

I. The Greatest Gift

A long time ago in my life, right after I got saved and started to study the Bible, I was reflecting on what God had done in my life and where I wanted to go with my life with God. It is like every young Christian. I see it in many of you young men and young ladies. God saves you. You begin to work through some things in the Bible, and the hand of God begins to orchestrate your life. Sometimes it can be a confusing time in your life. Sometimes you are never sure exactly what God wants you to do, or how you should do it, or when you should do it. I understand and can sympathize with that.

In the middle of all that, God gave me a great verse. When I think of Christmas, and I know Christmas means something different to everybody, but when I think of Christmas, I do not think of Matthew 2 and the wise men and the star of Bethlehem and all that. I do not think of Luke 2, where it talks about His birth in a manger and no room in the inn. What comes to mind for me is this verse right here.

Christmas is traditionally about giving. We are giving you a gift today and giving out a lot of gifts today, but it is not because of the idea of Christmas. I think every child has experienced the love and the warmth that can be in a family at the time of Christmas. I think that they also need to be taught that the gifts that they get are only a shadowing of what gifts God has for us. That is what I want to talk about today in my verse that God gave me, which really has nothing to do with Christmas, but on the other hand, has everything to do with God and Christmas in that sense.

The dilemma we all face when we buy gifts is that you always have somebody in your life that is really hard to buy for. We all do that. Traditionally, everybody tells me, "What do you get me?" I say, "Well, here, I got a list right here." It is the thing, the man who has everything, or the woman who has everything. As the child of God, we have everything if you really have it plugged in right. I want to go along those lines as well.

I remember as a child, Christmas was a special time for me. It really still is, but just not for the same reasons. I remember as a kid, my parents used to wrap the presents and put them under the tree. My big deal was when nobody was looking, to count them first of all. Get a head count of all the gifts. That was easy because you could do that from across the room. The next one was a little tougher, and that was to get your hands on them and check out the sizes. The third one was really, really tougher in my house, anyhow. That was to shake them. Here is how it went: if it was big and heavy and it had some movement in it, you probably were going to be very happy. If it just kind of laid there and was fat and heavy and did not do anything, it was probably underwear or clothes, and you did not care for that.

I remember how my mom and dad, they always were trying to stay ahead of me. I remember when I was 13 years old, my dad was starting to take me rabbit hunting, and I did not have my own gun. My dad bought me a 20-gauge single-shot Winchester youth model, Model 37, which

if we had it today, it would be worth about five or six hundred dollars. Back then, it was \$19.95. It was a Winchester. I remember looking at it at the gun store, and it had Winchester stamped in the bottom in red. It was one of those ones where you broke the thing that popped the shell out. It was everything I could ever want. I remember the guy putting it back, and I could not wait for Christmas.

My mom and dad were always trying to get one up on me. What happened was that Christmas morning, I am down there, and I am looking at all the presents, and all I see are presents like this. This shotgun is a long deal, but there is no long package underneath that tree. So I am getting a little worried, like, maybe they changed their mind. My mom and dad all the time, we were always trying to get one up on me. I opened all of those presents, not really caring what they are, because there is only one thing I want under that tree. It was not under that tree.

Finally, at the end, they opened up the last present, and my mom and dad are standing there with a grin on their face. I am thinking, I am going to, I am trying to be happy, but I am really disappointed. Then from behind the couch, my dad walks over and picks up the big one I am waiting for and gives it to me, and it made my Christmas. They deceived me a little bit.

Years later, when my mom passed away, I got even with her, and I remember she was laying in a hospital bed. I went up to the life support system and said, "Hey, my mom is still alive and kicking." I am just kidding. My point is that as children, we like to get presents, do we not? We do.

I have carried this verse with me for almost 28 years, and it changed my whole perspective on things. It is hard for me to think of the concept of Christmas or giving without putting this as a framework of my value system and understanding God and the Word of God. It is in Matthew chapter 7, verse 11. It simply says this:

Matthew 7:11

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You. We thank You for all that You do for us today. We pray, Father, that You would take the words today and that You would really help us to go beyond just all the concepts of Christmas, all the commercial aspects of it, and to really not just focus on today as Christmas, but the rest of our lives, Father, and how God has impacted us. Lord, we thank You and praise You for all that You do today. We thank You for our visitors who are here. May our church be a blessing to them, and may the Word of God be even more of a blessing to them today. Lord, if they are looking for a church home or they are looking for someplace that will love them and teach them the Bible, may we be in their list, Lord, of churches that they would consider because we truly love Your Word, and we love You, and we love the people that You have given to us. We thank You now and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake, we ask it. Amen.

II. God's Character and Our Relationship

That verse is a great verse because it really says this: I am a sinner. I am saved, a time in my life when I trusted Christ as my own personal Savior, but the Bible says I still have my flesh to contend with. Even though my sins are forgiven, I am still a sinner. We are all sinners, whether you are saved or lost, or just a saved person whose sins are forgiven.

