

Jason Upchurch - John 17 - Christmas Eve 2020 - The Father's Gift

I don't know about you but Christmas Eve is always filled with anticipation for me. I like gifts. And even more, as a father, I like seeing my children enjoy gifts. I think finding joy in giving gifts is part of our being made in the image of God.

Obviously as Christians we want to ensure that we don't delve into materialism. The world is tempting and it is easy to follow their example. However, I think the way we fight materialism is to be reminded why we give gifts in the first place.

Our gift giving isn't tied to the solstice or Hanukkah or Santa. Our gifts are tied to Jesus Christ coming into the world which the Bible says is cause for celebration and joy.

If you look at gift giving in the Bible, specifically when God's people all give gifts to one another is often tied to a victory. When Esther saved the Jews from destruction the Jews dedicated a day each year to feasting, and gladness as a holiday where they sent gifts of food and gave to the poor. God had given them a great victory and they were to celebrate by giving gifts to each other.

Some might say, "Wait, Christmas is when Jesus was born - he hadn't accomplished anything yet." Maybe not in a technical sense, but victory over sin and death and shame was assured the moment he took his first breath. It'd be like me shooting hoops and Michael Jordan showing up and challenging me to 1-on-1. It's over before he even steps on to the court.

The moment Jesus came into the world, salvation was as good as done. That's the reason the angels are proclaiming good news of great joy. God showed up. And what sinful people had been messing up for thousands of years, Jesus would set to right in a matter of a few decades.

And so long as our gift giving is tied to the joy of the birth and death and resurrection of Jesus, I think we're on safe grounds. Gifts are good.

The Bible talks about our very salvation as a gift:

Eph. 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing it is the gift of God; not a result of works so that no one may boast.

The Father sending his Son Jesus to die on the cross in our place for our sins was all a gift. There is nothing that anyone does to earn forgiveness of sins. That's not possible. Our sinfulness is so great all we can do is ask the Father to forgive us based on the death of Jesus. Trusting that when he died he bore the punishment we deserve and that by his mercy he credits to our account his righteousness.

Rom. 6:23: The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Every aspect of our salvation is a freely and graciously given to repentant believers.

But this evening as we look to Jesus together, I want us to see that the richness of our salvation goes even deeper than simply God's gift to us. That's magnificent and wonderful news. But the gift is even better than that.

What I want us to see this evening in **John 17** is that the gift of salvation that we praise God for is actually just a small part of a larger gift from God the Father to God the Son.

Have you ever seen those one of those puzzles that are a mosaic of pictures that are arranged to make an even bigger picture? Where they take a 1000 piece puzzle, print 1000 different pictures on each piece and when you put the whole puzzle together it turns out that all those faces actually make up one bigger picture?

That's kind of what Jesus is getting at here in **John 17**. This is called the high priestly prayer. This is Jesus's prayer to the Father the night before he is crucified.

And in this magnificent prayer what we learn is that - as much as our salvation is a gift from the Father to us - what God has done in saving us is to put us together a huge mosaic of joyful worshippers and has given us to Jesus to praise his grace and his glory forever.

What we're going to see here is Jesus talking about the people God gave him to redeem. We'll see the word "gave" over and over: You gave them to me; those you gave me. Jesus is talking to the Father about all those he would save.

So what we see then is in eternity past the Father promised to give to the Son a group of people he would save that would praise him forever and ever. So while we look at our own individual salvation as a gift - and it is - our collective salvation - all y'all, all of us - are a gift from the Father to the Son.

Our salvation is a gift inside of a gift. And so what I want to do is just walk through this passage and stand in awe at the eternal plan of God to not only save us sure destruction, but to use our praise as a gift to the Son.

Read 1-2

So Jesus's hour of glorification has come. What is the glorification he's talking about? It actually the glory of dying on the cross. How is that glory? It's glory because through his death, and subsequent resurrection and ascension, he will receive praise. Why do we give praise to Jesus? Because he died for my sins. My praise to Jesus - my giving him glory - is precisely because he died on the cross. The cross is glory for Jesus.

And in **Vs. 2** we see 3 times where something is given. **Read 2**

The word give is going to be the key word in this entire chapter. I counted 16 times it's used explicitly, but giving is referred to even more often.

