

“God’s Perfect Gift”

Tonight I want to talk with you about gifts. I want to talk about the gifts God has to give. Because, when God gives a gift, he doesn't mess around. It's the right gift. It's the perfect gift. It's a gift that gives us exactly what we need.

It's hard not to think about gifts at Christmas. (Any kids here tonight?) Raise your hand if you've been thinking about gifts? I'm not surprised. It seems like everyone's thinking about gifts.

I heard of one store, a while back, (speaking of gifts) that had two Santa Clauses. (Did you hear about that store?) The one was in an express line...for kids wanting less than nine!

Everyone's thinking about gifts at Christmas. One little girl prayed to God. She said, “Dear God, please send me a new bicycle and a pair of roller skates.” (She said), “Honestly, I've never asked you for anything before. You can even look it up.”

Another little boy prayed to God. (He said), “Dear God, last year I asked you for a baby brother. Thanks for sending him. This year,” (he said), “I want you to take him back.”

It's hard not to think about gifts at Christmas. I thought a lot about gifts when I was a kid. I think a lot about gifts now that I'm grown. But finding the right gift isn't always so easy. Sometimes we give gifts and they end up not being the right ones.

But it's not so with God. God knew exactly what to give when he sent his Son into our world. God knew exactly what we would need when, 2000 years ago, Jesus became one of us.

The apostle Paul says, “When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoptions as sons.”

God's gift on that first Christmas was the perfect gift for our world. God's gift to us tonight is the perfect gift for us. And it's the perfect gift for four simple reasons. It came at the right time, in the right way, for the right reason, and with the right hope.

Let's take them one at a time, starting with the first: God's gift came at the right time.

Did you know there are two ways in which the Bible talks about time; two words to describe how time works? The first is the word “chronos,” from which we get the word “chronological.” (You know how that works.) Chronological time has to do with days and months and years. It has to do with placing things in the order in which they occur.

We set our clocks chronologically. We organize our lives based upon the order in which things take place. Even on my phone, the calendar I keep, everything we do in this life, when it comes to time, is done chronologically. Much of Jesus' life (in the Bible) is given to us in the chronological order in which it happened.

But there's another way the Bible talks about time. (It'll use the word “chronos.” It'll talk about things chronologically.) But it'll also use the word “kairos.” The word “kairos” has nothing to do with chronological order. The word “kairos” means “when things are just right.” At the right time, at the right point, when it's just the right moment for something to happen.

That's what happened at Christmas. “When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son.” It was the perfect time. It was the perfect moment. Jesus was born into this world at a “kairos” moment in history.

Now, chronologically, it was when Caesar Augustus was in power. (We read part of that story tonight.) It was 2000 years ago, according to the calendars we keep. That's why you can date it. You can put a time on it. It was a real-life event. It happened chronologically at a specific moment in history. More importantly, it was the right time, because it was God's time. And when it's God's time, the timing is always right.

I trust you know that? (I hope you know that!) Christmas begins with God. Don't miss (what's happening) here tonight. This isn't our holiday we're celebrating here tonight. This is God's holiday! God was the one who chose to send his Son. God was the one who decided to come to this earth. God was the one who made a conscious decision, at a specific moment in history, to enter our world in Jesus Christ. And he did it at a time that was right for him.

Don't get caught in that trap, (I hope you don't), thinking that this is all about us. (A lot of people do that.) They make the mistake of coming to church, coming at God, coming at Christmas expecting to hear a word about themselves. And it doesn't work.

"How can I be happy? How can I have a better marriage? How can I find more fulfillment for my life?" And they get frustrated because their questions aren't answered in way or in (the timing) they'd like. Now, we'll get to that (in a moment), because Christmas helps answer those questions as well.

But Christmas is first and foremost about God, and it's about not only what God has done, but what God is doing. And it's about his timing, and not ours. It's about how things happen (with God) not chronologically, in the right order, but at the right moment, at the right time, in a "kairos" way, according to the plans and purposes set by him.

Number one: God's gift (was perfect) because it came at the right time. Number two: God's gift (was perfect) because it came in the right way. "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son...born of woman, born under the law."

That's what was happening on that first Christmas. On that first Christmas God became one of us. God became a man. (He became human.) He entered this world through a tiny little baby. And he did it because it was the right way. It was the perfect way. It was the only way that would show us how much he cared.

I don't know if you saw it? Earlier this month, Facebook unveiled its annual "Year in Review," which highlights some of the biggest moments of the past year. There were no surprises. A lot of good things happened, there was a lot to celebrate, but (in many ways) 2017 was rough.

Go down the list. There was Hurricane Harvey, which caused more than \$196 billion in damages, making it the costliest nature disaster in U.S. history.

