

December 24, 2023

Title: Greetings O favored one! [LUKE 1:26-38]

Christmas time! is here. We've been celebrating! Partying! Gathering presents for our loved ones. Do you know where that tradition came from? In our Immanuel Men's Fellowship we studied about St. Nicholas, not the Santa Claus of advertising but a real person. St. Nicholas, the bishop of Myra, Turkey. Legend says he would give gifts to needy people of the town. The tradition of gift giving to loved one on Christmas day sprang from that. And in the latter century, exploited to be a major sales and marketing tools. In fact, far beyond giving to the needy is that Christmas gift giving has become obligatory. You give not because of need or love, but rather just because. You don't really take into consideration whether the person wants or needs the gift. I wanted to share some gift-giving experiences, from the Internet. I picked out two from the not-so-great gifts which teachers received from their students. On the not so great list was Mugs and candles: One teacher said "I literally have hundreds of mugs.... mugs which I cannot throw away because they are special. And candles, I have enough (candles) to get me through the next 87 years." And the best, from the not-so-great list, which I thought was funny was - "Homemade food." "Any cakes, biscuits or other foodstuffs which were made by my pupils go straight in the bin right after Christmas. Having seen how much nose-picking and nail-biting goes on in the classroom, I can never bring myself to eat them," ewwww! Gifts from the not-so-great list.

So, what is a good gift? What makes a good gift? I don't think it has to do with price or brand, necessarily. Three criteria for good gift-giving might be the following:

1. You actually need it.
2. It's something you wouldn't buy for yourself
3. It's well thought out
4. It's personal

First category: You actually need it - You know what I am talking about. How many gifts have you received which you didn't really need or didn't really want for that matter. In fact, a special name was created for gifts which "no one really wants." They are called "white elephant" gifts. Second category: It's something you wouldn't buy for yourself. This is something you maybe you've always wanted but could never convince yourself to buy it. "ah, that's too expensive." or "I don't really need it, I guess." It is a gift which pleases the heart, and not the head. The third category of a good gift is "A good gift is well-thought out" It is a statement of value... not of the value of the gift, but it is a statement of how valuable I am to the giver of the gift. A gift which shows some planning and effort, probably had to be "special ordered." Perhaps it was hand made. It may have special personal meaning. Its value may be more than the dollar cost, but rather because of some other sacrifice to get it. A well thought out gift says, "you are important to me" Finally, a good gift is personal. This is a gift which had YOU specifically in mind. Its meaningfulness comes not just because of its intrinsic value, but because it has meaning and value to you. Four criteria for a good gift is that it is needed or

wanted; something which we might not buy for ourselves; well-thought out; personal. Good gifts are good to receive. We all desire good gifts. We all appreciate good gifts.

As we celebrate Christmas I want you to remember that by any criteria you have already received the best Christmas gift possible - Jesus Christ. Let look at this from the categories of Good gift giving. Category one: A good gift is something we need. Since the time of the fall of Adam and Eve, sin has had its way with mankind. As a result mankind has been separated from God. Mankind has become blind to God. Sin has corrupted creation in such a way that it is normal for bad things to happen. God saw our situation and had compassion. God saw our greatest need and desired to save us. God desired to give us a gift. If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us the gift of an educator; if our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; if our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; if our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need was none of these. Our greatest need was forgiveness, forgiveness from God, a new relationship with God. So the gift which God sent us was a Savior.

What kind of savior did we need? What kind of gift did God send? Mankind needed a savior who could live a perfect life that we couldn't and please God. Scripture says the wages of sin is death. Because we sin, we had a debt of death, a debt which we couldn't pay. So death belonged to all mankind. Well, not all. Because Jesus lived the perfect life, he didn't have to die. He didn't have to pay a debt of death. But he experienced death anyways. But he did that for a reason. When Jesus died on the cross, his death did not have to pay for any sins he did. Rather, God allowed Jesus' death to pay for OUR sins instead. It was this way that Jesus overcame death and opened to us a living relationship with God. In this way, Jesus meets the first criteria of the perfect gift. Jesus is the gift all mankind NEEDED. Not only that but He was the gift which met category II - "something we wouldn't buy for ourselves." Not only would we not buy it for ourselves, but He is a gift which we were totally incapable of buying for ourselves. For this reason He is a gift of immeasurable value. Now I want to look at the third Category III. A good gift is well-THOUGHT OUT. God's gift of Jesus was well-thought out. Since the time of Abraham, through Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David and the prophets, God had promised His people that they would enter His promised land. Even before that, since the fall of Adam and Eve, God had promised redemption. And even farther before that at the creation of the world, God had put into place all that was necessary for that redemption. Take the star of Bethlehem which heralded to coming of Jesus. Since the time of creation, God put the star of Bethlehem in its path, so that it would appear over the birthplace of His son, Jesus. And in Bethlehem, 2000 years ago, Mary became part of that plan. Jesus was no accident. His birth was no accident. His parents were no accident. The timing of His birth was no accident. God was always in control. Everything about the gift of Jesus was thought out and planned long before it came to be. This was no random event. God meant this gift for us. Finally, the last criteria "a good gift is given with you in mind." From John 3:16, scripture tells us "God so loved the world that he gave His only son, that whosoever believed in him would not perish but have eternal life." God's offer of eternal life, was given to all people. Jesus' death paid for the sins of all mankind. The doorway to heaven has been opened to all mankind. In John 17:20

when Jesus prays for his disciples, he says ²⁰ *“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.”* Jesus was a gift offered to all. Jesus was a gift offered to all the world, to all those in the past, to all those in the future, to us. It is said that even if you were the only person in all creation, God loves you so much, that He would have sent his Son to die for you alone. God’s gift of Jesus, was a gift with YOU in mind. By all four criteria, Jesus was the best, the perfect gift to mankind. By any set of criteria, the gift of Jesus was a wonderful gift. God has blessed us mightily through Jesus, and it is His birthday that that we celebrate this Christmas.

On an ending note: about “re-gifting.” While many gifts are re-gifted because nobody wants it, it is precisely because of the value of our Jesus Gift, that we want to re-gift it. We “re-gift” Christ, when we share the message of Christ with others, especially with those who have never heard about him. But one of the most powerful ways to re-gift Christ, is to share ourselves. It is like the story of the coal in the fire. In the old days when you barbequed meals you would pile some charcoal onto some crumpled newspaper. You poured some lighter fluid and then set it on fire. As the coals burned, they would turn red hot, and then white with ash. If I piled them high they would burn faster and hotter. Every once in a while a lone coal would fall off on its own. Eventually, it would grow cold and black again. Because it was separated from the pile of coal, it soon lost its heat and stopped burning. Only those coals which were part of the pile remained hot. God gave us the church, the body of Christ, to keep our faith strong. By ourselves the challenges of this world can weaken our faith. But together, as we encourage one another, we can keep our faith strong.

In Summary, God has given each of us the perfect gift in Christ Jesus.

1. You actually need him.
2. It’s something you couldn’t buy for yourself.
3. It’s well thought out.
4. It’s personal

God calls us to re-gift that gift to re-gift Christ Jesus by giving ourselves to others. In HIS way God has made each of us the perfect gift to one another. Amen