

The Gift of Jesus – Men of Covenant 12/6/25

I know this will come as a shock to you all, but this morning our message will be about Christmas!

In just 19 more days Christians and non-believers alike will celebrate this Christmas holiday.

AND ... although our group may have a deeper knowledge of December 25th than most, it's VERY CLEAR that the majority of people celebrating this month MAY NOT even know "why."

Here's a few statistics from a Pew Research Center study a few years ago. The study surveyed several thousand adults on the subject of Christmas

SLIDE: PEW RESEARCH (1/3rd Secular)

The study opens up with this statement:

QUOTE "Nine-in-ten Americans say they celebrate Christmas, and three-quarters say they believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. But only about half see Christmas mostly as a religious holiday, while one-third view it as more of a cultural holiday" END QUOTE

The same study found that MEN were 7% more likely to celebrate Christmas as more of secular holiday than women and that young people 18-29 were 25% more likely to celebrate Christmas as a secular holiday than their most senior counterpart (65+)

This data provides evidence that Men are dropping the ball around their role as Spiritual Leaders when we find the young people they COULD LEAD, and SHOULD BE LEADING are simply missing the point of Christmas.

SLIDE: PEW RESEARCH (Family Time)

Digging deeper into the study we begin to see the "reason" that people like to celebrate Christmas. Here we find an even more significant departure from the true reason for Christian celebration. The vast majority of people – OVER 2/3rds look forward MOSTLY to being with family and friends vs acknowledging and celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

When we take the data from both slides we find that 1/3rd of the people view Christmas as a "MOSTLY SECULAR" holiday AND 2/3rds are looking forward "MOSTLY to FAMILY & FRIENDS get together.

This is interesting, because this same survey found that nearly 90% of these same people (86%) say they plan to buy gifts for friends and family over the Christmas season

It makes you wonder why? Why do they give GIFTS? Why do WE give GIFTS?

SLIDE: GIVING

Well one thing we DO KNOW is that people are just more generous and GIVING around Christmastime than normally so. Not just Christians but MANY people groups.

It's a happier time for most people and a time where the TV shows move toward themes of giving, generosity, prodigal returns, family reunions and dare I say it – even more biblical values.

SLIDE: CARING

Strangers will begin to help strangers with no expectation of anything in return. Showing CARE for one another where just a month prior, there was little “care there”

The Christmas show plot lines on the Hallmark channel where everyone gets along, love triumphs, special gifts are given and there is always a happy ending SHIFT from being ridiculed the other 11 months of the year, to being a celebrated part of family entertainment – at least for the month of December.

SLIDE: KINDNESS

The closer we get to the actual day of December 25th, the KINDER people seem to get. The final week moving into Christmas finds people showing more patience, relaxing more than usual and being nicer than they normally are. These behaviors are not exclusive to believers either – we see the same general “softening” of the human heart toward others in many people. It's an interesting phenomenon – especially in the non-believer, because for the most part, they may not even know WHAT they are celebrating and WHY they are suddenly being nicer to people.

SLIDE: JOYOUS CHRISTMAS (Topic Intro)

To prove the point about just how confused the world is about Christmas, I searched the internet for images by using just the word “Christmas” – just one word ... to see what would come up. What I received was a single page of over 200 images that you see on the left of the screen ... just ONE of these had any imagery related to the reason for the celebration – that was the image you see on the RIGHT – the one of the church scene. Now, the church is an amazing part of the Christian faith but it's not what we all celebrate on December 25th

- What is it about Christmas that makes all people take AT LEAST a tiny step back from the flesh and the world they live in?
- Why are believers and non-believers alike especially kinder and more gentle with others during this time?
- Why do they spend so much time (and money) searching out the perfect gifts for each other?

Did you personally ever get that “perfect gift”? Maybe as a child or even later in life?

I understand that not every man here this morning has a memory like that, and if you don't then let's at least praise God for the new memories being created in a life lived for Jesus.

