

The Best Present

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Date: 04 December 2022

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- [0 : 0 0] Christmas is just around the corner, isn't it? It is, I'm telling you, but you probably know. It means lots of different things, doesn't it?
- What does it bring to mind for you? Maybe things like holidays, summer, crazy amounts of food. Here's some photos I've taken from my previous Christmas and post.
- Maybe also parties and family and usually lots of fun. But there's another thing which I think no matter how old you get, I think just creeps into your mind and that is presents.
- Christmas just wouldn't be Christmas, at least in Australia or the West, without all those tantalising secrets stacked under the tree, just glaring up at you, all the way up until the day teasing you.
- You just want to take a look, don't you? But you can't. Just back off. Just take a moment, 30 seconds, ask the person next to you what's the best Christmas present you've received.
- [1 : 0 9] Go. Go. Go. Okay, that's enough time.
- Who'd like to dub in the person next to them or just tell us what you said? Best Christmas present. Lego. Lego. Lego. Lego. Okay, nice one.
- Love that. Someone else. Nice one. Love that. One more.
- Come on. Socks. Socks. Socks. Your parents have done well. I obviously can't remember every present I've been given, but I can remember one I was totally stoked about.
- As a teenager and maybe as an adult as well, I loved waterfights. And what made them better was having the biggest water pistol, yeah? Back then in my childhood, the weapon of choice was the pump action Super Soaker 50.
- [2 : 2 3] Yeah? You know this? It was so powerful. It could shoot like 20 or 30 metres. Every kid needed a Super Soaker.
- Yeah. Well, after I was convinced that my parents didn't love me, my brother gave me a big surprise.
- For Christmas, he gave me the master of all Super Soakers. I've actually still got it. Do you want to see it? Yeah? Let me show you. Let me show you. Let me show you.
- This thing is next level. Absolute.
- No worries about pump action, you might be wondering. You see those black things in there? It's got pressure built in. Now I will control the water fight.
- [3 : 2 3] It's so powerful, when you shoot with one hand, your arm recoils. It was a fantastic present.
- Cords. It's okay. Was it the best present I ever got? What if I got this one?
- That would have been pretty good. A little less practical. But pretty good, yeah? Would it be the best Christmas present?
- I'm not sure. I think the best present that I got, God gave me. And the rest of the world too. Listen again to the well-known verse from John's Gospel.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God's son is the best present we will ever get.

[4 : 34] Now this isn't to say that other presents you've gotten or will get are no good. No. Or that we can't enjoy presents. Of course not. Presents are fun. And getting is good.

But God's is best. Why? Why? Well, two reasons, I think, I'm going to talk about at least. God's present shows his love.

And God's present is heaps more valuable. Firstly, just for a moment, I want you to forget about what you've gotten and think about what you've given. Who do you give to?

Why do you give to them? Because you have to? Because you want to? How much time do you spend thinking, planning, searching for that perfect gift?

For wife, husband, mum, dad, brother, sister, friend? When I was younger, I mostly gave gifts to my family.

[5 : 37] And when I think back, my gift quality, it really said a lot about how much I cared. When I was in early high school, I had already set the standard pretty low, like Josh's parents.

And so one time, my sister was pleasantly surprised to open her present from me and find a lovely gold bracelet. Jeff, that's so thoughtful.

I didn't think you had it in you. I did not expect that. She told me she really liked the style, but would have loved it even more in silver.

And, you know, she asked if she could exchange, if I could exchange it. I wasn't upset. That's an okay request. Exchange is a part of presents. I'm sure you know that. She liked silver better. I even knew that.

She obviously thought, surely it's not hard to swap it for a silver one. It was then that I had to break it to her that I didn't find this beautiful, thoughtful gift in a jewellery shop, but in the dirt on the playground at school.

[6 : 48] I'm not too sure if they have a returns policy. If the Bible verse from before was written about me, it would say something like this. For Jeff so loved the sister that he gave a dirty rubbish bracelet so that he wouldn't have to spend his time and money on getting a real gift, but keep it for himself.

Like when we give gifts to people, God's gift also shows how he feels. When it says God so loved the world, it means this is how God showed his love for the world.

God shows us how he loved the world. And how was it? By doing what was easiest for him? By giving us the leftovers? By putting himself before us?

No. By giving us his only son. And he certainly didn't have to, did he? Our Old Testament passage reminded us that God's people, Israel, did their best to resist his love.

The more they were called, it said, the more they went away from me. But he was persistent. Despite what you or I might feel in response to such treatment, God reminds his people of his character.

[8 : 10] I will not carry out my fierce anger. I am God, not a man. The Holy One among you. This passage makes sense of God sending his son, doesn't it?

