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Rethinking Christmas: Rethinking A Holiday That Has Lost Its Meaning
“Christmas Is About Gifts of Meaning Not Meaningless Gifts”
(Part 3)

Intro: Let’s face it...some gifts we receive at Christmas have significant meaning while others are pretty meaningless. For years, every Christmas season advertisers bring out certain products to pawn off on the public. (These only come out at Christmas) Chia Pet / The Clapper / The Ove-Glove ...Men, can you imagine buying your wife a set of Ove-Gloves for Christmas? Can you say “Marriage counseling?”

Christmas reminds us that Jesus came to bring us gifts of meaning. The gifts that Jesus brings are so much more than mere trinkets under a tree or any material possession. His gifts can have significant meaning and can radically change our lives.

- What are these gifts that Jesus brought? Let me give you 4 very meaningful gifts that every person can unwrap and experience this Christmas.

I. Jesus Gave Us The Gift of Compassion

A. Compassion is what God feels towards us

- Have you ever wondered what God feels towards you? Does He look down from heaven and see your life and look at you with disgust / anger / disappointment? NO! He sees your struggles / your pain / even your sin and feels compassion for you.

Is. 30:18 “Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you...” (NASB)

Ps. 103:8, 10 “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love...he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.” (NLT)

1. It was God’s compassion that moved Him to become a man. It was compassion that caused the God of the universe to be born as a baby. It was God’s compassion for our hopeless condition that moved Him to do something so radical.
2. During Jesus’ life, compassion is one of the most recorded emotions we see Jesus exhibiting. (See the crowd / demon possessed / physically impaired = compassion)
Matt. 9:36 “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (NLT)

3. In order to have compassion, one must be able to emotionally place oneself in the experience of another. Be able to walk in another person's shoes if you will. This is exactly what Jesus did.
 4. He put on human flesh / physical clothing / came and walked in our world. And it was His compassion for you that compelled Him to do such a thing.
- Experiencing compassion impacts us / receiving compassion from another is powerful: Story: If you have ever been the recipient of someone's compassion you know how powerful this is.
 - If you have any questions about how God feels about you today. Regardless of your life / your choices / your circumstances...He feels great compassion towards you. AND His compassion is something you can experience.
- B. Compassion is a gift we should give to others
- Matt. 9:13 "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' ..." (NASB)*
1. The sacrifices were the monetary and physical gifts that the religious leaders would offer at the temple. Jesus said that these gifts are meaningless. The gift that really means something, is the gift of compassion to those who are hurting.
 2. Unfortunately what most people experience today is judgment and condemnation rather than compassion. You know, it's just so easy to judge people rather than care for them. Judging people closes off your heart – protects it from feeling / acting.
 3. Foothill is part of a larger organization during Christmas called "Compassion In Action". (explain) I like this name! WHY? Because genuine compassion is compelled to action. Real compassion does something about it! More than mere lip service.
 4. This is what God did for us. His compassion for us compelled Him to intervene in our lives because we couldn't help ourselves. This is a great model for us.
 5. If you have been a recipient of God's compassion / if you have tasted and experienced this amazing gift / how may God want you to share this with others? Who has God put in your life who desperately needs some compassion? Are you closing your heart to needs around you or are you willing to be moved by their needs?
- Who may God want you to extend some compassion to this Christmas?

II. Jesus Gave Us The Gift of Sacrifice

- A. Jesus was willing to be uncomfortable to meet our need
1. Sacrifice is all about being uncomfortable. Jesus left the comfort of heaven for the smells and sounds of a manger. Left His exalted position and embraced humility. Recognized we had a debt that no one pay but Himself. Willingly sacrificed His life on a cross in order to satisfy that debt.
- I think it is very easy to forget the tremendous sacrifice Jesus made in order to rescue us. *Is. 53:5-6 "But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten*

so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all." (NLT)

Col. 2:14 "He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross." (NLT)

2. The manger scene simply represents the entry point of Jesus' plan for sacrificing His life for us. This table represents the culmination of it. The manger was the beginning, and then on the cross Jesus said, "It is finished!"
3. Sometimes I think we get so over familiar with certain stories that they can lose their impact. We think that it was an easy thing for Jesus to be born, live and then die for us. After all, He's God...how tough can it be. Well, let's see....
4. He was born in a barn / had to flee for His life / raised by peasants / grew up in relative obscurity / came from a town with a bad reputation – Nazareth / was rejected by the religious leaders / His closest friends abandoned Him in His greatest need / died in one of the most horrifying ways – slow agonizing death by crucifixion – suffocate.
5. You're thinking what would possess someone to sacrifice this much? His love and compassion for you. His sacrifice for us is a meaningful gift because of what it accomplished. It is also a great example for us to follow.