Then there was Hurricane Maria that all but destroyed the infrastructure in Puerto Rico. Then there was the Las Vegas strip shooting that left 58 dead and nearly 550 injured. Then there was the Manchester terror attack in which 23 innocent people lost their lives, and the horrifying events in Charlottesville that brought back many bad (racial-related memories) in our country's history.

And then there were (more recently) the countless allegations of sexual misconduct, harassment, (and even worse) from men (in positions of power) that we would hope to be able to respect. (Who knows how that will play out?) Not to mention (here in California) the devastating fires up north and what's happening down south. And the list keeps going. 2017, in many ways, was not an easy year.

It makes us wonder if God really cares. It makes us worry about whether he even knows. The truth is, we wouldn't know apart from Christmas. We would forever wonder (and worry) were it not for Christ.

Christmas is the story of God becoming one of us. The face of the Christ-child (reminds us) forever that God not only knows, but he cares.

Just think about it. It's hard to imagine that the God of the universe would give it all up for us. (But he did.) It's hard to fathom that the God who created this world (and your life) would step of his position of power and (leave the heavens) for you...but he has.

The Bible says "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and lived among us."

In other words, the God who was there (from the very start) is here and will never leave. The God who was there (when this all began), there's nothing that (ever begins) without him knowing and caring about what's going on.

Jesus experienced everything (in his life) that you and I experience in ours. Jesus faced everything in his life (and even more) that we do, and he did it because he cares.

(Now, we're talking tonight about gifts.) Do you want to know the three most frightening words (for a parent) late at night on Christmas Eve? The three most frightening words: "Some Assembly Required."

I learned that lesson the hard way, years ago, when our four kids were young. As a preacher, I was here until midnight (Christmas Eve), just like I will be tonight. And as a Dad (a guy), "No problem. I've got this handled." And I did, (no problem, it was all handled), until I got home at (about one o'clock) and opened the box.

"Some Assembly Required." I had no idea what that meant when I first read it. Five hours later (at six o'clock) I finally figured it out. (It was a great Christmas!) Believe me. I was so well rested. And I learned my lesson. It'll never happen again. Never.

Now, let me ask you a question. Have you ever had trouble assembling your life? Have you ever had (times in your life) when you couldn't get all of the pieces of your life to fit? There's an answer...and his name is Jesus. There's an answer...and his name is Christ. And he came into this world to share in the things you face.

I can't recall anywhere in the Bible where Jesus told His followers, "Believe the following things and you're life's going to be OK. Do the following things and everything in your life will fall into place." No! (That's not what he said.) What he said was, "Follow Me." What he told us to do was to learn to trust.

That's the Christian life. That's the Christian faith. Faith in Jesus is not beliefs about Jesus. (We all believe in Jesus or we wouldn't be here tonight.) But are you following, are you trusting, are you letting Jesus do what he came into this world to do, in helping you assemble the pieces of your life?

My friends, I don't know what kind of baggage you're carrying here tonight when it comes to the story of Jesus. I don't know what kind of experiences you've had when it comes to the Christian life. What I do know is that Jesus knows your story. What I do know is that Jesus understands your life. And not by studying it from heaven until he has it all figured out, and not by reading it on Facebook and finding out what's been going on...but by becoming one of us, by joining us, and by sharing in the things we face.

God's gift at Christmas was the perfect gift. It came at the right time. It came in the right way. And it came for the right reason. "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son; born of woman, born under the law...to redeem those who were under the law."

More than anything else, that's the reason Jesus was born. Jesus came to redeem us. He came to save us. If we could have saved ourselves, Jesus never would have been born. But we can't and so he was.

Do you know what I think the biggest mistake is (people make) at Christmas? Of all the things that happen (at Christmas), do you what I think is the biggest mistake? They celebrate the day, (the event), without remembering the reason. They remember what happened (long ago), when Jesus was born (how he came into this world), but fail to remember why it had to happen, that he came into this world to die.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son." Jesus came to save us. He came to save you. Do you know what the Bible says about your life? It says you're loved eternally by God. It says that God loves you more than realize.

Do you know what it also says? It says you're a sinner. It says your life in this world comes up short. And even if the Bible didn't say it, I'll bet you already know it (about your life), as I do about mine. We all come up short, every one of us.

It also says that our sin separates us from God. Because of our sin, we're separated from God forever. We're eternally (and forever) set apart.

But there's an answer to your sin. There's an answer to my sin. And it's not a set of principles by which we're called to live, but it's a person (in life) we're being called to follow. It's not adherence to some set of rules (put together in the Church), but a day-by-day trust in the living Christ. Jesus came to save us from our sin. He came to give us something we could not give ourselves.

