



**"THE ULTIMATE GIFT" Christmas 2014**  
**December 21st, 2014 at Jesus Fellowship of Believers,**  
**Menomonie, Wisconsin by Pastor Tim Dodson**

John 6:30-40 *"Therefore they said to Him, What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'" Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." And Jesus said to*

*them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."*

According to statistics, the average American will spend 861\$ on Christmas gifts this year. Wow. To some of us, that is still a lot of money. For such a Christmas, there is a cost, and it is apparently fairly high. For Christians especially, the debate goes on in this matter as we struggle with the ethics and ramifications of such materialistic spending. But that's not what I want to talk about today...

Think back on your life...what is the greatest gift you have ever received? Maybe great financial cost was involved, and maybe not. A gift doesn't have to be expensive to be important. For the true value and importance of such isn't usually measured in terms of money. The gifts that we remember and hold dear are the ones that came with a story, and usually with a great passion and heart. When a gift is personal and brings great joy to *your* life, it is bound therefore to have great value to you personally.

As disciples of Christ, we are cognizant of the fact that all of this is not primarily about Santa and new toys, but about Jesus and his coming. And for *that* Christmas' also there was cost, ...a cost so often beyond our understanding and our grasp. Yet how many of us even today fail to grasp the extent and magnitude of that gift? In John 4, verse 10 Jesus said to the woman at the well, *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."*

When I was a kid, my brother got a little Christmas gift from his employer. He opened the end of it and shook out a nice little pocket knife. But what he failed to know was that around that knife was a 50 or a 100 dollar bill (I can't remember exactly...), but the point is, he unwittingly burned that bill with the wrapping paper. It was a nice pocket knife, but he failed to get the whole picture. He didn't understand the magnitude of the gift.

I think now clear back to the garden. God had created His masterpiece, the earth and everything in it and He did it 6 days. He could have done it faster...He was taking His time no doubt. But it was *perfect*. I wonder if we are truly aware of that? It was His symphony! His 'Mona Lisa.' His "Sistine chapel." And it was a gift from Him to us: personally and intimately *for* us. We can see even now such beauty and craftsmanship in the natural world around us, and that is the *fallen* version! Apparently both then as well as now, we didn't get it...we didn't understand the magnitude of the gift. So we thus inexplicably threw it away with the wrapping paper.

It seemed that Christmas's came and went, and God kept giving man some awesome presents. And again and again, we didn't see the full impact. Noah won the lottery and his whole family was rescued when everyone else died. But he soon fell to getting drunk and stupid. He appreciated the 'pocketknife,' but unwittingly 'burned the cash.' Moses and the gang were given the gift of freedom from slavery and then promptly started complaining and whining in the desert because the gift apparently wasn't big enough. Like spoiled children around the tree on Christmas morning they cried "*is that all we get?*" David was the apparent winner of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" and went from a little shepherd boy to King over God's chosen nation, but he wanted some other guys present and so he killed him and took *his* special present which was his wife. He didn't understand the gift either.

Page after page of 'the book' records story after story of spoiled children and unappreciated...*perhaps somewhat unwitting*, receiving of divine gifts. And finally the Old Testament closed and the Grinch stole Christmas for over 400 years. It was all quiet. No fa la la and no ho ho ho.

But then suddenly out of the silence of over 4 centuries came blasting forth "Peace on earth good will toward men..." There was awesome lights, angelic carolers, a live nativity! But most of all, there came the greatest gift God ever gave man: *his very self embodied in the flesh of humanity*, the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ! Wow...what a present! We were very thankful...and we liked our new gift. But as usual, most of humanity appreciated the pocketknife and promptly burned the real gift with the wrapping paper. We just didn't get it. And many of us today even now fail to understand this awesome gift, and have put it away in the closet like a white elephant present, and there it sits this morning still.

The news in my life these days is that my new/used car talks to me. It tells me when my tire is low on air and which tire it is. It tells me when my headlight is out, what the temperature is outside, and what my average miles per gallon is. Ever since I got that car I keep finding things that it does. It's like the first year of my marriage. I keep expecting secret doors to pop open and maybe find James Bond missiles launchers or an ejection seat or something.