Here, the Father gives Jesus authority over all flesh - his dominion is over absolutely all people. He has been given that by the Father.

And then Jesus turns and gives eternal life to the ones that the Father has given to him to save.

And I know this brings up issues of free will and predestination all of that. But however we square all of that, what we see clearly is that while Jesus has authority over all flesh, he gives life to the ones the Father has given to him. This is the gift inside the gift.

Our gift of salvation is actually a gift from the Father to the Son. People call this the covenant of redemption. The Father's promise before the world began to give to the Son a redeemed humanity. And we are part of that redeemed humanity. We have the gift of eternal life.

What is eternal life? **Read 3**

The eternal life that Jesus has given us is intimate knowledge of him and the Father. Yes it's salvation from hell. Yes it's heaven with streets of gold and gates pearl. But more than that it's intimate knowledge of our Creator and our Savior. And in that sense, eternal life isn't something we wait to get one day in heaven. Eternal life according to Jesus begins the moment we are saved because eternal life is true intimate knowledge God through his Son.

This is exactly what Jesus came into the world to do. He came to give eternal life to the people God gave him. And now that's almost accomplished, he's ready to return to heaven in glory. **Read 4-5**

Jesus did precisely what the Father wanted him to do. He always said what the Father wanted said. He always did what the Father wanted done. He accomplished the will of his Father and now he says, "Father, I'm ready for my glory back." Hark the Herald Angels: "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see." His glory has been veiled

throughout his ministry. But once he ascends to heaven his glory will again be on full display as God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. He will manifest the glory he had before the word began.

The rest of the chapter is Jesus praying for those who the Father gave him. This is the sweetest and most intimate prayer because it is inter trinitarian communication and subject is the well being and care Jesus has for us because the Father gave us to the Son.

The rest of the prayer is broken up into 4 simple parts. The first in **Vss. 6-10** is basically Jesus saying: I got the ones you gave. Mission accomplished. Notice how many times Jesus mentions the Father giving us to him.

Read 6-10

Over and over, Jesus is focused on the ones the Father gave him. He proclaimed the name of the Father to the ones the Father gave him. They were the Father's, but now the Father has given them to the Son.

And if you're like me, you're thinking "I'm the gift God is giving to the Son? Oh, I'm getting returned." And that would be true if our worth was wrapped up in us. But our worth and value is not wrapped up in us. Here, Jesus says our worth and value is not us intrinsically but it's wrapped up in the fact that we are a gift from God.

My dad gave me an old lever action rifle. This rifle has been in our house since before I can remember. It's not fancy, it's not the latest technology, I'm not even sure it's safe to fire to be honest. But that rifle has incredible value to me because of who gave it to me. It was my father's and he gave it to me and now it's mine. The worth of the object is based on the giver.

Listen, the reason you are valuable to Jesus is not because of what you can do for him. And you're no less valuable because of your inabilities. Every believer is precious in the sight of Jesus because we are a love gift from God the Father to his holy Son.

He has gifted us with salvation, but he has gifted the Son with us. We are precious because the Father has given us. And for that reason Jesus prays specifically for us. **Read 9**

Jesus recognizes the beauty of this gift and prays for those whom the Father has given him. And there's a sense in which we are both the Father's and the Son's. **Read 10**

So who's are we? Do we belong to the Father or the Son? The answer is yes! The Father has given us to the Son, but there is a unity in the Trinity that is beyond our comprehension and so we are the Father's and the Son's, sealed and kept by the Spirit.

The ones the Father gave to Jesus - those are the ones Jesus went out and purchased.

But Jesus knows he's going away for a while. In a matter of hours he will endure the cross and death. He will rise to glory, but his followers - you and me included - are to some extent without Jesus right here with us. And so Jesus asks the Father to protect us in his absence. **Read 11-19**

So Jesus is saying, "Father I'm coming to you. And I'm leaving the gift you gave me for a while. I'm leaving all these people I've given eternal life to. So I need you to protect them."

And, of course, this is the predicament of the Omni-presence of Jesus. Jesus is everywhere. He says in Hebrews "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He says in Matthew 18 that where 2 or 3 are gathered he is there with them. There is a spiritual presence of Jesus among his people. Jesus even said a few chapters earlier that he comes to make a home in all those who believe in him.

