

Thanks Be to God for His Indescribable Gift

by Richard Siple

The sermon emphasizes the value and cost of God's gift of Jesus, and how it compares to our own giving and receiving during Christmas.

Duration: 37:31

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:32, 2 Corinthians 9:15, Ephesians 2:8, James 1:17

Topics: "Christmas Worship", "Gift Of Salvation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by emphasizing the true meaning of Christmas as the worship of Christ. He encourages the congregation to open their Bibles to 2nd Corinthians 9:15, which states, 'Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.' The speaker reminisces about his childhood and how, despite having little money, his family celebrated Christmas with joy. He shares a favorite memory of receiving a small truck as a gift and the excitement it brought. The sermon highlights the joy and wonder of receiving gifts, but ultimately emphasizes that the greatest gift of all is God's indescribable gift of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Good morning, and Merry Christmas. Not season's greetings or best wishes for the holidays, but it's a Christ Mass, the worship of Christ, amen? That's what it is. We thank God for it.

I don't know what I can do to get even with John, but I'll think of something. If you'd like to open your Bibles this morning to 2 Corinthians 9, chapter 9, verse 15. Just a very short sentence from my text this morning.

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. Christmas gifts.

The excitement of small children, hands shaking, tearing at the gift wrap, trying to get it open, eyes large with wonder, exclamations, wow. Look at what I got. Those older, oh John, you shouldn't have.

Can we afford it? I can't wait to try this. Just the right color. Wait till the guys see this.

What, for me? Is it the right size? Oh wow, it's a genuine Rolex. Well, we better clean up the mess before Aunt Nell and Uncle Josh get here with their gifts. Most of my childhood years, we had very little money, and Christmas gifts were few.

However, we celebrated Christmas with all our hearts. My mother's aunt, Aunt Bessie, was single, had a good job, and made sure that each one of the four children in our family had at least one gift for Christmas. My favorite year was, there were three boys and one girl in the family, and my favorite Christmas gift was the year that each one of us three boys got a little truck.

Now, it's hard to remember back 100 years, but, as to the size, but I think it was about that long, and about that wide, and they were amazing little trucks because they had a steering wheel that actually steered the front wheels. I mean, really and truly. And it had flashlight batteries with two flashlight bulbs for headlights.

Can you imagine? And so, Christmas night, all three boys with all the lights out in the room, except the lights on the tree, and we're down there with our little truck steering with the headlights on, driving all over the place. I tell you, that was my favorite Christmas gift as a child. Wonderful family traditions.

We always decorated the tree together. Mostly homemade decorations. Do you remember making those chains? You cut little strips of paper and pasted them in circles into each other, and made chains to hang on the trees.

All kinds of things you could do. You could make little stars by cutting paper, folding it, and cutting it a certain way in the stars, showing you put a little string on it. And so, most of the decorations were made by us, simply because, again, of a lack of money.

And yet, it was always a beautiful tree, and maybe one string of lights on it, but that was okay, just so that we could decorate it up. And then, Christmas Eve, we wrapped our gifts in separate rooms, you know, all the hush-hush and secrecy and, don't come in here, you know, that kind of thing, and trying to get everything ready and got it all under the tree, and then went to bed, and in the morning, we could get up whenever we liked, I mean, within reason, but we couldn't touch anything. You know, we could get up, we could come down, we could sit and look at the tree, we could even plug in the lights and sit there and look at the gifts, but we weren't supposed to touch them, you couldn't shake them or anything, you know.

Don't touch. And then finally, dad and mom got up, and then we had breakfast together, and then after breakfast, we went in and sat down near the Christmas tree where the gifts were, and my dad read the Christmas story from the Bible, and then he prayed. We were kids, we were dying.

We were dying. Don't read the whole story. Matthew, Mark, just, but no, no, went through the whole business, and I'm so glad he did because my whole life as a child was saturated at Christmas time with the truth.

Amen? The truth about Christmas, and then we could open our gifts. Well, after Anita and I were married, and we were in the ministry, so we were not ever near our parents' homes, but she had a large family, Louisville, Kentucky, six children, three girls, three boys, and all living in Louisville except for us and one other sister, and they were all married, and they all had children, so Christmas time, if at all possible, we went home for Christmas, and what a wonderful time it was for us. I don't know if you can imagine it, but all these families, the lead family, then the children, married children, and their families in all the homes, and it was great.

House to house, meals, parties, visits, just wonderful times round and around the family, and then the church caroling, they went out caroling, and they always stopped at a certain house and had cocoa and all that. But it was a day and a half trip by car from where we were at that time at first to Louisville, Kentucky,

to get home, and I always will remember the last 50 miles from Elizabethtown to Louisville, Kentucky, because we were so close to home, and by then it was getting dark, and I still remember this one Christmas, we were on that road, headed home, and then it started to snow, not bad, but just little snowflakes in the air, and we, in a few minutes, we were going to be home for Christmas. It does put a lump right up here in my throat.

