son, his problem was how he spent all of his father’s property on a reckless and indulgent lifestyle in a faraway country. But his main problem was about his relationship with his father. Remember what he said to his father? He said, “Father, give me my share of your property” (Luke 15:13). This was a big deal for a son to ask his father for his part of the inheritance. It was a big offense because a son gets his inheritance after his father dies. Asking for the inheritance early was as ridiculously offensive as saying, “Dad, you are pretty much dead to me. Give me my share of your property. And give it to me now.” The son’s problem was that he disowned his father. He rejected their relationship. He would rather have his riches apart from the love and care and attention he had in their relationship. This describes our problem. As spiritual orphans, we are the offensive, ungrateful children who have rebelliously disowned our Heavenly Father. We have rejected our relationship and we would rather selfishly

have his riches instead if we could choose. This is how we were slaves to sin. We were under the law that exposes our sin and showed us how far we ran away from God our Father.

- But, praise God! Because when the time came to be fulfilled, God sent his one and only Son to be born of a woman, born under the law like us to redeem us from the law. It was a costly act and a costly gift in buying us out of slavery and welcoming us into his family. And in our adoption, our relationship with God is fully restored. And it was also done by the initiative of our Father. It was a costly act of running after the runaways, patiently pursuing rebellious children, and bringing us back home to be with Him again.
  - In our adoption, not only was our relationship restored, but we graciously gained the promised inheritance of our Heavenly Father. This again is all by his overflowing grace. Verse 7 says “since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.” In the ancient world, the practice of inheritance was regularly done for the benefit of the man of the household who did not have a son. Because in those days, women were like second-class citizens. If you were a daughter, you didn’t get much from your father in terms of property as an heir. The property would go mostly to the sons. So, parents did not necessarily adopt infants as many do today, but they adopted young adult males who had shown themselves as worthy heirs to carry on the family name. It was not an adoption of grace and free love for the adopted child.
  - But in our adoption with God as our Father, he adopts us not by our spiritual standing or moral record. We don’t need to prove to him that we are worthy to be adopted. Like we saw earlier in Part 1, our standing and record show us how unworthy we are for God’s love. We deserved to be punished as rebellious runaways, cut off from the family and cut off from the inheritance. But our story can end like the prodigal son. When he came to his senses and realized it is better to be a servant in his father’s house rather than a beggar eating from the pigs’ food, he returned home.
    - If you have been running away from God, your Heavenly Father, hear these words:
    - “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But what did the father do? He said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.” (Luke 15:21–24)
  - No matter far you find yourself from God, no matter how distant you feel from your Heavenly Father, may we confidently say by faith the words of 1 John 3:

#### 1 John 3:1a (NIV)

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

- Secured in our Father’s love, we can cry out to God, “Abba Father!” whether in Hebrew or Greek or Indonesian (Galatians 4:6). Because we are known by God and we have special access to Him as his child. And he is attentively listening to us in his love and watching over us in his care. So we can go to Him and call upon him with great confidence and security.
  - Imagine a president or a king is in a meeting. The people allowed in are the only people worthy of his time and attention. They must have certain accomplishments, credentials and influence to be there with him. But, only his child can come running to him because of the father’s love for his child. This is how we have such access to God.<sup>2</sup>
  - Many of us come from broken families. Some of us may have been threatened to be disowned and have even heard the words from our biological, “You are not my son or my daughter.” Some of us may have never had a parent-child relationship and wonder what it is like. But we can still know. And we can know it even better than any of our earthly parent-child relationships. All because God has given to us the gift of adoption into his family.
- When Jesus Christ was born, the gift of adoption as God’s own sons and daughters was offered to spiritual runaways and orphans.
  - Receive the gift of adoption by returning to our Heavenly Father.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, (Penguin Publishing Group, 2016), 70-71.

- “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22).
  - The words God the Father spoke to God the Son, are the same words that He speaks to us: “You are my beloved child; I love you and with you, I am well pleased.”
    - (i) These words melt away all self-righteousness and seals our hearts with new desire to live for God, our Father.
  - *But God receives us as sons, and loves us with the same steadfast affection with which he eternally loves his beloved only-begotten. There are no distinctions of affection in the divine family. We are all loved just as fully as Jesus is loved.*
    - (i) *Packer, J. I.. Knowing God (p. 216). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.*
- How do we cherish this gift?
  - We must remember our new legal and spiritual status before God, no matter how distant we may feel from God.
  - And as children, we can trust that any hardship we face in life is not just purposeless chaos. But as God’s child, we can face all our hardships knowing that is for our good in God’s fatherly discipline (Hebrews 12:7–8).
  - Cherish this gift of adoption in prayer. The Christian name for God is “Father” (J. I. Packer) and we learn to cherish him as we pray, “Our Father in heaven...”<sup>3</sup>
  - Cherish this gift in community of believers. We have the privilege to call God our Father, Jesus, our brother. And therefore, we have many brothers and sisters in Christ in our adoption as well. As you serve and disciple one another, remember you have one Father and one Brother. Cherish together by giving to one another generously and graciously as we have received from our Father.

Remember that these gifts, and many more that we see in scripture, come with the ultimate gift of Jesus Christ himself. For God so loved the world he gave his only Son.

Do you feel like you have lost the sparkle of Christmas?  
 Revisit these gifts you have once opened and received.  
 So, how to cherish these gifts? Not by force. Not by guilt.

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15)

### Life Application:

1) Reflect: How is God speaking to you from His Word? Reflect carefully on these gifts God offers to us through the birth of Jesus.

2) Repent: Have I assumed or taken for granted these wonderful gifts God has given to me in Christ? Repent of any self-righteousness and rejection of our Father’s discipline.

3) Rejoice: How wonderful is God’s love for me that he would give such gifts? Rejoice in the many gifts we have through the ultimate gift of Christmas, Jesus Christ.

### The One Thing:

*Cherish the wonderful gifts of Christmas  
 that God gives through the birth of Jesus.*

<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, (InterVarsity Press, 1973), 201.