What that verse is saying then is that me as a sinner, if I can have the compassion, if I can have the love, if I can have the understanding to want to give my children something good as a sinner now, how much more must Almighty God and the Lord Jesus Christ love me and want to give good things unto me as His child?

Matthew chapter 18, verse 1 through 3, is a great passage there. It talks about the fact that in Jesus's time, the apostles were arguing. In that chapter 18, verses 1 through 3, we really see the issue of that day, and I believe it is the issue today. This is why churches do not get the job done with people. The issue in Matthew chapter 18, verse 1 through 3, is that the apostles, and they are all walking along here now, they are going with the Lord, and they are all arguing about one thing. Do you know what they are asking? "Who is the greatest among us?" That was the issue of their day. It was not the fact that God was with them or the Lord Jesus Christ was doing all of the things. They had gotten to the place where they had gotten so inward on themselves that now all they are concerned about is who is the greatest among us. That is a lot of the problem with a lot of pastors, churches, and Christians today. It is like a big competition about who is the greatest. That is really what it becomes.

Jesus said something that I think is very instructive. He says, "You know what, boys, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." He said over in Mark chapter 10, verse 13 through 16, in another passage, it is just all like that. Here is a case where the little children wanted to come to be with Jesus, and the great apostles, they did not want the little kids invading His time. Little kids play in the dirt, they get dirty. I am sure by this time they all had white robes on, and they did not want little fingerprints all over them. They thought by this time that Jesus was so busy that He was only interested in the adults of life.

I never want this ministry to be just about the adults in life. That is why we have, I do not know how many, you saw them up here. Most of the people in our church, they do not know all of the Bible, but the young couples, anyhow, they got down the verse in Genesis and said, "Be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth." We have tons and tons of kids in our church. For me, and I have said this before, the thing I love doing is going to their birthday parties. I did not miss one last year. It was almost like, as I told you before, it was almost like twice a week sometimes. I love going and being part of their little lives right now because I never want this ministry or my ministry or whatever I do to exclude the kids. I want them to grow up knowing that I am their friend, not just their pastor, not just their preacher. I want them to know that I love them, and I will go, and I am not somebody who just goes and sits on a log someplace. I will help them on the jungle gym and get involved. I love being part of their life.

The truth of it is, the Bible says, no matter how old you are, how old you get in life, that in our relationship with God, we should always be like a child. That keeps you from getting to the point in your life where you simply worry about who is the greatest. It just keeps you humble to the

place that you have that childlike faith that you just believe what God says. You never get educated beyond your intelligence, and you just always want to just take the things from God as a father in a child relationship. As a child, I like gifts, and as God's child, God has some gifts for me.

III. Six Gifts from God

I am going to talk to you about six gifts that God has for you and for me. We put gifts under the tree. God puts these gifts under history, the tree of life. These gifts, some of them, one or two of them, you are going to automatically associate because you are here, but I guarantee you most of these, the average child of God never understands. In the Bible, these six gifts, and I am not talking about the spiritual gifts that we talk about in the book of Ephesians, Colossians, or Corinthians, and you hear so much about today. I am talking about the gifts that God has given to you. Remember now, He said this:

Matthew 7:11

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

I want to talk to you about the good gifts that God has given to you and I as His children. If you have your Bible this morning, and if you do not, you can just listen to it. I want you to turn to two passages here real quick. The first one is in Romans chapter 5. In Romans chapter 5, picking it up in about verse 16, he starts to say some things here, and here is what he said:

Romans 5:16

And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification.

You say, "What is he saying?" Here is what he is saying. He is basically saying what Romans says a little bit before this, "by one man sinning into the world." That is what he is saying. He is saying, "Because by one man, Adam, sinning into the world, one man has given us the free gift that leads to justification." He says in verse 17:

Romans 5:17-18

For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.

Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

You go over to Ephesians chapter 4, verse 7, and he says simply this in verse 7:

Ephesians 4:7

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

When I start coming down through these, obviously one of them is going to be the gift of God's Son. That is the next one. Obviously, another one is going to be the gift of salvation. That is the one after that. Most of us around this time of year, or when we think about it, we think about God's gift to us. We think about Christ and salvation.

IV. The Gift of Grace

Without grace, the gift of God's Son and salvation would be worthless. Do you know what the Bible teaches? Do you know why this is such an important gift? This is such an important gift because in this gift, it gives you the ability to come to God. You and I in our natural state, we do not have the ability to come to God. Romans chapter 3 says, "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." The Bible says that there is no man that seeks after God on his own. This idea that you and I are going to wake up someday as a sinner and suddenly find God is not going to happen.