Any of you remember things like this? The wonderful times, and it wasn't the gifts, but it was the family and the warmth and the love and the beauty and just being together that we looked forward to. But what about Christmas gifts? What do they represent to you? Well, my wife and I said this year, you know, our Christmas gift is going to be getting to our son's place for Christmas, in Akron, Ohio, that is, and flying out there and being with him, and they're just adopting a little five-year-old girl, and we've talked to her on the phone, and she calls us grandpa and grandma, but hasn't seen us yet, and so we're excited, looking forward to that. I hope they don't buy her too many gifts, but I'm sure they will.

But what do Christmas gifts represent to you? They should make us think about God's indescribable gift. They should make us think about that. Let's take some time this morning to consider the parallel between God's giving, his indescribable gift, that we think that Christmas is all about, really, and our own giving.

Let's notice the parallels between the two things, God's giving of his son and our giving as we give at Christmas. Well, the first thing I think about is that gifts do cost, and I was watching the news, and one day last week in the United States, they figured they spent \$1.6 billion on Christmas gifts in one day. That's a lot of money.

Can you think that much money? I can't. So Christmas gifts can cost, and they do cost, and they're getting more and more costly, right? So you have to think about that. When you go to buy Christmas gifts, what can I afford? And what can I really not afford that I'm probably going to buy anyway? Well, a local car dealer was known to have taken advantage of some people in his community, and he wanted to purchase a cow from a local farmer for a Christmas gift for one of his relatives who had a farm.

So the farmer priced the cow in a way the car dealer could understand. Basic cow, \$499.95. Shipping and handling, \$35.75. Extra stomach, \$79.25. Two-tone exterior, \$142.50. Deluxe dual horns, \$59.25. Automatic fly swatter, \$74.55. Four-spigot high output drain system, \$149.20. Automatic fertilizer attachment, \$339.40. Farmers suggested list price, \$1,379.85. Additional dealer adjustments, \$300. Total list price including options, \$1,679.85. That's quite a Christmas gift.

But you know, if we're going to think about cost, we stop and we say, what did God's gift cost him? And I doubt, even in all eternity, we'll ever really be able to get a hold of that. What it cost God to love us. What it cost God to give us his son.

To impoverish heaven and take his one and only son that he loved and give his son to us. For God so loved the world, that you and me and the entire world, God so loved us that he gave his only, his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. A tremendous cost.

By this the love of God was manifested to us that God sent his one and only son into the world so that we might live through him. And this is love, not that we loved God. I mean, he gave this gift to people that didn't even love him, that weren't even related to him, that weren't in his family, that belonged to his enemy.

Not that we loved him, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the blood sacrifice for our sins. He says your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus who being in very nature God, did not consider his position as God something to be held on to, but emptied himself, laid aside his prerogatives as God and took upon himself the very nature of a servant being made as a human being and humbled himself and died on the cross for our sins. Now that's a costly gift.

That's a gift, the cost of which there is no way for us to take in. It just overwhelms me to think about it. Even in the Old Testament, they talked about that cost.

The prophets, Isaiah 53, let me read you a few verses from there. Speaking about Jesus, he grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground. There was no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, like one from whom men hid their faces. He was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted, but he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray and we have turned every one to his own way, but the Lord has laid over on his son.

He has laid over the iniquity of us all. I'm just talking about what it cost God to give us his Christmas gift, what it cost him to give us the gift of Jesus. I never will forget one gift that my father made for the family.

My father had been a carpenter and inside finisher before he went into the ministry, but there was a time in our life when he became caretaker of the large summer conference grounds in New York State. It was up in the foothills of the Adirondacks and in the winter we really had the snow. It was cold and we got snowed in.

You could make caves in the snow, tunnels through it, and we had winter. But we didn't have any money. I know that's hard for some of you young people to understand, but if you live long enough you know what I'm talking about.

So one Christmas there really wasn't any money for Christmas gifts. But the whole month before Christmas I noticed that almost every night my father would leave the house and he would go down to another building on the grounds where there was no heat whatsoever in bitter cold winter. He'd be down there for a number of hours, usually come back just in time for family devotion so we could go to bed.

He did this night after night after night of what he was doing. And of course if my father said, never mind, that ended it. And so we never minded.

And kept up and kept up. And then Christmas morning we found out what he had done. He had made, it was a combination carom and croconaw board.

Now if you don't know what that is, well I don't have much time left to preach I'm not going to tell you. But it was a big board. And they had sent off to Sears and for 50 cents they got the rings.

You know, you can shoot. And so he had it all marked and painted and varnished and everything. There it was.

