

A Christmas Gift Without Disappointment

Did you get everything you wanted for Christmas? There is this old home video of me when I was a little kid opening up a Christmas present. It was a video game. I knew it before I opened it. It was shaped like it. It felt like it. And I loved video games. I opened it up and it was a video game. But it was for Nintendo and we didn't have a Nintendo. We had the Sega Master system. They were not compatible. My siblings still make fun of me to this day because of it, because I had this look on my face of a fake smile, trying to be nice to my parents who gave it to me, but obviously holding my anger and tears, not understanding how my parents could not understand the difference between Nintendo and the Sega Master system. In the home video I say with a whiny, disappointed, near tears voice, "This is for Nintendo." (No, I will not be showing you the video). Have you ever been disappointed with Christmas?

This was actually the case for the people that the writer to the Hebrews was addressing. But it had nothing to do with not getting the gifts that they asked for. They wanted a God that they could see, that they could feel, that they could hear. They wanted a Savior who could help them with the "real" problems of their life. Their "real" problems were serious. These Christians who used to be Jews were being persecuted by emperor Nero at the time. Christians were being persecuted but at this time in history Judaism wasn't. So a lot of people thought, "I'm just going to go back to Judaism, because that's easier. Jesus isn't enough for me. He isn't doing it for me." Some people who weren't content with the message of Jesus were getting into angel worship. It was more interesting to them. They felt that Jesus wasn't enough. The baby lying in a manger wasn't enough for them.

More people than you think are left disappointed with the unwrapping of this baby in Bethlehem. How many people are looking for something more than what Christianity offers? How many people who are or were Christians are looking outside of Christianity to find something more because they just didn't get what they wanted out of this religion? They don't see Christ as essential to their life and faith. They are disappointed in what Christ offers. And we can't just point the finger at the other people out there, but let's look at our own heart.

How many of us wish that Christ could be more for us? Couldn't he help us with our finances? Our health? This virus? Addictions? Temptations? Could he help us with our relationship problems with our spouse or the feuds going on in our family? Couldn't he help me with the things going on at work? Couldn't he help us more with our "real" problems? Couldn't he at least communicate with us and let us know why these things are happening in our lives? Even for us who gather on Christmas day, do we leave disappointed like a little kid holding a pair of socks or a video game they can't use, about to cry, because we hoped for something better?

Today the writer to the Hebrews unwraps the baby lying in a manger and helps us to see what we sometimes struggle to see in this humble scene. So every point that the writer to the Hebrews mentions here is to help you see that there is nothing to be disappointed about on Christmas. Christ leaves no one wanting, but he provides everything for everyone. He is absolutely essential to our daily life, whether you realize it or not.

He gets right to the point in the first verse of this letter. Verse 1 says, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." So he's saying that in the Old Testament the message to God's people was partial and incomplete. God spoke to the people through the prophets at random times in history. The people only had a vague picture of who this Savior would be and who their God was. But now he speaks to us through his Son Jesus, in the word, that is, the Bible. In the Bible we see him, the complete revelation of who our Savior is and what he has done for us. As much as you would love for God to speak to you through a cloud every now and then, God has decided that he wants more contact with you than that. And he wrote his Words down in a book so that you can listen to your God speak to you whenever you want. And you can talk to him through prayer, whenever you want. That spiritual conversation of God talking to you through the Word of God, and you responding back with prayer, is the best way of communicating with each other. So for the person who thinks it would be better if God spoke to us in a different way, the writer to the Hebrews says, "This is a better way."

I heard someone once complain about the bible saying that the bible doesn't give us answers to as many questions as it could. We wish God's Word was better in the sense of the amount of information and application to our unique and specific lives. There is a reason people look at horoscopes, or go to palm readers, look for signs or believe in superstition. They want more direction for their lives. But Jesus tells us what we need to know for our salvation in the bible. He gives us a lot of principles and applications to guide us in our Christian life. He gives us the design of marriage. The difference between right and wrong in the 10 commandments, and so many more principles. and he says, "Use your God given reason to make decisions in life and I'll bless you wherever you go. When you mess up, I'll forgive. That's

better than having to comb through 10,000 volumes of the bible trying to cover every topic under the sun for every situation in life every single person may face.

