

Christmas is about Giving and Getting

Galatians 4:4-7 (NIV)

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."
⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

There are so many things to love about Christmas. Lights and decorations of all different shapes and colors. Evergreen Christmas trees and wreaths, which remind you that even in winter there is still life. The smell of fresh baked Christmas cookies along with the joy of decorating and devouring them. Maybe a little eggnog or hot chocolate while sitting by the fire. Traditional Christmas carols sung at church or playing on the radio. Hopefully, the tranquility of a light snowfall, pure white covering over everything.

Did I leave anything out? Of course, I did: presents! Maybe that's just my inner child, but Christmas is also about presents. Yes, you love visiting with family, consuming special holiday meals and treats, but you know that as a kid you looked forward to unwrapping and enjoying presents. You can't have Christmas without some kind of presents, right - even if there aren't many presents or even if the presents aren't material things.

Well, that was when I was a child. As St. Paul famously said, "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me." (1 Corinthians 13:11) We did that with Christmas presents, didn't we? We became adults, and we realized that Christmas is not all about getting presents. We took on a different attitude. We took to heart the words of our Lord, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

As we got older, Christmas became about giving. How many times have you already heard this December that the true spirit of Christmas is about giving? And we've lived that. We give not only gifts to other people, but we give of our time and our energy to set up all the beautiful Christmas decorations and make those delicious Christmas cookies. We go out of our way to make sure that we visit and be with family on Christmas. We even set aside time to come for a special, extra church service today. We give and we give and we give and we give because that's the true meaning of Christmas.

Maybe some of you have given so much that it's hurting you. The credit card debt has risen from all the gifts you purchased. You are tired and exhausted from the decorating and the cleaning and the baking and now the family meal, but you are trying your best to keep a smile on your face because it's Christmas and I have to give so that everyone else can have a good Christmas. And then you give more as you try to please both sides of the family, all the extended relatives, friends, acquaintances, and so on. You are spent emotionally and physically. You've given beyond your means. You can't give anymore.

Why? Why do we give to exhaustion, give until it hurts? We instantly chide ourselves for thinking such things and quickly answer ourselves, "Because it's Christmas. That's what you do. It's tradition." You give because you want people to be happy. You give so that no one is left out. And yet with all that effort there's still that one person that you forgot or that one gift that you couldn't get. All your giving just wasn't quite enough, and you can't give anymore. You've become a slave to the spirit of Christmas giving, giving because you feel compelled and obligated to do it to the point where it hurts you. We end up serving the holiday of Christmas instead of Christmas as a holiday serving us.

Of course, Jesus' words are still true that it is more blessed to give than to receive. However, let's look at who's giving what on Christmas. "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law..." (verse 4) Christmas is God giving to us. God did not give us Christmas as a mandate for us to give or as an example of what we should try to give. Instead, Christmas is God giving to us something only he could give us: his Son in the flesh, born under the law.

We could give every last penny in our bank accounts. We could completely max out every credit card that we were approved for. We could spend every waking moment and every sleepless night giving to God of our time in studying his Word or in prayer. We could spend every available minute volunteering at Family Connection, serving at soup kitchens, visiting sick people in the hospital, looking for and completing service projects. Yet, we would never break out of our slavery to giving, never give enough to care for all the needs that exist in this world, and never match what God has given us on Christmas. And on top of that, because we have given until it hurts, we have our Grinch moments. We are exhausted, spent. We get irritable, cranky, and turn into Scrooges, putting away the spirit of giving because I have given all I could, and it wasn't enough.

God saw that we could never give enough to have accomplished all the giving required in the world. He decided long ago that Christmas would be his gift to us, a gift that we could never give or out-give. He gave us the gift that every single one of us tonight desperately needs, the only gift that is a complete gift to every single person ever in the existence of the human race, the only gift that lasts beyond tonight and beyond your time on this earth, the only gift that is truly forever. (Sorry, diamonds.)

Without us ever asking, without us ever deserving it, without us ever earning it, God gave us a gift on the very first Christmas. God the Father gave us his one and only Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law. That's us. We are under the law of giving, a law that try as hard as we do, we can never give enough to satisfy it or complete it. Instead of making Christmas only about this spirit of giving, relish in the gift that was given. God gave us a gift of a life, the life of the God Man Jesus Christ. He is the one who made the law who now, as the son of a virgin named Mary, lives under that same law. The gift of the Son of God is a gift of one man living under the law who is also God living perfectly under that law. That means while Jesus lived on earth as a man, he obeyed every single commandment from God for his entire life. Then, after he had perfectly kept the law, he sacrificed himself, gave his life as payment to pay the debt our sins and our wrongs had incurred against God. By doing this, by being this specific and unique gift from the Father, Jesus freed us from lives lived under the compulsion of laws, of to-do lists, of endless giving.

We've tried finding satisfaction in life by giving. Yes, it gives us a good feeling to give gifts and to see smiles on faces when they unwrap their gifts or when they open the door after we arrive. Yes, it makes us feel like we are really serving God by being so selfless and giving so much. But we also know that as we keep on giving with no end, we wear ourselves out with giving and giving and more giving. We never give enough.

This is why God gave the gift of his Son. And so much comes with that gift of his Son, including things we could never give: "When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir." (verses 4-7)

God the Father did not give you his Son just so that you would have an example of giving to follow at Christmas time, that you would feel obligated to give like God did, to give until it hurts trying to match his giving. No, God gave you his Son as a gift for you to enjoy, so that you would enjoy freedom from the law of giving. He gave us his Son, Jesus Christ, to live under the law in our place, to keep it perfectly where we failed, to keep it perfectly as only the one and only God Man could do. He did this so that we would have a place with God, a place we never could have earned through our giving. The Father gave us his Son Jesus so that we would be brought into his family, that we would no longer be a slave to giving but would be family. God gave us this Christmas gift of his Son so that every single one of us can now freely call God "Abba, Father" – a term of endearment, a term of belonging.

Not only that, but God by giving his Son born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem us under the law, has also made us heirs. God has given us the eternal riches of heaven because his Son has purified us from every single one of our sins. We are at peace with God because of the gift of the Prince of Peace, this babe born and laid in a manger. God has given to me and you the gift of belonging with him, of completeness in life despite our incomplete giving. God has given us the gift of a permanent place with him through the gift of his Son.

I know that at Christmas time, sometimes we focus only on the shiny new presents like kids who think it's all about what you get. Sometimes we focus only on the idea of giving as if Christmas is only about the spirit of giving. Christmas is not solely one or the other – giving or getting. Christmas is both. Christmas is God the Father giving us the gift of his Son to free us from a slavery to the spirit of giving, slavery to giving that we could never fulfill completely. Christmas is getting what God has given us: freedom from the law, adoption into his family by means of Jesus buying us from our debt of sin, an inheritance of heaven. Christmas is God's gift to you to be his child and his heir. Today we receive the gift of God's Son, our Savior, our Prince of Peace, the one who makes us a part of his family. Let's give the gift we have gotten from God because Christmas is both getting God and giving him. Amen.