

The True Christmas Gift

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Our Scripture reading this afternoon is from 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

6 But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. 7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: 9 (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. 10 Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) 11 Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. 12 For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; 13 Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; 14 And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. 15 Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

Thus far the reading of sacred Scripture.

We live, dear congregation, in a sobering world, a world which is awash with terrorism; a world in which innocent people are blown to bits motivated by people who are fanatics, who have access to weapons of fearful destruction. The prospects of our culture and our society when looking upon this world are grim. Our western culture is not much better. We're awash in drugs and alcohol; our society is filled with sensuality, materialism and violence. People everywhere are speaking about their rights. The effects of gambling and pornography and abortion and illiteracy and debt and theft and divorce permeate our culture. What future do we have? What can we say? What message can we bring? The answer is in our text this afternoon. We do have a message, a glorious message; a message of good news in the midst of great sobering realities; a message of gratitude and wonder and love that springs forth in the midst of a self-hating, self-destroying world. It's

a message of the glorious Gospel of our blessed God housed and compacted in one glorious person, the advent Immanuel.

This afternoon we want to just meditate with you on our duty to simply thank God for this unspeakable gift and so the words of our text are 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." Our theme this afternoon is the true Christmas gift and I want to look at this with you in three thoughts. First, a divine gift; second, an unspeakable gift; and third, a received gift. The true Christmas gift: divine, unspeakable, and received.

A poet once wrote,

"Christ reigns, ye saints, exalt your strains,
Your God is King, your Father reigns,
And he is at the Father's side,
The man of love, the crucified."

This is possible only because God became incarnate in Jesus Christ and God gives the gift of his Son, gives the King who has the whole world in his hand for sinners, for poor, needy sinners like you and me. My friend, if we realize this even for a moment, our hearts would rejoice with joy unspeakable. We would have discouragement free zone in our lives if we understood what it means that Jesus Christ has come and suffered and died and rose again and ever intercedes at the Father's right hand for us moment by moment if we're true believers. What a gift. What generosity in the heart of God to give his only begotten Son.

That's really where Paul climaxes at the end of these chapters in 2 Corinthians where he's been speaking now for two chapters about the generosity of the Corinthians and the divine benediction that is resting upon those who are generous with their giving. Paul is saying some wonderful things here about Christian stewardship and those who give generously. It's amazing. In verses 7 and 8 he says let every man do it from his heart. God loves a cheerful giver and God is able to make all grace abound to you when you abound in every good work in giving charitably and freely and joyfully. It is a wonderful thing to give. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

But as Paul always does, while he's talking about things on a human level, his mind is always racing toward Jesus Christ and he always takes good things he's talking about on a horizontal level among men and he lifts them up at some point, doesn't he, and he brings them up to Christ and that's what he's doing in the closing verse of 2 Corinthians 9. He's expounding this wonderful generosity, commending the Corinthians for their generosity, but then suddenly his heart just swells and it's like he can't stop his pen and he says, "But thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. He is the generous one par excellence. He gave his only begotten Son." This is a divine gift; a holy, divine gift. Think about that. Let that sink into your soul a moment: Jesus Christ is the gift of God to sinners. That's the theme of the Gospel; this unexpected gift; this glorious gift; this all-sufficient gift; this

gift that made Paul say, "Christ loved me and gave himself for me. The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This is the season of the year especially when people think about gifts and people go out and get gifts and sometimes people are hurried in doing so. Sometimes they don't give out of a right motive. They give out of a sense of duty, but this is no fake gift, congregation. Jesus Christ is the genuine gift of God. There are no strings attached. There is no fine print attached to his coming. This gift isn't like those envelopes that you get in your home in the mail that tells you the contents are highly important and when you open it up, it tells you you've been chosen to receive a wonderful gift. But before your heart beats faster and dreams of wealth, you discover there is all kinds of fine print and all kinds of conditions and you've got to sign forms and take part in competitions and you're involved in some sweepstake and you discover that this so-called gift is really no gift at all. Well, the Son of God isn't like that. There are no strings attached. He's a genuine gift and he's offered freely. He's offered freely to people like you and me who would have no natural claim to him, and he's given without anything being received in return; it's a one sided, unconditional gift.

