

CHRISTMAS: IT'S NOT YOUR BIRTHDAY 5

"It's the birth of Generosity!"

I have very much enjoyed preaching the series, Christmas: It's not your Birthday this Advent Season. Though it's not our birthday, we've discovered that Christmas did however birth; Hope, Joy, Peace, Love and tonight, I hope we'll come to see how Christmas birthed Generosity. Consider these words from God's Word:

*Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer **generosity** he put us in right standing with himself. A pure **gift**. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ. Romans 3:22-24*

This evening we light the Christ Candle, and we celebrate the greatest gift: Jesus Christ. On a star lit night some 2000 years ago, God chose to become one of us, so that we might choose to become one of His. I want to consider this gift in a bit more depth with you this evening.

There are three common complaints about the gifts we receive at Christmas. In just a few minutes or hours, we'll gather around our family Christmas tree, and gifts will be presented, gifts will be shared, gifts will be opened, gifts will be tried on, gifts will be laughed at, gifts will be given and gifts will be received. With the giving of gifts; there are also some complaints, in fact there are three that reign supreme:

1- They are impractical and useless. We've all received something, sometime from someone; which is impractical and useless. The thought and intention are probably good and right, but the gift is all wrong. Giving me a gift of paint brushes, canvas, and oil paints won't produce any masterpieces, but it will produce a mess, and someone will complain about that. Sometimes people complain about their gifts because:

2- They break too soon and don't last long enough. Santa had one little boy on his knee last week who requested, "a race track set, a good one that doesn't break too soon." Have you ever received something that just didn't last?

Who of us dads has not labored long into Christmas Eve night fighting with the instructions while fidgeting kids waited somewhat patiently; as we tried desperately and quickly to assemble this simple toy or game or whatever? And then, just about as soon as we get it together, it breaks or stops or just never works. Talk about frustrating for all, and to all a not-so-good night! Some people complain about their gifts that:

3- They are cheap and meaningless. None of us should ever expect to get certain things from certain people. We should always be surprised and appreciative, whatever we receive. But truth be told, most of us at some point in our lives have been disappointed with what we received from someone, because it did not represent or cost what we thought appropriate for our relationship. I know I've given Susan stupid things over the years that were unworthy of the love and relationship I treasure; I'm just a poor shopper, and I know it, and I'm sorry.

Tonight, though, I want to think with you about God's Greatest Gift; Jesus Christ. This gift is none of those things, in fact it is just the opposite. Consider:

1. The Use of the Gift – It's Practical

Jesus Christ is the most practical gift you'll ever receive. You'll use it every day of your life. Jesus is not just a "take down for company show-piece"; He's not just to be played with on special occasions...say like Sunday. He's an everyday, useful, practical gift. You can use this gift every day of your life. You can apply His love and grace and forgiveness to every sin in your life. You can incorporate this gift into every relationship of your life. You can give this gift to every other person in your life, and never have it diminished in your own life! Jesus is the one gift that fits every occasion. He is the one gift that is never inappropriate. He is the one gift you should be proud to display, use and even share, every day of your life. When considering whether or not to buy this gift...consider just how practical it really is. Jesus is the most practical gift you'll ever receive.

2. The Length of the Gift – It's Forever

Jesus is the only Gift you'll ever receive that will last forever. You don't have to worry about replacing batteries, or parts wearing out, or instructions getting lost, damaged or destroyed. You don't have to worry about it going out of style, or losing its edge, or wearing out its welcome. You won't pack it away in a box and forget where you put it like the other Christmas decorations...or at least you shouldn't! Jesus is the one, and truly only gift...that keeps on giving! God's promise to us in Jesus was not a once in a life-time event, but a once FOR a lifetime experience. Jesus is the greatest gift, because those who receive HIM will not perish, but have everlasting life. You know why they call it everlasting life? Because it lasts forever! DUH!

We live in such a disposable world, where stuff gets thrown away when the batteries wear out, because it's cheaper to replace than to repair! Not Jesus! He is non-disposable, non-returnable. His worth is non-refundable, His value is indescribable, His love is incomprehensible, and His life...which becomes our life...is eternal. When considering whether to buy this gift...consider how long it will last...it is forever!

