

The Greatest Gift

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[0 : 00] Chapter 2, I hope you're ready. Christmas is coming. I've got a delivery coming today and one coming Tuesday.

That's kind of pushing it, ain't it? We all want to give the best gift, the greatest gift that somebody can get. Some are not easy to buy for and some will tell you what they want and some will tell you more things than they're going to get.

However, if we go to the first Christmas, to the birth of Christ, there were a lot of great gifts given. I want to talk about that for a few minutes this morning.

It's in Luke Chapter 2, beginning in Verse 1. It says, In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria and all went to be registered, each to his own town.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and the lineage of David, to be registered with Mary his betrothed, who was with child.

[1 : 18] And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

I want to share with you this morning a great gift around the birth of Christ, several great gifts around the birth of Christ. One of them was promise.

The promises of the Lord are some of the greatest gifts. The promise of the Lord to Zachariah and Elizabeth, the promise they got was precious.

Elizabeth was Mary's cousin. She was older and could not have children. Now that's always a heavy weight when childbearing is difficult, but it's even more so difficult in their time because of the scorn of others.

Zachariah and Elizabeth had prayed and had fasted and asked the Lord to move in a mighty way in their lives, and he hadn't done it. And they worried about it, and they doubted that God would move in that.

[2 : 25] You ever been in a situation like that? When you had a situation where you asked God to do something mighty in your life, and there's just no evidence of it, struggling in the midst of that.

Well, you're not alone. People have been there before. But they sought the Lord, and the Lord answered their prayer, and Zachariah prayed, and the message of the angel was this.

Do not fear. Your prayers have been answered. And the reality is that God answered their prayer better than they had asked it, better than they ever thought he would.

He answered better than they had asked. And the son that they would have would pave the way for the Lord. He would baptize the Lord Jesus.

And Jesus would say about this son that Zachariah had prayed for, had worried about, had doubted deeply. Jesus said in Matthew 11, 11, among those born of women, there was arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.

[3 : 30] When God answers, folks, he answers big. He does it in his time, and he does it in his way, but he answers big.

One of the greatest gifts that we have is promise. And he gives us that promise when we seek his face. Another gift that's so precious around the birth of Christ is room.

Now, there was room for a very pregnant mother, a journeying father, and an expectant baby boy. Now, I know what I'm supposed to say.

I'm supposed to say there was no room, and that the inn had no room, and that the innkeeper had been a monster ever since.

But consider something with me. What if the innkeeper was watching out for the expectant family? Just consider, what if the lack of room was not a lack of vacancy, but a lack of elbow space? [4 : 40] Because as I understand it, the hotels in these days were not, were basically mere sleeping stalls. Just enough to lie down in.

And that's like a sleeping stall. If you've flown recently and been to an airport, you'll notice at large airports that they have sleeping pods that you can rent for just a couple of hours. It's a very small room. It's got a little couch that can make into a bed there and just a very small space for you to take a nap and miss a flight. It's a great place to do that. And in reality, that space there is very similar to what a first century inn was like. It was not really fit for a berth. I'm not saying any hotels fit for a berth. But saying that there's no room might mean there's tight quarters. I don't know that for sure. [5 : 38] It might not be. It might be the bad guy that Brian Clevenger made him out to be during Merry Christmas Pickens. But even so, there was room.

And by the way, Clevenger, when they asked him to do that role of the innkeeper, he was scared to death. He came to me and I said, listen, man, there's nothing to it. There ain't but two words you got to say.

No room. And he believed me. And when I gave him the script, it was rude. But anyway, that scene to me looks pretty special.

Looks pretty sweet, quite honestly. However it came to be. Whether he was rude and wouldn't give him space and threw him into a cave.

Whether he said, this ain't the right place for a lady to have a berth. Can we provide some more privacy in a place that's not ideal but at least allows some decency?

[6 : 43] Whichever it was, God cleaned Mary out of space on the outskirts of Bethlehem and enabled her to bear the Savior of the world.

And because of that, we all can have an eternal difference because he did that. A great gift of Christmas's room. Another gift at the birth of Jesus is presence.

People often say that the greatest gift that you can give to somebody is just being there for someone. Just being present. And nowhere is that more true than in the presence of God.

I want you to notice how the Lord's presence changed the atmosphere. It's in Luke chapter 2 beginning in verse 8 and it says this, And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night.