And this gift that I have been given in Christ? In that too I keep finding new switches, lights, and bells. I keep finding more things that this gift can do and more things that it means. I mean, I think I got the idea even at first that there was this "forgiveness of sin" thing and that I could ultimately cash it in for eternal life in heaven. Sweet. But not exactly practical for my life today. It's like getting flip flops for Christmas. Cool. But I can't really wear them for a few months. But all of this is essentially burning the real gift because I am still failing to adequately unwrap the present.

For like Adam, Noah, Moses, David, and all the rest of those gift receivers, what you and I are really given is "life." Not just the breath of life, but "life abundant." For in this present is the "swiss army knife" of life. There is peace of soul, joy of living, power over fear, clarity of vision and wholeness of purpose. It is a smile in the morning because you own it, and 'rest' when you go to bed because it owns *you*. It's so cool that you want to hold it every day in your hands and put it up to the light to see it shine. As you start 'flipping the switches' you find that it makes a marriage, and is the GPS of parenting. It is the supreme 'hiking and camping' guidebook, and for some crazy reason it makes some people like you when you look just like you did before you got it. Now women find you handsome, and your parents think you have been taken over by body snatchers. It came with all sorts of attachments: friends that are closer than family, trust when everything seems crazy, a map of life, and a phone number to call for tech needs where you get to talk to a live voice 24 hours a day.

It is the supreme proverbial “gift that keeps on giving.” For today, those of us that have opened up that present, are even yet receiving all that it means...all the ramifications of the “gift of Jesus Christ.” It is more than the ‘gift of salvation’...He is the *gift of life*.

And unless we understand the gift, we will not grasp the cost. It was free to us, but it cost God so very, very much. And today, some of us have dutifully thanked the giver, and then put the gift away in the closet...unaware of what the gift really is and what it really does. Some of us sadly have not even opened the gift because we even now fail to understand its value. Frankly, we didn’t pay much attention because we didn’t recognize the name of the giver on the card. But this gift comes with a story. It comes with passion and heart.

So this morning the world seems to me to be in chaos. Little groups and even individuals are arming up and killing anyone who disagrees with them. Governments and people groups seem so frail and the world so vulnerable. The political realm seems like an exercise in madness. The media daily brings us scenes of violence and pain. Where is our peace on earth? Where is our "good will toward men?" Even within the greater church there is overt attacks on our brothers and sisters, slander, lies and cheap social media venting being played out daily. We say we got the present which was delivered, but I fear we do not grasp the magnitude of the gift!

For hundreds of years God had given such great presents, and we took them almost as if we thought we somehow deserved them. We played with our toys and often broke them even before the day was out. But despite all such misdeeds, God still gave us the greatest gift ever: *himself*. And not just to save us from our sin, and not just to buy us into heaven. Because wrapped around this God present, is *LIFE*. Jesus said in John 10:10 "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." Colossians 3:3 which tells us that "your real life is hidden with Christ in God." 1John 5:12 "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

God gave us Himself...in the form of His only Son. And the cost to Him was so very very high. Deity willingly and purposely came down into all of this chaos...all the mess that we have made of things here, took upon Himself the form of fallen man and joined us in all the fray...to bring us redemption and eternal life yes, but also real and abundant life here and now. We must be so aware of this today, and not burn this gift with the wrapping paper because we missed it!

We who are His today are alive! And we have been given "all things that pertain to life." What then, believer, should be our response to this gift? Should not our response therefore be to really live out this new gift..this 'new life'? To live this life in all of God's reflection, all of His blessing, and all of His joy? To take on the daring, to take the keys and go for a spin!

We have been given Superman's cape. Let us therefore don that cape and step up to our roll as Christians. For eternal life does not begin when you breath your last. It began when you breathed your *first*...your first breath as a child of God.

Merry Christmas child of God. Merry Christmas...

**"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"**

*2 Corinthians 9:15*