



GOD'S GREATEST GIFT

WEEK 3
12.20.15

FOCUS VERSE

II Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

LESSON TEXT

John 1:10–14

10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 3:13–18

13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Acts 2:1–4

1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Through the Incarnation, God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He lived and died so we might have eternal life. We must continue to fulfill His mission here on earth.



CULTURE CONNECTION

The Incarnation

William E. Booth-Clibburn wrote the lyrics to one of the most majestic, beautiful hymns ever written celebrating the Incarnation: “Down from His Glory.” All three verses beautifully describe the truths of God who is Spirit manifesting Himself in flesh for the purpose of human redemption. Verse two is possibly my favorite of the three verses, where he poetically wrote of Christ’s “condescension” to bring us “redemption.” What a beautiful and rich truth to realize God came down to humankind!

My response reflects the first line of the author’s resounding chorus: “O, how I love Him! How I adore Him!”

The Incarnation is the crown jewel of the Christmas story. Further, to begin to

comprehend the Incarnation, one must understand the nature of God and the Oneness message. God, who is Spirit, manifested Himself in flesh as the Son of God that He might pay the great price of humankind’s redemption from sins. The Father did not send a separate entity to pay the price of sin; He came Himself for He alone could pay the high price of redemption. “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:19).

To really understand the beauty of Christmas and the genuine love of the Almighty, one must understand that through the Incarnation He came Himself to rescue us from sin.

OUTLINE

I. THE GIVER’S GREAT LOVE

- A. The Giver’s Long Journey Down
- B. The Giver’s Great Sacrifice
- C. The Receiver’s New Possessions

II. A GIFT UNOPENED

- A. Creator Unnoticed
- B. Kinship Rejected

III. THE GIFT APPRECIATED

- A. Receivers Rewarded
- B. Value Revealed

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Everything relating to God is inexpressibly wonderful; everything He does is indescribably awesome. As David declared in Psalm 19, God’s majesty may be witnessed in the heavens. Lest we spend our time only gazing into the heavens, however, we should look around us, for His glory also is evident throughout the earth. The hummingbird was His unique creation, and by Himself He fashioned the wilderness rose.

*“He maketh lightnings with rain,
and bringeth forth the wind out of
his treasures” (Jeremiah 51:16).*

The psalmist said we should sing with thanksgiving because the Almighty has prepared rain for the earth, made grass to grow on the mountains, and given food to the beast and the young ravens. (See Psalm 147:7–9.)

Evidence of God’s provision for living creatures is everywhere. But above all else, He has provided for the ones created in His own image and after His own likeness. How astonishingly the Lord has bonded Himself to mankind! The writer in Hebrews 2:6 quoted the psalmist David: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:4).

God’s love for humanity had to express itself. It had to reach out to the helpless and to the hurting. It would cross all social and racial barriers and would not be contained by religious prejudice. This matchless love was destined to offer tremendous wealth to every

impoverished soul. It was to be poured out profusely and given unreservedly.

The Almighty came into this world, manifested in human flesh, to seek and to save that which was lost.

The value God has placed on humankind must be judged by the priceless gift He has given to them. In a sudden outburst of praise, Paul exclaimed, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (II Corinthians 9:15). The Greek word translated “unspeakable” in the King James Version has also been translated as “indescribable” or “too wonderful for words.” Such giving is humanly incomprehensible. Paul had been commending the Corinthians for their generosity in meeting the needs of others; but for the apostle, nothing could compare with what God has given through His Son.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE GIVER’S GREAT LOVE

What could a holy God share with sinful humanity? Ultimately, with those who obey the gospel, the Lord will share Heaven itself. Eventually, for the redeemed people of God, there will be a great inheritance in His kingdom (Romans 8:17). But before there could be a joyful experience of fellowship between God and His people, there first had to be a painful process of reconciliation. Something had to be done to bridge the gap between the two.

God was determined to bridge the gap, to personally cross the great divide between Himself and His creation.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the

glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14).

Here was the divine plan in fulfillment. (See Isaiah 9:6.) God came to live among His own creation as a human and gave Himself as a ransom for all because there was nothing greater He could give. It would prove to be the ultimate gift of all gifts!

A. The Giver’s Long Journey Down

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:19).

Many well-intentioned individuals suppose Christ is distinctly different from God, but such a concept has no basis in Scripture. Jesus told the Jews, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30), and later He informed Philip, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). The truth is that God—who is eternal, limitless, omnipresent Spirit—dwells within Jesus Christ in all His fullness (Colossians 1:19; 2:9). The Almighty came into this world, manifested in human flesh, to seek and to save that which was lost.