Do you know what God had to do? When the Bible says in Luke chapter 19 that the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost, that is an understatement because you and I as a sinner, there is no way that we are going to be able to come to God. God has to draw us and give us something that allows us to understand and come to God. Do you know what that is? It is grace. It is grace. It is grace.

I was with a group of preachers one time, and I heard them talking, and the guy said, "You know what? I do not understand how God could ever, ever, ever send anybody to hell." One of the liberal moderns. I walked out of there and I thought to myself, knowing what I know about man and knowing what I know about me, I do not know how God could stand to take anybody to heaven. But the answer is grace. Without that element, you will never get saved. You and I would never find God, would never find Christ. We would never find eternal life if God, before He gave any other gift, did not give us the gift of grace.

Grace is the ability for you and I to understand what God did while we are in an unsaved natural state, that everything we do is totally against God and everything that God is. That is a gift. There are some gifts that you do not know you need, and when you see them, you think, "Ah, what is the big deal with that?" But later on, they become invaluable, and grace is one of them. We can talk about God's Son. We can talk about salvation all day long. But the first gift and the greatest gift that God ever gave that really makes the other two work is the gift of grace. That is something that if you ask the average child of God, "How does grace figure in your life?" they would not have a clue. It is the great unknown gift that God has given to us that precedes every other thing that we have. It opens the door. It unlocks everything for you and I to get everything that God wants us to have.

V. The Gift of God's Son and Salvation

Of course, the next gift, the next gift obviously is the gift of God's Son. There are many, many places in the Bible where it talks about that. In fact, in 2 Corinthians chapter 9, in verse 15, when he is going down and he is talking about the great characteristics of God and he is showing the parallels between our God's nature and what our nature should be. Obviously, the nature of God

is giving. That is the nature of God. The nature of God is, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." That is the nature of God.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 9, he is talking about the church at Corinth, and he is talking about the church of Corinth that are much like a church like this. There were some needs that some other Christians had, and the church at Corinth had responded to those needs. What he is talking about here, he is saying this, he is saying the same motivation that motivated your church to reach out to others is the same motivation that God had to reach out to you. Really, the understanding for me of my giving to others and giving to God and letting God use me to touch other people's lives is the very model of the character of God that while I was yet in sin, God gave the gift of His Son. It is the model for me, and it is the model for you. The character and the nature of God is to give. Our giving to God simply is based on my understanding of God giving His Son for us. He says in verse 15:

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

Wow, what a great verse that is. It is hard to talk about. It is hard to explain. It is hard to explain the love of God that would motivate Him to give His only Son for you and for me. We all have children. We all have grandchildren, but many of us, it is inconceivable to understand how we as humans, if it took us giving our son, our daughter, to pay for everybody else, how we could conceivably come to that conclusion that that is what we are going to do. Well, God had the same dilemma. He came to the conclusion that you and I were more important than His own Son. So He gave His Son as the gift. Yes, no question about it. The second gift that God gave was the gift of His Son.

By now, you are probably already guessing the third gift, and that would be, yes, the gift of salvation. Wow, what a great verse.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The wages of sin is truly death, but God gives us the gift of His righteousness, eternal life. Now you can begin to see the order it forms. We have the gift of grace. The gift of grace is what we take, and God gives us that allows us to understand what God is doing in our lives. When we have grace in our lives, that gift, when we open up that gift, it leads us to the gift of Christ. Now we can understand it. When we open that gift, the Bible says:

Romans 10:9

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Once you open that gift, that gift leads to the great gift, and that is the application of eternal security. I do not know where you are at here this morning spiritually. I do not know if everybody in this room has trusted Christ as your personal Savior or not, but here is how it

works. Once you understand you got grace, and grace lets you understand that God gave His Son for you, the next step is applying His death on the cross to your sins.

It is a lot like this. I can say, "You know what, my wife this week won the lottery." I do not buy lottery tickets, but my wife did, and she won \$67 million. "Now what we are going to do today is we are going to give everybody a hundred thousand dollars here. We got your checks made out back here." You go back here and you grab that check, and you say, "Whoa," and you think all the way home, all the way home, you are doing two things. The first thing is you are looking for a bank that is open on Sunday. The second thing is you are thinking about all the things that you can do with that money. But the truth of the matter is this: if you never cash that check, you really do not have the money. There are all kinds of people who know about grace, and they know about His Son's death, but they never opened the third gift. The third gift is cashing the check and applying what He did to your life and becoming His child. That is how it works. That is how it works.

These three are very important, but the next three, I bet you could not find 20 Christians in this city that understand or have even opened these next gifts. These gifts are what I call the great unknown gifts. The other gifts deal with mankind in general. If we are going to categorize these gifts, they would be like getting a set of plates, getting a set of cups, somebody giving you and your wife an electric blanket. A gift that a lot of people can use, generalized gifts, because the first three gifts are to mankind in general. But these next three gifts are cut to your shape and size. These three gifts are hand-fitted to you. These three gifts, God measures your shoulders, He measures your waist, He measures your trouser length, He measures your dress size. These are custom fit to you, and when you open these, they really begin to do in your life what God intended for you to do.

