

The Gift of God

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[0 : 00] If you're thinking, there's no Christmas story in Mark, that's not Matthew or Luke, that's true, but I'm not going to take you to Bethlehem just now.

Mark chapter 1, if you could find, I want to rewind the hands of time with you tonight for about 2,000 years as you probably expect, but we're not going to go back to Bethlehem and to the night, the eve that Mary and Joseph made their trip to Bethlehem, but rather not quite that far back.

Where I'm going to take you to tonight, and if you could just imagine and see this in your mind, I want to take you to the shores of Galilee, to northern Israel, in the region of Galilee, the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias and others, and along that shore, there was some fishermen.

There were several of them, and they were about to have a most unusual encounter. And so read with me in Mark chapter 1, and I'll read verses 16 through 20. Now as he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets and followed him. And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship, mending their nets.

[1 : 33] And straightway he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him. Now I want to focus in on one of these men that are mentioned.

We've read of Simon and Andrew. These two were brothers, and they were both fishermen. And then we read of a man named Zebedee, who had two sons with him, James and John.

These were brothers. All of these fishermen by trade spent, no doubt, grew up there in that region, and along the shores of Galilee, probably knew the sea by the back of their hand, and could fish it morning, noon, or night.

But the one I want to focus in on's name is John. Nothing much about John here, except that just says John, his brother. And John was in the ship with his father Zebedee, with his brother James, doing what they do every day, every night.

They just were taking care of business. And a man walked by. Another Hebrew man walked by. And he called to them and said, Follow me.

[2 : 37] Follow me means I'm a teacher, and I'm going to teach you. And I have to go back and think, these are grown men that have been trained by their teacher, their dad, how to cast a net, what to look for on the water, all of the things about fishing.

And a man comes by that's from Nazareth, not terribly far away, still up in that same region of Israel, of Galilee, but not exactly their neighbor.

And he says, Follow me, implying that I have something to teach you. I have a way of life to instruct you in. And it says in the passage that straightway, he called them, they left their nets, they left their father, they left the servants, they left the ship, and they followed him.

Right away. When he called, they followed. And what I notice about John is that John believes that Jesus of Nazareth, that this man that's calling to him, he believes that he is the Christ.

And he believes that he is, in fact, the Messiah that God promised would come to Israel. I don't know if he's ever brushed shoulders with him, ever been to Nazareth, ever knows the layout.

[3 : 49] I don't know if they've ever interacted or met each other in their lifetime. But in this moment of time, Jesus called to John and John answered the call. And John spent three and a half years with him.

And John witnessed things that John, as a fisherman's son, never imagined he would see in his lifetime. And in these three and a half years, he saw things he couldn't even...

It's too good to be true. If you told him he'd see it, he wouldn't believe you. And yet, later he wrote about it. And John has his own gospel, like Mark does here.

And John wrote of a few things that he witnessed. One of the things he witnessed was that they were in Jerusalem. And they walked up by this pool, this pool called Bethesda.

And they were at this area where it was just a bunch of lame, crippled people laying, waiting for something miraculous to happen that they might be healed. And one particular man had been laying there.

[4 : 49] His Bible says he was impotent for 38 years. 38 years. He hadn't moved. He hadn't been able to carry himself about and do his business. For 38 years, he was stuck.

And John, with Jesus walking by, he watched him walk up to the man and look down on him and say, Rise, take up thy bed and walk. And John watched the man get up on his feet, pick up his bed and his things and walk away.

And everybody's mouths just dropped. John saw him and he wrote about it. He wrote that in his gospel in chapter number 5, telling us about this account that he witnessed with his eyes.

A little bit later in chapter number 9, John tells us that they were going through a place and he saw a man that was blind. He had been blind from his birth. And Jesus, he was with his disciples and his disciples say, Hey, well, you know, Master, you're teaching us things.

We have a question. This blind guy here, was he born blind because he sinned or because his parents sinned? And Jesus looked at him like, You guys don't know what you're talking about.

[5 : 59] You don't get it. This guy was born blind so that the works of God could be manifest in him. And John watched Jesus spit upon the ground.

And he reached down with his hand to that spit and worked it into the dirt and pulled that dirt into his hand. And the disciples are thinking, What is he doing? And he goes to the blind man and he carefully takes that clay and places it and stamps it around about upon his eyes.

And the blind man knows no difference. He can't see a thing. But Jesus says, Now go wash in the pool of Siloam. And so he follows orders.

He leaves. The Bible says he went and washed and came seeing. Now at the moment, Jesus had moved on from there. He didn't meet up with that man until later on.

But John saw this happen and wrote it down. In John, another case in chapter 11 of his gospel, there was a dear friend.