And I've thought many times of the price he paid to do that for us. Down there working in the bitter cold night after night to try to give us something Christmas morning. And then I remembered that later I was never in that much poverty.

But pretty far down the scale in a church where I was pastor in Alabama and we had two children, a boy and a girl and they wanted bicycles for Christmas. I couldn't buy them new bicycles for Christmas. I mean that is totally not even to be discussed.

But I thought I'm going to do something. So I looked around and I looked around and I asked questions. I finally got a girl's bike for \$5 and a boy's bike for I think \$2.50 or something.

They were in pretty bad shape. But I had been a paper boy and I had learned how to fix my own bicycle. So I took those two bicycles and I found a shed downtown that somebody would let me use and I put them in there and I took them totally apart and I cleaned all the parts and I put them all back together, packed them with grease, got some enamel, painted them all up.

They looked like two brand new bicycles. And I tell you we had two happy kids on Christmas morning. And you know I didn't think of that as a sacrifice.

It was just giving a gift of love. Right? You understand that. Well, it has cost God a great deal to give us Jesus.

Listen to a prayer from a Christian of the 17th century who understood what I'm talking about. He said, My God, I love you, not because I hope for heaven thereby, nor yet because who love you not must die eternally. You, oh my Jesus, did me upon the cross embrace.

For me did bear the nails, then spear and manifold disgrace. Why then, while blessed Jesus Christ, should I not love you? Well, not for the hope of winning heaven or of escaping hell, not with the hope of gaining ought, not seeking a reward, but as you, Jesus, loved me, oh ever loving Lord, even so I love you and will love. And in your praise will sing solely because you are my God and my eternal king.

Aren't you thankful for God being willing to pay such a price to give us Jesus? That's what Christmas is about. Well, gifts are free. When we were children, I mean to those who receive them.

When we were children, there weren't many gifts, but they were free. It never crossed our minds that we should earn them or pay for them. And the song about Santa Claus has always bothered me.

You better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout.

I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town. He knows when you are sleeping.

He knows when you're awake. He knows when you are good or bad, so be good for goodness sake. I'm sorry, that's a travesty about Christmas.

God's indescribable gift is absolutely free and it doesn't have anything to do with whether I'm good or bad. Amen? I mean, you're all bad. Face it.

I had a great big Greek walk up to the front of the church after service one morning in Campbell River. Great big guy. We've become great friends.

And he said, I've been coming for three Sundays. I like your preaching. I want you to know I'm a good man.

I said, I want you to know you're a bad man. So we became great friends. Oh my.

No, no, no, no. Romans 4, 4 and 5. Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trust God who justifies not good people but who justifies the ungodly.

Hallelujah. That's how I get in there. His faith is credited as righteousness for the wages of sin is death but what? The gift of God.

The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Well, at one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy of one another.

Not a picture of the world but when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared he saved us not because of righteous things we had done but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of the new birth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously, generously through Jesus Christ our Savior so that having been justified by his grace we might become heirs having the confident expectation of eternal life. Ha.

God's indescribable gift is free. Brothers and sisters, you can't earn it. You can't pay for it.

You can't be good enough to get it. Jesus the Savior is given to you unconditionally by a loving God generously if you will believe and receive it. Doesn't that make Christmas great? Ha ha.

No wonder I like Christmas. Well, number three, quickly, gifts are for receiving. I remember when I first went in the ministry I felt awkward when people gave me things and believe me I needed them too.

I remember one brother he went to another church but he loved all God's people and an old German farmer and he would see me somewhere downtown and he'd say, Hello Brother Sibley and he'd come walking toward me and I loved to meet that man because he would shake hands with me and leave a \$20 bill in my hand. Ha ha ha. Wonderful guy.

In heaven now. Ha ha ha. Never embarrassed me too much for him to do it because I knew he had lots of it.

But how do I receive a Christmas gift? How do I receive a Christmas gift? I mean, somebody gives you a Christmas gift and you've opened it and you've said thank you and you say now if you just tell me how much you paid for this I'll see if I can get the money. No, in fact if it has a price sticker on it you try to get it off. You breathe on it try to peel it off.

Sure you do. It's free for you and so you receive it. You just receive it and thank the person for it.

Some of you guessed I have a Christmas gift. That's a nice gift. It really is something nice.

It's something nice. It would be for well from a little older teenager on up a little child might not enjoy it but from teens on up you would enjoy it. It's a very nice gift and it did cost me something but not a great deal I confess.

It's not cheap and it's a very nice gift. Now who would like to have it? Thank you. You're welcome and you're just the right kind of person for that.

Now do you get it? Now you'll have to probably open it or else you'll drive all these people crazy. You don't have to open it now but before you leave because they're going to come you know how that is. So you receive it.

