

“The Perfect Gift”

Liturgical Date: Christmas Day

Primary Text: 1 John 4:7-16

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, this Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus-Christmas Day, is the Epistle Lesson from 1 John 4. The title of today’s sermon is “The Perfect Gift.”

By now, I imagine that many of you have opened Christmas gifts. Perhaps, you are already completely finished opening everything you will get this year. Hopefully, everyone got their shopping finished before the stores closed last night as I imagine that there were a few people (probably almost all men) at Wal-Mart at 11:55 PM last night trying to get everything purchased before the store closed! If you still haven’t got everything, the good news is you can go out tomorrow and get tons of stuff half-price! But for most people all that remains now is to spend some time admiring and enjoying those gifts we received.

There is no denying that gifts play an important part in our Christmas festivities. We have been inundated with ads since now even right after Halloween about all the deals on things we supposedly can’t live without. So what is the perfect gift? Do you have a particular something in mind? Some Christmas movies even center around getting a particular gift—a Red Ryder BB gun, a big Christmas bonus, or even a special someone to love.

This morning I want to submit to you 4 things that a gift needs in order to be perfect: it must come from the right motive, it must be

expensive, it must have a purpose, and it must be durable. So let's look at each of these characteristics.

First, to be perfect, a gift must come from the **right motive**: love. True love enjoys expressing itself in gifts. The perfect gift cannot be given out of a selfish motive that gives demanding something in return. We've probably given a few gifts like this, perhaps to impress a member of the opposite sex. Perhaps we given gifts out of obligation: I *have* to get something for everyone at the office or I really don't like this relative but it would be awkward to not get them something you may have thought. The perfect gift must not come from these bad motivations, but must be given out of love that sacrifices of itself in order to give.

Second, the perfect gift must be **expensive**. Wait a minute you may think-not everyone has a lot of money-but when I use the word "expensive" here I am not talking about merely dollars and cents. The perfect gift can't be about holding anything back, giving less than the giver's best. For example the gift of a box of candy canes may be viewed very differently if given by a person in poverty as opposed to given by a billionaire. Or thinking about it this way, if you are a parent you probably have received those simple hand-made gifts from your children that wouldn't sell for much on E-Bay, but are priceless to you.

Third, the perfect gift must have a **purpose**: it must be useful. That's to say, it isn't about what the giver wants-it's what purpose it will really serve the person receiving it. A great gift for one person, may not be valued by another. Diamond earrings may impress your wife, but not your toddler. For a more practical example giving a bicycle to a child that is in a wheel chair would not only be without purpose, but

offensive. Now, if you could give that same child the ability to walk again it would be a useful-possibly perfect-gift.

Now for the fourth and final requirement of the perfect gift. Many of the gifts that you give and receive may meet the first three requirements, but all of our gifts lack one thing: **durability**. The toy fire truck that you bought your son will likely be broken into pieces after it has been played with for a while. Mom's new outfit will eventually become frayed and the color will fade. Even the best quality products that the world has to offer will eventually wear out.

So no gift that we can give can fully fulfill all of these criteria. So is there a perfect gift? As Christians we've been speaking about the birth of Jesus Christ, God's gift to us, for some time now. So let's see how the gift of Jesus stacks up against our list of attributes for the perfect gift.

First of all, is this gift perfect as to the **motive** by which it was given? Listen to the words of verses 9-10 again from the Epistle Lesson from 1 John 4, *"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* There are many attributes of God: perfect, holy, worthy of all glory and honor, all knowing, all powerful, and present everywhere. But above all as verse 16 says, "God is love."

This was what prompted God to give us this gift. It was not selfishness, for what could God gain as He already has everything? He would receive nothing that He needed in return. You could say He would get our worship and service, which does please God-but He doesn't need it. God is still God without us serving Him. In fact,

humankind by nature has over and over again showed contempt and ingratitude for this amazing gift. We have all broken His 10 Commandments, not loved God with our whole heart and not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We deserve worse than coal in our stocking-we deserve God's anger and wrath, but yet He loves us still. He loves His creation despite its dirty, repulsive, and hateful sins. God the Father revealed His love when He sent His only Son into the world.

But His love does not stop with those of us who are gathered in His house this morning. His love is unlimited and He offers this gift to all people-not only to those whose behavior might merit such a grand gift-because that would be no one. Unfortunately, not all will receive this gift as they will continue to choose to accept Satan's shiny, attractive, but deadly "gift" that only leads to death. The truth is that if you are part of this world, God's gift of love IS for you-look to the manger and to the cross. Look to the empty tomb. God's gift truly comes from the perfect motive: love.