SLIDE: GREATEST GIFT (Gift Memories)

For those that DO have that memory, I want you to think back to that one PERFECT gift you'll never forget. Maybe it was a surprise, but more likely you wanted something desperately, and asked Mom and Dad (or Santa) for it, thinking it might never come to pass. But then on Christmas morning, you unwrapped it and it was suddenly, unexpectedly, unbelievably YOURS.

Once opened it was time to put that gift to use! You started to play with it, to try it out or try it on and most likely you wanted to show it to your friends – right?

I've asked a few men that received a gift like this to share their personal story

I'll ask 3 questions of each man:

1. What was the gift?
2. Who gave it to you?
3. What made it so special?

Let begin with Joe Feltner

- **Joe Feltner [Tractor]**
- **Pastor Ken [Wesley Pen]**
- **Ben Yoder [Horse & Buggy]**
- **Dean Palombi [Bicycle]**

Thanks to each of our speakers for sharing with us this morning, and ... and I pray that it brought up more good memories than not for all of you here today.

What this exercise demonstrated for me is the impact of gifts. You could hear it in their voices and the words they used to describe what they had been given. There is power in giving and it etches something deep into our memories when we finally get something we really, really desire.

Years have passed since many of these gifts were given, and if you had a special memory of a gift, that “thing” we so desperately wanted and cherished AND actually received is long gone ... but the part that remains with us – seared into our minds, is the kindness, appreciation, and the love that the gift represented to us.

I don't know about you, but I want more kindness, appreciation and love in my life ...

I also want to be the kind of man that GIVES more of that to others ...

... and Christmas is a perfect time to REMIND us of giving.

This is because the greatest gift ever given in the history of mankind. The gift that was the most precious and unique gift in the universe. Was given over from God, to mankind on Christmas.

So what was the actual gift offered at Christmas?

- Was it the cross?
- Was it the forgiveness of sins?
- Was it relationship with God?
- Was it the Holy Spirit?
- Was it the Christian Church?

Nope, none of the above.

On the evening of the birth of Jesus, which we celebrate as Christmas

- The cross hadn't happened yet
- And the forgiveness of sins demanded that Jesus be hung on that cross
- And relationship with God required the finished work of Christ on that cross
- We all know the Holy Spirit didn't appear until AFTER the cross
- And the Church was birthed AFTER all of this had occurred

So what exactly was the GIFT? It's simple – **it was Jesus**

REVEAL THE BOX

SLIDE: MANGER SCENE (Jesus The Gift)

Jesus himself was God's gift to the world on that first Christmas

The image you see on the screen, is a painting completed in 1622 by Gerrit Honthorst a famous Dutch "golden age" painter. The title is the "Adoration of the Shepherds" and this title and paintings very similar to this one, have been painted by dozens of artists over the past 2,000 years. In fact, Wikipedia lists nearly 20 FAMOUS artists who have painted this very scene.

The event that Honthorst portrays in his painting represents a very special day in Christianity, the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. This month, Christians around world will celebrate this fact with house parties, dinners, gift giving, decorations, church services, carol singing, baking, and ... more

Now ... there's nothing wrong with any of these activities so I'm not here this morning to discuss or debate "how we celebrate" but rather to pull back the curtain and discover that behind them all, every professing Christian must examine (as they say) the REASON for the SEASON

We'll start by asking ourselves ...

What happened on the night Christ was born? What exactly is the meaning of Christmas to you and I?

Sure, almost any Christian will point to Christ as the reason for all of the aforementioned activities thus simplifying and even potentially watering down Jesus, by drawing a straight line from the manger to Christmas trees, Hams, ribbons and bows.

BUT Men of Covenant can't stop there, because we are called to a deeper understanding of Christmas

Let's begin this morning with the simple but miraculous part of Christmas. We can find this part in John 1:14 where John describes the "what happened," part of Christmas in a book of the bible that reads more like poetry than verse:

SLIDE: JOHN 1:14

John 1:14

14The **Word became flesh** and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So here we learn that the "Word" became flesh – and in reading this we discover the "what happened" part about Christmas.