As many as received him to them he gave the power the right, the authority to become the sons of God even to them that believe on his name. So you receive Jesus Christ by faith the free gift of God the indescribable gift of God. For if by the trespass of one man death reigned through that one man how much more will those who receive who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Those who receive God's gift says the scriptures. And Jesus said to the religious people of his day you know the prostitutes and tax collectors are pressing into the kingdom of God before you because they believe and receive. And so that's the message to receive the gift of God.

Now I have one more thing to say. Number four, gifts can be wasted if they're not received. Of course there are inappropriate gifts.

There are gifts like picking out a tie for someone else. Please don't do that. If you've already done it take it back to the store.

Never give me a tie please. Because you don't know how to get a tie for me. Okay? Totally inappropriate.

But my friends listen God's gift is exactly suited to our deepest needs. God knew what he was doing when he gave us Jesus our savior to die for our sins to love us to come and live in our hearts to save us forever. God knew Jesus is exactly suited to our needs as sinners as lost people as people that need his comfort his healing his help his strength everything.

There isn't any way that God's gift is not suited perfectly to us. Don't waste his gift. Don't refuse his gift and waste it.

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God the same was in the beginning with God all things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men and the light shines on even this morning in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory the glory is of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth.

He was in the world and the world was made through him and the world did not know him he came to his own and his own did not receive him. That's possible. They didn't receive him.

God's indescribable gift suited to our every need wasted on thousands of people who do not receive him. But there he is and that's the issue this morning not to waste him. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

Paul said holding fast the word of life so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. He said in Galatians 2.21 I do not nullify the grace of God then Christ has died needlessly. Christmas is a time to receive.

Christmas is really about God's gift. Christmas is not about us. It's about God.

Christmas is really not about us giving gifts but about God's indescribable gift. And I love Romans 8.32 He that spared not his own son but delivered him up for us all how shall he not also along with him freely give us all things. Well that's Christmas.

As I close this morning I want to give you a story a true story about a gift. It was the Sunday night service before the pastor began to preach he introduced a guest minister who was in the service. The pastor told the congregation that the guest minister was one of his dearest childhood friends and that he wanted him to have a few moments to greet the church and share whatever he felt would be appropriate for the service.

With that an elderly man stepped up to the pulpit and began to speak. He said a father, his son and a friend of the sons were sailing off the Pacific coast. A fast approaching storm quickly blocked any attempt to get back to shore.

The waves were so high that the father though an experienced sailor could not keep the boat upright and all three were swept into the ocean as the boat capsized. Grabbing a rescue line the father had to make the most excruciating decision of his life to which boy would he throw the other end of the lifeline. He had only seconds to make the decision.

The father knew that his son was a Christian and he also knew that his son's friend was not. The agony of his decision could not be matched by the torrent of waves. The father yelled out I love you son then threw the lifeline to his son's friend.

By the time the father had pulled the friend back to the capsized boat his son had disappeared beneath the raging swells into the black of night. His body was never recovered. The father knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into eternity without Jesus.

Therefore he sacrificed his son to save the son's friend. How great is the love of God that he should do the same for us. Our heavenly father sacrificed his only begotten son that we could be saved.

The old man turned and sat down as silence filled the room. After the service two teenagers came to speak to the elderly minister. That was a nice story said one of the boys but I don't think it was very realistic for the father to give up his only son's life in the hope that the other boy would become a Christian.

Well you have a point there the old man replied glancing down at his horned Bible. A big smile broadened his narrow face as he looked intently at the two boys and said it sure isn't very realistic, is it? But I'm standing here today to tell you that story because I was that father and your pastor was my son's friend. What a gift of love.

What a sacrifice. What a price. It was said of Jesus he saved others.

Himself he cannot save. So that is God's kind of Christmas gift. You can receive that gift right now.

Right there where you're sitting in your seat. It's really quite simple though you have to mean it with all your heart. But Jesus died for your sins no matter what they are and he is here by his spirit to enter our hearts if we open our hearts to him.

In a moment, I'm going to pray a prayer that you might want to pray if you want to turn your heart over to God and open your heart to Christ and accept him as your savior. I'm going to pray it slowly in short phrases so that you can follow me. If you want to receive Christ this morning then while I pray you silently where you're sitting just silently follow me in the prayer but mean it with all your heart to God.

And Christ can come into your heart. You can receive God's indescribable gift right now this morning and for your first Christmas be truly a Christian. Let us all bow our heads and you may follow me silently in prayer.

Dear Lord Jesus, I thank you for your love I am a sinner. I do need you. I bow before you now.

I thank you Lord Jesus for dying for me. I ask you to wash away all my sins in your blood. I open my heart to you.

Lord Jesus, I receive you now. Come into my heart. I give you my life.

Help me to live for you. Thank you for saving me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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