

Introduction:

Many of us will be exchanging gifts with family this week. Some of the gifts will be extremely meaningful. Some will be tokens just to say, "I thought of you." Some will be completely useless, causing the receiver to wonder if the giver thought at all. We will take some of the gifts and use them fully, enjoying them. Some of the gifts will be hung on the walls; decorations and memories for everyone to enjoy. Some of the gifts will be used quickly and then forgotten. Some of the gifts will be put in the closet or the attic and never used. I would like to take this time of gift giving and shift our thoughts away from video games, dvds, gizmos, gadgets, sweaters and ties to the greatest gift of all—God's gift of Jesus. **John 3:16** says "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (ESV). The greatest gift was not a cute little baby in a manger. Rather, it was a rugged, mangled, grotesque picture of suffering as a man hung on a cross, bleeding, gasping for breath, finally died. Then three days later He arose, triumphant over death, paving the way for our resurrection if we will just believe and follow Him. That is the greatest gift ever. God has offered everyone that gift. What will we do with it?

Discussion:

I. Reject it.

- A. The biggest shopping day of the year is the day after Thanksgiving. The second biggest day is the day after Christmas. That is when 75% of the people take back what was bought for them on the day after Thanksgiving. I remember one gift I bought for Marita. She had said she wanted it more than once. I thought I was getting her exactly what she wanted. It was a big George Foreman grill. A couple days after Christmas (or maybe it was a birthday, I can't remember which) Marita sheepishly came up to me and said, "Would it terribly upset you if I took the George Foreman grill back?" You know the answer to that question based on the fact that I am bringing it up so many years later. She had rejected my gift. What had happened? Well, Marita had repeatedly said she wanted it. But by the time I finally got around to getting one, she had decided it wasn't as useful as she once thought.
- B. Rejecting the gift sometimes says, "The gift doesn't fit, I need one that fits me better." Sometimes it means, "I like the gift but it is the wrong color. It doesn't perfectly suit me and my tastes." Sometimes it means, "I just don't like it." Whatever spin we put on it, rejecting the gift ultimately means, "I don't see any use in my life for this gift." That is exactly what some people do with God's gift. Consider **I Corinthians 1:22-24**. Paul explained most people don't have a use for the cross. To the Jews, it was a stumbling block. It didn't fit them and what they expected. They stumbled over it, not really knowing what they should do with it. To the Greeks, it was foolishness. What use did they have for God coming in the flesh to die a humiliating death? They didn't want the gift. So they rejected it. Will you do that with God's gift?

II. Procrastinate.

- A. What is the single most bought gift these days? Gift cards. You don't know what to give, but you know they like Barnes and Noble, Starbucks, or Olive Garden. Give a gift card. Then you can pay for the exact gift they want. Were you aware that, until a few years ago, most gift cards came with a catch? Until consumers started pitching fits, retailers would charge fees. If you didn't use the card within a specified period of time, the retailer deducted a fee at regular intervals. Some people, hanging on to the gift card until they found the perfect item, found out they couldn't buy it because they had procrastinated too long; their balance was too low.
- B. **II Peter 3:9** says the Lord is patient, but that doesn't give us leave to try His patience. The parable of **Luke 13:6-9** demonstrates the point. The vineyard-owner had come to the fig tree for three years looking for fruit and found nothing. He was going to remove the tree but the vineyard-keeper said, "Leave it alone for one more year. Let me fertilize it and see what happens. If it doesn't produce anything next year, then cut it down." God is patient. But we do not know which year we are in. It is not an issue of age. It is an issue of God's judgment. No matter how old you are, for all you know, you are in the fourth year. If you don't bear fruit soon, God is going to cut you down. Some people want the gift, but not today. They want other things first and procrastinate. For most of these, it becomes too late. What will you do with God's gift?

III. Put it on the hidden wall.

- A. When I was in college in Wichita, KS, I lived with an older couple named Bob and Jean. While I was there, they got a picture. I don't remember if it was someone's gift to Bob or if it was Bob's gift to Jean. Or if it was Bob's gift to himself. Bob thought the picture was the most hilarious thing. If I remember correctly, it showed two caricatured cows kissing. It was funny in its own weird way. However, it is not a picture most people want in their house. Jean did not, but Bob did. What could she say? She let it be put up on the hidden wall. The only way you would see it is if you came in the back door. Even then you might miss it if you came in looking toward the dining room instead of looking straight ahead. Bob got what he wanted—the picture was hung up. Jean got what she wanted—almost no one ever saw it.
- B. Some people treat God's gift like this. They want the eternal life; they just don't want anyone to know. They won't talk about spiritual things, invite people to assemblies or classes, stand up on moral issues or speak out when error is taught. They sometimes go along with sin because they don't want to stand out. They dress like the world, act like the world, talk like the world, and look like the world. They want heaven and earth all at the same time. So they hide Jesus on the back wall. Only the few people they "go to church" with know Jesus is remotely connected to them (supposedly). **Matthew 10:32-33** explains clearly this kind of treatment is not acceptance at all. Unless Jesus is publicly displayed in our lives, He will not publicly display us before His Father. We can't accept God's gift and then hang it on the hidden wall in our heart. We have to declare Jesus in our actions and words. What will you do with God's gift?

