God's Unspeakable Gift

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BIBLE INSTITUTE HOUR
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By

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"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (II Cor. 9:15).

With the approach of Christmas, and the almost universal custom of gift-giving, we ask ourselves: Who was the greatest Giver, and what was the greatest Gift? The answer is not far to seek, for in Christ, God extended to every sinning son of Adam His "unspeakable gift."

It was unspeakable love that thought it.
It was unspeakable life that brought it.
It was unspeakable death that wrought it.
It is unspeakable joy when taught it.

This gift is "unspeakable" in the sense that it is indescribable by mortal men. In its almightiness it is beyond comprehension or comparison.

Unspeakable Love

Far back of the birth in Bethlehem was God's love for lost men. It had its beginning even before the foundations of the world were laid.

"I have loved thee," God declared through Jeremiah, "with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3).

"God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

"Thou hast in love for my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back" (Isa. 38:17).

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:10).

Salvation is God's love gesture toward us. It is the deepest expression of His heart. It is the choicest token of His holy affection.

All down through the ages, men have tried to find words to express the love of God in Christ. More than a century ago one of them wrote the following lines which graphically and gloriously—albeit inadequately—deal with this theme:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the heavens of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love
Of God above
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll
Contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

Oh, how great and gracious is the love of God!

There is an old story of a Roman army that completed the conquest of a German province. The vanquished were waiting to learn their fate. Arrayed before the Roman general were the defeated king, the king's son, the king's son's wife, and a number of nobles. Before the general could say a word, the king's son stepped forward and with passionate entreaties begged that his life might be taken, and the others be spared.

To the astonishment of all, the general gave sentence that the offer should be accepted. Amid the shouts of acclamation that followed, only one person, the wife of the king's son, remained silent. Finally the king asked her sternly whether she had no word of thanks for their merciful conqueror.

But she replied, "I have neither eyes nor ears for any, save for the dear one who offered to die for me."

This Christmas, may God give us eyes to see only the One who loved us even unto death. May He grant us ears to hear only Him who gave Himself for us. Let this
fact eclipse all others; let this love absorb us, and let this Person possess us.

Martin Luther, in his prison cell, was given to meditating on the love of God. One day he thought of a simple device to help him in this spiritual exercise. With a piece of chalk he drew a cross on the wall of the cell. At the top he wrote “height,” at the bottom, “depth,” at the sides, “length” and “breadth.” With praise to God he saw at once that in the cross, the outreach of God’s mercy was endlessly extended in every direction.

Oh, the love that drew salvation’s plan,
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man,
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary!

We too should dwell upon the love of God that led to the birth of our Redeemer. Truly it was unspeakable love that planned the unspeakable gift by which we are granted fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When Nansen, the explorer, was looking for the North Pole he found himself in very deep water. He tried to take the soundings but his line would not reach bottom. In his diary he wrote the date, the length of the line, and added the words “deeper than that.” The next day he lengthened the line, dropped it again, and again it failed to touch bottom, and he wrote as he had written the day before. Finally he gathered all the line that he could find and dropped it, but it found no resting place and he wrote once more, “deeper than that.” Thus also is the tender mercy of Jehovah—deeper than man can know.

Contemplation of the love of God can sweeten life’s bitterest days. It may be that, at this Christmas season, your heart is heavy. You have burdens which you cannot describe to others. There may be a vacant chair in the family circle, and you long for the tender touch of one you have loved and lost a while. Child of God, lose yourself in the Father’s love. It is a safe and blessed place in which to rest. George Matheson found this true, and when blindness and the frustration of his ambitions crowded painfully upon him he could sing:

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee...

There is no other sanctuary for the harassed soul that is nearer or better than the shelter of God’s love.

A businessman was called home one morning because of the sudden illness of his wife. An hour after he reached her side she went to be with the Lord, leaving him with the care of two small children. That night he could not quiet the little ones. Finally he lay down beside them and held them close in his arms. His own heart was nearly breaking. For some time he thought surely the children were asleep. He was surprised to hear a little voice say, “Daddy.”

“Yes, dear,” he answered.

“Daddy, it’s awfully dark here... I can’t see you at all. But you love me anyway, don’t you Daddy... even when I can’t see you.”

