

The Free Gift Of God

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[0 : 00] If you would, please find a copy of God's Word nearby. There should be one in the seat back in front of you. If you didn't bring one with you, that's okay. And our text this evening is just one verse from the book of Romans.

Paul's letter to the church in Rome, chapter 6, verse 23. Romans, chapter 6, verse 23. Paul writes, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Pray with me. Father, we pray once more as we open up your Word this evening. Would you speak through the preaching of your Word? We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Christmas is the season of gift-giving and, of course, gift-getting. And we think hard, long and hard, put a lot of effort into thinking about what we might give to our loved ones.

[1 : 15] And if we're honest, we also think pretty hard about what we want them to give to us. I know our kids spent a long time flipping through magazines. We still get some of those and highlighting the things that they want to receive.

Now, they spent a long time, I think they started in October, writing out their Christmas list, different editions, different drafts. And finally, the deadline came and we said, enough's enough. You get what you get.

But this evening, what I want to do is we come together here on the night before Christmas. My aim is very simple tonight. I just want to remind us of the incredible gift we've been given in Christ Jesus.

God has given us an unbelievable gift in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul says it is the gift, the free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So let's take a look at it this evening in two parts. I have both bad news and good news for you this evening. First, we'll start with the bad news.

[2 : 20] I want us to consider our earning. Consider our earning. You know, there is a certain economy in the legends of Christmas.

You know what it is. If you are good, then what happens? You get good gifts for Christmas. But if you are not good, if you are naughty, if you happen to cry through the Christmas Eve sermon, then you might get lumps of coal in your stocking.

That's mine, so I can say that. And when you think about it, there's really very little grace here at work. What it is, is you get what you have earned. And so, parents, come December, you start warning your children you'd better be good.

You'd better stop hitting your brother. You'd better start listening. You'd better start behaving. Or you won't get any gifts up underneath the tree. And children all over the world go into December fearful with this in mind.

He sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake. He's going to find out who's naughty or nice.

[3 : 29] In other words, the economy of secular Christmas is you will get what you have earned. You get a wage for Christmas.

If you are good, you get good gifts. If you are naughty, you get a bad return. Of course, the truth is we don't really want to get what we've earned, do we?

Because, again, if we're honest, I think that we would admit none of us have really been all that good. If we're honest, we would admit even if we've tried our best, none of us have been absolutely 100% perfectly good.

And even if we start behaving right after Thanksgiving all the way to December 25th, we still have January through November looming over us.

There's always a little bit of reason to worry that we might get some coal in our stocking, isn't there? As a kid, I could not imagine anything worse. That is bad news, isn't it?

[4 : 29] Well, the Apostle Paul, here in the book of Romans, what he does is he spends the first several chapters of this letter telling us some very bad news.

And, you know, it's even worse than we feared. The bad news is that we're right. None of us have been very good. And the biblical word for that is sin. The Bible tells us that we have all, from top to bottom, male, female, young and old, every single one of us, we have all sinned against a holy God. And the wage that sinners are paid for our sin is much worse than a lump of coal. He says in chapter 1, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

Our sin has earned us as a payment, as a wage, God's wrath. He says in chapter 2, the unrighteous are storing up wrath for yourself.

On the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed, listen to this, He will render to each one according to his works.

[5 : 46] That is a wage. In other words, you get what you have earned. Paul just knocks us over the head with this right here at the beginning of the letter. This is really bad news.

But, of course, you might think, well, maybe there's just a chance, right? Maybe there's a chance that you, out of all the people of the world, maybe you have been good enough.

So, when he says this, maybe he's just talking about somebody else. Maybe he's not talking about me. Maybe he's talking about my neighbors. I can't stand them.

They're terrible. Maybe he's not talking about me. He's talking about those other people down the road, not me. Maybe he's talking about the people that vote differently than me.

Or think differently than me. Or root for a different college football team than me. He's thinking about people that sin differently than me.

[6 : 42] He's talking about the really bad people in this category. He is not talking about me, right? Chapter 3 shatters that idea.

Here's what he says. None is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one. In other words, if Jesus, if God were to make a list, Paul says he wouldn't even have to check it twice. Everybody in the world is listed right here in the naughty column. This is bad news. The bad news is all of us are sinners, which means all of us have earned God's wrath.

And so Paul sums it up here in the first half of our verse. The wages of sin is death. What have we earned for our sin?

[7 : 47] We have earned death. Physical death and spiritual death. Separation from God and the fullness of his wrath.

That is what we have earned. And that's what we will receive. Unless God himself does something to change the equation.

And that's where this one glorious word here in the middle of this verse. It changes everything, doesn't it? Yes, the wages of sin is death.

But our ears ought to perk up when we hear that word, right? Because when that follows bad news, you know what's coming? Well, hopefully it's some good news.

The house burned down, but everybody got out safely. The store was out of everything that I wanted to buy you for Christmas. But I was able to find it online.