IV. Use it for show.

- A. Have you ever seen the movie "The Christmas Story" about little Ralphie who wanted the Red Rider BB gun (I can only recommend watching a version edited for language). Before getting the gun, he got another gift—a big pink rabbit costume from his aunt. What do they do with the costume? Well that is one of those gifts that is put away except when the aunt comes around. Then it has to come out and be worn. It is one of those gifts you don't really like, but you will put it on for show around certain people or in certain situations.
- B. Some people do this with Jesus. They don't want Jesus running their lives, but they are happy to let Him out of the closet in certain situations. Certainly, when they are "at church." Or when the preacher comes to visit. Have you seen those businessmen or salesmen that put pictures of a fish or a cross on their business card? I don't want to paint with too broad a brush, but my experience has been that is usually for show. In fact, I had a friend who said you can just about be certain you are going to get gypped if the person has a fish on their card. It reminds me of the used car salesman who was cussing and talking dirty with his co-workers, but when we walked into his office he had a framed picture of **John 3:16** on his wall and a Bible laying on his desk. **Matthew 6:33** says we need to seek God's kingdom and righteousness as the priority for our lives. His kingdom and righteousness should be the foundation and prime-mover of our lives. Christianity is not something we dust off and bring out when we want to secure a deal, impress someone or look good among other Christians. Christianity is to be a way of life. What will you do with God's gift?

V. Accept it half-heartedly.

- A. Something changed about 20 years ago. About 20 years ago I started having to pay for my own clothes. Since then, I love to get clothes for Christmas and birthdays. But before then, getting clothes was ho-hum. I liked having good clothes, but I didn't like getting them for Christmas. My parents had to buy clothes anyway, why do it at Christmas? Regrettably, they viewed clothes at Christmas as a two for one deal, getting new clothes and Christmas presents at the same time. Whenever they handed me a box, that set off the clothes radar. I knew to put on the smile, pretend to be happy, hold up the shirt so they could get a picture of it, and then toss it to the side so I could look for something cool. I took the clothes, but I was never excited about them.
- B. Some people accept Jesus this way. They want just enough Jesus to get into heaven, but not enough to actually crimp their style. After all, they have to live a little. They'll make it to the Sunday morning assembly, but give up extra hours to be back on Sunday night, Wednesday, or join a H2H group? "Give me a break. I have a life you know." Some will make it "to church" regularly, but ask them to sacrifice a Monday night to help a widow, a Saturday to help clean the building or a Friday evening to have a Bible study and you hit a brick wall. It's as if to say, "Hey, I get enough of that church stuff on Sunday." They'll attempt to cut back on the immorality they were committing before becoming a Christian, but talk to them about their wandering eyes and they respond, "Hey, just 'cause I'm on a diet, doesn't mean I can't look at the menu." These and many others have only half-heartedly accepted Jesus. Consider the Laodicean Christians of **Revelation 3:14-22**. Jesus said He wants extreme Christianity, not lukewarm, half-hearted service. What will you do with God's gift?

VI. Accept it and make it part of your life.

- A. Perhaps one of the greatest gift givers in the world is Marita. Not long after we married she gave me two fold out picture maps of Middle-Earth based on the *Lord of the Rings* books. Then a few years later she snuck off and had them framed. Gifts like that get publicly displayed in my house or office everywhere we move along with my shrine of other *Lord of the Rings* gifts. Several years ago, we had bought aluminum swords for the boys. They are great and lots of fun to play with. They sound so real when you are banging on each other. I was so excited for the boys and couldn't wait to get to play with them. Lo and behold if she didn't sneak in a big one just for me to be able to play with the boys. It came with a belt and scabbard. I kept it draped around my bedpost. But the two best gifts came on Father's days. One gift was a circle box filled with little trivial items. But inside was a poem explaining what each item meant. The teddy bear that shows how we love to bear hug. The piece of gum that shows how we stick together. The band aid that shows how I always come to my kids' rescue and so on. I keep that gift in my office and often pull it out to look inside and remember what they said about me. Another gift was a small scrapbook that has pictures of me with my dad and me with my kids and lots of great little messages. I love that thing. It is the most special gift I have ever received from another person. These are the kinds of gifts we accept whole-heartedly. They become a part of our life. We show them off for all to see and share them with others. This is what we need to do with God's gift.
- B. Sadly, very few accept God's gift this way. **Matthew 7:13-14** says few will follow God's strait and narrow path through Jesus. **Galatians 2:20** shows the real acceptance of God's gift. We sacrifice ourselves allowing Jesus to live through us. God gave us His Son. In response, we must give Him our lives. What will you do with God's gift?

Conclusion:

Here is the interesting thing about Christmas gifts. We live in such a time of plenty. Most of us received gobs and gobs of stuff last Christmas. Few of us, however, can even remember the gifts we received for Christmas last year, let alone all the past years. The specialness of any one gift is often lost in the crowd of multiple gifts. We must not ever let God's gift to us just blend in with all the other gifts. We must never lose sight of what God did for us. We ask, "What have you done for me lately?" God responds, "I gave My Son." We beg, "God I need Your blessing." He responds, "I gave My Son." We cajole, "God, please just show me something that says You care." He responds, "I gave My Son." He loved us so much, He gave His one and only Son. What have you done with God's gift?