The child’s words were a message of comfort to the parent’s lonely heart. You likewise may be “in the dark.” Remember, God loves you; He is holding you in His everlasting arms, if you by faith have become His child. Though you may not see His face in the midnight of your present experience, He whispers to you, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

**Unspeakable Life**

In the second place, as we consider God’s Christmas gift to men, we see that it was an unspeakable life that brought it. The Lord Jesus Christ, very God of very God,
"humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). Voluntarily He assumed our humanity, for only thus could our salvation be accomplished. He was the representative Man, standing with and yet ever above all people. No stain of iniquity, no shade of evil, no foul thing ever attached to Him. From His birth in Bethlehem to His death on Calvary and ascension to God's right hand, He was "holy, harmless, separate from sinners." At no time did He yield the members of His body to the service of sin. He was the only One since the fall of Adam of whom it could truly be said, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). No other person spoke as He spoke or lived as He lived: "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Among the choice writings of God's great servant, C. I. Scofield, is a message on "The Loveliness of Christ" which has been widely circulated.

"It is in His way with sinners," the writer points out, "that the supreme loveliness of Jesus is most sweetly shown. How gentle He is, yet how faithful; how considerate; how respectful! Nicodemus, candid and sincere, but proud of his position as a master in Israel and timid lest he should imperil it, comes to Jesus by night. Before he departs, the Master has shown him his utter ignorance of the first step toward the kingdom, and he goes away to think over the personal application of the truth: 'they loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.' But he has not heard one harsh word, one utterance that would wound his self-respect. ... Christ's gentleness is never weak; His courage is never brutal. 'He is altogether lovely.'"

Think of the Saviour's sympathy for derelicts and human wrecks. Consider His compassion for the handicapped and the ostracized outcasts of society. Remember His scorn of empty ostentation. Recall His love for little children. In Him, all these qualities were raised to the highest superlative.

His was indeed a wonderful life, and the more one looks at it, the more one is amazed at the grace and glory that issue from it. Someone has aptly expressed the truth in these lines:

No mere man could forgive my sin,
And break its reigning power within,
And reach down to my deepest need,
And give life that is life indeed.
All that God could ever be
The Man Christ Jesus is to me.

We live in a subtle age when the humanity of Jesus is emphasized to the exclusion of His deity. But no one has ever understood, even slightly, that beautiful life who has not seen its true purpose: a necessary part of vicarious death, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

**Unspeakable Death**

In our consideration of God's great gift, we observe that it was indeed an unspeakable death that wrought it. I do not know how anyone can honestly study into the death of Christ without finding in it a portrayal of vicarious atonement. Jesus came into the world to die, and while He hung upon the tree "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself."

In I John 2:2 we read: "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world." The word "propitiation" comes from the same Greek word that is translated "mercy seat." You will recall that in Old Testament days the ark stood in the Holy of Holies, at the far end. Upon this box was a golden lid, or mercy seat. Every year the high priest sprinkled blood upon it, and in the succession of hundreds
of years it must have become so heavily encrusted with blood that one could scarcely see the gold. The cherubim bent on either side of it, and in the middle, between them, the Shekinah light shone—that eternal brightness that you and I will see some day burning before the throne—the sevenfold light of God. At this mercy seat, covered with blood and radiant with glory, God met men.

The cross is God’s mercy seat for the world, the only ground upon which sinful man may draw near to God. At the cross, righteousness and peace kissed each other, and God remained just and justifier of those who believe in Jesus. The mercy seat of the Old Testament is a faint shadow of Calvary, and the blood that was sprinkled upon it was a type of that which was poured out when the Son of God gave His life a ransom for many. This was indeed an unspeakable death; in fact no other death could have made possible the plan of salvation in which we so greatly rejoice.

We ought ever to bear in mind that God does not love a lost world because Christ died, but Christ died because God loved a lost world. It was not the death of Christ that brought God’s love into the world, but it was God’s love that sent Christ into the world to die.

When I was a lad in Australia, I observed a stone figure of a lamb atop a high building. This was a strange sight to me, for neither the structure itself nor the neighborhood had anything to do with sheep-raising. I asked my father what it meant, and he told me this story.

When the building was in process of erection, a man accidentally fell from the scaffolding. His fellow workers rushed to him, expecting to find him dead. Instead, they saw that he was unhurt, standing and walking about. He was looking at a dying lamb, with blood oozing from its wounds.

At the moment of the man’s fall, a flock of sheep was being driven along the road near the site of the new building. One lamb took upon his body the weight of the man’s fall, and though the creature gave up its life in so doing, it saved the life of another. The one whom the lamb had befriended later placed a statue of a lamb at the top of the building in commemoration of the event that had so profoundly impressed him and to which he owed his very existence.

