

What gift do we bring?

The Gift of Our Life!

An overworked pastor is at the church late one evening when he realizes the building is on fire. He runs outside and calls 911 from his cell phone.

The operator assures him everything will be alright and then asks him how they would get to the building. The frazzled pastor pauses and answers “in the red truck of course.”

This advent season we are asking the question “What gift do we bring?” Last week we looked at the gifts brought to Jesus by the wise men. Today we look at: The gift of our life and two elements of the life we have been given by God.

I. Our Priorities

1st aspect of this is:

-Jesus First!

Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

I had only been a Christian for 3 years when I first set foot on the campus of Liberty Baptist College, now called Liberty University. 8 kids from my youth group went there in my time largely due to the influence of our youth pastor who had graduated from Liberty.

Liberty was started by Thomas Road Baptist Church and the ministry of The Old Time Gospel Hour. In the late 70’s and early 80’s that ministry was giving away the Jesus First lapel pin. (See the slide)

This was a reminder for all of us that Jesus was to have first place in all things. But how do we measure this?

Luke 14:26, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.”

What is Jesus saying here? He is simply saying that our first priority must be Him, Jesus! Now, some may think this is pretty selfish, is it? Really, is it?

Why does Jesus want us to keep Him first? Because He is the only way to eternal life with the Father. Jesus wants us to keep Him first, so we stay connected to Him forever.

The 2nd aspect is:

-For His Glory, not a reward!

Paul writes this in:

1 Corinthians 10:31, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

Insert running illustration: Paul is telling us that everything we do should be for God’s glory. Do you remember the story of Eric Liddle? He was known as the flying Scotsman. He was a great sprinter who went to the Olympics to only have his race fall on a Sunday.

As a Christian and desiring to become a missionary he declined to run on a Sunday. Instead, he entered the quarter mile which he won the gold medal in. When he was asked about why he ran his answer was this, “When I run, I feel the pleasure of God.”

Do you feel the pleasure of God? What is more common than eating or drinking and Paul says when we do that, we are to do it for the glory of God.

This doesn’t mean we say a little prayer before eating or before everything we do, but that isn’t bad. The

idea here is what is our reason for doing everything that we do. Do you see the difference?

Is Jesus your reason for eating and drinking? Is He your reason for working and playing? Is He your reason for loving your spouse? Your children?

If Jesus is your reason, your motive for all that you do, you will be different. Do you see the difference?

The 3rd aspect of our priorities is:

-living sacrifice!

Romans 12:1, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”

This is your true and proper worship...giving God your body as a sacrifice, a living sacrifice.

What in the world does that mean? Right? What does that mean?

It means we make our life a present, a gift to God. We give it away. This means that God’s desires for our lives becomes our desire.

That seems like a lot, doesn't it? Kind of all inclusive. The 4th aspect of our priorities is our:

-heart, soul and mind!

Matthew 22:37, "Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

Well, that's the bottom line, isn't it? Heart, soul and mind, that pretty much covers everything doesn't it?

What are you holding back? Who does your heart belong to? Who do you love most in your life? If the answer is anything other than Jesus, well, you have a problem.

How about your soul, who does that belong to? Have you given it to God, trusting in Jesus for your salvation? Again, if you haven't you have a problem.

Finally, what owns your mind? Is it video games? The niceties of this world? Things you can't or shouldn't want? What occupies your thoughts? If it isn't Jesus, you have a problem.

You see, most people just want to be entertained when they come to church. They want to check off the list, they went to church, but they don't want it

to demand anything else from them but therein lies the problem. God wants it all, your heart, your soul and your mind.

The 2nd element is:

II. Our Design

This is what we were designed to be. God built us to live in union, in fellowship with Him. When our priorities are aligned with God's we live out what we were designed to be.

1. Worship

Isaiah 43:20-21, "The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, 21 the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise."

We were formed for worship! Unfortunately, those who are not actively living a life of worship don't know the beauty of worship. For those of us who worship, we know the peace and joy that a life of worship produces.

So, how can those who aren't worshippers learn about the benefits of worship? We tell them, we

share our experiences with them, we invite them into a life of worship.

The second aspect of our design is that we were created too:

2. Love God & Love People!

Matthew 22:37-39, "Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

We keep coming back to this passage, the 2 greatest commandments. Love God & Love People!

But did Jesus really mean this? Love everyone? Really? We know that husbands are to love their wives. We know that the church family is to love one another. But Jesus said that we are to love our neighbor.

But did He really mean that? Honestly, He can't be serious, can He? Does he know that I live next to...well, you know...a liberal.

Or maybe you live next door to someone with an alternate lifestyle. Jesus surely didn't mean them, could He?

Oh, I know what some of you are thinking. He didn't include my in-laws did He. Or that brother, you know the one, you call him the black sheep of the family. Surely Jesus didn't include him.

But just imagine, what if Jesus did mean them, all of them. He did mean them, didn't He? So, how then should we live with them? What would happen if they knew, they knew 100% that you loved them. What difference would that make, could that make in their lives?

Who are you in conflict with right now? How would that relationship change if that person knew, unconditionally, that you loved them?

The 3rd aspect of our design:

3. Unconditional obedience

John 14:15, "If you love me, keep my commands."

This is where many of us get hung up. We want to do our own thing and obeying someone else, well, to be

honest, that just isn't American. We are all about freedom.

Do you want to know something? God is all about freedom too. God gave us a freewill so we can decide to obey or not. But let's be clear, when we choose to disobey it doesn't provide us with greater freedom. No, rather choosing to disobey enslaves us.

You see, disobedience to God results in slavery to sin and obedience to God provides true freedom. That is how God designed us.

You know this to be true, don't you? Every time you sin you feel its weight on your back. Every lie you have ever told sat like a stone upon you. The time you cheated in school or took something from work is just another weight loading you down. That's not freedom, we call that a burden. Sin is a burden.

Do you feel the weight of sin in your life? You can cast all that weight off with one simple act, confession. Just tell God what He already know and be done with that weight.

Obedience is the doorway to freedom; will you enter through this door?

The 4th aspect of our design is:

4. Devotion

Psalm 100, "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."

Did you hear all the emotion of this passage? Joy, gladness, joyful, we are his, thanksgiving, praise, thanks, praise, good, love and faithfulness.

When we are honest this is exactly what our hearts yearn for because this is what God designed us for. So, when we live a life of devotion to Him it isn't a surprise that we enjoy this peace, joy and contentment no matter what our circumstances may be.

When we learn to live a life of devotion it helps us fulfill the 5th aspect of our design:

5. Hearts of thankfulness!

1 Thessalonians 5:18, “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

We all know someone who we might call “the complainer” don’t we? Whoever the complainer is in your life I’m sure they are the example you would least like to emulate.

When we give thanks in all circumstances, we become a sweet aroma to all around us. We just need to decide how we are going to live. Will you be a thankful person or a complainer?

Will we live the life God designed for us to live or will we reject that life for something of our own creation and do we honestly think our path will be so much better than what God has created for us?

Lucifer took that course, how do you think it is working out for him? Ultimately you have the choose, will you follow God’s plan or will you follow the example Lucifer choose?