God came a long way to redeem us. The Highest came to the lowest. Though Jesus Christ was without transgression, He moved freely among publicans and sinners. What greater contrast could the Lord have experienced than this deep descent from marvelous light to appalling darkness?

“Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (II Corinthians 8:9).

B. The Giver’s Great Sacrifice

God could not overlook our sin. Rather, in His great love He provided one great sacrifice to take away our sin forever. All the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were insufficient: “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). There had to be a superior

offering, a holier way, before anyone could be clean and acceptable before God—free from the taint of their sinfulness. Hebrews 9:26 reveals that Jesus Christ “appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

The cost of God’s redemptive plan was a staggering price for the Almighty to pay. But “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Think of it! Nothing would be withheld by the Lord Almighty in His effort to redeem our souls. The great Giver “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (Romans 8:32).

Jesus Christ was delivered into the hands of sinful and vengeful men, handed over like a criminal for us all. He had warned His disciples, “The Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall . . . deliver him to the Gentiles” (Matthew 20:18–19). Matthew 27:1–2 states that “all the chief priests and elders of the people . . . led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.” After scourging Jesus, Pilate “delivered him to be crucified” (Matthew 27:26).

C. The Receiver’s New Possessions

On the Day of Pentecost about 120 followers of Christ received the Holy Ghost. But God’s gift, once opened, was too superb to be confined to a few disciples in the upper room. The promise of the Father was the greatest of possessions and was to be shared wherever anyone would receive the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*An overcoming
believer who walks
daily with the Lord
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assurance of salvation.*

Everlasting life. Is mankind undeserving of the gift of eternal life? Yes! We as sinners were spiritually bankrupt and had nothing to offer the Lord when He offered us His priceless gift. But

through the Lord Jesus Christ, we have become wealthy. According to Ephesians 2:7, God in the ages to come will reveal “the exceeding riches of his grace.” Freely and abundantly the Lord has offered salvation to us, though we are not worthy. Not one of us has anything of which to boast. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

God bought us back when we were slaves on the open market of sin. What we rightfully deserve is eternal condemnation; however, what we can receive by grace is everlasting life. We must choose between accepting the remuneration of a harsh and unloving tyrant or the benevolence of a loving Savior. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Although the Bible does not teach the doctrine of unconditional eternal security, it does teach that for the faithful, God’s gift is eternally secure. No one should have a greater sense of hope and security than the person who is born again. As an overcoming believer who walks daily with his Lord, he can have a rock-solid assurance of salvation. As a child of God, he simply needs to hold on to the blessings God has given to him.

Salvation. It is true the Lord answers many types of prayers. It is also a fact that He heals bodies—often of people who are critically ill. He solves many financial problems for individuals and restores broken marriages. Moreover, He sometimes shields us from serious accidents and terrible conflicts. All of these things are wonderful; but above all, Jesus Christ has come to save our souls. This was His consuming passion. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He reaches for the Jew and He calls for the Gentile. He offers salvation both to the rich and to the poor, to the educated and to the illiterate, to the young and to the old.

Were we to own the Cullinan Diamond or the Hope Diamond, still we could never pay for the salvation God has provided. He paid a far greater price than one ever could measure in silver or gold. We were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). And yet, for all its incredible worth, salvation is full

and free! “Come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat” (Isaiah 55:1).

Revealed name. Jesus is the name by which God has chosen in this dispensation to reveal Himself to all mankind. It is the actual name of the heavenly Father, for Jesus said He had come in his Father’s name (John 5:43). Many names and titles in the Old Testament are significant expressions of God’s character, but none match the one that was given to the Christ child. An angel had carefully instructed Joseph, “Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Like the star that led the wise men from the East, this name leads individuals to the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

If we will repent of our sins and submit to water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, every one of our sins will be remitted through the name of Jesus.

The name of Jesus reflects everything that is wonderful about Him. That name, chosen by the Almighty Himself, mirrors all of our Savior’s virtues, and it speaks of all of our Savior’s blessings. If we will repent of our sins and submit to water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, every one of our sins will be remitted through the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

When we pray by faith in His name—as Jesus has commanded—He will answer our prayers. He will lift our burdens and mend our hearts. Through the power in Jesus’ name, the deaf receive their hearing and the blind receive their sight. Through His name cancer

patients are healed and even the dead are raised to life again.