Jesus Christ is God’s Lamb. He “got in the way” of our forever perishing lives, and when we were plunging to eternal ruin, He, in His own body, took the weight of our sin so that we might live. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

I well remember a certain Christmas season in Chicago. Evangelistic meetings that had been in progress in a downtown church continued with unabated interest right through the holidays. The preacher was the intrepid John Harper, and though none of us knew it then, he was pleading from the threshold to Glory, for he lost his life just a few weeks later on the Titanic.

At that time I thought I was a Christian. I had said so, quite believingly. As a boy I had been brought up to attend church, and I knew all the shibboleths. But when Harper preached from that mighty text, “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,” I saw for the first time how great was the price the Saviour had paid for my salvation. What a revelation this was to me! When the invitation was given, I went forward to receive that gift of eternal life which the death of Christ made available to me and to every other sinner.

I rose from my knees, satisfied. To right and left of
the organ loft were wall texts in large letters that I had seen many times before, but now they had new meaning, for they spoke of Christ who, so far as this life of mine was concerned, was thenceforth to have the pre-eminence in all things. I read: “Who gave himself for us,” and “His name alone shall be exalted.” People were singing all around me, a song about the cross:

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God;
All earthly things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

That has been the prayer of my heart ever since, and may God grant that it may continue to be. May I ask: Is it yours?

Arthur M. Barnett, M.D., physician and missionary, has written a valuable study of “Life... in the Blood.” The doctor states that, more and more, men of science are accepting the truth that “blood... constitutes one of the finest, if not the finest, cure for many diseases.” He declares: “There is scarcely a disease for which transfusions are not given. A graph of the number of transfusions given in a recent three years in the hospital in which I worked would show the increase on a practically perpendicular line, so important has the blood transfusion become in modern medicine... In our physical bodies, we cannot appropriate any breath whatsoever unless we do so through our blood. So also in the spiritual realm, we can partake of no spiritual life whatsoever unless we do so through the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. He Himself said: ‘Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you’ (John 6:53).”

Men claim that the doctrine of atonement by blood is distasteful to them. Did our wounded on recent battle-fields insist that human blood, poured in life-giving stream into their bodies, was “distasteful” to them? Did their anguished loved ones at home look upon this method of modern science as a gruesome thing? No. And any man is inconsistent who does not regard with equal honesty the value of the blood of Christ by which means alone spiritual life is imparted and sustained.

Oh, thank God for the death of Christ. The precious blood is an unspeakable gift.

Because of Christ’s sacrifice, the sting of death has been removed for every one who trusts in Him. It was the silver-tongued orator, William Jennings Bryan, who declared: “Christ has made of death a narrow sunlit strip between the companionship of yesterday and the reunion of tomorrow.” While he spoke fearlessly against evolution that “strikes out the stars and deepens the gloom that enshrouds the tomb,” he added his own testimony to the comfort which faith in Christ affords in life’s most trying hours.

In his early life, D. L. Moody’s outlook upon death was expressed in these words: “I felt terribly afraid when I thought of the cold hand of death feeling for the cords of life, and being launched into eternity, to go on into an unknown world.” But when the end drew near he could say: “This is my triumph; this is my coronation day. I have been looking forward to it for years.” Life-long association with the Christ of the cross had prepared him for his passing, in triumph, across that “narrow starlit strip” into the presence of the King—and it will do the same for us.

Unspeakable Joy

Finally, this truth about God’s gift of salvation is unspeakable joy to those who are taught it. Pleasure that
is deep and true and rooted in God is the portion of the
Christian, and it belongs only to him. Someone has said,
"The devil has no happy old men." But what beaming
Christians there are! Many of them have come a long
way on life's path; they have borne the burden and heat
of the day; their physical powers are waning. But how
their faces shine with holy joy! They are a testimony to
the grace of God.

Christians—be they young or old—have every
reason to rejoice. They have passed from death unto life. Their
transgressions are pardoned. They are freed from the pen­
alty of sin. They are provided with the Word of God and
the Spirit of God as their companions through life. They
are given daily strength and guidance. They are promised
eventual likeness to Christ Himself: "For when we shall
see him we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

Unspeakable joy!

The question now arises: What shall we do with
God's gift?

