

The Greatest Gift

Text: Romans 8:32 for 12/24/2020 by Pastor Bolwerk

What were some of your expectations for 2020? Were you expecting to watch the Summer Olympics in Japan? Maybe you were expecting a grand graduation ceremony, or a wedding and reception with all your family and friends there. Then along came COVID. Plans were shattered. Events were canceled. And even the things that were not canceled often left us with less than what we expected. A year of expectations turned into a year of disappointments. With only six days left in this year, we may very well look back on this year and think, “That’s it?”

But disappointment doesn’t always happen on such a large scale. Because of job loss or reduced hours at work how many children are going to be disappointed tonight in their living rooms? For weeks, they’ve been looking at shiny-wrapped gifts with excitement, but the gift on the inside may fall far short of their expectations. Depending on their age, while they may not say it out loud, they may be wondering: “That’s it? That’s all I’m getting?”

It makes you wonder, was that the response of people at the very first Christmas? There was so much hype leading up to the first Christmas. Think about everything we heard about the coming Savior from Micah and Isaiah. With thousands of years of prophetic marketing, God’s people probably couldn’t wait to open this gift God had wrapped for them. They were promised someone who would crush Satan, someone who would be a Restorer. God’s Chosen One would be great to the ends of the earth. Jesus was the most-hyped person in the history of the world.

But what did people find that first Christmas Eve? From the inn that was so full that Mary and Joseph couldn’t even find a tiny room, what if someone from that inn went over to the barn out back and looked in. What might they expect to see? What did they see? A tiny baby with two parents who were rather poor. Whoever saw the scene of that first Christmas might very well have thought to themselves, “That’s it? That’s the Gift?”

Yet they would not be the only one who are disappointed. We can sometimes find ourselves disappointed with God’s Christmas gift. He doesn’t do what we want or give us what we think we deserve. We want to get accepted into college, or marry that special person, or get that raise, or the important job we’ve been expecting. We expect a life of leisure and ease. And then our expectations aren’t met. We look around at the suffering of the world this year and we wonder, “That’s it God? You can’t do anything more about this mess?”

Why do we become so disappointed with God’s Gift? Could it be we don’t fully grasp, or maybe we temporarily forget, who Jesus is and what he does for us? On this Christmas Eve let’s look again at the manger through the lens of Romans 8:32 and see just who this “it” is when we murmur, “That’s it?”

In that one verse, the Apostle Paul says of God and his Gift, **“³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”** (v. 32). Paul says, “God gave.”

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When you look at the gifts under your Christmas tree, do you just see the gift, or do you see the love behind the gift? Often, it's what is behind the gift that makes it a "great gift." Homemade gifts demonstrate love because someone was willing to sacrifice not just money, but also time and skill to show you their love. Or sometimes people spend a lot of money on gifts because when it comes to bringing others joy, they don't count the cost. Look what God gave you in the manger. God wasn't just giving you a baby. He was giving you his Son. More than that, he was giving up his Son for you. **"He [...] did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all."**

That baby in the manger has been God's Son from all eternity. Think of all the experiences they shared. They worked side-by-side creating the world. Together, they rescued Noah before unleashing the flood. Together, they called Abraham, rescued God's people from slavery in Egypt, and received honor and glory from the worshipers in Solomon's temple. Can we even begin to imagine just how close the Father and the Son are? They are one and the same God. Yet, the Father was willing to give up his Son for sinners like you and me. The Father gave up that which was most valuable to him, so he could show you just how valuable you are to him. That baby in the manger is truly a great gift.

But that was 2000 years ago. What about today? What does that baby in the manger do for us today as we are faced with failures, suffering, and disappointment? Earlier we talked about how God promised to send a Savior as soon as the first sin occurred in the Garden of Eden. Then, for thousands of years, God watched a world constantly disobey him and continually reject him. Faced with this world's hatred and rebellion God could have said, "Forget it. I'm not sending my Son to them. I love my Son way too much to have him live with a bunch of people who are only going to ridicule, and mock, and beat, and kill him." God certainly had every right to say that.

Yet 2000 years ago, God kept his promise as he wrapped his Son in flesh and blood and gave him as a gift to this world. If God followed through on that promise, doesn't that give you the confidence and the assurance that God will keep all his other promises to you as well? Because of Christmas, you can be sure that God will send his angels to guard you (Psalm 91). Because of Christmas, you can be sure God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1). Because of that baby in the manger at Christmas, you can be absolutely certain that God will Work out everything for your good, and that nothing can separate you from his love (Romans 8). It's just as Paul said: God gave us the gift of his Son, so, **"how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"** This isn't just lip service. God's Word is completely true. That means God's promises are always true, and that baby in the manger proves it.

Look at the manger. Look at God's gift – to you. Humanly speaking, the Gift looks small. The Gift looks fragile. The Gift probably looks dirty and maybe even disappointing. But after what we heard today, I pray you don't look at that Gift and say, "That's it?" Instead, look at God's Gift and say, "That's it! That is exactly what I

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need! That is God showing his love to me. That's God's keeping his promises for me!"
That's quite a Gift. That is the Greatest Gift! Amen.