God himself, through the birth of His son Jesus, came into OUR world as a Man. To be with us, to teach us, to leave us with instructions, to show us the way to God, and to die for our sins and make it possible for us to spend eternity with God

BUT ... the bible tells us in Matthew 7:13-14 that not ALL men will find their way to an eternity with God

SLIDE: MATTHEW 7:13-14

13"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and **many** enter through it. 14But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a **few** find it.

Notice here the word FEW ... it's a description of a group of people we WANT to be part of!

Karl Clauson – a Chicago based pastor says this about the gift of Jesus and Matthew 7:13-14.

QUOTE: "When the gift of Jesus is offered, our spiritual condition is dismal. In fact, we are born walking away from God - on a broad road that leads to destruction. Christ calls us to turn, surrender and follow. Repentance isn't about perfection, it's about direction. It means turning from self to Christ, turning from sin to obedience, turning from pride to surrender. END QUOTE

The birth of the "gift" of Christmas (Jesus) - all by itself is a staggering truth.

- Before Jesus, we stood condemned before the law.
- Before Jesus, God and man had been forever separated from the time of the Garden of Eden.

AND AFTER Jesus the world was given a way to trade our condemnation for righteousness and our separation for relationship.

Yes, the "what happened" because the "Word" became flesh WAS the biggest event, the biggest miracle and the biggest thing to happen to humans since we were created ... but what followed that first Christmas morning? Why do we celebrate the world over on the day of Christmas? What does it mean to men who call themselves called "Christians?"

Let's go to the bible to see what it has to say about all of these questions ...

SLIDE: LUKE/MATTHEW

Luke 2:10

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

Matthew 1:21

21She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he **will save** his people from their sins."

Luke 2:34

34Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child **is destined** to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,

Well, when we look at the words I've highlighted, they all speak to what will happen in the future. These are NOT words that describe something that is done, or accomplished, or completed.

Instead - they ALL speak to a future POSSIBILITY

The phrases:

- WILL be
- WILL save
- IS destined

These were the KEY words used to describe Jesus just before his birth and at CHRISTMAS

BUT ... and this is a big but, did you know that though all of this came to pass, that although every word written became a reality, that YES, Jesus ended up doing every single thing spoken of at his birth, then throughout his short life here on earth ... that these realities are NOT true for every man?

Let me explain ...

Before Jesus arrived on earth. There was no chance of ever approaching God, of having a relationship with him, no chance of redemption and no path to heaven ... but then Jesus was born, and an unstoppable plan for man-kind's redemption was put in motion.

It took the cross – the actual crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus to make the “will be” manifest into the “he is.” It was then, that Jesus had accomplished exactly what the Father sent Him to do

- BUT! ... On that FIRST Christmas day, over 2,000 years ago, baby Jesus represented the “what will be” to mankind.
- AND! ... On THIS coming Christmas day, sadly ... he will represent the EXACT same thing to too many men.

Hold on!

How can the finished work of Jesus, now 2 millennium in the past, still be represented by the words “will be?” Isn't he done? Didn't he come to save the world?

Let's see what the bible says about this seeming contradiction about Christmas?

SLIDE: JOHN 3:18

18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Contrary to popular opinion that Jesus came for "everybody," he did not. In John 3:18, just 2 verses past perhaps the most famous verse in the new testament (for God so loved the world) we read that for all that do NOT believe in him, **there is no salvation.**

For further proof let's read from John 8:24

SLIDE: JOHN 8:24

John 8:24

I told you that you would die in your sins.

If you do not believe I am He, you will indeed die in your sins."

Here we find Jesus castigating the Pharisees when he says to them "If you don't believe in me" ... you will NOT BE SAVED. You will die!

In other words, Jesus came so that NONE may be lost, BUT YOU, each individual person, every single unique man has to "GOT TO - WANT TO."