I deal with a lot of people, and I have for many years. I believe that my job as a pastor of this church is not only to help you with your problem but anybody that has problems. I have to say to you, I have never seen a time when God's people have lost their way in life with God. I know why that is, to a small part, because churches and pastors have lost their way. In my mind, 99% of the churches and the pastors have got it all backwards. They really do.

I want to tell you something, and if you are a visitor here, I want you to hear this, and I do not care if you do not hear anything else, just hear this. This church does not exist here, nor any church should. It does not exist so you can give to this church. This church exists so it can give to you. As a pastor, I am not here so you can do something for me, though you all do. My main focus is to do something for you, and in turn, we do something for each other. I know in most churches today, it is a tragedy, but most churches today, the pastors hold the gifts that are the most important gifts. All you ever hear from them or ever see explained is the three I already told you, but there are six in the Bible, and the other three are unknown. They are unknown. They are unknown.

I like this time of year because I like to see the events that go on. I really, and I wish I could talk to him. What I am about to say, I really do not, I am going to tell you three little stories. I only know the real insight on one of them. Everything else I am telling you, it is not a critical thing. I

am not condemning anything. I am just giving you my observations. I love the idea of this guy's Secret Santa, the guy that has cancer. I love what he does. I think it is a great thing. I would love to sit down and talk to him. I really would like to find out if he is just some guy who knows he is going to die and thinks that his good works are helping people is going to cut him some slack with God, or he really, really understands the concept of giving. You do not get it from Channel 9.

I have a friend of mine that is a pastor, and I called him this week, and on there they had a little girl, and this little girl was incredible. She had a very rare form of cancer. She went through all kinds of chemo, and I think the girl never got it past four or five years old, and she died. But this little girl, at her funeral, this little gal, she is one of the most unique things, she impacted so many people's lives that at her funeral, there were, and I was talking to my friend, at her funeral they had over 2,500 people, and 268 people got saved at her funeral. This little gal, and I cannot even go into all the stories.

After her death, her mom and dad, and you may have saw it on the news, her mom and dad opened up a thing, and it is a thing where they call, I forget what her name was now, but it was a thing where you brought gifts. I saw a thing on the news this week, and I called my buddy the next day. I said, "Was that a little girl in your church?" He said, "Oh yeah," and he told me the story. He said, "I said, 'Well, they interviewed the dad and the mom and some of the other people,' and he said, 'Did the dad give a good witness?'" I said, "Well," and he said, "Well, he never, he never tells the story about how he lost his daughter without also telling the story of what Jesus Christ has done for him." But Channel 9 cut that out. They did not want that. They just wanted this, there is one of the social side of it. They wanted that nice warm feeling you get. They just wanted that. They did not want the gospel being put into the thing. This guy never tells the story of what happened to his daughter without communicating to people what how God has done it and what it is all about. But Channel 9 did not want that. So I am kind of limited in my stories because if this guy's Secret Santa, he may be passing out tracts, he may have him down on their knees winning people to Christ over there. I do not know. Channel 9 does not give that impression. But I would like to talk to him. I really would, because there are a lot of churches today that think that you can give people things without giving them the gospel. The great social mentality today is to feed the hungry and help the poor and all of that, and I am all for that. But I have to confess to you, Jesus never helped the poor, fed the hungry without giving them the gospel.

Last week, we went down to the mission Sunday night. We had a great guy. I think half our church was down there. We had gifts for all of the guys, and then we had about 30 or 40 gifts left over, so we were looking for some homeless people. We wanted to, and we drove around, and finally we hit a park that must have had 20 or 30 of them. Once the word gets out that there are guys down there, everybody was down there, and it was a great time to give them their gifts, but also tell them that there is a better gift than these socks and this hat I am giving you, that there is a way out of your dilemma. There are a lot of hurting people out there in the world tonight, and I think that most churches, like many, many people in society who want to give to everything and everybody, they just, they missed the boat.

