

**A New People**  
*Unwrapping the Gospel*  
By Jimmy Davis

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**Bible Text:** Ezekiel 36:22-28; Romans 8:28-30  
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Happy New Year, Metrocrest. Is it too early? It is the New Year for the church because it is the first Sunday of Advent and the church calendar traditionally starts with Advent so Happy New Year. Let's roll into this new year together and let's do it by going to God's word together as we unwrap the Gospel together this Advent and Christmas season. I'll be looking at three different passages, one of which you've already heard. All of those passages are put in this green insert that you'll find in your program or you can read along with me in your Bible. Our Old Testament reading comes from the book of Ezekiel where God describes the new covenant that he makes with his people.

Hear the word of the Lord from Ezekiel 36,

22 Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. 23 And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. 24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

And now for our New Testament reading, the book of Romans 8:28-30. Hear the word of the Lord.

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those

whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

In our Gospel reading this morning was our call to worship but let me read those verses again, Luke 1:67-79. This is Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist just after John has been circumcised and it has been confirmed that his name will be John and Zechariah has received his voice back and here he praises God.

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

*Father, we ask that you would by the power of your Spirit, give us light, illumine our hearts to understand your word, to understand the story of the birth of your Son, this gift of salvation, the good news of the Gospel. Help us not only to understand it but to know a little more today about what it means to live it and let it live in and through us. We ask that you would do this. Jesus, unless you show up here by the power of your Spirit, nothing good happens. Please come. Come, Holy Spirit. Speak to your people, encourage us, equip us, we ask in the name of our Savior, Jesus. Amen.*

Well, you've heard the expression "that's as slow as Christmas." Why do we say that? Because it seems, especially if you're young, that Christmas will never get here. It's slow. Now, the older I get, the quicker it seems to come and I'm not ready for it but part of what makes Christmas slow is the anticipation, the eager awaiting for that morning to arrive.

I'm going to tell a story that I would like to put a little disclaimer on like they do with the commercials on TV. Children, do not try this at home. Parents, forgive me for telling the story. There was the year that I decided to be clever and to unwrap as many of the gifts

that I could that were already under the tree early, and being a latchkey kid, my parents were both working full-time and I had idle time at home by myself in the afternoon so I thought, "I'll try this." So I took several of the gifts that were under the tree, my mom learned a lesson after this, don't put things under the tree too early, I took several of those wrapped gifts and carefully unadhesified the tape and unwrapped the present so that I could see what I was getting. So I did. I think there was a chemistry set and a couple other things but the one I was excited about was the Atari videogame cartridge that I had asked for, some game about a chicken trying to cross the road; it's something like Frogger. But now that one, I went back to every afternoon and I would unwrap it, carefully slide it out of the paper, open up the game, plug it in and play. I played that thing every afternoon for about two weeks and I was excited about that present.

Now, kids, before you get the idea that this is a smart thing to do, I have to tell you that was the most boring Christmas morning I have ever experienced in my entire life. I got up Christmas morning, I knew everything that was there, pretty much, there were a few things that weren't there before but everything was old to me already. I was bored with it and my parents were amazed at how good I already was at this videogame I had just received. But I was even bored with that. So it doesn't work. Don't do that. Save the surprise, okay? And parents, don't put the presents out. Just don't do it, or use duct tape. They didn't know until I told them a year later what I had done.