So there's a sense in which he is present, but there's also a sense in which he is absent. We await his return, do we not? And it's that physical absence he's talking about. I'm going away. And that's a good thing for my followers. We are glad that Jesus has gone into heaven and sits at the Father's right hand to reign and to intercede for us.

But because he's gone we're vulnerable to attack and so he pleads with the Father to keep us safe. **Read 15-19**

This is really amazing, actually. We'll read in a little bit that Jesus actually desires to be with us. But he also knows we have a purpose and a mission here. So he's not asking God to take us out of the world. He's sending us to accomplish that mission. And he wants us to be protected from Satan. The number one way we're protected? According to Jesus it's through sanctification by knowing his Word.

He wants us to be equipped to go do the mission well. And he doesn't want just Bible nerds. He wants holy people - sanctified people - who know his word to complete the mission. He wants us to be like him.

So **he** accomplished the Father's mission. And he wants **us** to accomplish the Father's mission.

And now he asks the Father for one thing. And this one thing is the prayer he makes for all believers for all time. What does Jesus pray for? **Read 20-23**

What does Jesus want for this redeemed humanity that the Father has given to him? He wants unity. He wants us to be one.

All Jesus wants for Christmas is unity in the Church. I don't know what you make of that, but that's a pretty big deal in Jesus's mind. The unity he desires among us is the same kind of unity that he has with the Father. That's pretty tight.

And this isn't just koombaya unity for the sake of unity. "Can't we all just get along?" No, this is unity in truth and holiness for the sake of glory to God the Father. When Christians are united in truth and purity Jesus says the world looks at us and says "Wow - maybe there really is something to this whole God sent Jesus thing."

Are there obstacles to unity? Of course there are. We're sinners. There are false teachers out there. There are disagreements. But all we can do - for our part - is seek unity in truth and love.

Most of us have watched tempers flare among little kids. It's pretty easy to figure out who's trying to be unified, who's trying to cause problems. God isn't fooled by lack of unity. He knows what's in our hearts. We might never achieve full unity, but we should certainly be striving for it until we see Jesus. This is what he wants for his people.

This last part is probably the most encouraging. I know I talk a lot about the glory of heaven but that's because I think the best thing we can do to live effective lives here on earth is to remember that this is not our true home. And our true home, in the presence of the glory of God should be what motivates our faithful service here.

But here's the encouraging thing: As much as we should want heaven because we want to see God, do you realize that Jesus longs to see us? **Read 24-26**

Do you realize that Jesus longs to see us? To see you?

I'll be honest, this is not something that crosses my mind often. That God wants to see me - like, in a good way. I often feel like the Prodigal son thinking, I'd like to see my dad because I know he'll be gracious to me. I often forget that God longs to see me. He longs to be with me. I mean, after all, Jesus came to us, did he not?

Jesus makes it clear: If you are a believer, if you are part of the gift that the Father has given to the Son in salvation, Jesus longs to see you. He desires to be with you - to be with all of those whom the Father has given.

He says he longs for us to see his glory. That seems like a weird desire at first. "I want to see you so you can take a look at me!" That would be the height of vanity if it were people talking to each other.

But what Jesus wants is for his people to see him in his bursting glory so that we are filled with awe and joy forever and ever. That's what we saw in Jude last Sunday: Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before his glory with great joy...

The reason Jesus longs to see us and we are precious to him is because we are a gift to him from the Father. And because of that, Jesus longs to give us the greatest thing he could possibly give us which is an eternity of pure joy as we gaze on his glory.

“Father, I desire that they whom you have given me, may be with me.”

Christmas is about Jesus coming into the world to save the world, but it's about so much more than that. It's about giving the gift of salvation to people who are a gift themselves from the Father to the Son.

This is what we celebrate. This is what we rejoice in. Praising the Son, to the glory of the Father.

And it's this joy and message of salvation that we spread. The light came into the world and the darkness has not overcome it. The light of the gospel is the power of God here on earth. And as we light our candles we rejoice knowing that what began as a small spark in Bethlehem has grown around the world. And One by one God is saving people - slowly, surely, until the earth is full of his glory.