[7 : 03] A dear friend of Jesus. John, I'm sure, many of the disciples knew him well. His name was Lazarus. He got sick and he died. And Jesus waited a few days and he came to the town where Lazarus was laid.

And he met with the sisters, Mary and Martha. They were grieving. They were crying and mourning. And there were many people that had come to be with them and to console them and comfort them. And to mourn with them over the loss of their beloved brother Lazarus.

And Jesus said, Take me to the place where you laid him. And so they did. They went out to the graveside, to Lazarus' tomb. And the disciples and Jesus stood there.

The others mourning and crying and wailing and all of this going on around about him. And Jesus said, Roll the stone away. And the sisters stopped. Whoa, Lord.

He's been dead for four days. Surely by now he stinks. The disciples are thinking, Why would he want the stone to be rolled away? You can't go in there to see him.

[8 : 01] That's a dead body. You'll be defiled. You'll be unclean. And the Lord spake and said, Lazarus, come forth. The Bible says that Lazarus came forth bound in his grave clothes.

And he commanded them that stood by to loosen him up and let him be freed. And John saw this and he wrote. And he told the story. John believed on Jesus Christ.

John saw things that he never imagined he'd see or witness. He saw Jesus do things. But he also heard Jesus say things that in all of his upbringing in Israel he had never heard before.

Of all the times in synagogue or even trips to the temple, he never heard of a rabbi. He never heard a priest or any ruler of the people speak the way Jesus spoke.

Jesus spoke of spiritual things. Not of carnal commandments and of rules and regulations and sacrifices.

[9 : 04] But no, of things of spiritual nature. One time Jesus spoke to a woman about how God is a spirit. And that they that worship him must worship him in spirit.

And those disciples, John wrote that in his fourth chapter, but had to ponder spirit. No one ever taught me about this spiritual side of God.

No one ever taught me any of this stuff but Jesus. And John begins to learn things from Jesus he had never heard before from his teachers. He spoke of of worshiping God in spirit.

He spoke of being born of the spirit. He spoke to Nicodemus and John recorded it in the third chapter of his gospel that Jesus said, Ye must be born again.

Except a man be born of the spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And John had never heard that before in his life. No one's ever talked about being born of the spirit.

[10:07] Why we're born of the seed of Abraham, so we're good. We're Jews, so we're in. But Jesus said, that which is flesh is flesh. But you need to be born of the spirit.

And the Lord Jesus Christ taught John things he'd never heard. He continued by teaching him of eternal life. That it could be receivable. That it could be possessed.

Not just worked for. Not just achievable one day in the afterlife. But that eternal life could be possessed now. He taught that you could have eternal life.

And he also taught that he himself, Jesus, was the only way to the Father. That no man cometh unto the Father but by me. This is things that John recorded in his gospel.

That he heard Jesus say. That he saw Jesus do. And John believed. Brother John believed on Jesus Christ. Because of what he saw.

[11:08] Because of what he heard. But many others. Many others didn't. Many did, but many didn't.

And so there was those followers of Jesus. But then there were those that hated him. There were some that determined. We've got to put a stop to this man. And to his ministry. And to all of his followers.

We've got to end it. And they came together and took counsel. How they might put him to death. They determined to put a stop to this man, Jesus.

Because they didn't believe on him. They despised him. They hated him, he said. As a matter of fact, they envied him. That's one of the reasons why they turned him over.

And I'm saying all of these things from John's perspective. To narrow in. And to just kind of hyper focus down into one verse of scripture.

[12:05] That John wrote in his gospel. Just one verse. In this Bible, there's over 31,000 verses. And I just want to look at one. Why? Because it's one of the most popular verses that has ever been written.

And it's been not just popular because I say so. But it's gone around the world in its popularity. As a matter of fact, some of these certain words I want to read to you are so popular.

They've been placed on billboards. They've been printed on t-shirts or on greeting cards. Even certain athletes have written the address under their eyes in the blackout to be seen on camera. You'll see it at sports games held up on poster boards. The address is John 3 and verse 16. You may not know a lot of Bible, but I bet you may have very well heard of that.

John 3, 16. If you've watched any sports, you may have seen John 3, 16. Somebody's trying to put it out there for the world to see. I'm going to try to this, John, but it may not work.

[13:11] Would you advance that? Here's a few ways that this thing has been put out for everybody to kind of get a glimpse of it. Emphasizing the love of God in the verse or putting the cross.

Even the one on the right, kind of interesting, using those letters out of the verse itself to spell out gospel. The good news. Advance it again. There it is in the NCAA championships when the champions are hoisting up the trophy on national television.

Somebody's got a poster in the back saying, John 3, 16. Another one. There it is under the eyes of Tim Tebow, an NFL quarterback. There it is graffitied on the side of somewhere.