Yes, there is remission, deliverance, and healing in the powerful name of Jesus. His name, which means “Jehovah is salvation” or “Jehovah the Savior,” is the one the Almighty honors above all others (Philippians 2:9). Men may despise and even revile what God has chosen, but Peter declared the unique and powerful status of the name of Jesus.

“This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:11–12).

Condemnation eliminated. “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

The basis of divine judgment according to John 3:19 is that light has come into the world, but mankind has rejected it. The rejection of Jesus Christ as their Messiah was the ultimate sin of the Jewish people in Christ’s day. (See John 15:22–24.) It remains the same for many people in our day. To reject light and truth is to accept darkness and error. To despise the gift is to despise the Giver. (See John 15:23.)

The apostle John used various forms of the Greek word *pisteuo*, translated “believe,” ninety-eight times in his Gospel. The word does not suggest mere intellectual assent. The verb means “to have faith (in, upon, or with respect to, a person or thing), i.e. credit; by implication, to entrust (especially one’s spiritual well-being to Christ)” (*BibleSoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*).

The writers of the New Testament were not simply promoting facts; they were presenting Christ. They were not just expounding a creed; they were making known a Savior. As they emphasized Jesus, the Son of God, they used the expressions “believe on him” and “believe in him.”

Christians have a union with Christ through faith; Paul said we are actually “in him” (Colossians 2:10). “In Christ” speaks of that special relationship that is ours through the new birth (II Corinthians 5:17). Though once we were bound by sin and shamed by guilt, we who have received God’s gift are now set free.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

A walk in truth and light. Believers can have a glorious walk in truth and light through the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ. He is the truth (John 14:6), and He is the light (John 8:12). Our sufficiency must come from our relationship with Him.

The word *walk* as used by Paul and John in their epistles meant a person’s conduct or his way of life. Even as Christ demonstrated by His life that He was a complete victor over sin, we are empowered through His Spirit to be “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37).

Believers can have a glorious walk in truth and light through the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ. He is the truth, and He is the light.

How simply and how effectively the Bible describes the matter of living for God! It is a matter of walking in light and truth as opposed to walking in darkness and error (John 12:35). As we walk in Christ (Colossians 2:6), we walk in the Spirit, for it is Christ’s Spirit that dwells in our hearts.

Keep walking, Christian. Keep living for God. Darkness will never extinguish the light of Christ. John 1:5 states, “And the light

shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” In this verse, the Greek word *katalambano* is translated “comprehended,” which some have suggested means “understood.” However, a better meaning would be “eclipsed” or “overwhelmed.” The fact is that darkness will never overpower light and will never put it out.

II. A GIFT UNOPENED

How could this gift—this Emmanuel—have gone unrecognized by His own people? Perhaps it was because of the common packaging in which the gift came that they did not perceive His true identity. God manifested Himself to Israel in human flesh. Isaiah had prophesied, “He hath no form or comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2).

A. Creator Unnoticed

When God revealed Himself to this world through the Incarnation, He came unknown and practically unnoticed. “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not” (John 1:10).

How dreadfully far Israel had strayed from the knowledge of their Creator! Through Isaiah the Lord had promised He would come and save them (Isaiah 35:4), but the nation had forgotten. He had promised the eyes of the blind would be opened and the ears of the deaf would be unstopped (Isaiah 35:5), but they had doubted and had done without. The Lord God had stated the lame man would leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb would sing (Isaiah 35:6), but His people had failed to realize the promise was being fulfilled before their eyes.

Even a righteous man like John the Baptist had his doubts and questions. While he was in prison, John sent two of his disciples to ask Christ, “Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?” (Luke 7:20).

God in human flesh passed by the shopkeepers, the shepherds, the fishermen, and the farmers, and they failed to recognize who He really was. The scribes and Pharisees treated Him as an impostor. Many of those in the throngs who followed Him did so for selfish reasons—for the loaves and the

fish. Unnoticed, God walked along the Sea of Galilee, the sea that He had created, and taught tremendous truths to all who would listen. Without fanfare He expounded the Scriptures, the words He had inspired, and gave brilliant explanations to those who challenged His authority.

B. Kinship Rejected

Most people long for the love and the respect of their families. Most of us hope for understanding and appreciation. This, of course, is what we desire, but it was not what the Lord felt when He came to His people, Israel. Rather, what He experienced was rejection and disdain. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).