The simplest way to think about it is this way:

- God loves all men, but not all men accept that love

To get a gift you MUST RECEIVE it!

A gift is not a gift unless you ACCEPT it!

SLIDE: ACCEPT THE GIFT (Justification)

The commentators at BibleRef.com put it this way...

QUOTE: "While the gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of reconciliation and hope (John 3:16–17), that hope is only accessible to those who believe in Him (John 3:18, 36). Accurately translated, the angels are not declaring God's benevolence to all humanity; they are celebrating His mercy to those who follow His will by **accepting His Son** (John 6:28–29; Hebrews 11:6)." END QUOTE

And make no mistake about God. God “will be” no matter if “we will” or not – because God’s plans are unstoppable, no matter the choices we make as individuals.

Jesus’s arrival here on earth on Christmas Day, started a miraculous redemptive process that “will save” those who accept His gift. The promises of God within the bible, though stated in “future tense” are irrevocable. Jesus “will be” the savior of the world, translates to “he was” and “he is” BUT ... each man’s response to this reality, each man’s decision to accept or decline the GIFT OF JESUS determines EACH MAN’S forever home.

Just because Jesus moved from “will be” to “is now” the savior of the world, does NOT guarantee that same salvation for each individual man. You MUST choose to accept the gift of grace, given to you by God himself.

You know, it seems absolutely IMPOSSIBLE to think that anyone would refuse a gift like this

Why wouldn’t EVERYBODY take it?

Well the facts demonstrate that MOST WON’T

How do we know this? It’s the math.

- There are 8 billion people on this planet
- Around 3 billion people in the world (1/3 of them in India) have not heard the Gospel at all
- This leaves 5 billion people who HAVE heard about Jesus and of that total ...
- Less than HALF claim to follow Christ and of that total ...
- Far fewer show fruit of that claimed relationship.

Christmas represents the gift of JESUS, given from God himself

- A most spectacular gift
- A gift so valuable, it could never be bought or earned
- And less than half of the world who has heard about this gift, has decided to accept it

But as we will see in a minute, there’s MUCH more to the gift of Jesus Christ than simply “accepting him”

Let me tell you a story to explain ...

SLIDE: BB GUN

I once received a Christmas gift like the men shared earlier this morning. This is a picture taken on that day more than 50 years ago. It was Daisy lever action BB gun and I was about 7-8 years old at the time. I can still hear the BB’s dropping down into the barrel as I loaded it. I can smell the oil that was used to keep it lubricated and the sound of the spring based firing mechanism when I first shot it. I ran outside at my grandmothers house and took a shot at the birds sitting on her bird feeder, and heard her voice seconds later reminding me not to shoot “her birds!” I loved that gun, I loved my parents for giving me that gun. To me it meant I was grown up, it meant they trusted me, AND it was a visual reminder of my independence and their love for me.

SLIDE: WRAPPED BB GUN

Now let me show you another picture. This image was taken JUST BEFORE I opened my brand new BB Gun. Imagine that you're there with me for a moment, the year would have been around 1969 or 1970 and you can see me standing in front of the Christmas tree holding this long, wrapped box with a green bow on it, with my parents smiling and watching me as I hold it up.

Now imagine that my parents did something no parent would do, but stick with me for a moment. What if they said to me – son, inside that wrapped package, is the BB gun of your dreams. It's the one you've been wanting and asking for over and over again. Now imagine me thanking them, then telling them I would cherish it forever, but then walking over to the Christmas tree and putting it right back where I got it from. I then moved on to another present which I proceeded to unwrap, but I never picked up THAT present again, and ... get this ... I never open it.

Sounds crazy right?

Well this exact same thing has been happening every day since the very first Christmas

On that day – God wrapped up the most valuable present ever given in the history of the world. That gift, just so happens to be the ONE thing, he has ONLY ONE of. It also happens to be His son, A son he loves in ways that you and I can not even begin to comprehend. A son He KNOWS he's now consigning to a death sentence.