When Lamar Hunt died this last week, I know nothing about Lamar Hunt, and what I am about to say is certainly not a criticism about him. As far as I know, he was a fine man. I am not saying anything about him that is derogatory. I want you to understand that. Here again, what I am giving you, I got from Channel 9, so we know how that goes. But I was listening to the people on Channel 9, and they were talking about all that Lamar Hunt did for this city. They talked about him bringing the AFL, whatever that is, here in the Kansas City, the football league. They talked about how many jobs he created, the World of Fun, and they just went on and on and on and on and on and on. Truly, I am not taking away from that, but I have to tell you this, my mind went back to the 1930s with a man by the name of Billy Sunday. For just a brief moment in time, now I was not alive in 1935, but I read the account over and over again by a newspaper reporter. Billy Sunday was the greatest evangelist probably this world has ever seen in the 20th century. He preached across this country in one meeting in Philadelphia over eight weeks. Back then, revivals were not two or three days when nothing changed. Billy Sunday's revivals went on for eight weeks in Philadelphia one time. Over an eight-week crusade, 2,500,000 people came to hear him preach. They took his sermons and put him in the newspaper in their entirety in the New York Times. When Billy Sunday died, he died in Chicago in 1935. A reporter from the New York Times covered his funeral, and they put Billy Sunday, put him in a basket or a coffin and put him in lying in state at one of the places where he preached, and over the next three days, over 2,000,000 people filed by his coffin. The man from the New York Times who was covering it said he stood there as just endless rows of people walked by, and he said he could not remember how many times he said he heard somebody say, "If it was not for that man, I would be going to hell today. I got saved because of that man's life. I got saved. My family got reinstated and put back together because of that man's preaching." Over and over and over.

You see, gifts can be deceiving. What always looks like is good for you may not be as good as what God has for you. Bringing everything to Kansas City and feeding the poor and feeding the hungry and doing everything that looks good is okay, but what is the point if at the end of their life they die and spend an eternity in hell without God, without Christ? That is where our churches are at today. We are so caught up in all of the "who is the greatest" that we forget that we are all God's children.

In the book of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and then in the book of Acts, you find that this is where God finishes the aspect of His first coming, and then He goes back to heaven in Acts chapter 1 and Acts chapter 2. When you study that, and these are where the next three gifts are. When you study that and you look at that, here is what you come up with. In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Christ is here. He is in a physical body. You can talk to Him. You can touch Him. People actually heard Him. He spoke just like I am speaking. They saw Him like you are seeing me. But God knew that there was a coming of time when He was going to take His Son out of this earth, and He was going to replace it with something else. When He goes back to heaven in Acts chapter 1 and Acts chapter 2, I do not know if you ever saw this or not, God replaces the physical body of His Son with three gifts, and these three gifts are really the key to where you and I are at this morning.

Colossians chapter 2, verse 9 and 10, talks about the fact that when you and I get saved, it says that:

Colossians 2:9-10

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

Do you know where our struggles in life come from? Really, do you know where as a Christian, do you know where our struggles come from? Our struggles come from not being complete in Christ Jesus the way He intended us to be. When you look at these, these three gifts divide themselves out. God's plan is so simple. It is so simple. God gave me three gifts. He gave me His grace. He gave me His Son. He gave me His righteousness. Now you see these three gifts get me to the place where God wants me to be back in fellowship with Him.

You all know the story. Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. Adam lost his relationship with God, and now Adam is incomplete. When Christ shows up, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, what He does by His death on the cross is He makes a way now that man can get complete. So to do that and make that complete, God gave three gifts. He gave grace. Then He gave His Son, and through His Son's death on the cross, He gave us His righteousness, salvation. Now in that sense, man is complete.

But now there are a couple more things we have to look at here. We may be complete as far as our eternity is concerned, but we still have to live here on planet Earth, ladies and gentlemen. The struggle that we all have today, and we all have it, the struggle every one of us has today is not necessarily because we are not saved. It is because we have come to the place in our lives that when we got saved, we never opened these next three gifts. Where the first three got me to where God wanted me to be, the next three will get me to where God wants me to go. The next three complete my completeness. The next three make me everything that God wants me to be. The next three complete me totally to the place where I am not only saved and on my way to heaven, but now I am equipped to live my life on planet Earth.

Do you know what Neil Armstrong said? Neil Armstrong was the first man that ever walked on the moon. When he came back, he was famous and did a lot of things. He went through a bad marriage, went into alcoholism, and he finally got saved someplace along the line in his life, and I heard him give his testimony. Do you know what he said? I thought it was one of the most provocative things a man has ever said. I think it was one of the most truthful things I ever heard a man say after he was saved and now a child of God and can look back in perspective. Do you know what he said? He said, "They could prepare me to walk on the moon, but they could not prepare me to live life on planet Earth." He said, "I got that completeness from Christ Jesus." That is the way it works. That is the way it works.

I deal with a lot of people. They come in with all kinds of problems. They come in with all kinds of heartaches. They come in with all kinds of circumstances. Some of them it is because of a life of disobedience, and some of them it is just victims of living on planet Earth. Some of them have times when I have dealt with them where they have been in depression, depression over this or

that, or they have been in sin, or they lost their marriage, or they lost this or lost that. Sometimes it is alcoholism. Sometimes it is drug abuse. Sometimes they have lost their job. Sometimes it is this. Sometimes they are just struggles or all the compounding things that go along with it. The bottom line is simply this: the way that you handle those problems is opening these three gifts, and I want to show you how these things work this morning, and maybe it will be a comfort to you, certainly something you can take with you.