That's what a gift is. (Right?) It's not something we give to ourselves. It's something someone else offers to us. That's what a gift does. It comes to us (from the outside) as a gift, as something we can't do or give on our own.

I don't what you've learned (or heard) over the years about your sin and how this all works, when it comes to God. There a lot of strange ideas out there about what God does (or doesn't do) with our sin. And most of them are nothing more than ideas, and they're not grounded in what's true.

Do you want to know what God does with your sin? Do you want to know what God did because of your sin? (Do you want to know the truth?) He sent his Son, Jesus, to the cross, because of your sin. He allowed his only Son to die, so you and I could live.

Now, I'd do a lot of things in my life for those I love. I really would. Depending upon who it is, (my wife, my four children, my family and some good friends), I might even be willing to give up my life. I might do that...for someone I love.

But would offer the life of one of my children for someone else? Would I sacrifice one of my own, for someone who doesn't know or love me in return?

Do you know what the Bible says? (It says), "While we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us." Long before you knew anything about him, he offered his only Son for you.

Do you want to know the definition of a gift? Look in the manger and see the face of God. Do you want to know what happened because of your sin? Take a long look at the cross and see how precious and how dear (and how much) God was willing to sacrifice for you.

God's gift at Christmas was the perfect gift. It came at the right time. It came in the right way. It came for the right reason. And it came with the right hope.

"When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son; born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law...so that we might receive adoption as his children."

My friends, I don't know where it is you place your hope in this life, what it is that keeps you moving forward each day. I have all kinds of hopes for my life. Hopes for my family. Hopes for my marriage. Hopes for my health.

But just because a person has hope, doesn't mean their hopes will come true. Just because a person lives with hope, doesn't guarantee that what they hope for will come to pass.

Do you know what happened (in our family) last Christmas? My wife's parents flew (from Phoenix) to join us for the holidays. They came in the week before and they left the week after. We had great plans for what was going to happen in those two weeks. We had all kinds of hopes for what we might do with the time we'd share.

Do you know what happened last Christmas in our family? The day they arrived, Mary's mom wasn't feeling so well. She stayed in bed for a few days, hoping to get better, but it didn't happen. We took her to the doctor. They checked her out and told her to go home.

Two days later, we put her on a plane and they went back to Phoenix. One week later, Mary flew down to join them. The week after that, her mom died and it was over. That quickly, all of a sudden, a life that was here was now gone.

The Bible says the things of this life are slowly fading away. Have you realized that about this life? Have you realized that about your life? It's fading. It's slipping. And someday it'll be gone.

I'll bet there are some of you here tonight who've also lost a loved one over the past year. It'll bet there are some of you here tonight who still miss someone who left this life years ago.

Every year it happens. When the Christmas season rolls around, it's always a mixed bag. For many, it's a time of joy and laughter, a time to celebrate and to rejoice. But for others, it's a time of sadness and loneliness, because someone who was part of their life is no longer here.

Jesus came to give us hope. And not just hope for our families, or for our marriages, or for our health, (or for the Holidays), but for our future! And not just for tomorrow, but for all of our tomorrows – not just for this life, but on into the next!

(I don't remember for sure.) Was it Bing Crosby who first sang it? "I'll be home from Christmas" (Remember the song?), "if only in my dreams."

Now, I doubt if that's what the songwriter had in mind, but do you know what God was doing on that first Christmas? God was fulfilling a dream. God was making good on a promise. And He was fulfilling it by sending His Son. He was making good on it by promising to us a home.

"The assurance of things hoped for," the Bible says, "the conviction of things not yet seen." That's the promise that belongs to us in Jesus. That's the hope given to us in Christ.

Let me close tonight with a story. (Maybe you've heard it.) It was two days before Christmas. There was a long line at the Post Office of people trying to get packages to relatives and friends on time. A woman with her little girl finally reached the front counter and asked, "Can you get this package to my Dad by tomorrow?" The man behind the counter said, "Sure, but it'll cost you?" "How much?" the lady asked. "\$43" said the clerk. "Oh, my goodness, that's a lot of money" (the woman said), "but I have to do it, because it's for my father, and it has to be there on time, because Christmas is also his birthday."

"That's too bad," (said the man), "What a bum deal. I'm sure glad I don't know anyone born on Christmas?" That's when the little girl, who had been standing with her mother, looked up (with a smile) and said, "I sure am glad I do!"

Let me ask you something. Do you know the One born on Christmas? Do you really know the One born to become one of us, to redeem us, and to save us, and to give us hope? If you do, then there's reason tonight to celebrate. If you don't, then it's time to unwrap the gift.

Because it was a gift given for you - it was a gift given to you. And it was given at the right time, in the right way, for the right reason, and with the right hope. My friends, don't let this year pass without opening God's perfect gift in Christ. Amen.