Jehovah's love for Israel was profound. They were His chosen people. He was their longsuffering God. They were "the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Psalm 95:7). He was the Shepherd that led them like a flock (Psalm 80:1; Jeremiah 31:10). The Almighty committed Himself wholeheartedly to the nation: "You only," God declared, "have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2).

If only Israel would keep His covenant, then they would be a peculiar treasure to Jehovah above all people (Exodus 19:5). If they would obey His Word, then they would be to Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6).

Jehovah's purpose was to be a Kinsman-Redeemer to Israel. That is, the Almighty came to perform the powerful role of the next of kin. Under the law, the kinsman-redeemer might restore property to a relative who had fallen into debt. He might act in judgment against the murderer of a family member. He also could take a widow in marriage to raise up children to the deceased as Boaz did with Ruth.

If Israel had only known the day of her visitation! She had sold herself into the slavery of sin and had become a widow, separated from her God (Isaiah 47:8; Lamentations 1:1). At this moment, in this desperate time of need, the Lord could not simply stand afar off from Israel. The Almighty came to redeem His people, though He knew they would scorn and reject Him.

III. THE GIFT APPRECIATED

No greater gift has ever been given to mankind than that which God offered on Golgotha. When Christ died on the cross, He made it possible for us to receive all the benefits of salvation.

A. Receivers Rewarded

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

While numbers of people rejected Jesus Christ, some gladly welcomed and accepted Him. There was the woman at the well of Samaria who heard of the living water. There was Bartimaeus, the blind beggar near Jericho, who received his sight. At Capernaum a centurion came to Christ in faith, and as a result, he saw his paralyzed servant healed. Wherever and whenever individuals accept Jesus Christ for who He really is, something wonderful happens.

As children of God we can go to our heavenly Father expectantly and confidently as a small child approaches his loving father.

How we should strive to receive Christ into our lives! He is the way back to God and the source of eternal life. His Spirit within our hearts witnesses that we are the sons of God. As such, we can approach God as a small child would approach his loving father (Galatians 4:6). We can go to our heavenly Father expectantly and confidently. We can know we are His and He is ours. We can be sure He will be our constant companion and will be sensitive to our every need.

John 1:12-13 gives a concise statement of what takes place when a person is born again.

Verse 12 states that those who fully trust in Christ and in His name are given the preeminent honor of becoming God's children. This is possible only through the power of Jesus Christ. Commenting on this verse, Adam Clarke wrote, "He who is made a child of God enjoys the greatest privilege which the Divine Being can confer on this side eternity." Verse 13 goes further by explaining that this birth is not of man. It is totally of God.

*We must share
Jesus Christ with
all people and let
them know they
too can be saved.*

B. Value Revealed

Only those who have fully trusted Jesus Christ—those who have opened God's gift—can begin to understand what has been divinely given. John explained that believers "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). We were all born into this world naturally through the flesh; but being sinful by nature, we were destined to suffer the penalty for sin. However, through the grace of God we have been born of the Holy Spirit and have become children of God. The difference is dramatic! "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17).

We do not fully understand all the wonderful things we have received in Christ Jesus.

Though God speaks to us through His Word and anoints us with His Spirit, we cannot fully appreciate what we have been given. Paul spoke of looking "through a glass, darkly" (I Corinthians 13:12). In other words, we cannot clearly see or perceive all things, but one glorious day that will change. "Then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Corinthians 13:12).

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

If it is remarkable when someone dies for a friend, it is simply astounding when someone gives his life for an enemy. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7–8).

Because Christ died, we can live. He was the ultimate gift to fallen man. Jesus Christ did not come to present another kind of law; He came to offer another kind of love. Christ Himself was the personification of God's love. He was the greatest sacrifice ever made—the perfect Lamb of God without spot or blemish.

God came in flesh to dwell among us. His own people saw a man, but Christ was more than a man. They heard a rabbi, but He was more than a teacher. The crowd saw a suffering prophet, but He was more than a prophet. They despised Him as one who was cursed of God, but He was our loving Savior.

The treasure we have received is too valuable to be hidden; the riches of God's grace are too wonderful to be concealed. We must share Jesus Christ with all people and let them know they too can be recipients. They can be saved. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (II Corinthians 9:15). ■

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss why Paul described God's gift as "unspeakable."
- What was God's long journey down from glory? Discuss.
- The born-again individual can have a rock-solid assurance of salvation. Discuss.
- What is so wonderful about the name of Jesus? Discuss.
- Discuss why it is imperative to receive Jesus Christ.