And there's t-shirts and several attractive looking t-shirts. Go ahead. There's the words of this verse. If you were to look up the address, John 3, chapter 3 and verse 16, there are the words on the screen.

I'm just going to leave them up there for a while. Because John wrote this. And he wrote it in his gospel where Jesus said, For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

[14 : 26] I think you've heard of this verse before. And it's one that it's popular. I've said it. It's gone around. And what I'd like you to do, and now take a pause from this and think, this time of year is Christmas.

And it's often called a season of giving. It's a season of giving. And I want you to understand that all of this fair and all of this excitement and lights and customs and traditions and festivities, all of it's premised on one thing.

And you're going to say, Jesus' birth. Well, yeah, but let me back it up a little bit more. It's right there. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

If you take away the Lord Jesus Christ, if you take away the gift of God to this world, there is no holiday. There is no Christmas without Christ.

It doesn't exist. You say, oh, Santa Claus and Rudolph. No, that has nothing to do with anything. That's a cover story, if you want to call it that.

[15 : 37] What we're talking about is the inception of the holiday. It started with the giver being God. Now, why did God give his only begotten Son?

Why did he give the gift at all? Is it because he wanted to show just a nice gesture to someone like we do? No. Was it because the world deserved a gift from God?

Not at all. So why did he give this gift? Why did he give his Son? I think the verse answers it at the beginning. For God so loved the world that he gave.

The love of God is the catalyst for the gift. He's a loving God. And as he looks upon mankind and sees them in sin, and he sees them that they violated his law, his word, they're altogether an unclean thing.

They're ungodly. But God loved the world. It's his creation. He doesn't want them to perish. He'd rather they have everlasting life.

[16 : 45] So in his love, he gave. He gave his only begotten Son. God initiated the entirety of this season by his gift.

But please notice something in this verse, that the gift was intended to invoke a response. He didn't just give the gift and walk away.

But it says that he loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son to invoke a response, that whosoever believeth in him, in the gift, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

God gave his Son to cause the world to believe on his Son, so that in believing on his Son, they could have everlasting life.

The counter to that, it says, should not perish. He doesn't want them to perish. The Bible says God's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come unto repentance, and that all should come to his Son, Jesus Christ.

[17 : 51] The gift of his Son was to incite the world to believe on his Son. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The opposite of the everlasting life is perishing. In that same gospel in John chapter 3, in the next verse, it says, For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already. And so the world is condemned.

The world is going to perish in their sins, but God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son. He wants the world to believe on his Son.

He gave his Son to die on a cross, to pay for the sins of the world, to cover their sins, so that they could receive everlasting life.

[19 : 06] Do you remember the blind man I told you about? Do you remember the blind man who Jesus spit on the ground and made clay and put it on his eyes, and he walked away? Well, later Jesus caught up with the blind man.

Later he ran into him, and the blind man had been, in the meantime, excommunicated from the synagogue. He'd been kicked out of the synagogue, forbidden to come back.

Why? Well, because they found out that everybody knew he was blind. Now he can see. How did you get your sight? He told them, Jesus gave me my sight. And they said, We know that Jesus is a sinner.

You give God the glory or you're out of here. And the blind man stood his ground. And he says, Well, if he's a sinner or not, I don't know. But one thing I know is, I was blind. Now I see. That's the man who gave me my sight. And they said, Get out of here. And they hated him. And so this blind man, he now has his sight.

[20 : 07] He's wandering around, and Jesus runs into him. And he says this to him. I'll read it to you in John chapter 9. He runs into him, and he says, Jesus heard that they had cast him out, in verse 35.

And when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? Up till now, he had never seen him with his eyesight.

Jesus said in verse 37, Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, Lord, I believe.

And he worshipped him. He worshipped him. This Jewish man was content to leave the synagogue because he met Jesus Christ.

He no longer needed a priest to tell him what to do because he had met the Son of God, and he believed on him, and he worshipped him.

[21 : 10] John, the author, we read at the beginning, he left his nets, and he left his father, his family, even at the time.

He left the ship and believed on Jesus, and he followed him. I wonder if you'd consider that God has a gift for you, and it's up to you to receive that gift.

Some here have believed on Jesus Christ, and they've followed him. They found eternal life in the Son of God. They took it. It was a great gift that God gave to them.

That one right there. And that gift that God gave then is still alive and still good and offered to you today. Tomorrow, somebody's going to hand you a gift, a box wrapped up, and it's going to be for you.

And what's inside that gift typically comes with no strings attached. It's yours. It's given out of love. And that's what this is.

