

Good morning, everyone. How are you? I love that movie. It's one of my favorites, the whole gift giving thing. Christmas is really about gifts, isn't it?

I mean, we don't want to make it all about gifts, but yet it seems like everywhere we turn there's another reference to gifts. One of my least favorite songs in the world. We were playing games last night. It, and it came on and Mason says, oh, I love this song. And I'm like, you've got to be kidding me.

It begins like this. I don't want a lot for anyone. Know what that is? Who sings it? What's the title of the song?

All I want for Christmas is. All I want for Christmas is Mariah Carey. No. All I want for Christmas is you. It's a horrible song.

It's the worst song if it comes to the radio. I just want to turn the channel or drive off the know. The second least favorite Christmas song for me is one that we've sing here. And it's unfortunate really because I love the lyrics, but it's the song oh, little town of Bethlehem. How many of you guys are shocked that I don't really love that hymn?

Now it's really all about the tune, the melody. It's just got a morose, sad little tune. Does anyone get that besides me? It's not a minor key song, but it sort of feels like a minor. There's sort of a downward drift.

No, like that's just not fun to sing. But the poetry, the lyrics are absolutely beautiful, particularly the way he describes. The poet describes God's gift to us. Here's how. Verse three goes.

How silently. How silently the wondrous gift is given where God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven. No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, I love this. Where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in. It's a gentle way to express what was really a miraculous and awe inspiring gift.

Luke describes it this way in Luke chapter two says there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shone round them and they were terrified. So something was heard. Some ears heard his coming.

But the angel said to them, do not be afraid, for I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people today in the town of David, a savior has been born. To you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Now, I don't know how many gifts the shepherds had received up to that point in their lives. But I tell you, not one of them, compared to the gift they received that night.

Unto you is born a savior. It's an amazing gift. Ever since the shepherds received that first gift, gifts have been exchanged. Ever since the wise men brought theirs and we bring ours. And some of them are great gifts that we know exactly what we're going to do with them.

Like, oh, my word, look at this. When Mary and Joseph opened the gift of the wise men and they found inside gold, I gotta be honest with you. I suspect Joseph was saying, yeah, I know what we're going to do with that. When they opened up frankincense, I don't know. And then the third wiseman said, and here's myrrh.

That's a bad joke. That's a bad joke. I shouldn't have said it. Alan said it earlier. And I said, don't tell that joke.

And then I went and did it. Oh, frankincense. And here's myrrh. Frankincense. Okay, stop.

I'll just stop while I'm ahead.

We all get gifts. Some make sense, some we love, some not so much. But I believe that every gift can point us to Jesus. Now, what do I mean by that? I'm going to explain here in just a little bit.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of Jesus today as we celebrate in anticipation of tomorrow's just fun morning, we pray that today we would remember again why we celebrate. We give thanks for this gift you've given us, Jesus. And in his name we pray. Amen.

In my role here, I'm used to receiving Christmas gifts. There's one over there on the pew that I got this morning. I've not even opened it, so I don't know what it is. I love little Christmas gifts. I'm not going to shyly admit that.

I'm going to boldly admit that. Especially those that Offer a little sweet treat for my sweet tooth, or even a little savory treat for my savory tooth. But I've got my share of just interesting gifts. I've always get sort of a religious themed coffee mug. Those seem to be favorites.

One year, I got a resin Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus figurine that I don't love, but I love the person who gave it to me. And so I always try to find a place for that little ugly Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. One year, the most awkward year. Well, the worst gift I probably ever got was the South beach diet. Book, anyone?

Yeah, let me just. Guys or ladies, if you have purchased a diet book for someone in your life, you have my permission to get up right now and go exchange it for something else. Do not give anyone a South beach diet book. The most awkward Christmas gift I got was from a worship team member many, many years ago. And there in front of lots of people, I opened the gift and I pulled out some red silk boxers with Santa Claus on them.

And I'm not as carefree and easygoing then as I am now. I didn't really know what to do with that gift. I just said thank you very much, and put it back and wrapped it up in the tissue paper so I didn't have to look at it. I got it home and put it in the dresser drawer and I kept it there for

a while. And every time I would open the dresser drawer, there were those red boxer shorts, and they would remind me of how embarrassed I felt when I got them.

And finally I just gave them away. I don't even have them anymore. But I am still uncertain what those red boxer shorts were about. If there's any stress involved at Christmas, it's usually about gifts getting the perfect gift, kids getting the perfect gift, parents giving the perfect gift. None of us want to be Aunt Clara with the awkward Christmas gift.

But it is inevitable that you will open something that is not exactly what was wanted or needed. And here's why that is a good thing. Are you ready? Bad gifts remind us that this is not our day. A bad gift reminds us this is not our birthday.

This day is not about us. This day is about Jesus. We can sometimes forget this inconvenient fact, can't we? When we make our wish list and our want list. But Christmas is about Jesus, not about us.