B. Are we willing to be uncomfortable to meet the needs of others?

Eph. 5:2 "Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us,..." (NLT)

1. Here's the example that we are follow...offering ourselves in a sacrificial way in order to love people in tangibly. (Just like Jesus did) Being willing to make some sacrifices to meet the needs of others is another very meaningful gift.
2. The natural tendency is to pursue comfort. I like being comfortable. But sacrifice is all about being willing to embrace discomfort in order to bring comfort to those who have none.
3. How can you give the gift of sacrifice this Christmas? Sacrifice can take many forms: It could be your time – gift and food boxes - / money - spending less on presents in order to give some away / comfort zone – being willing to do something that would make you uncomfortable in order to meet a need – neighbor, nursing home, cooking a dinner for someone – (talk about those who do this)
4. Jesus gave us the gift of sacrifice. May we be willing to do the same.

III. Jesus Gave Us The Gift of Forgiveness

A. Jesus' gift of forgiveness is unconditional

Eph. 1:5,7 "God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure...He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the

blood of his Son and forgave our sins.” (NLT)

1. This was God’s intention all along. He wanted to forgive us and bring us back into His family. Jesus was born in order to fulfill this mission. His life was to culminate at the cross providing forgiveness to the human race.
2. Our forgiveness had to be purchased. WHY? Because our sin required a cost. God is a holy and just God. Our sin was a violation of God’s spiritual and moral laws. Just as in our society, breaking laws requires payment. Justice requires payment. So also our sin required payment. God’s justice had to be satisfied. This is why Jesus died. (This table represents the price paid for our forgiveness)

Col. 2:13 “You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.” (NLT)

3. The great gift of God’s forgiveness is something we cannot ever earn or work towards. Jesus did it all. It’s already provided. We must simply receive it. It is unconditional and free...available to everyone.
4. We never have to make ourselves forgivable to God / try to clean ourselves up so He will forgive us / or think that we have gone beyond the reaches of His forgiveness. No matter who we are or what we’ve done, forgiveness through Jesus is available.
5. Have you unwrapped this gift? Have you experienced what it is like to be completely forgiven / No more guilt – shame – regret – self condemnation. Just the emotional freedom that comes from being forgiven.
6. HOW? It’s a gift. Simply receive it. Tell Him you’d like to receive Him and His forgiveness. (Once we experience his gift...)

B. Jesus wants us to extend His gift of forgiveness to others

Eph. 4:32 “Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” (NLT)

1. Since we have been recipients of this wonderful gift, how can we not extend the same gift of forgiveness to others? Forgiven people must be forgivers.
2. Who do you need to forgive this Christmas? What grudges do you need to let go of? What old offenses have you been hanging on to for years? Can you give the gift of forgiveness?
3. You may be thinking, “They don’t deserve it!” That may be true. But you didn’t deserve forgiveness either. And yet it was provided for you. We don’t offer forgiveness because it is fair or because someone deserves it. It’s a gift!
4. We choose to give the gift of forgiveness because God commands it. WHY would He command such an unfair thing? Because it’s the only way for you to be fair to yourself. It’s the only way for you to be emotionally free from those who hurt you.
5. Here is a forgiveness exercise. Get a small box / put the names of those you need to forgive in the box plus the list of offenses / gift wrap it / Go before the Lord and

choose to give the gift of forgiveness to these people / then get rid of the box.

IV. Jesus Gave Us The Gift of Eternal Life

John 3:16-17 “For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” (NLT)

John 10:28 “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish...” (NIV)

A. Jesus’ gift gives us the assurance of eternity

1. Eternity was never something God wanted us to worry and fret over. Eternity is something God wants us to anticipate and look forward to.

I John 5:13 “I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.” (NLT) Not wonder or hope!

2. Jesus came and eliminated the fear of death / the anxiety over our eternal location / the dread over any future judgment / and the hopelessness that comes from wondering if you’ve done enough to “make it”.
3. Jesus’ compassion compelled Him to make the sacrifice that purchased our forgiveness so we can know we have eternal life! You see, these gifts are a package. They all belong together.
4. It’s like that new Verizon commercial. “There’s more.” As soon as you unwrap one you discover...”There’s more!” Compassion – Sacrifice – Forgiveness – Eternal Life

B. Jesus’ gift must be accepted

John 1:12-13 “But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.” (NLT)

1. Too often this gift is rejected like when you get mail that’s not your own. You write: “Return to Sender”, on the package, and send it back. This is a gift you don’t want to send back. This is one you want to open!
2. The real question is “Have you?” This verse talks about 2 very important things...believing and accepting. I see so many people that stop at the believing part and fail to realize there needs to be a receiving part. What do I mean?
3. We get deliveries at the church office all the time. When the UPS guys show up they bring the packages into the office and then someone has to sign their computerized pad to accept the shipment. I may believe those packages are for us, but until I sign my name, I haven’t accepted them yet.
4. You may believe in Jesus, and His gifts, but until you’ve put your name next to His, you haven’t accepted them as yours yet. Until you personally tell Him, “Yes, I want your compassion / I accept your sacrifice / I embrace your forgiveness / I want this eternal life / all those things just stay unopened.
5. Before we celebrate with communion today, I want to give you an opportunity to

make sure. I want to give you an opportunity to unwrap these gifts this morning.

- For those of you who have experienced these amazing gifts, take the time to thank Him and be amazed at His love and compassion for you.

Prayer

Communion.