[8 : 47] One, we have earned death for our sin. But God has done something glorious.

So second, let's consider God's giving. And here, church, here is the good news. The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life.

In Christ Jesus our Lord. I can't think of a greater contrast than what we see in these two halves of this verse. Can you? The two halves of this verse are absolutely polar opposites.

On one side here is death, but here on the other, God gives eternal life. This is life that is not threatened by death. You know, we go through life with this looming threat of death everywhere we go.

And we know that this life has an expiration. But here on the other side, there is eternal life to be had. Life that will blossom into more and more and more life in the presence of God for the rest of eternity.

[10 : 01] Life without sickness. Life without shame. Life without guilt. Life without pain. Life without tears. Life without sorrows. Life without sin. Can you imagine it?

Eternal life. On one side is our wage, what we have earned. But here on the other side, God gives a free gift. Now, if you're cheap like me, you hear that word free and your ears perk up, don't they? Free is good. Now, we want free. We go to Costco just for the free. You don't have to pay for it. You just receive it.

You walk to the sample line and they just give it to you. Sometimes if they're nice, you can go around again. You just receive it. But free for you is at cost to someone else, isn't it?

If it's free for you, that means that somebody else has paid it on your behalf. And that's exactly how this works. Eternal life is offered freely to you, freely to sinners as a gift.

[11 : 08] But it comes at great cost to the Lord. Jesus Christ paid for this gift with his own life.

Jesus Christ died to give you this gift. On one side is hopelessness in us, and on the other side here, there is hope in Christ.

This is the gospel, church. The bad news is, yes, we've earned death. We've earned God's wrath. But the good news is, the good news of the gospel is that God has done something to give us eternal life.

What has he done? God has sent his own son, Jesus, into the world. You know, most of us here at Christmas, we understand that it has something to do with Jesus, right?

I think broadly speaking, even in a non-believing world, non-believing community, they understand there's a connection here, Jesus and Christmas. It's a birthday. You even hear some songs on the radio.

[12 : 10] It's hard to believe that still is allowed to play on the airwaves. You hear some Christian songs about Jesus here at Christmastime. You see manger scenes all over the place. But I'm not sure that everybody really gets it.

Why Jesus comes. Why we celebrate his birth every single year. Here's the reason. The child that we celebrate here at Christmas is our only hope of salvation.

Jesus Christ has come to pay the debt, to take the wrath of God, to receive the wage that we have earned.

The King of heaven has taken upon himself our human nature. He was born as a baby in the flesh so that he might live and die and rise for sinners like us.

Jesus came to take what we have earned so that he can give us what he has earned. Jesus came to die in our place so that we can live in him.

[13 : 21] Jesus came to bear the wrath of God so that sinners like us might know the peace of God. He came to be as we are so that in him we might come to be as he is.

Jesus has come to give us the gift of eternal life. A million dollar question. How do we get in on this gift, isn't it?

How do we receive the gift? It's not by working or by earning or by striving or by bettering. It is simply by receiving.

It's a free gift in him. Tomorrow morning, if you're lucky, someone might hold out a gift for you. It has your name on it.

It's for you. They thought about it. They wanted to give it to you. And what will you do? You will reach out your hands to receive it, right? You will reach out your hands to take it and to make it yours.

[14 : 27] And that's exactly how we receive this gift. John Calvin says it like this. Faith is like an empty, open hand stretched out toward God with nothing to offer and everything to receive.

If you would like to receive a free gift, the free gift of eternal life, and who wouldn't? All you must do is simply come to Christ in faith.

The gospel is the good news that yes, we have earned death by our works. But the good news is we receive eternal life by his works, by faith in what he has done.

You see, the real economy of Christmas is a little bit different than what we hear on the radio and what we sing about in the Christmas songs and in the legends of Christmas. The good news is this. Christ has come so that in him, God would not give us a wage, but rather this free gift of eternal life. We have earned death.

[15 : 33] Christ has earned life. And in him, we receive eternal life. We have earned separation from God, but in Christ, God has come to us in the flesh.

We have earned judgment for our sin, but Christ has died in our place. He's taken our judgment. He's showering us with grace. We have earned hell, but in Christ, God has given us heaven. Of all the gifts that you might get tomorrow, as you think about giving and receiving this Christmas, there is nothing better that you could possibly have than eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. So as we close this evening in prayer, if you have not received that gift, I want you to pray as I pray. And I want you to cry out to the Lord as a sinner in need of saving grace. And church, for those of us who do have this gift, who have received the gift of eternal life in Christ, would you let it stir your heart once more to worship him this Christmas?
[16 : 52] Even as we just sang earlier this evening, Let's pray.

Father, we praise you for this free gift of eternal life in Christ. We confess, Lord, that yes, we have sinned against you.

There's not a person in this room who is free from sin. But God, we rejoice that you have provided payment, full payment for our sin, simply to be received by faith in Christ who came for us and who lived for us and who died for us and who rose in victory from the grave.

We love you, Lord. We pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.