Many of us still can recall some painful scenes in our
life when, as a child or as an adult, we gave a present to
someone we loved, and that one failed to appreciate it.
Perhaps it was only a handmade object representing little
monetary value, or it may have been an expensive token;
but we pressed into it our choicest affection, and when
that was unobserved, our hearts were broken. Even while
we masked our feelings we knew the truth of the poet's
words:

How sharper than a serpent's tooth
To have a thankless child!

God has presented to us, in Christ, the greatest Gift.
Will we ignore His love? Will we spurn His favor? Will
we thus break His heart? If we do, it will be because we

fail properly to evaluate the worth of the Gift or the
affection of the Giver.

A number of years ago, a Christian institution erected
a new building as its headquarters. A friend of the work,
a gentleman who was a lover of fine art, brought a beau­
tiful painting, explaining that he would like to have it
displayed within the new building since it was too large
for the apartment he was occupying at the time.

In the course of the weeks that followed, the picture
was greatly admired by those who saw it. Then circum­
cstances arose which made it necessary for the owner to
obtain certain funds, and he offered to sell the painting
to his Christian friends for fifty dollars. They declined
his proposition, and he cut the price to twenty-five
dollars—still without effecting a sale. When the owner
died shortly thereafter, the painting was removed to the
studio of an art authority for appraisal. Immediately it
was recognized as the work of a master, and the sum of
fifty thousand dollars was paid for it.

What an opportunity those dear Christian people for­
feited because they did not inform themselves as to the
true worth of that which was within their grasp!

I beseech you at this Christmas season: Consider Jesus
Christ, God's "unspeakable gift." He is the brightness of
His glory and the express image of His person. He up­
holds all things by the word of His power. When, by
Himself, He purged our sins, He sat down on the right
hand of the majesty on high. (See Hebrews 1:3.) Won­
derful Gift!

This Christmas, will you reach out the hand of faith
and receive Jesus Christ? Whoever you are, you are in
one of two positions. Either you are a sinner, and you
need Him as your Saviour, "for there is none other name
under heaven given among men, whereby we must be
saved” (Acts 4:12); or else you are a believer, and more and more you need to recognize Him as your Lord. There is no middle ground.

It may be that for a long time you have declined His offer of salvation. You have thought yourself equal to any emergency that might face you. That is not the main issue. The first question is: What will you do with God's love Gift, the Lord Jesus Christ?

You know you need to be saved. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (Isa. 53:6).

You know you cannot save yourself. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3:5, 6).

This Christmas, why not take God's proffered Treasure, heaven's Dear One, to be your personal Saviour? “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17).

Perhaps, however, you have already received Christ into your heart. You rejoice in His Saviourhood. But do you know anything, practically, about His Lordship in your life? Every one of us who names the name of Christ should search our hearts concerning this matter. For while one may have appropriated by faith all of Him, it is still sadly possible that He does not possess all of us.

Let us ask God to give us new capacity for appreciation of the Son of His love, and new courage to yield to His will in all things. Thus will we become victorious Christians, to an extent that we have never known before.

Several years ago a twelve-year-old Chinese girl was withdrawn from a mission school where she was a boarder. Her parents said she must now earn her living, and she was sent to a city thirty miles away to work in a heathen home. She came to the room of the lady missionary to say good-by. Then, turning round once more she said quietly, “I shall be the only Christian in that city.”

“Yes,” replied the missionary, “but you know who is going with you.”

“Oh, yes,” said the little child, her face lighted up with joy. “The Lord Jesus Christ is with me.”

In that heathen city the small Christian refused to worship idols or do reverence to the household gods, and as a result was not a little persecuted. She showed no resentment, but was always sweet and kindly whatever they said or did.

A month or two later, two men walked those thirty miles and called at the mission school. They said they were sent to ask whether the Christians would send someone to teach them about Jesus and start a school. Now the missionaries had several times tried to get permission to work in that city, but always in vain.

“Why do you ask us to do this?” they inquired of their visitors.

The reply was that a little girl of twelve had come to the city, and everyone who visited the house where she worked was struck by her happy, radiant face, and gentle, kindly manner. When asked about it she would always speak of “Jesus, my Lord.”

“We want the other girls in our city to become like that Christian girl,” the two men added.

One little radiant Christian child—because the Saviour was the welcomed Sovereign of her life—had opened a hostile city to the gospel message.

This Christmas, should Christ tarry, songs of the
nativity will again be sung. May that old favorite of many years have new meaning for every child of God:

Joy to the world! THE LORD is come:
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing.

Unspeakable love...unspeakable life...unspeakable death...unspeakable joy—"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."