The first thing I want you to think about is the Bible says this in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 8, and this kind of goes along with what we talked about when He went back to heaven. He says:

Ephesians 4:8

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

Now what is he saying there? He is saying exactly what I just told you. The Bible says when He ascended up on high, that is when He went back to heaven. The Bible says He led captivity captive, took the Old Testament saints with Him, and then the Bible says He gave gifts unto men. These are the three gifts that I want to talk to you about this morning, and I want to run through these, and then we are going to be finished.

VI. The Gift of the Holy Spirit

I do not know if you know it or not, but the first gift God replaced Himself with, it took three things. When the body of Jesus Christ was no longer here and it went back to heaven, God replaced the physical body of His Son with three gifts, and He gave them to you and me. The first gift is the Holy Spirit of God. I want to show you how these things work. The first gift He replaced Himself with was the Holy Spirit.

Acts chapter 10, verse 45, Peter speaking, and on the gospel going to the Gentiles, and here is what he says:

Acts 10:45

And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

When He went back to heaven, He gave you and I a gift, and that gift is the Holy Spirit of God. Never before in the history of the world had the Holy Spirit come to indwell people's body. In the Old Testament, it came and left. There was no sealing of the Holy Spirit of God because we are dealing with a different circumstance back there. But now it is changed. Christ has come. His body has been manifested to the world, and now He is going back, and He is leaving you and I as His children to do a job, and He has to give us six gifts. The first three get us to where He wants us to be, saved and in fellowship with Him. The next three get us to where He wants us to go so we can do what He wants us to do.

The first thing was the Holy Spirit. He just did not give you the Holy Spirit of God then take it back. The Bible says in Ephesians 4, when you got saved, you are sealed unto the day of

redemption. It never leaves because it is a gift that you need. It is something that you need to accomplish the plan that God has for you.

What does the Holy Spirit of God do? Well, it does many things, but we do not have time to get into it all today. But it does this: it leads you and guides you into all truth. It is a lot like this: if you were in a dark house with no light, there are all kinds of stuff that you could break your neck, hurt yourself, or break. But if you had a flashlight, one little flashlight, it does not take a lot, one little flashlight illuminates your path in the darkness that you do not stumble over the obstacles. Well, life is darkness. This world, the Bible says, is darkness, and what the devil has done is he has filled the world with clutter, stuff that you and I will trip over, stuff that you and I will come up against that we will bump ourselves onto it into the night, and it will impede us in our spiritual walk. Do you know what God did? God gave you a light. That light is the Holy Spirit. It is like taking a flashlight and shining it on the road and sidestepping the obstacles where you do not trip on them because the Holy Spirit of God illuminates your path so you do not get caught up. Do you know why? Because God wants you to accomplish something. The first three gifts got you where God wanted you to be. The next three get you where God wants you to go. That is why the Bible says:

Matthew 7:11

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Most people never learn to use the Holy Spirit of God in life because, very simply, they never see it as a gift that God gave them. They never do. They never see it as a gift that God gave them. Most churches today, they do not teach you how to use the Holy Spirit of God. Oh, they will tell you there is a Holy Spirit of God. They will tell you that there is, you know, He is a great this and a great that, but they will never show you how to use Him in your life. They will never show it that God gave it to you as a gift, and when God gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit of God, God gave you everything that He wanted you to have to illuminate the way that you go.

VII. The Gift of the Word of God

Then the second gift, after you got the Holy Spirit of God, there was a second gift that God had to give you to complete the gift process, and that was the gift of the Word of God. 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 10 and 11, says this:

1 Peter 4:10-11

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Where the Holy Spirit of God is your light, because you see God has something He wants you to do. If you are saved here this morning, God has a plan for your life, hand-cut for you. It is not some global plan that everybody is involved in. It is a plan specifically for you. Your one job after you get saved and you get the first three gifts is to open these next three gifts, get whatever help it takes, and start illuminating your path to see the obstacles so those obstacles do not keep you from accomplishing what God wants you to accomplish. Once you have the Holy Spirit of God, the light, then you have to have directions by which where you are going. That is the Bible. The Bible is in written form, the directions that God wants you to have.

Unfortunately, do you know why people do not know the Bible? Do you know why there are God's people, bless their heart, and many of them, they have just never been taught? I am not saying that everybody out there that stumbles in life and they are the child of God and do not make it, I am not saying they are bad people. Many times they never have gotten plugged in. Nobody has ever sat down with them. Nobody has ever tried to help them. That is why in this church, I will sit down with anybody in this church, or you do not even have to be a member of the church, for an hour a week and try to help you put together these three gifts because if you do not get them, you are not going anywhere.