You see, if something is valueless like a stone in a gutter, it's not considered suitable for a gift. Or if something is offered without any reluctance, utterly freely, the giver has no obligation whatsoever to make the gift, but this gift is different. This gift is not like the tax that you send to the IRS. You say, "Well, I'm giving to the government," but it's not really a gift, it's that you know you'll have to go to prison if you fail to send in your money. You do it out of a sense of duty or sometimes you give to people because they deserve it. Perhaps you're an employer and you give to your employees; you cut them checks. They've earned it. They've got an hourly wage and you pay them and they don't get the check and say, "Oh, what a gift! Thank you for your gift!" They're grateful for a job but they say, "We've earned this money. This check is not a gift." But, you see, the point that Paul is making here, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift," is it's all a gift and it's a true gift. It's a genuine gift. It's an eternal gift. It's a gift that will never be taken back.

Sometimes when people give gifts, well, that's true in our seminary as well, so that they can get a tax deduction and they have a nonprofit status and so we put on the bottom of the letter, "For the sake of the giver that we have given no goods or services to this giver in return." This was a bona fide gift. This giver just gave this gift and there's nothing we've given back, you see. It's a real gift.

Well, Paul says God has given us an amazing gift; a gift of immense value; a gift that is uttered in all its fullness in the word of God; a gift that is offered freely; a gift that comes without any obligation on God's part. A gift that we have no claims to except, well, our own destruction is the only claim we have and God offers this gift to deliver us from that destruction. God never offered his gift so that one day he'd receive something back in return. It's not a loan. It's not a low interest gift. It's uttered utterly, utterly free. No hidden obligations. God's hands are stretched out and he says, "Here is my Son. I give him to you, sinner, freely." It's a divine gift.

So God, being under no obligation to provide a Savior at all, having provided none for fallen angels, provides a gift, the unspeakable gift for fallen sons and daughters of men and he sets his love on countless millions like the sands on the seashore and he determines to save them and to give them this glorious gift, and all they can do is stammer back, "Thanks be unto God." Can you stammer it this afternoon? "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift to me."

Well, it's a divine gift Paul says, but secondly he says it's an unspeakable gift. It's an unspeakable gift. The original word here, it's a very interesting one, *anekdiegetos*; it means it cannot be expounded in full. It's beyond human language. It's indescribable. It's beyond the confines of our human vocabulary. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Today, I've had the privilege of serving you for 21 years. This has been my goal from the very beginning, to declare this gift, but I haven't begun to declare it. At very best, you see, this gift is so great the very best we can do in this life is like putting your toes in an ocean's edge and there is an entire ocean of which we can swim in the infinity of the love and the gift of God in Jesus Christ and we stammer a little in our broken language, but it's beyond us, you see. *Anekdiegetos*, beyond our comprehension, beyond our vocabulary, beyond our grasp. There is so much more to know; so much more to swim in; so much more to discover. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Yet we are called to stammer about it, the little we know. The little we know. And what can we stammer about it? Well, let me say just a few things. First, this gift is unspeakable, it's indescribable because of what that love has done. John 3:16, you know, is the most well-known verse in the Bible. It doesn't say how exciting it is that God loved the world. It doesn't say that God loved the world fervently or greatly or immeasurably or unspeakably. It doesn't give all kinds of adverbs and adjectives to this love. It's the greatest verse in the Bible because it describes what God gives. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." What an amazing thing. A mother loves her unborn son so much that she refuses chemotherapy for her own cancer that the child be not hurt in any way. She takes death that she might give life to her boy. Love makes her act like that. But that's not what we have here. We have something beyond that here. We have the cancer loved: the lust of the eyes; the lust of the flesh; the sin love. "God so loved the world," the sin loving world, the God hating world, "that he gave his only begotten Son." This love is indescribable.

Secondly, this love is indescribable because of God the Father's love for his own Son. The Father loved the Son like no one has ever loved anyone and it's an immeasurable love. This love was in the bosom of God. God loves God in an intra-Trinitarian personality of love that is beyond human language. And this God who loves the Son of his bosom with delight from eternity past, this God gives his Son for rebels and sinners like you and me. If this God is so able to love even his enemies and bless them with countless benefits every day, what must his love be like for his only begotten Son? And yet he subjects that Son to the cross, to nails, to the whip, to nakedness and shame and

mocked and darkness and the anathema and the grave? Someone put it this way: it is as if God trained a vast jet of a torched flame upon his Son and kept it on him hour after hour, fusing him to our sin and our sin to him, and the Son willingly endured it out of love for us all that we might be spared the flames of hell and know eternal communion with him.

