

WHAT GIFTS DO WE BRING?

The Gift of Our Service!

A Sunday School was putting on a Christmas pageant which included the story of Mary and Joseph coming to the inn. One boy wanted so very much to be Joseph, but when the parts were handed out, a boy he didn't like was given that part, and he was assigned to be the innkeeper instead. He was pretty upset about this, but he didn't say anything to the director.

During all the rehearsals he thought what he might do the night of performance to get even with this rival who got to be Joseph. Finally, on the night of the performance, Mary and Joseph came walking across the stage. They knocked on the door of the inn, and the innkeeper opened the door and asked them gruffly what they wanted.

Joseph answered, "We'd like to have a room for the night." Suddenly the innkeeper threw the door open wide and said, "Great, come on in and I'll give you the best room in the house!"

For a few seconds poor little Joseph didn't know what to do. Thinking quickly on his feet, he looked

inside the door past the innkeeper then said, "No wife of mine is going to stay in dump like this. Come on, Mary, let's go to the barn." And just like that..... the play was back on track!

In our advent series we have examined the gifts brought by the wise men and two aspects of our lives which God gave to us. Today we explore other gifts God gave us, equipping us to serve Him.

The first gift given by God is:

I. Our Skills & Passions!

1 Peter 4:7-10, "The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

This passage provides great insight into the source and purpose of spiritual and natural gifts that God has given to us. First notice that the gifts you have received are not inherent in yourself. You got them from a source outside yourself, from God through the

Holy Spirit. And since God gave us the gifts, He can direct us how to use them.

Peter teaches us here that our gifts are to be used to serve others. That is the purpose of all of our gifts.

Scripture is clear that all spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit. It is also clear that no one has all the gifts and that there is no gift that everyone has. We are not all hands; we are not all feet. We each have our function which is unique to ourselves.

Some people teach that we all need a specific gift in order to be complete, even claiming that you don't have the entire Holy Spirit if you don't have this specific gift. That claim is not supported in Scripture anywhere. It only distracts from the purpose of the gifts you have been given and that is to serve others.

Now here is why we serve others:

Colossians 3:23-24, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

So, God gives you a gift to serve Him so ultimately you, after using that gift, can receive a reward from God. Do we see the beauty in God's design? God equips us to receive His blessing!

I also want to add one other observation: not only did God give us the gift to serve Him. He gives us the passion to serve Him. Our passions color the manner in which we serve.

The second gift given by God is:

II. Our Time!

The concept of serving one another carries into this gift from God also. Paul says this:

Romans 12:6-8, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."

So, what God is telling us here is for each of us to do our thing and this takes time. Whatever our gift is, it

requires that we invest time into using our gift to serve others.

A second aspect of this gift of time may possibly be the most important use of our time. Keep holy the Sabbath!

Exodus 20:8-11, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

First, can you believe how difficult it is to get people to do nothing? Really, God says take a day off and people just want to go out and do stuff, anything other than resting.

Second, it isn't just about doing nothing. It's making it holy, it's setting apart a day to rest and dedicate to

the Lord. Resting in Him means being with Him, walking in His presence, reading His words.

The Sabbath is a gift of God; will you accept it?

The third gift given by God is:

III. Our Treasure!

This gift is just like the others. God gives something to us, then we give it back, or part of it back and when we do it, we are blessed as we bless others.

That's just like God, isn't it?

Scripture teaches a lot about money. Here are a few items:

2 Corinthians 9:7, “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Are you a cheerful giver? God isn't going to brow beat you to give. When we realize that everything we have ultimately came from God it should create within us a desire, a cheerfulness, to give a portion back to God.

Next, we are to give in proportion to what we received.

Deuteronomy 16:17, “Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.”

Each of you means all of us. We are all to participate in giving. And we are to give in proportion to how we have been blessed. Aka this means if you have been given much you should give a larger amount. If you have been given little your gift will be smaller.

A matter of fact, one of the greatest gifts ever given was the smallest.

Luke 21:1-4, “As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. 2 He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3 “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

So, where did your treasure come from? How will you use it?

The fourth gift God has given us is:

IV. Our Mission

God has given us a purpose! We all know the Great Commission. We are to tell people the good news of salvation through Jesus...evangelism.

When I mention the Great Commission or Evangelism what do you think of? Is it fear of speaking to someone? Is it fear of getting it wrong? To often we narrow down the gospel to that act of us telling someone something.

Let’s look at it in a different way today. Let’s try to look at it from God’s perspective. You see, ultimately sharing the gospel with people is our gift of giving others to God.

To understand how God looks at evangelism we need to understand two realities. The first reality is:

1. The Reality of Hell!

Jesus spoke about hell more than any other person in Scripture and He spoke of it as a literal place. Listen to some of what He said.

Matthew 8:12, “But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 25:46, “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Revelation 20:14-15, “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Then listen to this story Jesus told His disciples:

Luke 16:19-24, “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’”

Skip to verse 27:

Luke 16:27-28, “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’”

Do we understand the seriousness of what Jesus is telling His disciples? Those who die without Jesus are doomed to eternity in a place of torment!

I have know idea of what this torment is. Is it a literal fire or is it the pain of separation from God having seen Him in all His glory at the judgement. Now knowing the beauty and majesty of God and being separated from Him forever.

I want my kids in heaven! I want my family in heaven!
I want my friends in heaven!

I’m not willing that any should perish but that all would have everlasting life...just like our Father desires.

People, hell is real. Separation from God is real and its hell. Do we believe that? If we really do it should scare us to our very core. It should drive us to our knees to cry out for those who don’t know Jesus.

One more passage on the reality of hell. Matthew 24-25 is about the 2nd coming of Jesus and there we read this:

Matthew 24:48-51, “But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ 49 and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. 50 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. 51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Will you be a faithful servant, ready for the return of the Master? Or will you live for your own purposes and be found wanting?

The second reality is this:

2. The Reality of Eternity!

If we simply look back a dozen verses in Matthew 24, we read this:

Matthew 24:36-44, “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of

Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

42 “Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Catch this, it’s important, if Jesus comes back for you, it means that He has prepared a place for you.

Has He prepared a place for you?