

The Gift of a Son

Isaiah 9:6

INTRODUCTION

One of my all-time favorite Christmas stories has for many years been the annual closing story of Paul Harvey's Christmas Eve broadcast. If that name of Paul Harvey is unfamiliar to you, he was a commentator on the ABC radio network for more than 50 year, from 1951 through 2008. At his peak, more than 24 million people listened to him every day.

A devout Christian, Harvey was not shy about sharing his faith on the air. His Christmas story is a good example of that. It is a story lives on because people like me find it to be especially meaningful at this time of year. The story goes like this:

Now the man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a scrooge. He was a kind, decent, mostly good man. He was generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he just did not believe all that incarnation stuff that churches proclaim at Christmas time. He just couldn't swallow the Jesus story, all of that stuff about God coming to Earth as a man. It just didn't make sense, and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. "I'm truly sorry to distress you," he told his wife, "but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve." He told her he would feel like a hypocrite. However, he promised he would wait up for her and the kids. So while the rest of the family went to the midnight service, he stayed at home.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window for a few minutes to watch as the flurries grew heavier and heavier, and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound. Then another, and then another. At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window. That was what had been making that sound.

Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could somehow direct the birds into that shelter.

Quickly he put on a coat and his boots, tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in. So he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs, sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted wide open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them. He could not. He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms. Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn.

And then he realized... they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can

trust me... that I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how? Any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.

"If only I could be a bird," he thought to himself, "and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to a place that is safe and warm. But to do that I would have to be one of them so they could see, and hear and understand."

At that moment the church bells began to ring. Above the sounds of the wind, the sound of the bells reached his ears. And he stood there listening – Adeste Fidelis – listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And as he did, he slowly sank to his knees in the snow.

To a world that is lost and thrashing around in the cold and darkness
To a world for whom shelter and warmth is available and accessible
To a world who cannot understand His efforts to rescue them
To a world that instead finds Him to be mysterious and terrifying ...

To that world – our world – to US, God sent His Son. His coming was proclaimed by the prophet of old:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is **given** ... (Isaiah 9:6)

The Son of God is the greatest of all Christmas gifts, guaranteed to be far better than anything that is under your tree right now. He is a gift that came wrapped, not in Hallmark paper and pretty bows, but instead wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger:

This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. (Luke 2:12)

You will find no tag on this gift to make it clear, but make no mistake ...

This gift is for you.

Thoughout this Advent and Christmas season our theme has been “Unwrapping Christmas.” Over the last month we have talked about how it is impossible to think of Christmas without thinking of the gifts that have been given.

- We give gifts to each other, but we didn't start that tradition.
- Amazon and Target didn't start it either.
- Long before Christmas catalogs were produced and letters were written to Santa, Wise Men from the East brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christ child
- And, as we have seen in this series of sermons, God has also given gifts to us, the greatest of which is ... His Son.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is **given** ... (Isaiah 9:6)

Christmas and gift-giving are inseparable.

Tonight I bring to you GOOD NEWS that should produce in your GREAT JOY. This good news is for all people born at all times:

Christmas comes to you wrapped up in one simple gift: Unto us a son is **given** ... (Isaiah 9:6)

And tonight I invite you to unwrap that gift.

#1: THIS GIFT OF A SON MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO KNOW GOD

In the final days of the earthly life of Jesus, the disciples were trying to process what life for them would be like once Jesus was captured and crucified. Uncertain about all this meant, it was Philip who made a simple request:

Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us. (John 14:8)

Just let us know God. If we know God, that will be enough. Jesus quickly responded to Philip's request by saying:

If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. (John 14:7)

"Knowing God" is far more than "knowing about God."

- "Knowing about God" is an academic pursuit called "the study of theology."

Many of you know that one of my hobbies is American Presidential history. In the last few days I have just finished reading a biography on Millard Fillmore (#13). Next on my reading list is a book about the life of John Quincy Adams (#6). I'm not an expert in this field, but over the years I have learned quite a bit about our presidents.

- I know about them, but I don't know them.
- In the same way it is possible to know "about" God and never really know Him.

Knowing God is instead built on a relationship.

- It is achieved over time, through worship, reading the Bible, and honestly talking to Him about the events and concerns of your life.

As that happens, you begin to discover that God is not some frightening figure who is trying to force you into a place you don't understand, but is instead someone who legitimately cares for you and wants the very best for you.

#2: THIS GIFT OF A SON MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S LOVE

There are times, yes, when you and I give Christmas gifts out of obligation, but most of the time when we give gifts so because we love the other person.

That's the motivation we read about in John 3:16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

He gave His Son. Why? Because He loved us.

In another passage, Jesus raises this question for us to consider:

Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will you give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:9-11)

Just as loving parents give gifts borne out of love to their children God extends His love to us through the gift of His Son.

One Scripture writer expressed his own personal amazement at that truth like this:

Look at what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

But until we realize that... until we realize that God is motivated ... not by a spirit of vindictiveness, but a heart of love ... we are like birds flopping around in the snowstorm ... all because we are suspicious of the motives of the God who is trying to show His love.

#3: THIS GIFT OF A SON MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO HAVE LIFE

This is the great truth of all. Because of the gift of Jesus, you and I can live. 1 John makes it very clear:

God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:11-12)

But it is more than just the promise of a home in heaven. Jesus Himself told us:

A thief has only one thing in mind—he wants to steal, slaughter, and destroy. But I have come to *give you everything in abundance, more than you expect*—life in its fullness until you overflow! (John 10:10, TPT)

As a congregation, we have been memorizing all of Isaiah 9:6 this month. It reads like this:

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,

and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Do you need someone who listens to your cries, who understands what you are experiencing, who cares when no one else seems to? The Son who has been given is to you a Wonderful Counselor.

Do you need someone to stand with you as you face the fiercest battles of your life, who is strong when you are weak, who continues strong when you grow weary? The Son who has been given is to you the Mighty God.

Do you need someone who is with you for the long haul, who provides stability and security when circumstances are frightening, whose hand you can grip so that you know everything will be all right? The Son who has been given is to you the Everlasting Father.

Do you need someone whose voice you can hear through the chaos, whose very presence calms your heart? The Son who has been given is to you the Prince of Peace.

Receiving this gift of a Son does not condemn you to a life of rule-following and misery. No, it frees you from all of that! A life of joy and freedom – one that lasts from now into eternity -- is yours as you unwrap the greatest of all Christmas gifts.

APPLICATION

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is **given** ... (Isaiah 9:6)

Let us pray ... Amen.