Thirdly, God's love is indescribable because of the person whom he gives, the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, when David wanted to make things up with the Gibeonites, he said, "Ask me what you will." And the Gibeonites said they wanted seven of Saul's relatives to be killed and we read that David gave them seven, but it says he spared Mephibosheth. For Jonathan's sake, he loved him. For Jonathan's sake. For the covenant's sake. And God made a covenant with his Son, but God did not spare his own Son. God gave him, you see. If God had given 10,000 angels we'd say, "Wow, what a gift! It's amazing. He gave 10,000 angels to save you." But God didn't give 10,000 angels, God gave something more. He gave the uncreatable. No one created God. He is the unoriginated, unbegun one, without beginning or end of days, as eternal as God himself. God gave the eternal God-man, made man, assumed to his Godhead. He gave eternal God, as it were. He gave himself. What a gift.

In giving us Christ, God gave us himself and all that he possesses. He gave us something more than the worlds and the universes in comparison to the Creator of the rolling spheres and the Lord of the angels. All these things are mere creatures, you see, but he's a Creator. He gave the Creator. Can you comprehend that? "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Then, fourthly, this gift is so unspeakable because of how low God had to come to give it. From the throne of the universe, down, down, down to become a little baby in the womb and then born to a poor virgin girl, wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger in Bethlehem. The eternal is dandled on a woman's knee. The mother of our Lord looks after the ancient of days. She nurses. She ministers to him. The Maker of all things is helping the one he calls father to make tables in the carpenter's shop in Nazareth. The one in whom are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, is sitting among doctors in the temple listening to what they say. The one who owns the universe has nowhere to lay his head. The Creator of the clouds and the rain and the seas asked a despised Samaritan woman for a drink of water. How do you understand it? It's unspeakable. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." It's a message of grace. It's a message of love. It's a message of substitutionary love. The joy of heaven has come down to earth to become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. This is an unspeakable gift.

It's unspeakable too because of what it saves us from. It saves us from atrocious sin. Fallen angels are bound in the blackness of darkness, Jude tells us, bound in eternal chains expecting an eternity of wretchedness and we, sinners, they be delivered and be saved, redeemed. And all our sins will be washed away and cast behind his back into the sea of eternal forgetfulness? Oh, what an unspeakable gift.

Do you use this gift? Are you quick to use it every day? Quick to run to him? Quick to confide in him? Quick to trust in him? There was an old Westminster divine, 1640s wrote a wonderful book. The title of the book is called, "How to make a speedy use of Christ in every situation." That gift is meant to be used. What do you think when you give a gift to someone and the person says, "Well, thank you very much. It's a very special gift. I'd better put that in the cupboard and not use it. It's too special." You say, "No, no, no, I gave you this gift to use it." God gives us an unspeakable gift, my friend, to be used. He wants us to pray to his Son; to think about his Son; to praise his Son; to find our life in his Son. He wants us to enjoy him.

Sometimes we are prone to forget about that and that's one of the riches of the Westminster tradition, you know, that that first question is so well known in Presbyterian circles, "What's the purpose of man? To glorify God and to enjoy, to enjoy him forever." God takes delight when sinners enjoy his gift. And isn't that true whenever you give something to someone else, you women when you make a wonderful meal and you invite some people over and they enjoy it and they compliment you. They say, "This is such an enjoyable meal. It's so tasty. It's so delicious." Don't you get a sense of satisfaction? In fact, you invite them to eat more. You say, "I don't want leftovers. Use it. Use it. Enjoy it." A minister when he preaches has much the same spirit. You want people to receive the word. As a minister, you want them to enjoy it. You want them to feast on it. I think one of the best comments a minister could hear after a sermon is that someone says, "Well, it was a feast for my soul. I enjoyed it in the depths of my being. The word did something to me." But God longs for sinners to enjoy his Son far, far, far beyond a woman desires when her meal is made or a minister when he preaches a sermon. God's heart is beating with longing as sinners enjoy this gift. Oh, my friend, do you enjoy the living God? Do you make use of his Son?

And fifthly, this gift is indescribable, it's unspeakable because of all the benefits it brings into the lives of God's people; all the ways, the variety in which he is to be enjoyed. You know, in Korea when you eat a meal, what people often do, especially a sit-down meal, is you sit on the floor around the table and then they bring you little dishes and you're expected to pass around all these little dishes, you see, and everyone is supposed to take out of this one little dish a sampling or two, a bite or two, of this food and that's their meal. Lots of little dishes; lots of variety. One time we came to a restaurant and I think there were four of us and we said, "Well, we're not really that hungry. We'll only order three meals for four people. Maybe we won't get so many dishes," because there is such a variety it almost is embarrassing. So we just ordered three meals and we got, I think it was 48 dishes. Little dishes. You taste this. You taste that. What a variety. It's amazing, Korean cooking.