Imagine with me for a second if you have kids -

Your beautiful baby has just been born, and for whatever reason, you won't have another ... and at that same exact moment of incomprehensible love for that baby, you KNOW he will die a tortuous death as an innocent young man. Imagine as a father standing over that child thinking – my beautiful baby, will die. It's unbearable to think on for any length of time ...

Yet ... God did.

And God still does ...

He walks this gift right up to you, packaged in the form of the JESUS, and says – take it if you are willing. No strings attached, it's yours at NO COST to you and at incomprehensible expense to me. You need do NOTHING to earn it and you are NEVER disqualified from taking ownership of it. It's yours because I love you in a way that you will never understand UNTIL you see me face to face. Please take it, I want you to be an adopted son in my family, with all the rights and privileges that come with being the son of the King of the universe.

Many men then say “thank you very much” and proceed to “put Jesus, right back under the tree.”

They claim him as their savior, but never “open the box” or “pull the wrapping paper off”. If they were to take the next step and OPEN the gift of Jesus, they would discover who he is, his love for them and begin to reap the full blessing of a life built around a relationship with him.

SLIDE: THE EXCHANGE (It's Worth It)

I know all about these kind of guys. In fact, I'm a bit of an expert on the topic of men just like this

How did I get to be an expert on these kinds of guys?

I was that guy!

I was different just a few years ago. I thought, cars, boats, status and the money of this world were the most precious things on earth. I worked hard, and didn't need any help from anyone to get along in life. I bought a lot of grown up toys along the way, but I was never able to get that BB gun feeling back again. As an adult my search to find the kind of "high" I got when I received that gift just resulted in spending more and more money, to get less and less satisfaction

I think I know why I searched for so long, and why I was never really satisfied with what I found.

I think I know why I left Jesus all "wrapped up" when in truth it was HE was what I needed all along

Here's why:

Because IF I had opened the gift of Jesus, that act would have required an exchange.

An exchange I was unwilling to make at the time. I wanted Jesus AND my old life.

The only problem with that is Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not compatible with our flesh.

When we accept the gift of Jesus as represented by His birth on Christmas day, we are justified instantaneously, but when we open the gift that is the Jesus of Christmas we MUST exchange ...

- The old man for a new man
- Our worldly desires for His desires for our life
- Our sin and shame for His righteousness

Not every man is ready or even willing to make those exchanges

Not every man wants the “old man” to die ...

You see, the gift is NOT like any other gift – it comes with the very specific demand that you give up the life that is KILLING YOU spiritually and literally.

I wish that EVERY SINGLE MAN who calls himself “Christian” had first counted those costs, FOUND THEM TO BE “WORTH IT” and had then made those exchanges. To put it another way ... I wish their behavior and character reflected the saviors name they claim to follow.

Challenge me if you will but I’m pretty sure we are supposed to be “new creations.” New men who live lives reflecting God’s will - not our desires.

PERFECT men?

No ... but men who eliminate willful sin from our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. Men whose character is VISIBLY new and whose behavior is VISIBLY changed. If those things are NOT happening in our lives – we have NOT YET OPENED the GIFT of JESUS!

- We might say it’s ours
- We might claim to be His
- We might celebrate Him
- We might study His life
- We might do good works
- We might go to Church

But ... for some men, in the private areas of their hearts, the gift of Jesus Christ, delivered to us on Christmas day, remains in its wrapper.

Worse yet, though Jesus HAS completed His work for humanity on the cross, He still remains a “will be” to any man who has yet to simply accept the gift ... to just “take it”

- When we accept the GIFT of Jesus – then WE are saved and Justified
- When we open it and use the GIFT – then WE begin to show the fruit of Him who’s in us, as a new man in Christ and we begin the lifelong process of sanctification
- When we praise and thank him for the GIFT– then WE are loving God for His grace and we begin to show the same love to others

Though I can't know, I'm betting that most or even all Men here have accepted the gift of Jesus Christ. But I also wonder:

Do we fully comprehend what kind of gift was given?