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them. The glory of the Lord shone around them and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

[7 : 53] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You'll find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

I want to tell you the most consistent prayer that I ever pray about Sunday morning worship at Pickens First Baptist Church is I pray for the manifested, felt, life-changing presence of the Lord Jesus in this room.

[9 : 06] Now I realize by his promises that he's here. I know that. But I like to sense it. I like to sense the camaraderie that comes when those are one in spirit and the spirit of God is moving in lives.

It is almost tangible when you sense that. And I pray for that more than anything else. Because honestly, if God's movement is in this place and he's moving in our lives, it takes care of everything else.

The lost gets saved. The saved get right. Things happen. And when the spirit of God moves, his manifested presence, it changes lives.

And I'll tell you, the shepherds here got purity tore up over the angelic presence that surrounded them. Verse 20 said that they left glorifying and praising God.

It said they went in haste. It means they were getting it to get there. There was another one who was obviously blessed by the manifested presence of God. But she responded differently.

[10:11] And it's in verse 19. And it says this, But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. That means she was thinking about it.

She was ruminating on it. She was chewing on it. She was meditating on it. Now, I try my best to preach the word of God with some kind of vigor and some kind of life because I think it's a life-changing message.

It means something to me. And I don't care about showing it. But you ought to see me when I prepare a message. Sometimes I have a little running fit there in the study, you know.

Something gets good and I enjoy it. Or I may well up when I think about the promises of God or when I think about the presence of God. Or I oftentimes walk around in there, talk about it, deal with it, with the Lord before I sit down and pen it.

And when I get filled with the presence of God, I get blessed. It's a wonderful gift of God. And God present, being born even in that cave and coming to this earth and promising the Holy Spirit would follow and would fill that gap once he was no longer with us physically present.

[11:28] I thank God for his presence. It's one of the great gifts of Christmas. And then there are those gifts that we're more familiar with that are more obvious.

Frankincense, gold, and myrrh. Those are the treasured gifts of the Magi that was brought to the king. And gold was a gift that was fit for a king.

And frankincense was a gift for a priest because it was used as a burning incense in worship. And then myrrh was therapeutic, but it was also used to prepare dead bodies in the ways of the customs of that culture in that day.

That means it was a gift good for a sacrificial life. The reality is each one of those gifts were prophetic of who would be in that manger and who they would meet when they came to him.

However, they are also very practical gifts. Because if they chose to, they could have used those gifts to help finance their travel.

[12:35] Especially the travel that came to them unexpectedly when they had to leave and travel to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. The precious, expensive gifts from royal visitors, but they were not the most precious.

They were not the greatest gift of that day. Because the greatest gift of Christmas was the babe. And is the babe. We often focus on the birth of Christ at Christmas, and we should. The virgin-born child was God in the flesh. He came to this earth to live a sinless life and to die a death for sinners. The whole purpose for him coming was to give us both hope, both now and for eternity. Not just any hope, but sure hope.

It is the greatest gift of Christmas. And all in one verse, we have what prophesied, what prophecy proclaimed that he would be. It says in Isaiah chapter 9, verse 6, that he would be a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an everlasting father, and a prince of peace.

[13:49] Literally, wonderful counselor means that he would be a wonder of a counselor. Wouldn't you love to go to a counselor that knew all things? I know one.

Wouldn't you love to go to one that knew your problem before you spoke it? I know one. One you could hide nothing from, that accepted you as you are?

I know one. One who would be thorough, just, honest, and loving. I know one. I know one.

One that understands us like no one else could. I know one. Isaiah 53, 3 says, He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

As one from whom men hid their faces, hide their faces. He was despised and we esteemed him not. The New Testament in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 15 and 16 says, For we don't have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

[15:02] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. I praise God for Christmas because that's what it is.

He's a wonder of a counselor. You want a special gift for Christmas? God gave you his son. And his son makes all the difference. You need somebody to shoulder your difficulty?

I know one that can. Do you need somebody who can lend you an ear? I know one who can. Do you need a trusting word? I know one who can. And it's all found in the Lord Jesus. He is a wonder of a counselor. But he's also a mighty God. And that word mighty that's used there is often used to speak of a fierce warrior.

One that not only goes into battle and is not afraid of battle, but praise God one that wins the battles. Don't ever think that you can win your own battles because the reality is we can't.

[16:01] The spiritual battles that we face are beyond our strength and are beyond our ability. And I've spent months talking about putting on the armor of God and wielding your sword of the word of the Lord.