3. The Cost of the Gift – Priceless

We've all become familiar, and somewhat nauseated with the Credit Card commercials that advertise this thing costs this much, this thing costs this much, and this thing costs this much. But this experience...PRICELESS. But the reality is; there is only one gift that is truly PRICELESS, and that is Jesus Christ. The most expensive gift ever you'll receive, is Jesus Christ. You might receive the life-long love of a spouse or a child or a parent, but those earthly relationships will end, this one lasts forever, remember, this gift is priceless, and not just for what it promises to give, but for what it cost!

God sent His one and only Son to this earth to die for each one of us, and that cost was born solely by God. God willfully and intentionally gave to each one of us, individually, personally, specially, this most priceless gift: His only Son.

There is no greater gift. When considering whether or not to buy this gift, remember not just its value, but remember what it cost: Priceless.

As mentioned earlier, I've challenged all of us to consider having half a Christmas this year, and giving the other half in an offering of love and generosity to the Ruth Meiers Hospitality House. In a few moments we'll be receiving your gifts of generosity, that when totaled, I believe (do you) will produce a miracle of generosity. As we've, this evening considered the gift of Jesus Christ, I also want you to consider this. When once we've received this amazingly practical, longest-lasting, and priceless gift...we have opportunities to advance that gift by giving to others. Part of the reason I've challenged us with this series: Christmas; is not our Birthday, is to remind us that it is Jesus Birthday, and that giving gifts to Jesus is more important than any gift we might receive. And since Jesus is no longer physically present with us, we give those gifts to the people Jesus would have given them to, had he been here. Make sense?

So in closing, I want you to spend a few minutes thinking about these scriptures:

*"Listen carefully to what I am saying—and be wary of the shrewd advice that tells you how to get ahead in the world on your own. Giving, not getting, is the way. **Generosity begets generosity. Stinginess impoverishes.**" Mark 4:24*

*"Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults— unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don't condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. **Generosity begets generosity.**" Luke 6:37*

*Hallelujah! Blessed man, blessed woman, who fear God, who cherish and relish his commandments. Your children will be successful everywhere; an entire generation of godly people will be blessed. Their houses brim with wealth and a **generosity** that never runs dry. Sunrise breaks through the darkness for good people - God's grace and mercy and justice! The good person is generous and lends lavishly; no shuffling or stumbling around for this one, but a sterling and solid and lasting reputation. Unfazed by rumor and gossip, heart ready, trusting in God, Spirit firm, unperturbed, ever blessed, relaxed among enemies. They lavish gifts on the poor - A **generosity** that goes on, and on, and on. An honored life! A beautiful life! Psalm 112 from the Message and NLT*

So here's what I think: The best thing you can do right now is to finish what you started last year and not let those good intentions grow stale. Your heart's been in the right place all along. You've got what it takes to finish it up, so go to it. Once the commitment is clear, you do what you can, not what you can't. The heart regulates the hands. This isn't so others can take it easy while you sweat it out. No, you're shoulder to shoulder with them all the way, your surplus matching their deficit, their surplus matching your deficit. In the end you come out even. As it is written, nothing left over to the one with the most, nothing lacking to the one with the least. 2 Corinthians 8:10

And speaking of "next year", I have another challenge for you. It could become our 2010 Christmas Challenge. A couple weeks ago a good friend gave me a great little Christmas book titled, Christmas Jars. It is a fictional story...that needs to become a practical reality. I'm sure we won't be the first, but I want to extend the challenge offered in the book. I'd like to offer a way to make the 09 Challenge even more practical for your family. Read the book, and then find a jar in your house, any size, any former purpose, and begin depositing your daily 'change' in the jar. It might be a jelly jar, or a 5 gallon pickle jar; just start dropping your change, (and now and then a few dollars) into this jar. Put a big CJ (for Christmas Jar) on the front and top of the jar, leave it in a prominent place, and begin filling the jar with your spare change. Everyday you'll be reminded that Christmas is not your BD, and occasionally people will ask the meaning and purpose of the jar...tell them the story. Over the course of this year, let's fill 500 jars, and come next Dec. we'll have all kinds of gifts to share with people in need.

Now, I want you to spend a few moments in silence, praying about your gift tonight. Do the absolute best you can...that's all I or God or anyone else expects!

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Common criticisms of Christmas gifts:

- 1- They are _____ and _____.
- 2- They break too _____ and don't last long _____.
- 3- They are _____ and _____.

The supreme Merit of God's Greatest Gift:

1. The _____ of the Gift – It's _____.
2. The _____ of the Gift – It's _____.
3. The _____ of the Gift – It's _____.

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