

God's Christmas Present

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Date: 25 December 2015

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[0 : 00] Father, open our eyes, we pray, that we might behold wonderful things from your word. Soften our hearts that we might receive it. Transform our wills that we might be doers of it.

And loose our tongues that we might proclaim it. We ask this for the glory of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen. Our friends, gift-giving is a long and honoured tradition, isn't it?

In fact, the practice of gift-giving is probably as old as humanity itself. It's been used in wooing. It's been used for celebrating key events. People have used gifts as a way of making political relationships or maintaining them.

Or forging friendships. Or helping a new couple to set up a house by giving them a gift at their wedding. We even see gift-giving in the Christmas story. Wise men acknowledge the birth of Jesus with gifts.

Anyway, in preparation for today, I thought I'd do some research into some of the most expensive gifts given in contemporary history. Here are some of the big ones that are recorded in an internet post a few days ago in the British Telegraph newspaper.

[1 : 09] First, and hopefully some pictures of these are going to occur. First, here's the Koh-i-Noor diamond, which you'll see this on the first slide.

It is a 105-carat diamond. It was the largest diamond in the world until relatively recently. It was a gift given to Queen Victoria in 1850 by Britain's then Governor-General of India.

However, its actual value is unknown. But let me tell you, it is one of the most important parts of the British Crown, which is valued at somewhere between 20 and 25 billion Australian dollars.

Okay, and here's the second, the Star of the East. The Star of the East is a necklace that features a 94.8-carat pear-shaped diamond mounted, at least originally, on a chain below a hexagonal emerald.

In today's money, it was bought at about \$16.5 billion Australian dollars. Edward Beale McLean, the heir of the Washington Post, together with his bride Evelyn, bought it as a wedding present.

[2 : 17] I presume they bought it together, so it must have been to share, as it were. Here is number three. It's a Giacometti bronze sculpture called Walking Man 1.

It was, at the time it was sold, the most expensive sculpture ever sold at auction. It was bought by billionaire Roman Abramovich for his future wife, Dasha Zukova, at the cost of approximately \$145 million.

It's a lot to pay for that, isn't it? Number four was an apartment. An apartment which consisted of the entire floor of one of Dubai's most famous buildings, the Burj Khalifa.

Now, this gift was bought by the business magnate Raj Kundra for his wife. His wife was Celebrity Big Brother star, Shilpa Shetty. And we don't know the exact cost, but apartments in the Burj Khalifa cost about \$1,300 Australian dollars per square foot.

So imagine what a whole floor is going to cost you. Shilpa later sold it because, in her view, it was too small. Finally, there's the gift of India's richest man, Mukesh Abani.

[3 : 37] He bought his wife, Nita, a luxury jet, complete with a cabin with game consoles, a kitchen, a master bedroom with a range of showers and a bar with mood lighting.

The cost? Approximately \$84 million Australian dollars. Friends, I wonder how you did this Christmas. Well, let me tell you, if you are a Christian, then God's gift to you leaves such trinkets in the shade.

God's gift to you is overwhelmingly abundant if you are Christian. It is costly. It is beyond measure in its generosity. And I'm just going to spend a few moments today explaining to you the passage we read from 1 John.

In fact, I'm only going to really concentrate on one verse. So hopefully that will lead you to think that this is not going to be terribly long this morning. And you're right. I want you, though, it will help me to have your Bibles open at page 1229 to 1230.

So 1,229. I'm going to concentrate on one verse, as I said. But before we do that, I want to give you some background. As some of you know, this is the third in a series of sermons that we started two weeks ago.

[5 : 02] We've been tracing the story, a particular story through the Bible. And that story is the story of a conflict between God and Satan. It begins in the Garden of Eden.

You see, God creates a garden in Eden. He creates it as a beautiful place for humans might live in his presence, where they might live in relationship with him, right relationship with him, right relationship with each other, and right relationship with the environment into which he's placed them.

However, there is a serpent in the garden. That serpent represents an enemy of God. And he tempts Eve to doubt and disobey God.