But, you see, it's nothing compared to the variety of the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole book, well, a multi-volume set of books could be preached out of this text quite easily. 280 names. Philip Henry preached 280 sermons on the 280 names of the Lord Jesus Christ or something like that, maybe not quite that many but every name is a sermon. Every name is a new dish to meditate on, to enjoy. And you think of the states of humiliation and exaltation, every step is birthed. Well, that's certainly a big dish, isn't it?

His sufferings. Well, we have seven weeks every year we preach on that and we only begin. His death, Good Friday. His descent into hell. There is another sermon. His burial. His resurrection. Oh, how many sermons could be preached on that? I have a book in my study of a man who preached 17 sermons on the resurrection of Christ and just scratched the surface. His ascension, there are whole books on that. Sermons full of books or books full of sermons. And then his sitting at the right hand of God. His coming again. Day of judgment. There is no end to it, is it?

What about his offices? How much he does as a prophet? As a priest? As a King? Many fat books have been written on any one of those three offices. Ministers have preached 20, 30 sermons on one office. All different dishes. Different dishes. The fullness of Jesus for sinners.

One dish that isn't served very often which should be is his intercession. What a rich thing that is. A tasty morsel. And he intercedes every moment for me at the Father's right hand. Never leaves me alone for one second in any need. No need is too big. No need is too small. That's to strengthen widows. That's to strengthen those afflicted. That's to strengthen those with cancer. He intercedes for me moment by moment by moment. Oh, what variety there is in the Lord Jesus Christ. And the wonder of all of this is that I don't deserve any of it. I don't deserve any of it.

If I gave my son a dollar to go in, say we're by a gas station, to go in, get a candy bar and he comes out and he's got a candy bar and he thanks me. That's a gift, isn't it? But what if I gave to him a thousand dollars and I said, "Here's a thousand dollars. You go in and get yourself a candy bar and, by the way, you can keep all the rest." "Dad," he'd say, "I can't believe you're doing this. That is so generous of you. I didn't do anything to deserve it." "I know, my son, that's why I'm giving it to you, because you did nothing to deserve it." That's what God's doing. Not just a thousand dollars. Not just a million. Not just ten million but a priceless amount he gives freely. Not just because we didn't deserve it but we actually went the opposite, you see. We undeserved it. We sinned it away. We made ourselves ripe for hell and instead he gives us heaven and his Son. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Well, you see, my friends, there is no end to the unspeakableness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's a divine gift. He's an unspeakable gift. Oh, what will it be in heaven one day? Let that be the last thought for this point. In heaven one day to be with him forever. What a gift. Never to have him lost sight of. Always the Lamb on the center throne. Always in view. Always full of riches and generosity. What a Lamb of God he is.

I was talking with a grandparent not so long ago and he said, "You know, I always look forward to seeing my grandchildren. I always look forward to seeing them." The grandchildren said, "Oh, we look forward to seeing our grandma. We can't wait to see her smiling face. And every time we come, she's got hugs for us and smiles and embraces. She kisses us. We love to go to grandma's house." That's a drop in the bucket compared to being in Jesus' house. The Lord is our dwelling place in all generations. To always see him; to never see a frown; to always feel his love; to have unstained spirits; unstained

souls; unstained bodies; perfect souls; perfect bodies worshiping a perfect Savior in a perfect realm of bliss forever and ever. This is the unspeakable gift of God. "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift."

Finally, this is a received gift. That's our third thought but every gift has a giver and a receiver. It must be received. So the question I have for you in closing this afternoon is very simple: have you, by God's grace, received the gift of his Son? And having received it, are you thankful to him for it? And are you enjoying that gift? You may receive it by the grace of the Holy Spirit. It's completely free. Nothing is freer in all the world. But I need to tell you something, you can't receive it if your hands are full with this world. It's an empty hand that receives a gift. Sometimes when you give something to someone they say, "I can't take it right now, my hands are full. Let me put this down and then I can receive it." And you see the tragedy, the tragedy of this life is that so many people have their hands full of the gifts of this world, rather than the gift of the world above. That's why Christ is lost beneath Christmas in so many homes, in so many hearts. So many poor children are looking so forward to Christmas because of the riches of the gifts they'll receive. Their hands will be full but their hearts empty. We need to come before God as sinners and stretch out our empty beggar's hands to receive the gift of God's provision.