I tell that story because there were some of those gifts that I was eager to see what was in them and I unwrapped them and saw it was a chemistry set, cool, but I didn't play with it. The one that I was excited about that I actually took out and played with was the game and I was so excited about that. It was what I had been wanting to get. And that's an illustration there of the eagerness we have for these gifts that we're looking forward to but there are some gifts that some certain members of your family give you that you are never eager to open. You know what I'm talking about. It's the gift from aunt Myrtle. Your aunt Myrtle, I'm sorry if someone has an aunt Myrtle. I tried to pick a name, but it's the gift that aunt Myrtle gives you. You unwrap it and there it is, once again, yet another hand crocheted turtleneck Christmas sweater that's either too small, too big, and it's definitely too ugly to wear in public. Nasty. You just don't look forward to opening that gift because you know what's there and you'd rather just leave it wrapped and under the tree because you're going to see it again next year. You know, I don't want as I have been thinking about this Christmas season and Advent, you know, Advent is all about anticipating the birth of Jesus and I don't want for myself or for you, I don't want the gift of Jesus as he is offered to us in the Gospel to be one of those aunt Myrtle kind of gifts that we just go, "Yeah, there it is again. The same as last year," and that we leave it wrapped and under the tree. We're never eager to open it up and to put it on and to put it to use in our daily lives. I don't want the Gospel to be that way. I don't want Jesus to be like that to me, but I fear here I am again. I fear it's going to happen again, that I somehow will be bored with what Paul calls God's inexpressible indescribable gift. I want to be eager to open up the Gospel this Christmas season, to open it up, to put it on, to wear it around, to live in it, and I know you want that too.

So what I would like us to do is to work on that in these five Sundays. I don't want us to leave this Christmas season thinking that the Gospel is something that's either out of style or too small for us or even something that's just too big, too big we're not even going to try to understand it or live it. I want us to eagerly rip it open and put it on. So in order to do that, we're going to look these five Sundays at five gifts that the Gospel, that Jesus gives us in the Gospel, and each week as we look at one of those gifts and you'll see them right in the center, there is a chart in the center of your handout, as we look at each of these gifts, we're going to talk about how they fit into the story of Jesus, then we're going to think a little more deeply about what the gift means, and then we'll think about how we can put that gift to use as individuals and as a congregation in the coming year.

Now, there is an approach I want to take to these that may be a bit different but I found it to be helpful to me. I am convinced that one of the reasons that I lose my enthusiasm for the gift of Jesus as he is offered in the Gospel is that I have relegated the story of Jesus to the fiction shelf in the library of my soul. The Christmas story has become so acculturated and encrusted with the stuff, the cultural trappings of our society that we've just taken it off the nonfiction shelf where it belongs and we put it on the fiction shelf with all the other traditional fairytales that have no power to change our daily lives, except maybe it has the temporary power, the seasonal power to get us into the Christmas spirit or it empowers us enough to make us want to decorate our homes, or sing different songs than we're used to singing normally, maybe it empowers us to want to give some stuff to people that we don't normally do during the year and it certainly empowers me to expect somebody to give me stuff. But even those little changes only last for a season and this is not a story that is just seasonal and limited in its power. It's a story, true, but it's the true story and if you and I would love that story and learn that story and live in that story, it will not merely get us into the Christmas spirit, it will get the transforming Spirit of Christ into us. That's what I want for me and for you this year. The Christmas story, the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is unfolded in the 66 books of this Bible, if we receive it by faith as the true story of everything, it will transform us.

So in order to help us, to help me, I'm selfishly going to preach this the way that's going to help me and I hope you get some residual effect. In order to help us get the Christmas story off of greeting cards and TV holiday specials and plastic sets in the yard, I want us to look at the Christmas story through 3D glasses. I want us to see it in 3D and I have mentioned this before but I'm going to bring it up again because I want this to be the framework every week of how we look at these five gifts. It has helped me lately to read the Bible in 3D and by that I mean read the Bible in three ways: as the drama that God is telling that helps us love the story of Jesus; as the doctrine that God has given us to help us learn the story of Jesus; but also as the directions that God has given us in his word to help us live in the story of Jesus. In that handout, there is a little short piece that I put in there for you to read later just to kind of help you get that in your mind but let me explain what I mean. I want to take each of these five gifts and I want to put them in the context of the drama. I want to put them in the context of Act I, Act II, Act III, Act IV of the story of the Bible.

