

“What Do You Want for Christmas?”—Titus 3:4-7

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “What Do You Want for Christmas?”, is Titus 3:4-7
 → *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* This is the text.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus:

“What do you want for Christmas?” This has probably been one of the most frequently asked questions during the past month or so. It is posed in an effort to determine the desires of someone to whom we would like to give a Christmas gift. It makes me ask: “If you want to give someone a Christmas present why not just give them something you’ve chosen? Why do you need to know what they want?”

One of the most frustrating feelings encountered with gift-giving is the expression on the face of a person who did not receive what they expected. As we watch them open up the gift we gave them in eager expectation to see their response, our joy of gift-giving can very easily be drained by their reaction if it is not what we expected. Disappointment can breed disappointment.

Such a disappointed reaction could produce even more disappointment if the one giving the gift can remember the days of receiving gifts of necessity at Christmas—not luxuries. There are many of us here who can remember getting clothes of various kinds at Christmas because they were needed, not necessarily wanted—and **even be very grateful for the sweaters, shirts, socks and underwear!**

Our text speaks about God’s method of “gift-giving.” The interesting aspect of God’s “gift-giving” is that He didn’t ask us first what we **wanted**—He looked at our **need** and gave! According to verse 4 of our text His giving was motivated by **His goodness and loving kindness**. This is in sharp contrast to the conditional expressions which flow from many a mouth during this time of year, such as: “If you’re not good you won’t get anything for Christmas!” or “If you’re not good Santa won’t come!”

We must be very fortunate that God’s gift-giving is not based upon our *goodness*. If it was, we would all be “gift-less.” Your sinful condition is so bad that even your best gift-giving is tainted by sin. In fact, our sinful condition causes people to deny their faults and sinfulness along with their need for a change in their heart and life. It prevents us from being able to receive and give gifts without conditions—even God’s gifts to us in Christ.

Jesus recognized the seriousness of our sinful condition even when encountering people who believed in Him on the basis of the miracles that He was performing. John 2:24-25 says that *Jesus . . . did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in man*. Notice that He *did not entrust Himself to them*. In other words, He was not going to let their reactions to Himself as God’s Gift influence His “unwrapping” it. Despite His numerous encounters with the unstable commitments of sinners He still went through with His plan to suffer, die and rise again to save us sinners!

His work was not dependent upon how His gift was received but rather upon how it was given! God’s Gift is directed at your **need** to be saved from the clutches of sin, death and the devil. It is truly a gift—an act of God’s **grace**—His undeserved favor and love displayed for us ungrateful, selfish sinners. Titus 2:11 puts it this way: *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people!*

Unfortunately many people of Jesus’ day did not like the Gift they had received from God because it was not quite what they were hoping to get. The “package” the Gift was “wrapped in” seemed strange. Many thought the Messiah should have appeared with the glory of heaven, not in swaddling cloths lying

in a manger. The humble ways of the Gift didn't seem right. The fact that the Messiah cared so much for sinners and the spiritual kingdom of God rather than an earthly kingdom proved an offense to many. Neither did His suffering and death on a cross appear proper for the gift **they felt they were promised**. Disappointment in unfulfilled expectations!

Such disappointment was heightened by the fact that they couldn't do something to play a part in their expected "salvation." Verse 5 of our text says *He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy*. Face it, one of the most uncomfortable dynamics of gift-giving for us comes when someone doesn't use or treat the gift we gave them in a manner which we feel is fitting. If someone doesn't receive the gift in a manner we deem as "proper" we may retort: "Well, I'm never giving them a gift again!" What happened to gift-giving as an act of **grace**, not dependent upon the works of the person to whom it was given—how he received it or what he did with it? What happened to gift-giving as an act of **grace** and not dependent upon our own works as givers?

Truly, the Gift that you need in your life is God's Son—Jesus Christ—and all that He has done for you!! The Gift of Jesus is given by the Father but takes on real meaning in your life by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word and Baptism. Verses 5-6 of our text says that *God saved us . . . by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior*.

No only do we need this Gift of Jesus for salvation and new life but we also need the Holy Spirit to receive this Gift for our salvation! 1 Corinthians 2:9 says that *no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him* but that *God has revealed this Gift to us through the Spirit*. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Gift of the Person & Work of Jesus Christ frees you from guilt and the power of the devil!

It is only this Gift that can put you in a right relationship with God. Verse 7 of our text describes this relationship:

- *so that being justified by His grace* → This is gift language. "God looks at me *justified*—'just-as-if-I'd never sinned because of what Jesus has done for me!" Therefore, you don't have to try to justify your gift-giving or receiving. It's all good because of Jesus!!
- *we might become heirs* → This is relationship language. An heir receives the benefits of an estate based upon relationship—not works. The heir also receives the benefits upon death—the death on one with whom he has a relationship. In your case, the death of Jesus **for you!**
- *according to the hope of eternal life* → Jesus died so that you can have a relationship with God as your Father and *become heirs* of His *eternal* blessings! This instills in you a *hope* that motivates your living!! You desire to express grace in your gift-giving on a daily basis, not wishful thinking resulting in disappointment from unfulfilled expectations.

Once we have come to recognize God's great Gift to us, we have the desire to respond to God with **unconditional** love for Him! This Gift is not a disappointment to us. Romans 5:5 says this *hope does not put us to shame, or disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us*. Thus we find it is a joy to respond to the gift of salvation in Jesus with thankfulness in all we do!!

Such gift-giving on God's part also effects our gift-giving. We strive to express the same unconditional grace in our gift-giving, both in the acts of giving and receiving. By the power of the Spirit we can actually let go of the gift with the prayer that it will not just be a blessing to someone but bring glory to God in thanksgiving and praise!! We can receive a gift graciously with thankfulness and allow it to be a blessing in our lives, not a source of guilt or "payback." We can give and receive without selfish expectations!!

So, what do you want for Christmas? The Holy Spirit gives us the desire to give and receive what we **need** most in our lives, salvation through faith in Christ, the Lord!! So what we want for Christmas is to give in such a manner that people experience God's unconditional Gift-giving for us sinners in Christ!

Amen.

1 Corinthians 2:12 offers quite an insight into our gift-giving in the midst of the spirit of Christmas. It says: *We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit Who is from God, that we might understand the things **freely given us by God**.* Amen.