

The Greatest Gift Of All

Text : **Ephesians 2: 1-13**

INTRODUCTION :

A. This is the season of giving.

1. Some stores make half their year's sales in Nov & Dec. (**35.3 bil in 2011, 751 per fm**)
2. Christians often lament commercialism of holiday, but love to give and receive gifts.

B. The tradition of gift giving on holidays dates back thousands of years.

1. **Esther 9:22** ... Mordecai declared holiday and gave gifts to poor.
2. We don't know where the custom began, but it extends beyond Christianity.

C. What is the gift that has meant most to you ?

1. **II Sam. 23: 14-17** ... Water given to David ... so precious he wouldn't drink.
2. People like gifts that involve personal effort or commitment from giver.
 - a. That which made the water so precious to David was the love of those who gave it.
 - b. We used to make all of our Christmas gifts. ***It was a common practice.***
 - c. Some of them were not very impressive, but people liked receiving them.
 - 1) Jellies
 - 2) Salt shakers made of walnut shells
 - 3) Christmas tree ornaments
 - 4) Homegrown and home-cured hams & sides of bacon
 - 5) Elephants to hold potted plants
3. Few people today are willing to invest time for such things.
 - a. People don't even take time to wrap their gifts. (***They may put it in a pretty bag.***)
 - b. Many this year ordered gifts on line and have them shipped direct. (***like a tax***)

D. In this materialistic society, many value a gift by what it cost.

1. The rich try to impress others with outrageously expensive gifts.
 - a. A Sheik gave his bride a \$25 mil. watch at their wedding.
 - b. A computer mogul gave his girlfriend a \$16 mil. engagement ring. (***They broke up.***)
 - c. A couple of performers exchanged \$1 mil. cars as birthday gifts.
 - d. A guy gave his daughter a \$2.5 mil. cell phone
 - e. Low budget, how about : 275K bottle of wine, 215K bottle of perfume, 24k mouse

2. None of these even come close to being the most expensive gift.
3. We can't compete with gifts like these; why do we keep giving gifts ?
 - a. Your gift can never be the very best ?
 - b. Only one person can give the most expensive gift. *It's probably not you.*

I. People give gifts for a variety of reasons.

A. Some give gifts to show off.

1. Those who are very wealthy want to draw attention to their status.
2. Some givers are trying to buy respect with money.
3. Jesus condemned such conduct :
 - a. **Matt. 6: 2-4** So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ³ “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. (**Matt. 5: 16** ... *Be seen so God gets the glory.*)
 - b. This “**hypocrite**” had no compassion for the poor, only a desire for recognition.

B. Some give gifts to buy favor.

1. Examples of mild bribes :
 - a. The guy who gave his fiancée a \$16 mil. engagement ring.
 - b. If a salesman wants to see the purchasing agent, he gives gifts to his secretary.
2. The wise preacher of old wrote about this practice :
 - a. **Prov. 18: 16** – A man's gift makes room for him And brings him before great men.
 - b. **Prov. 19: 6** – Many will seek the favor of a generous man,
And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts.
3. Of course, the bible condemns using gifts to buy favor.
 - a. **Prov. 29: 4** – The king gives stability to the land by justice,
But a man who takes bribes overthrows it.
 - b. **II Chron. 19: 7** – Now then let the fear of the Lord be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the Lord our God will have no part in unrighteousness or partiality or the taking of a bribe.

C. Gifts are often given as rewards.

1. Remember **Daniel 2** ... Kg. Nebuchadnezzar rewarded Daniel with great power.

2. This is the origin of the Christmas bonus.
3. Husbands give gifts to their wives to show appreciation.
4. Christians show appreciation to God by giving gifts above their tithe.
 - a. Our daily needs are a gift from God.
Eccl. 3: 12-13 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; **13** moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor — it is the gift of God.
 - b. We have nothing good that was not given to us by God.
James 1: 17 – Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights,
 - c. When that collection plate passes, we're not just paying the church's bills; we are expressing our love and our gratitude to the one who gave us all.

D. Gifts are given to show honor and respect.

1. **I Kings 10: 9-10** “Blessed be the Lord your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the Lord loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.”
10 Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones. Never again came such an abundance of spices as these that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.
2. **Matt. 2: 11** ... The magi brought gifts to baby Jesus. (*Gifts common to Kings*)
 - a. Gold ... standard of value, treasure
 - b. Frankincense (*gum resin from Boswellin tree*)
 - 1) Part of anointing oil ... **Ex. 30:34**
 - 2) Used in Sacrifices ... **Lev. 2: 1** , **Ex. 30: 7**
 - 3) As perfume ... **Song of Sol. 3: 6**
 - c. Myrrh (*sweet smelling extracted from wood*)
 - 1) Crystallized and used in trade like money
 - 2) Part of anointing oil ... **Ex 30: 23**
 - 3) Primarily a perfume ... **Psa. 45: 8**, **Prov 7:17**, **Song of Sol. 3: 6**
- * Associated with death of Jesus
 - **Mk 15: 23** ... On the cross Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh
 - **Jn 19: 39** ... Myrrh and aloes used for burial wrap of Jesus
3. Gifts are a part of our worship to God
 - a. **Lev. 22: 12-23** ... Instructions about freewill offerings as part of worship.
 - b. **Luke 21: 1** ... Jesus referred to their offerings as “**gifts.**”