As much as we want the day to be perfect for you, it's more important that it be focused on him. At the end of the morning, if you're surrounded by torn up wrapping paper and you're belching hot chocolate and you've not spent any time reminding yourself and those that you're with about Jesus, then you sort of lost the plot of Christmas. I know some of you do a good job at this. You read the story every morning with your kids or with the people you're with. You read the scripture again and give the account of Mary and Joseph and the angels and the shepherds.

Some of you make birthday cakes and sing happy birthday to Jesus. I think that's a great, great tradition. Some of you are working on teaching your children, some classic Christmas carols. Those Christmas carols have some excellent theology. Some of you guys hang a candy cane upside down on your tree so it looks like a j.

And people ask about it. You can get a talk about Jesus. The point is, you don't have to have a lot of new traditions. You just need to make a point to bring your family's attention to the fact that this is Jesus's birthday, not their day. If you get a bad gift, you simply smile and just remind yourself, hey, it's not about me today.

The other thing when you get a bad gift is you smile and you say thank you, because a bad gift will remind us of the perfect gift. You see, even though it is Jesus's birthday, he is the one that has given us the gift. We receive the gift. The songwriter wrote, how silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given. So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.

John says it this way. The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Glory is of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. What an amazing gift. Not everyone appreciated the gift.

John goes on to say, he came to his own, but his own received him not. They took one look at that precious, amazing, beautiful gift, and because it wasn't what they thought they wanted,

they said, eh, thanks, no thanks. And they discarded him. But verse twelve goes on to say, to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. And becoming a child of God is an indescribable, unimaginable, generous gift.

Carol says, it comes with the blessings of heaven. And this is what Paul says himself in the letter to the Ephesians. He says, blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Then for the next 20 verses, he talks about what those heavenly blessings are. In verse four, he says this, for he chose us in him before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless in his sight.

He chose us.

As we listen and obey, God is slowly undoing the extensive damage the world wreaked on us. The old ways of thinking and feeling that hurt us and others is being exchanged by his way of thinking and feeling. And he's giving us his heart and his mind so that we can be part of his plan to bring this world back into unity with heaven. I love that Jeremiah 31 says this. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people. Why? Well, in Ephesians, Paul goes on to say in verse twelve, he says, in order that we who were the first to put our hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory. He's done all of this, rescued us, redeemed us, given us a new home, a new name, and teaching us a new and better way for the praise of his glory. This doesn't mean that he's doing it just for bragging rights.

He's doing it just because that's who God is. That makes him glorious. I love that he chose us. In him. There's this truth that we need to acknowledge, that we were living in a place of abandonment, abuse, neglect.

We were unloved, we were mistreated. We had absorbed into our lives all the bad and terrible and destructive thinking that the world feeds us all the time. God found us there and said, I want to bring you to a new place. I want to bring you back, and I want you to take you from this place of destruction where you are condemned. You are being assaulted, you are being oppressed by sin and death.

And I want to bring you out of that, into this new place, into my family. The scripture says, he gives us his name, he puts in us something of himself. He redeems us. This is the idea that he takes us from this horrible place where we are and brings us now into his place. We're brought into a new family.

We have new people around us who are feeding us, who are nourishing us, who are taking care of us. We're no longer left and abandoned. But God brings us to himself, and he says this to us, if you will trust me, if you will listen and obey, then bit by bit by bit, I will bring you into this new way of thinking. I will change you so that you can be part of what I'm doing in the world.

Verse 13. The scripture says, when you believed, you were marked in him with a seal. The promised holy spirit who is deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of his glory. We are his. His holy spirit is in us to make sure we don't forget who we belong to.

What did the angels tell the shepherds? They said unto you, is born in the city of David, a savior. It's the exact gift we needed, a gift that we are invited to receive, and a gift that we are encouraged to regift.

Compared to this gift, a red rider carbine action 200 shot range model air rifle does not even begin to compare. In fact, no other gift does.

This Christmas, prepare yourself for some disappointment. I've been telling the boys that for about a month and a half, you are going to get gifts that you're. Huh. You're going to get gifts that someone thinks you need. I hope it's not a south beach diet book.

But whatever gift you receive, whatever disappointment you may experience on Monday morning when you open the gifts that someone has thought to give you, I want you to remember each gift, whether it's one that you're like, yes. Or one that is like, okay, points us to Jesus. Points us to the fact that this day is about him and he is the perfect gift. Are you among those who have received the gift and with it the blessings of heaven? Then say amen.

Give thanks to God. But if you're not, if you have not yet received the gift so wondrously given, then know this, in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, this morning we thank you for your love for us. In love, you predestined us to be part of your family.

You saw us when we were far, far away, living in a place of just death and destruction, where sin ruled and brokenness was the name of the game. We were living in darkness, as Isaiah says, with no way out, no future ahead of us, no hope for tomorrow. And you said, I want him. I want her. And in love, you gave us Jesus through his death, his burial, and his resurrection.

Now we have a new name, a new life, a new home, a new future. Only because of him, we give thanks for Jesus. We remember that he is the reason we are standing and sitting and worshiping and praying and giving thanks today. And in his name we pray. Amen.

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