And following that question, I MUST ASK this ... Have we completely opened the gift of Jesus, really looked Him over, gotten to know every single thing we can know about him?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, have we used the gift of Jesus, applied HIM to our lives – or have we accepted HIM and put HIM on a shelf, or worse stuffed HIM in a closet and mostly forgotten about HIM, only recalling the GIFT OF JESUS at Christmas or during Sunday's sermon.

Precious gifts, once accepted and meant to be used

SLIDE: O LITTLE TOWN

Let me close by sharing a well known Christmas Carol called "O Little Town of Bethlehem".

This carol was written in 1868 by an Episcopalian priest named Phillips Brooks and in the 3rd stanza writes about the GIFT of Christmas

- How silently, how silently,
- the wondrous **gift is given!**
- So God imparts to human hearts
- the blessings of his heaven.
- No ear may hear his coming;
- but in this world of sin,
- where meek **souls will receive him**, still
- the dear Christ enters in.

Here we see all we have discussed this morning laid out so simply

- The wondrous gift has been given
- Blessing from heaven are given to those that accept the gift
- Faithful Christian men ... Take it, unwrap it and throw the box away

Just accept the gift, and you receive ...

- Life everlasting
- A future promise of an end to pain and suffering
- Forgiveness for everything you've ever done wrong
- An adoption certificate into the royal family as a Son of God
- The right to call the creator of the universe "Dad"

BUT WAIT!!

If Jesus is the GIFT of Christmas, and he is represented by THIS gold gift box, then simply taking the gift gives you everything I just described ... BUT ...

AND THIS MAY BE THE BIGGEST “BUT” IN THE WORLD

THE BIGGEST “BUT” IN THE CHURCH AND ...

THE BIGGEST “BUT” IN THE HEARTS OF MEN AROUND THE WORLD THIS CHRISTMAS

BUT ...

- Just like me with the BB gun example ... **wouldn't it be crazy not to OPEN the GIFT?**
- **Wouldn't it be nuts** not to open the GIFT to discover all there is to know about Jesus?
- **Wouldn't it make sense** to open the GIFT of Jesus to change your life NOW?

SLIDE: OPEN THE GIFT

PICK UP THE JESUS BOX

Listen carefully as I shake this box -THERE'S MORE INSIDE!

People that love you would never give you an empty box all wrapped up pretty, just to disappoint you upon opening

Would GOD DO THAT! Would the most loving person in the universe present you an empty box?

He WANTS us to open it! And when we DO OPEN the GIFT of Jesus we begin the process of sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit and Men of Covenant start to live out the mission we ALL signed up for – the PURSUIT OF HOLINESS...

- Here's what's in the box - Here's what unwrapping the GIFT of JESUS offers
 - A personal relationship with our savior
 - Peace and Joy that surpasses human understanding
 - The removal of sin as the master over our life
 - The ability to produce fruit and works of God
 - A Holy Spirit led life in place of a selfish and flesh driven one
 - The ability to overcome: hate, pride, anxiety, anger, lust, selfishness, a judgmental, mind, deceitfulness and all forms of immorality
 - The chance for YOU ... his one-of-a-kind creation, to leave a LASTING LEGACY as you complete God's once-in-a-lifetime mission for your life to His glory!

Pastor Ken shared with us last Sunday that the first Christmas now more than 2,000 years ago, was the birth of the faith called Christianity. He rightly said it was the beginning of "The Faith."

- Accept the GIFT of JESUS and ... the words "The Faith" - change to MY FAITH
- Open the GIFT of JESUS and ... "Your Life" is becomes a life lived for Him and thru Him

Don't let Jesus be just a "possibility" in your life!

Change the "will be's" in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke be TRUE for YOU.

Let the GIFT that was given to you over 2,000 years ago:

- Change you
- Change others around you BECAUSE of you
- And let it bless and glorify the giver who is God our Father

OPEN THE GIFT of JESUS this Christmas and be blessed for it!

Amen & Merry Christmas