- c. **I Cor. 16: 1-3** ... The money you put in the collection plate is a gift to God.
 - 1) Money give to the poor is a gift. ... **II Cor. 8:20** (*Given to God, via the poor*)
 - 2) Money give to mission work is a gift. ... **Phil. 4: 16-17** (*Given to God, via mission*)

E. Gifts are often given to repair broken relationships.

1. That's where we get the term "peace offering."
 2. Most husbands have tried to appease an offended wife with a peace offering.
 3. JESUS gave the ultimate peace offering when He died on the cross.
 - a. As the Samaritan, most folks don't realize the great gift that's been given for them.
John 4: 10 – Jesus answered and said to her, "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."
 - b. Jesus gave Himself as a gift to pay the penalty for our sins.
I Tim. 2: 5-6 – For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.
- * It was offered of His own free will. ... **John 10: 17-18**
- c. It was the gift of the body of Jesus that made reconciliation with God possible.
Col. 1: 21-23 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — 23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

II. In Jesus, God has given to us the ultimate gift. The greatest gift ever given !

A. In Jesus, God gave us the gift of salvation from sin.

1. The debt we owe is beyond our ability to pay.
Rom. 6: 23 – For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
2. The gift is beyond our ability to earn.
Eph. 2: 8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

3. Without the gift given by God, we could have no anticipation of Heaven.

Eph. 2: 12 – remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

B. In Jesus we are given God's grace as a gift.

1. **Eph. 4: 7** – But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.
2. Grace is something one does not deserve and cannot earn; *it must be given.*

C. In Jesus we have been given righteousness. (No condemnation in Him. Rom 8:1)

1. There is not one person on the earth who can be righteous by his own efforts.
 - a. **Rom. 3: 10** – As it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one."
 - b. **Rom. 3: 23** – for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
2. But though we are wicked on our own, we can be made righteous in Christ.
 - a. **Rom. 3: 24** – being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;
 - b. **Rom. 5: 16-17** The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷ For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.
 - c. His grace is greater than ALL our sins.
3. *God's gift is not like a box of chocolates ... eaten, then gone. **RE-GIFT IT !!** It's meant to be shared and there is no loss in doing so ... It cannot be consumed.*

D. The gift of grace, of redemption, and of forgiveness results in eternity with God.

1. No one deserves it, but God wants everyone to have it.
2. He commanded us ... *Ya want it, you gotta share it.* **Matt. 28:18-20, Mk. 16: 15-16**

III. What should be our response to God's gift ?

A. We should respond with great gratitude.

1. **II Cor. 9: 14-15** while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.
¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

2. Joy is a normal response to a valuable gift.

I Pet. 1: 8-9 ... though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, **9** obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

3. One has positive feelings toward one who is good to him.

B. Those who receive normally desire to reciprocate in some way.

1. It is human nature to want to respond in kind whether for good or evil.
2. Nothing hurts worse than unrequited love.
 - a. When one returns evil for good it brings a vitriol response. (cf- **Psa 109**)
 - b. That's why those close to us can hurt us worse than anyone outside our heart. Small offenses by brethren or family hurt worse than major one from others.
3. Jesus expects for us to reciprocate for His love and generosity toward us with love.
 - a. **I John 4: 19** – We love, because He first loved us.
 - b. After all He given, imagine the hurt our sin and neglect bring to Him.
4. Jesus said that if we want a relationship with Him, we must conform to the family values.
 - a. Those who love him obey him. **John 14: 15**
 - b. Those want a friendly relationship with Him, must obey Him. **John 15: 14**
5. God's highest family value relating to mankind is the salvation of souls.
 - a. God gave His Only Begotten Son to save man. **John 3: 16-17**
 - b. Jesus left Heaven and was born of woman to save lost people. **Phil 2**
6. Jesus sent us to carry on His ministry of saving lost people. (**Luke 19:10, I Tim 1:15**)
 - a. **Matt. 28: 18-20** ... We must disciple all nations.
 - b. **Mark 16: 15-16** ... We must share salvation with every individual on earth.

CONCLUSION :

- A. What are you doing in response to the greatest gift ever given ?
- B. Have your received it ? Are you enjoying the security you have in His grace ?
- C. Are you sharing it with others. It would be the greatest gift you ever gave.

INVITATION :

Lesson Text :**Ephesians 2: 1-13**

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, **2** in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. **3** Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), **6** and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; **9** not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands—**12** *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.