[22 : 19] God is offering you a gift of eternal life. One that you can receive from God Himself, receive out of His love, and understand He doesn't want you to perish.

He wants you to believe on His Son. I'm going to finish here just in a second, but I want to read another passage. And this is such a great passage to tie right into this.

It's something else that John said. Later on in his life, in one of his later epistles, he wrote these words. And would you clearly listen to them? He said, If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.

For this is the witness of God, which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son hath this witness in himself. He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son.

I'm going to pause right there and say, which side of this are you on? Are you on the side that believes the record that God gave of His Son? That He wants to give you eternal life and save your soul from hell?

[23 : 27] And that He gave His Son to die for your sins? Are you going to not believe that record and pretend it didn't happen or it doesn't mean anything or it's a fairy tale? It's your choice. Free gift, free choice, free world, whatever.

But the Continuous says, and this is the record. That God hath given to us eternal life There's the gift. And this life is in His Son.

He that hath the Son hath life. And he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. There it is.

There's the whole thing. As that simple as, here's my Son. Die for your sins. Will you take Him as your Savior? Or will you reject Him?

By rejecting Him, you're rejecting God's gift to you of eternal life. You think you can get the God another way? You didn't read the Bible. Jesus said, No man cometh unto the Father but by me.

[24 : 33] You better believe in Jesus Christ. If you reject Jesus Christ, you're going to stand on your own two feet in your own unrighteousness and in your own sin and offer God what?

Think on it, please. Think on it tonight. He offers you His Son. If you reject that, what are you going to offer to Him? You're going to perish.

You'll be condemned. He's given you His Son. Will you receive His Son? Paul the Apostle said that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

One last verse. It's in 1 John 5 and verse 20. And we know that the Son of God has come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true and that we are in Him that is true even in His Son, Jesus Christ.

This is the true God and eternal life. Amen. There's a gift given from God above, given to each one of us.

[25 : 48] Have you received it yet? I have. I've received it and I'm nobody. I'm nothing in this world, but I've received the gift of eternal life from God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ.

I just did it by faith. I did it by asking. I said, Lord, I understand Your Word. I'm a sinner. I understand what You said, what the record is that You said.

I believe it. I'm no good. I'm ungodly. And I believe Your Son died for my sins. And I believe on Him. I'll take Him as my Savior.

Have you taken Him as yours? This will be a great time to do it. Tonight would be, I'm not going to twist your arm. I'm not going to chase you out in the parking lot. But tonight would be a great night for you to bow your heart humbly before your Creator and say, I'm a sinner.

And I believe the record You gave of Your Son. I believe that You gave Your Son for me. Would you bow your head before God and your heart and humbly receive His Son, receive His gift of eternal life?

[26 : 58] It's really simple. Religion makes it hard. God makes it easy. There's a difference. And I'm inviting you tonight to receive that gift of eternal life. Could we all bow our heads tonight and with no one looking around, I want to close this portion of the service.

But I want to ask a question. Please don't look around. Just ponder this in your pew. Ponder this in your heart as if God was speaking to you directly and asking you a question.

Have you received my gift of eternal life? And if not, what's keeping you from receiving it? Are you too proud?

Is it your family getting in the way? John left. Is it your career? John left to take Jesus and believe on Him.

Is it some religious system you've been raised in? John left, the blind man that was healed, he left that because he found Jesus Christ and found that is what I need.

[28 : 11] He is what I'm missing. I want to invite you tonight if you've never believed on Christ in your heart to do that. In your own words, would you bow your heart humbly before God, admit to Him that you are a sinner, that you know that and believe that, but also what that verse on the screen says, that He sent His Son for your sins, that He gave His Son that you could believe on Him and have everlasting life?

Would you call out to God tonight and ask Him to save your soul believing on His Son alone? Don't promise that you'll be good because you'll mess up.

Don't promise that you'll give Him something in return. He doesn't need it. He'll take your sin and wipe it away paid for in the blood of Christ.

Before we finish, I'm going to pray. Before I pray, I'd like to ask you if you've prayed that prayer tonight or asked God to save your soul for the first time, would you just slip your hand up?

Nobody's looking. Nobody at all. Would you slip your hand up as a testimony to God? I prayed. I want to be saved and receive Jesus as my Savior.

[29 : 39] And I'll take Him alone for eternal life. Father in Heaven, thank You for the gift of God. Thank You for giving Your Son to come to this earth to suffer the cruel torment of that cross to pay for our filthy sins.

Thank You, Lord God. Thank You for the gift so easily received, so simple to believe on the Lord Jesus and to be released from all of our work and all of our labor.

Lord, help those that need to understand this to see it. Please impress each soul. And Father, as we go on with this night, we want to thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's in His name we pray. Amen. Amen.