The second quality of a perfect gift is that it must be **expensive**. Is the gift of which the Bible speaks of expensive? It depends on whether you are looking at it from the perspective of the giver or receiver. For us, the receivers, the perfect gift is free-forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation have been paid for by God Himself and just like you would not expect someone who gives you a gift to charge you a portion of the cost-God does not either. But this perfect gift was very costly for God to purchase. God the Father has only one Son and He sacrificed Him for everyone. God came in the flesh-Jesus Christ-leaving the glories of heaven for a humble life on earth.

The Father could have sent His Son as a great king with gold, jewels, or other riches. He could have sent him as a military or political hero that would vanquish the foes of Israel and set up an earthly kingdom-and in fact that is what many expected of the Messiah. But the Son of God had a humble-even humiliating-arrival. He was born of a virgin, Mary. His earthly father, Joseph, had to swallow his pride, emotions, and plans and trust-by faith-what the angel told him. The Son of God would be born in a stable, laid in feeding trough for animals, and be raised not in a palace but in a blue-collar family. He would later be rejected by most of His people-even His own hometown tried to throw Him off a cliff! He would be mocked, spit upon, and feel the sharp pain of the whip, thorns, and the nails as they pierced His flesh. A horrible death, the death of a criminal, awaited this Holy Child on the cross of Calvary. So we may receive this gift freely, this gift cost the giver a very high cost. And many of the very people who He came for would reject this gift-and I would urge you to not make this same mistake and reject this gift.

The third requirement for the perfect gift is that the gift must have a **purpose**. Remember the example I gave earlier about giving a bike to a crippled child? The bicycle may be very valuable, but to that child it is useless. God's gift of Jesus is not only valuable, but extremely useful. What purpose does this gift have? Recall the words of the Apostle John in verse 9, *"God sent his only son into the world, so that we might live through him."*

Life eternal. What more perfect and useful gift to give to the human race that was dead in sin. God told Adam and Eve in Genesis 2

that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would die. And after they disobeyed God, sin and death reigned. Every man, woman, and child is by nature sinful and unclean. This means that physical death will eventually come to all. No matter how giving we are in this Christmas season, or anytime of the year, nothing we do can overcome this. Our only hope of overcoming sin and death is not in ourselves, but in the gift of Jesus Christ. Romans 6:23 sums it up, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

And death without the gift of Jesus is worse than only physical death. Spiritual death means eternal separation from God and all that is good in hell. But thanks be to God that no sooner had sin entered the world, that God promised a Savior. That gift would be delivered in a stable in a seemingly insignificant town called Bethlehem among the beasts that first Christmas night. So the gift of Jesus has the utmost purpose. Jesus Himself said it clearly in St. John 10:10, *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”*

And what of that fourth requirement of a perfect gift, **durability**? Verse 14 says that *“we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.”* John 3:16 declares that all who believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. An eternal gift. One without expiration dates and one that will not wear out and fade over time.

The gift of Jesus is durable. Jesus in St. Matthew 28:20 promises, *“and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”* As we

heard earlier we are sinners with a free will to rebel against God and reject the gift. But when we receive this gift in faith, we have the promise of God Himself that He will hold fast to us and keep us eternally as St. John 10:28-29 offers these words of assuring promise, *“And I give unto them eternal life; and they never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out my Father’s hand.”*

So there you have it-the perfect gift. But there is one more thing you must know about the perfect gift. In order for this gift to be perfect for you, you must have it. Again back to the child in a wheel chair. If you told the child about a doctor who could perform a surgery that she may walk again, but provided no way for the child to get access to that doctor’s healing surgery then the gift would be of no benefit to her. The perfect gift must be given, and it must be delivered and received.

God the Father not only told us about the way to salvation. He not only sent His Son to earth. On the cross He gave His son unto death for the sins of the world-and He continues to give Him to this very day. God the Holy Spirit delivers this gift by creating faith in the hearts of those that receive the message of the Gospel.

We heard the Word of God read earlier this morning. You have heard the message preached. The Holy Spirit works through the Word. We hear words like this, and my prayer is that you believe them: *“Your sins are forgiven. I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This is my body. This is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”* The perfect gift is given. Grace is offered again and again. One more verse from our Epistle Lesson (15), *“Whoever*

confesses that Jesus is the Son of God abides in him, and he in God.” Don't refuse this gift. It is for you. God's love is for you. God's forgiveness is for you. Eternal life is for you.

As you enjoy the giving and receiving of gifts this Christmas season, may you also be more aware of the precious gift God the Father has given for you in His Son, Jesus. Share the perfect gift by sharing in your witness so that others may enjoy the many blessings of the perfect gift. Share the love of God. Live in the love of God. Rejoice in the love of God made flesh and born that man no more may die, but live eternally with the Savior.

Amen.