And Eve then talks to Adam. And he's caught up in this whole thing. And he complies. And together, they eat of the tree that God told them not to eat of. And the result is that the harmony that existed originally in the garden is shattered.

Human relationship with God is tainted. Human relationships with each other are tainted. And human relationships with the environment into which God has placed them is also tainted.

[6 : 03] And that's expressed in three curses. One curse to the serpent, one to the woman, one at the man. It's the one to the serpent that I want to concentrate on. It is addressed to the serpent in Genesis 3.15.

And I'm hoping you will see it on the data projector screen. There it is. God says to the serpent these words. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head. Remember the serpent's being spoken to. And you will strike his heel. This is seen in the Bible to be a curse that affects all the world. And I want you to take notice of it.

You see, it's a curse that affects the serpent and all the descendants of Eve. That is all humanity. But I do want you to notice it's also somewhat typical of God, this curse. Even in a curse, there's good news that something will happen to overcome the curse.

God is saying that in the world there are going to be two lines of descent. The literal word used here is seed. In the Hebrew Bible, the word seed is like our word for sheep.

[7 : 07] It can be used for singular or plural. And anyway, God is in effect saying that in this world you can find two sorts of seed. There will be the seed or the offspring of the serpent.

And there will be the seed or the offspring of the woman. And those two will be at war with each other. The impression is that there will be two lines of descent. There will be those two lines.

And those who identify with... And everyone will identify with one or the other. There will be those who oppose God and put him to the side. Those who have themselves at the center. They in one sense are lining up with the serpent.

And on the other side, there will be those who pursue God and his ways. Who line up with God and put God at the center. Those who live under God's rule and live as God created them to live. That conflict is seen in the story of Cain and Abel.

That follows immediately after this curse in Genesis 4. But I want you to notice two more things about this verse. Just have a look at it there. The impression given in this verse is that God has one particular seed or offspring in mind.

[8 : 13] That is one particular seed or offspring of the woman. One representative individual. And God promises the serpent this. That he will crush your head.

And you will strike his heel. I wonder if you can hear it. God promises the serpent there's going to be a male serpent head crusher as it were. Oh the serpent might strike at his heel.

However he will deal a mortal blow to the serpent. He will crush his head. And over the last two weeks we have chased this story through the Bible.

We've seen how this head crusher will come from Abraham's line. He will be a king from Judah's line. He'll be a descendant of David the son of God. And we've found out that it eventually is Jesus. And that brings us to our verse today. Sorry it's taken us so long but we'll move fairly quickly now. Have a look at this verse with me. It speaks of God's great gift. Let's see if we can spot it.

[9 : 14] John is speaking to his fellow Christians. And he warns them in verse 7 with this. Dear children, don't let anyone lead you astray. John considers that Christians, you see, live in a world where there are forces that will tempt them to go astray.

Forces that will push them away from God's way. Forces pushing them away from Jesus who is God's way. And that's what's underneath the second half of verse 7. God talks about he who is righteous.

In the context, this has to be Jesus. Then he goes behind the scenes and he talks about Jesus who is righteous. And then he also talks about the enemy of righteousness. He talks about the devil. And look at what he says. Verse 8. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. That's exactly what we noticed back in Genesis, isn't it? There are two lines of descent from Eve. One line is like the serpent who's the devil. The other line is like the seed or the descendant of Eve who will crush the serpent's head. I wonder if this is in mind in verse 9.

[10 : 17] Can you look at verse 9? John talks about God's seed remaining in the person who is Christian. Anyway, the point of verse 8 is clear, isn't it?

The devil has been sinning from the beginning. That sinning is seen when he tempted Eve in the garden. That sinning is seen in his spiritual progeny who opposed God.

And then John turns to the most marvelous statement in the second half of verse 8. Look at it. Look at it in your Bibles. John says, The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. Did you notice the language? First, notice that Jesus is called the Son of God. That is, he's the descendant of David. The descendant of Judah. The descendant of Abraham.

