

Jesus “The” Christ (Slide 1)

The Spirit of Giving

Reading: Acts 20:18b-35

Some would say that using illustrations from a Holiday is wrong. Just as a disclaimer for this lesson, Santa Claus, Rudolph, Frosty the snowman and Christmas Trees are not religious symbols and are not to be considered so. But it is the *Spirit of Giving* that I want to focus on that comes from this time of year.

In addition, Perhaps Jesus was not born in December (*I don't personally believe that He was*) but that doesn't negate the fact that He was born of a virgin and that someday during the calendar year is His birthday.

Today, I want to relate to you a story told by an entertainer who I believe was genuine, funny, serious, caring, conservative, and loved people, particularly children and he also loved his country.

Though many might think this is a children's story, I believe we can all benefit from the messages within it. I will tell it to the best of my recollection.

(Slide 2) There was an unusual tree in the forest and I say unusual because this tree could think, hear, see and talk. The tree was actually a Christmas tree, but the tree didn't realize it was a Christmas tree.

This tree lived in a vast forest or at least in its mind it thought it was a vast forest. For many years it inhabited a spot of land amongst some of the most beautiful trees and a magnificent landscape that one could imagine.

(Slide 3) Each year, migrating birds would come and nest temporarily in his branches. The birds, the squirrels and the like made him feel special as if it was his place to give the birds and squirrels a temporary sanctuary. A Home!!

(Slide 4) One day there came through the woods a family of people. A mom and dad and their children. Suddenly, he could feel the father doing something at the bottom of his trunk and before he realized it he was detached from the portion of the trunk that projected deep into the ground.

He began to fall to the earth. As he lay there in shock and petrified (no pun intended) he felt human hands grasp his branches and the stub that was once connected to the earth, where in his mind he stood tall, and then, strap him

to the roof of their station wagon. Off they went! Astonished as to what just happened, he kept looking back to his spot and his forest.

He was carried into a house and his decapitated trunk was placed into a pool of water surrounded by steel legs that allowed him once again to stand upright.

A day and a night passed as he soaked up the water from the stand. Then the mother and the children gathered around him and began to place shiny objects in and on his branches. They also placed what looked like green rope all around him from the top of him to the very bottom. Then the father took the other end and stuck it in the wall. Suddenly he was blinded by a mysterious light.

For days he was in that house, in that stand and watched and wondered what his purpose was. He had always lived in the forest and thought he was to provide shelter and beauty. But now he's stuck inside and most likely won't live much longer. In fact, he can feel himself drying out and his branches becoming weaker and weaker.

One evening very late as he was pondering his fate, a man suddenly appeared dressed very peculiarly. He spoke to the man and asked him, "Who are you?" The man looked

at him without surprise that the tree could talk and said;
“Why Santa, of course!”

“What are you doing here?” The tree asked.

“Well, you see, each December 24th I come to “give,” that is, to leave presents under the tree?”

“Oh, I see. But why do you do that?”

“Because that’s my purpose and it makes me feel good to give.” Santa replied.

“Oh” said the tree with much despair; “I have been thinking for several days about my purpose! I used to think my purpose was to give shelter and a place to rest for much of nature’s wildlife.

Tree sparrows would come back to my branches from year to year and build their nests during the summer. Squirrels would live within me all year long. But now I’m here, I’m dying and I have lost my purpose.”

The peculiarly dressed man responded and said; “You wait until morning. You’ll see your purpose when all the children gather around you and receive their gifts. They will be filled with joy and so will you!”

“Do you want to stay and see that with me?” The tree responded.

“Oh no, no. I can't, I've never been invited.”

“You mean you do this year after year but never see what happens when the people gather around the tree? Why do you do it?!!”

“It is my hope that those who benefit from what I do will learn the ‘*Spirit of Giving and will pass it on!*’ That they will recognize that giving is better than receiving. That joy comes from bringing to others hope and peace.”

“Wow! And you think that this is my purpose?!!”

“Wait until morning. You shall see. You shall see.” The next morning the tree witnessed the joy of the children receiving their gifts and he thought within himself, ‘*the sacrifice was definitely worth it!*’

Of course the tree did die because the *Spirit of giving* often requires sacrifice.

The ultimate example of the Spirit of Giving comes from God. He literally gives us breath and life. From the bounty of His creation we have all things that sustain us.

James 1:17 (Slide 5)

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

King David acknowledges the very *Spirit of Giving* shown by God to him in his life and to those in his kingdom:

1 Chronicles 39:12-14 (Slide 6)

12 Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name.

(Slide 7) ***14 "But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You."***

But great gifts come with tremendous sacrifice. The greatest gift is Jesus the Christ. And He is indeed a gift.

Out of God's Love for us and all of *Humanity* we have Jesus as a gift.

John 3:16-17 (Slide 8)

16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

The perfect gift that came with a heart wrenching sacrifice. Some say that Jesus died on the cross from a broken heart and that the events that transpired at the moment of His death were caused by the emotions of God who had just lost His only begotten Child.

I don't know if any of that is true but we can be assured that if God and Jesus are capable of such great love then they can have tremendous sorrow as well.

Ephesians 5:1 (Slide 9)

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

From our reading this morning, we know that the Apostle Paul knew that the *Spirit of Giving* requires great Sacrifice. No one knows it better than he did. In our lives we must have the Spirit of Giving!

The chorus of *Ivory Palaces* gives us a glimpse of the Sacrifice Jesus Himself made to give us the gift of Life:
(Slide 10)

***Out of the ivory palaces
Into a world of woe,
Only his great eternal love
Made my Savior go.***

“Oh What a Savior!!”

In the next few lessons for this Month of December, we will focus on the Gift of Jesus The Christ.

Invitation

Today we invite you to become a member of the Lord's church by being baptized into Christ Jesus and then share in this great gift. The Lord Himself will add you to His church, purchased by His precious blood at Calvary!

Perhaps you have been baptized but wish to renew your commitment to Him. We will pray for you and with you as your relationship with Jesus is restored.

Please let us know how we can help you this day.

Reading:

Acts 20:18b-35

"You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

25 "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. 28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

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