There has to be a receiving, you see, that's the point, but there is no receiving, the gift hasn't been transacted. That's why John says at the beginning of his Gospel when he's writing about this indescribable gift and he says, "He came to his own," fellow Jews, "but they didn't receive him." They received him not. They despised him. They rejected him. He said, "We have no king but Caesar," and they crucified him. What are you doing with Jesus? When God offers, are you turning away? Are you filling your lives with worldly things or legitimate earthly things? No room for Jesus. Oh, what a tragedy that is. The only thing that can satisfy you and you have no room for that? No room for that?

There was a man who said to me just a week or two ago, he said, "Do you know what I've learned in my life? I've learned that nothing can satisfy me except for Jesus." Then he said this and it's quite remarkable, I thought. He said, "You know, even if you're preaching about Jesus, speaking about him," and he does do some speaking, he said, "you can be so filled with him, you can have such an enjoyment when you're speaking, but if you don't enjoy him yourself, when you're done speaking you'll feel an emptiness, because even as a minister, even as you preach him, as wonderful as it is, if you don't enjoy him yourself, it will disappear." That's why ministers speak of the Monday morning blues. You often feel let down. They feel discouraged because we ministers just like you, we need to have Jesus himself. We need to receive him, not just talk about him, but receive him, enjoy him. We find our delight in this gift of God.

You see, this is why people are pursuing all kinds of other things: worldly things; godless things; externally sometimes good things. That's why they put their hearts in areas of this life that maybe are legitimate, maybe are illegitimate, but they give it their all. They've got to put their energies somewhere. They've got to find their enjoyment somewhere. But it's only when we enjoy Jesus Christ as our supreme enjoyment and receive the gift of God for poor needy sinners and find our all in him, only then does all the rest of our life

fall in place and everything have its proper level of enjoyment. Calvin would say enjoyment with moderation remembering we're sinners. "Seek ye first," dear congregation, "seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other things will be added to you."

But, oh, how tragic when we say with our hands full and our hearts empty, "Lord, I don't want thy Son. I don't need thy Son." That's what we say every time we reject the proffered Gospel. "I don't want this gift. Yet, maybe one day." We're good Felix's by nature, aren't we? "One day, a convenient season, when that comes." Blessed are you when you can't do without this gift and your hands are empty and you see the emptiness of this world and you must cry out, "Give me Jesus else I die!" The best moments of our life are those moments when we consciously receive the gift of God and enjoy his Son and find all our salvation in him. There is no sweetness like that. Then what do we do? Well, then we don't have to work at thanksgiving, do we? It just springs up, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." It springs out of our hearts like it sprang out of Paul's pen suddenly, in verse 15.

Now, some of you, some of you aren't sure whether you have received this gift or not. Sometimes you think you have it, other times you fear you don't. Friend, don't rest in that condition without assurance. Seek to make your calling and election sure. You know, if you were dying and there was some miracle drug that a doctor was offering you, wouldn't you want to know where to find it? Wouldn't you want to know whether it had been given to you or not? Could you tolerate the uncertainty of there being this great cure but you didn't know whether you received the drug or not? If it was a test and some people received a fake drug, other people received the real thing, you'd want to know. "Did I get the real thing?"

Don't rest without knowing, "Do I have the real Christ? How do I know?" Well, Jesus told us, "He that hears my words and believes on him that sent me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation but has passed from death into life." Do you hear him? Do you receive him? Do you believe in him? Do you trust him? Or must you say with the poet,

"No room in the inn for Jesus,
When he came on that starlit night.
No room for the great Creator,
No room for the giver of light.
No room in the world for Jesus,
No room in our hearts today.
No room for the King of glory,
Oh, how can we turn him away?"

"No room? Dear Lord, please forgive us,
For keeping thy Son outside.
No room, do open the portals,
And all the doors fling wide.

Make room, O thou gentle Redeemer,
Make room, O giver of light.
Make room in the world for Jesus,
Make room in my heart tonight."

Is there room? Be honest. Is there room in your heart today?

Let me close with this little poem by Robert Murray M'Cheyne.

"When this passing world is done,
When it's sunk beyond glaring sun,
When I stand with Christ in glory,
Looking 'oer life's finished story,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not 'til then how much I owe.

"When I stand before the throne,
Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see thee as thou art,
Lovely with unsinning heart,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not 'til then how much I owe."

"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." Amen.