The reason why we do not ever learn how to apply these, well, we are a lot like I was when I was little. On my birthday, it did not happen so much on Christmas because you got presents, but on my birthday, all my family would send me cards. I knew in those cards was a five-dollar bill. I just know how it works in my family. My aunt, my grandma, everybody from both, I would get five bucks in a card. So I am good to make about 30 or 40 bucks here, and as a little kid, that is pretty good. I was just like, I was like most of God's people today. When those cards would come, oh, I would be waiting for the mailman. My birthday, June 14th, I am going to write that down. Go ahead. Starting about the 12th, I started looking for the mailman. On those cards, "Bobby Alexander." I hate "Bobby." Do not ever try it. There is a five-dollar fine if you do. "Bobby Alexander." Well, I knew that was me, and I knew what it was, and my mother would always get on me because here is what I do. I would get those cards, I would rip it open, and the money would come. I love the way five dollars just floats down out of those cards. There is something serene about that. My mom would say this, "Are not you going to read the card?" "No, no, I am not. I am not interested in it." "But my mother really wrote something nice." "Good." I did not care about reading the cards. All I cared about was what was in the cards. In other words, I just wanted out of it what I got out of it for me. Most people come to the Bible that way because they do not look at it as a gift. All they want from God is what they want from God, and they never bother reading the card that God gave them. That is the problem.

Now I have grown up since then, and now my wife reads the card and tells me what it says, and I just take the money. No, I have learned to appreciate. I have learned to appreciate what people write more than what is in the card because at this stage in my life, it is not about that. It is not about what I get. It is about what God has given me that is to me that changes my life. Today, there is nothing greater in this world of value to the friends that God and the men and women that God put in your life that are bound together to accomplish the plan of God. There is no amount of money for that. No amount of money for that. But we do not see the Word of God as a

gift. The Bible is my road map for my life. It is the road map for your life. Its principles are unchanging. Its precepts are ever binding. Its truths are eternal. The Bible says in Psalms 119:89, "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven." Yet Psalms 12:6-7 says that it is purified in a furnace of earth, and God has given us in the Bible. He has given us the map that shows us exactly what He wants us to do.

VIII. The Gift of the Local Church

Then the third and the last gift that God replaced Himself with, and it took three, remember now, the first three got me to where God wanted me to be, my image restored, saved, in fellowship with Him. But then God has a plan for me, and He gave me three more gifts, and these are the great unknowns. These are the gifts that in most of God's people's lives, they are never opened. The third one was the local church.

There is a reason why God has men and women meet. I know the reason is lost today. It really is. I am sorry to say, and I apologize almost every time I say it, most churches are about how big and grandiose they can be. Most churches are about building some kind of great edifice and all of that. I am not fighting it. I am just saying this: you can never lose the central reason for God as the third gift giving the church, and that church is only here for one reason. I exist, this church exists for one reason: that is to help you figure out the first two gifts that God has given you. That is my job. I do not make grandiose decisions about, "We are going to build this, we are going to do that." I have told you before, I was told, we started this church with about 25 people. Everybody told me, they said, "You will never build a church without having your own building." So much for that advice. We do not have a website that finds our church. We did not have a sign out until about a year ago. Because I believe this: I believe that when you do what God wants you to do, the Bible said, Jesus Himself said:

John 12:32

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

I believe that if I just simply stand on this pulpit and preach the living Word of God that changes men and women's lives and spend the quality time to help them open up the gifts that God gives them, the church will build itself. I cannot build this church. Are you kidding me? I cannot build anything. I have no ability to go in and fix people's problems. I have no ability to orchestrate a great organization that just people want. All I got, all I know is the truth of this book that changes people's lives, and when you proclaim it, God sustains it, and that is all I know. It is all I know. This last gift gets you where God wants you to be that He can accomplish what He wants to accomplish through it.

He said, I already read in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 8, he says:

Ephesians 4:8

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

Now here come the gifts, verse 11 and 12 in the same chapter:

Ephesians 4:11-12

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Now notice the progression here. I think this is very instructive if you are any kind of a Bible student. He said He gave some apostles, that would be Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Some prophets, that would be the early book of Acts. Some evangelists, that would be Paul, Acts chapter 9. And then some pastors and teachers, that would be Acts chapter 11 with the church in Antioch, and off you go.

Now why did He give those gifts? Oh, I know why He gave it. Now you might build the biggest church the world has ever seen, that you might have a spire that people can see when their planes are coming in at KCI, they have to get out of the way so they do not hit it, that you could be known all around the world as a great church with a great pastor, that you could just go around and in the great discussion of who is the greatest of us all, you would win. No, no, not at all. Look what the church is for. Look at my job is, and some of you boys someday down the line will pastor, and when you get in the position of pastoring, you need to remember your job as a pastor of a church is for one purpose. He said it. He said, "And gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers," why?

For the perfecting of the saints

For the work of the ministry

For the edifying of the body of Christ

Now there it is. The job in this church, my job is threefold.