Sometimes when things go bad, you might hear people say, God doesn't love me. If he did, then he wouldn't let such and such happen.

You may have thought or said that yourself. I've had things like that cross my mind. This verse teaches us how God loves us, not by giving us everything we want, not by letting us do whatever we want, but by giving us his son.

By coming to live among us, a free gift to save us from death. God's gift to the world shows us his love.

But not only this, God's gift is best simply because it's so much more valuable. At the first Christmas, when Jesus was born, there was a bunch of gift giving going on too.

[9 : 19] In Matthew chapter 2, we hear about a bunch of gift giving to Jesus. In 2, 10 and 11, the Magi saw the star. They were overjoyed.

They came to the house. They saw the child and the mother Mary. They bowed down and worshipped. They opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They gave, the Magi gave very valuable gifts, didn't they?

Very valuable. But despite this impressive offering, they pale in comparison to Jesus. Sorry, to God's gift.

Listen again to the verse from John. God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not die, but have eternal life.

God's gift in Jesus is so valuable that it brings those who have it a new life that will never be affected by sin, suffering or death.

[10 : 27] Just think for a moment about a gift of great value that you might like to get. What about a 99 ATAR?

Or perhaps just no more exams. I know there's plenty of you who still have to do exams in your jobs. That sucks. What about a free personal driver for the rest of your life, anywhere, anytime?

That'd be valuable, wouldn't it? What if that pain in your back would go away? Or that pain in your neck? What about just all of your problems?

Lots of gifts are really valuable, aren't they? You might get one. You might give one. But only one gift will give you a new and better life.

A life without frustration, without failure, without disappointment, without broken bones, without broken promises, without broken relationships, without bullying, without exclusion, without hot tempers and mistakes, without guilt, without shame, without loneliness, without sadness.

[11 : 55] This Christmas you may give and get lots of gifts. Some may be pretty average, like a gold bracelet. Some may be pretty fantastic, like a super soaker.

You might get something you can keep and use for years. But only the best present from God will last forever.

Only God's Christmas present shows his amazing love. Only God's Christmas present brings a better, happier, never-ending life. Let me wrap up with a few thoughts on our response.

A few years ago, I gave a very special gift. Another piece of jewellery. This was bought more legitimately to Tiff, my wife, so we could get married.

For this to happen, both of us needed to make changes. Those changes were things like start living together, look after ourselves.

[13 : 07] Tiff knew this change might bring various challenges, but she said yes. She decided that it would be worth it, despite the challenges, and it is.

Sometimes it's hard, but it's worth it. Let's just imagine for a moment that she said no. She didn't want the ring or the life that came with it. What would that mean? Well, it's obvious, isn't it?

We wouldn't be married. We wouldn't have the life and relationship that we have. Is it similar to God's gift to us?

We need to accept God's gift, don't we, that he gives us to say, yes, I'll have that, thanks. The verse doesn't say, God gave his only son so that no one will die and everyone will have eternal life.

It says, God gave his only son so that whoever believes will have eternal life.

[14 : 17] Since God gave his gift to the world and you are in the world, there are only two possible responses. Yes, I accept God's offer.

I will believe in God's only son. Please let me have the eternal life. Or, no, I don't accept. I don't want it. Or I just don't care about it.

The reason I told that story about me and Tiff is because saying yes means that life has to change, doesn't it? We stop living alone and start living together.

We become a new family. We live according to the promises that we made each other. This is true for lots of decisions. If you say yes to God, if you accept and believe Jesus, life has to change.

You no longer belong to this dying, frustrated, disappointing, shame-filled world, living together, but alone.

[15 : 30] Instead, you belong to God's perfect, eternally satisfying, never-ending world. even becoming part of God's own family with a room in his house, John goes on to say.

Of course, it won't be perfect now, which God tells us in the Bible. There will be challenges. There will be difficulties. And we are able to share them together as God's family, knowing all the while that even if our challenges and difficulty result in loneliness, rejection, and death, just like they did with Jesus, our true and heavenly home, our real and better life are yet to come.

Christmas brings lots of fun and interesting things, doesn't it? Food, holidays, family, friends, presents, embarrassing uncles, tense political conversations.

But the best thing Christmas brings by far is Jesus. Make sure that you have said yes to God's amazing gift.

Accept and believe in Jesus and you will not die but have eternal life. How about I give thanks for this? Thank you, Heavenly Father, for the amazing gift of your Son, Jesus, whose coming we particularly remember at Christmas.

[17 : 09] Help us this Christmas to let the wonderful truth of the salvation that comes through Jesus' death linger in our minds and fill our mouths with thanks and praise.

Would you enable those who haven't yet accepted this great gift to say yes to Jesus and start believing in him to have eternal life? Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.