That is, I think he's saying he's the head crusher, the serpent head stomper of Genesis 3.15.

Second thing, he appeared. The world, you see, has been waiting for him since Genesis 3.15.

[11 : 19] Finally, he comes. And what we do is we remember that he comes into the world as we remember him at Christmas. That's what Christmas is about. It's about the appearing of Jesus finally into the world.

The Son of God who will destroy the works of the devil. Then John tells us why, which is the third thing. He appeared to do what the Son of God was meant to do.

He appeared to be the head stomper. To destroy the devil's work. And we know he did this when he died on the cross. He triumphed over God's enemy, the devil.

And the writer, the apostle Paul, in the book of Colossians says, that he made a public display of him. He crushed his head as God had promised he would.

And as he headed towards the cross, do you know what Jesus said to his disciples? He's about to go to his death. And he says to his disciples in John's gospel, now is the time for judgment. That is now as I go to the cross, now is the time that judgment is coming on this world.

[12 : 22] Now the prince of the world will be driven out. And then when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw people to myself. And in his dying breath, do you know what he said?

He said, it is finished. That is, it is done. It is wrapped up. It is all complete. Friends, can you hear what is being said?

This is God's gift in the world. A marvelous, overwhelming gift. A human being who appears in order to reverse human sin.

God who appears in human flesh in order to deal with the problem that we humans created by listening to the devil and following his ways. This serpent head crusher. This is God's gift.

Great gift. Now look at John refers back to it in verse 1 of the same chapter. If you're in 1 John chapter 3, look back at verse 1. He talks about God's great love lavished upon us that we should be called the children of God.

[13 : 26] Friends, how awesome is this? This has been worth waiting for, hasn't it? So friends, this is God's gift. If so, how should we respond to it?

Well, the very first thing is we ought to receive it. And John gave us some hints as to how to do this back in chapter 1. He talks about the word of life appearing in the world to the original apostles.

And then he talks about them proclaiming to the world what they have seen and heard. And then he says that if they do, then others will be able to have fellowship with them and with the Father and with the Son.

In his earlier writings, he talks about the very same thing in some different language. He says this, Friends, this is the very first reaction we should have to God's great and generous gift.

This gift from God has taken a long time to arrive. As I mentioned at the beginning, it's not a trinket like the other gifts that we looked at at the beginning. So if you have not already received it, I do want to urge you today to do so.

[14 : 42] There is no greater gift available in the world than this. Any time in history, nor will they ever be in history to come. There is no greater gift available in the world than this.

There is no way to be a child of God except through accepting all that God has done in and through Jesus. You can only be freed from the devil through the seed who is Jesus.

So that's the very first response we should make. It is to receive that gift. But there's a second response. I wonder if you noticed it in these verses. Look again at 1 John 3 and verse 9.

John talks about not continuing to sin because God's seed remains in us. In verse 10 he talks about the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. You see, the children of God not only accept the great gift, they reflect it in their lives as well.

They no longer do evil. They used to do it over here, but they no longer do now. Instead, they do what is right. They love their brother and sister. They're not like the devil's first progeny after Eve.

[15 : 52] They're not like Cain. Look at verse 12. John says, we are not to be like Cain who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. No, we are, rather than being like Cain, we are to be like the son of God.

We are to love each other. Look at verse 16. Jesus Christ laid down his love for us, so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Friends, as we celebrate Christmas today, I wonder if I could speak to both groups of people that are here today.

If you are not a believer in Jesus, I want you to listen to what Christmas is all about. It is about God's great gift to the world in Jesus. And I'd love you to receive that gift.

You do this by believing in Jesus and accepting all that he's done for you. But I also want to speak to those of you who have already received that gift. And I want to say to you the other part of what John says.

That is, friends, be people of love. That is, love one another. Don't be like Cain who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. No, no, be like Jesus who loved the world so much that he willingly appeared on earth to destroy the devil's work and to bring you to God.

[17 : 08] Let's pray.