1. Dealing with the perfecting of the saint. That does not mean sinless perfection. That means that I perfect you through the Word of God, through what I teach, what I preach, the one-on-one time that we spend. We work through problems and we come to the point where you become everything that God wants you to be as far as perfected.
2. For the work of the ministry. The next one is the ministry. God has something He wants you to do. God will bring people into your life, circumstances in your life. You will grow up in a place in your life when you say, "Hey, you know what? God has given me so many gifts, I want to give something back to Him." What you do is you take what God has given you and you give it to somebody else. Every time somebody comes over, and I work with different people, and I got this sweet lady, she does not come to our church, so you do not know who she is, but she was going through terrible depression, and in about eight weeks, we had her just going over. Her husband called me up and he says, "Boy, she is, I do not know what you are doing, but it," and eventually they will get here, you just got to take your time with it. She says to me, she says, "She is coming through this thing and she is growing." She says, "I just

feel like," she says, "I just feel like that, you know, I am getting all this." She says, "You have got to let me do something for you." She says, "I want to give. Can I pay you? Can I do this? Can I do that?" I said, "Oh, I said, 'Ma'am, do not worry about it.'" I said, "I got, there is something you are going to do for me." I said, "My goal is simply this: what can you do for me?" I said, "What you do is this: you learn everything I teach you. You glean everything. I will show you every principle to help you get through your struggles. I know you are having a tough time with your job right now. I know you have a tough time with your family and your marriage. You just keep and the principles, and when you get on top of it and God's Word changes your life because you are well on the way, then someplace down the line, I want to say to you, 'Hey, you know what? I got somebody over here that is struggling. I want you to help bring them through what I brought you through.'" That is what it is. I want something back from you, you bet I do, but not for me. I want something back for Him. That is God's plan for your life, and if you are not on that plan, and you are not, that is not the goal in your life, that may be why you have some struggles in your life. Maybe God is trying.

3. You see, not everything that happens in your life is bad. We look at some things that happen in life, and when you are in it, and it probably looks bad. Do you know what the Bible says? I read a book one time, it says, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Then I read God's book, and it says: Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. When I realized that, I realized there were not any bad things that happened to good people. Whatever happens to us is all good because it is for God's purpose. We just cannot see the purpose. Do you know what the job of the church is? Help you figure it out. That is what the job is, is to help you understand what God is doing. An old preacher told me one time, and boy, it is great advice, and it is hard to apply it when you are in the scenario, but boy, it is great advice after the fact, and when you look, he only told me, he says, "Bob," he says, "Never doubt in the darkness what God has given you in the light because it is what He gave in light that will carry you through the darkness."

4. For the edifying of the body of Christ. Edifying simply means the lifting up. Every time I get in the pulpit, I try to accomplish these three things. Every time you come along my house, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, all day, all night, whatever, I try to accomplish these things in your life. I try to perfect you. I try to help you get closer to the ministry, and then I try to help edify you.

These are the great gifts that complete you. The first three got you to the place where you are reinstated with God. You are restored to the image of God. These three are cut perfectly for your body, soul, and spirit. They help perfect you. They help you work through the problems in life. They help you get your focus, get your perspective, get your passion, get your everything laid out exactly the way God wants you to go, that the first three gifts are nullified, but you are never opening the last three.

That is why it is so hard to buy something for me. I got everything in this book, and that is what a Christian should be. A Christian ought to be the hardest person to get something for because they have got so much already right here. When you do that, you do not focus on yourself. You are now focusing on what God has for you with others. But there is a process to get there. That is

why God gave you the three gifts after He gave you the first three. He gave you the Holy Spirit of God. He gave you the Word of God, and He gave you the local church. The Holy Spirit of God is your guide. The Bible is your road map, but the local church is the vehicle by which you get there, and God wants you to use those three things in your life and open those gifts.

I hope for nothing else today, this becomes the greatest Christmas you ever have, not because of what is under the tree at home, but because today, maybe for the first time, you understood the gifts that God has given you because:

Matthew 7:11

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

In just a second, I can have my little helpers come up here and get ready to do this. We are going to work this out. But let me just say this to your mom and dad before we do this. If you are here this morning and you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior, by that I mean this: if you do not know today if you die that you would go to heaven, I want to tell you something. When this thing breaks up and we start doing all that we are doing here and we start making our way out of here, whatever, if you would come to me and you would say, "Bob, I want somebody to show me from the Bible how I can know for sure," I would be more than happy to give you the greatest gift that God ever gave to man, the first three. I would love to help my ladies, if you are a young lady, or my men, if you are a man, show you how you can know for sure that the first three gifts were for you to restore. Then I would like to help you one-on-one. There are so many of you in here that have just come in the last couple of months that I want to spend some time with. That is why I am saying New Year's Eve, if you do not want to come out, just come on out and hang out together. We will talk. We will laugh. We will eat. We will goof around, and we will just spend some quality time because I want to help you be everything that God wants you to be.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We...