Not only is our Savior an amazing Christmas gift in the way he communicates with us through his Word, but he is also an amazing Christmas gift in who he is, his essence. For us on Christmas day, who see a baby in a manger, the writer to the Hebrews wants you to look more closely at this baby. See who he really is. He lists here in these first few verses a number of things that shows that Christ is absolutely essential for your life. And there is nothing else on the face of the earth that could be better than what this child gives us. He is called in verse 2, "heir of all things." He is owner and ruler of all. Vs. 2 also says that "he made the universe." If you go to a store with a complaint about something, you don't talk to the 16 year old working the counter. You want to talk to the owner. That's Christ. It doesn't make sense to talk to anyone else but him when it comes to our issues on this side of the grave. He is the only one who can actually solve our problems, whatever they may be.

Vs 3 says that Jesus is the "radiance of God's glory." Radiance is the brightness that shines out from a light bulb. So it's one thing to talk about what God is like. The attributes and characteristics of God are given to us in the bible, loving, kind, wise, patient, holy, all powerful, all knowing. But if you want to see those characteristics in action look at Jesus. See his miracles of calming the storm, and raising people from the dead. See his patience and wisdom as he teaches the people about salvation. See his holiness as he experienced all the same temptations we have fallen into, but he didn't for your salvation. See his unconditional love as this child born in Bethlehem, begins a 33 year long journey to the cross for us. As much as I would love to have seen the glory of the Lord that shown around those shepherds when the angels appeared, we see the glory of the Lord when we look at what Christ has done for us. The next phrase says something similar. "the exact representation of his being." This phrase as a picture of an exact impression made by a tool, like a coin stamped by a die. So Jesus exactly represents the father. In John 14:9 Jesus says, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." He comes among us and lets us see him by giving us Jesus.

He goes on in verse 3 saying that he is "sustaining all things by his powerful word." For the person who thinks they could do without Jesus, the writer to the Hebrews says that we wouldn't last one minute without Christ holding this whole world and our lives together. He's the one who keeps making sure the sun comes up in the morning. He makes sure the crops grow, that the weather doesn't get too cold or too hot, that your heart keeps beating. He makes sure to not allow too many difficulties in your life that you can't handle, but makes sure that you have enough so that you don't forget about him. You know what I thought of when I saw this phrase, is this picture. (guy spinning several plates on a stick making sure they keep spinning without falling down). This may be a challenge to anyone of us, but not to our Savior. Colossians 1:17 says, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

I remember hearing about a pastor who preached on this topic of Jesus holding us all together and sustaining all life. After the sermon, someone came up to the pastor and told him, "It's just like laminin." The pastor said, "What's laminin?" He said, "It is like the glue that holds all our cells together in our body. Without it all our cells would just fall apart." And he said, "The most amazing thing is what it looks like." "What's it look like?", the pastor said. Google it when you get home. So he goes home later that day and looks it up and this is the picture that pops up. (Show picture). It's a great illustration of how Christ holds us together and without him we'd all fall apart.

The writer to the Hebrews says in the same verse, "he had provided purification for sins." He gave us the greatest gift that we needed. I'm guessing that none of the kids in our congregation asked for food for Christmas, or a place to sleep. Even though they are essential to our life, we don't ask for them, we barely even think about them, because for most of us, it's simply always been there for us. It's the same way when it comes to the forgiveness of sins. The most essential need in our life isn't something we have ever had to worry about, because it's simply been provided for us. Christ came and lived, died and rose for us and gave us the most important gift of all.

The last one mentions that "he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." When the angel Gabriel said that this baby was going to be great, that was the understatement of the year. This Savior stands in control of everything that happens in our life and in this world. He is on our side, fighting for us every day. Helping us in life without us even knowing how. We have no idea how many tragedies he saved us from in our life. And we have no idea how he is going to use the difficulties in our life to help us.

So about 20 minutes after I opened up that useless video game. My parents had us all open one more big present. It was the Nintendo Entertainment System. Apparently the original video game they had given to me was a much better gift than I could see at the time. Today on Christmas, when we look at this child, born to a poor family, helpless and defenseless. Don't be deceived by what you see. He is the greatest gift this world has ever seen and will ever see. He is absolutely essential to our every day life. He is worthy of all the celebrating and decorations and presents and family gatherings that make this time of year what it is. Because of him we will all have a very Merry Christmas. Amen.