And to seek his face faithfully because he is a mighty God that's up to any battle that we may face. Not only that, he's everlasting father. Which is interesting. Because it's a prophecy about the son of God. Yet it says everlasting father. And what that does is brings up the Trinity.

And I want you to just think about this for a moment. God is described as three separate persons. The father gives all authority to the son.

And bears witness to the son. As does Jesus to himself. Yet the son claims nothing for himself. He gives all glory to the father who has sent him.

[17:01] The father serves the son. The son serves the father. The father and son defer to the Holy Spirit. Who in turn serves and defers to the father and son.

In a oneness that is eternally dynamic and is inexhaustible. And you don't understand that. And I don't either.

Because it is beyond us. Because God's bigger than us. It is absolutely an amazing wonder. But they're all distinct. So why is Christ called the everlasting father?

Well, let the word speak for itself. Colossians chapter 2. Verse 9 and 10 says, For in him, speaking of Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

And you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and all authority. Christ himself put it this way.

[18:01] In John 14, 9, he said, Whoever has seen me has seen the father. In John 10, verse 30, he said, I and the father are one. That term father means originator.

It means source. In other words, God is the source of all of eternity. And I will tell you that from the beginning, from Genesis 1, when God first spoke, Christ was there.

Let us make man in our image. The evidence of the Trinity always there. He's the everlasting father. Not only that, but he's also the prince of peace.

The secret of Christmas is that you can't have peace unless you have the prince of peace. And Christ came to earth from heaven, born in a manger, lived among us, died for us, rose again on our behalf so that we could have peace through him.

He controls every part of that peace. I want you to think about it for a moment. He creates peace. He told the disciples in John 14, 27, Peace I leave with you.

[19:16] My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let it be afraid. In homes that are troubled with anguish, Christ creates peace.

In hearts that are troubled with despair, it is Christ that creates peace. And in your situation, no matter how big it is, no matter how obvious it is, no matter how secret it is, Christ is the one that creates peace.

But not only does he create peace, but he commands peace. He said to a raging storm, Peace be still. And you know what happened? The waves died down and the storm went away.

What's your storm? What's your storm? Whatever it is, he can bring peace in the midst of that. We would never know real peace if he had not come to the earth.

He commands peace. Not only that, but thank God he preserves peace. Philippians 4, verse 7 says, And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, it's beyond our mindset, folks, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[20:42] That means it'll go far beyond anything that we can imagine or think up. It means that it guards us. His peace protects us. And it's a peace that we cannot understand.

And it is just part of the greatest gift of that Christmas day and of every Christmas day. The greatest gift of Christmas is the babe.

It is Christ Jesus, our Lord. And because of that, man, I wish you a Merry Christmas. With every head bowed and every eye closed, I want to ask you something this morning.

Let's be honest. Just you and God. Has there ever been a time in your life when you've asked the Lord Jesus to come into your life? You surrender your life to him and ask him to save you and change you.

And if that's never happened, what a greater Christmas gift can you get than receiving salvation through Christ. I'd be happy to guide you in that process and talk to you about that.

[21 : 52] It's the greatest decision you'll ever made, the greatest gift you'll ever receive. Maybe you have done that, but you've never acknowledged that publicly. And Jesus, by his commission and by his example, tells us that we're to follow that up with baptism.

It is a sign to others of what's already happened to us inside of our lives. And the reality is, if we don't do it as believers, it becomes a hindrance to us.

Maybe you're here and God's leading you to First Baptist Church. You've prayed about what God would have you to do and you felt led to do that. And I encourage you to come as God leads.

We guide you through that as well. Maybe you just need to give to the Lord today. There's areas of your life that you're keeping for yourself and you need to turn those things over to the Lord today. There's hindrances and strongholds that are in your life that you need to start afresh. The blessed gift of Christmas is that Christ will meet you where you are.

[23 : 03] He'll forgive you and make you clean. You do business with God. Leave here today as a gift to the Lord, being right with him and being obedient when he speaks to your heart and life. I realize that you can do that where you stand in just a moment or you can do it at this altar.

I'll be happy to pray with you through that. Either way, I have no idea what God's told you, but I know you'll never be satisfied to do anything less than God's very best for your life.

I want you to have that peace that only the Prince of Peace can bring. And so just follow him. Just trust him. He'll guide you right. Lord Jesus, I love you and I thank you.

For the privilege of worship today, Lord, will you lead us, Father, to be everything, Lord, that you would have us to be. Help us to be obedient right now as we pray. In Jesus' precious name, amen.