Let me briefly remind you of what those are. Act I, what we might call creation or it could be called a reflection. God creates a people to be in community and on mission with him, to share and show his glory and goodness throughout all creation forever. He created us with "you first" hearts that look at God and each other and all that God has made and say, "No, you first." We were created to reflect the relationship and rulership of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That's Act I.

But in Act II, there's a rebellion, the fall. The people God created rebelled against him and became a "me first" community, on a "me first" mission, and thus incurring for themselves the righteous judgment and wrath of God for their sin and rebellion. People are now from Act II on, under the penalty and power of sin. We have a broken relationship with God, with each other and with all that God has made.

But God has a plan, Act III. Act III is called redemption. In Act III, God plans for, promises and provides a way to redeem and re-create a people for himself, a people who will be in community and on mission with him through Jesus. So that's where our reading in Ezekiel 36 comes from. This is a description of this new covenant, this new arrangement that God was making with his people that would transform them from the inside out, enabling them to be a new people with a new purity and have a new passion and a new power and a new partnership with God. Jesus was born to bring these promised gifts of the new covenant to his people, to us, so that we no longer live under the penalty and the power of sin. That's where the story of Jesus, the Christmas story, fits into the wider drama.

But there's more to come, Act IV is yet to come, and that's the restoration. One day all of God's people will be in community and on mission perfectly with God to share and show his glory and goodness forever in a new heaven, in a new earth, and we will no longer experience the presence of sin. That's where we're headed.

So what we're going to try to do is put these five gifts in the context of that bigger story each week. But there's also doctrine and directions in the Bible, not just the story. The third question of our Shorter Catechism asks this question: what does the Bible primarily teach? And the answer it gives is this: the Bible primarily teaches what man must believe concerning God and what God requires of man. These are what I'm calling doctrine and directions. Doctrine is what man is to believe concerning God. Directions are what God requires of man.

So I like to think of it this way and I think I've used this illustration before so forgive me if you've heard it but I have Tolkien's Hobbit and Lord of the Rings series, all of those paperbacks, I've got them from high school sitting on the shelf but I also have alongside them a little paperback book that I picked up at a yard sale one day called "The Complete Guide to Middle Earth." Yes, that little book does what doctrine does for God's story. That little book asks questions of the entire story that Tolkien wrote like: who is Gandalf? Then it collects all this information across the whole story into one place and tells me who Gandalf is. Or what is mithril? And it collects all the information and puts it into one place. It's an encyclopedia of sorts. That's what doctrine does for us in the story of Jesus.

It asks questions. Who is God? And it goes through the entire story, Genesis to Revelation, and pulls together answers to the question, "Who is God?" and we call that systematic theology. It's doctrine: teachings about who God is, what sin is, who people are, all these things, and they help us to learn the story of Jesus better just like that "Guide to Middle Earth" helps me understand Tolkien's story better.

But there's one thing that Tolkien's story can't do that a book cannot be written or should not be written, a book of directions on how to live in Tolkien's story. There are those, mind you, who believe that they live in the story. You see them wearing costumes at movies. There are people who believe they live in the Lord of the Rings story. There are people who believe they live in the Harry Potter stories or people who believe that they live in Narnia. There are people who believe they live in the woods with vampires and wolves. And there are books to help you understand those stories but there is no book that tells you how to live in that story and the way we think about people who pretend that they do live in those stories, we kind of think they're nuts. But the Bible is a book that tells us, it gives us directions on how to live in the story of Jesus, and do you wonder why sometimes people look at us as if we're nuts because we are saying, "This is a story I can live in. It's true. A man rose from the dead, and he's still alive, and he is seated on a throne, and I worship him, and he is coming back." If we truly live in that story, of course we are going to be thought foolish. "Why do you dress up like that as if you live in the story?"

So that's 3D Bible reading and so that's what I want to do with each gift. So let's do that with the first gift. The first gift of the new covenant of the Gospel is the gift of a new people and you saw that in Ezekiel 36:24. God promises, "I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land." He is going to gather for himself a new people and that brings us to Zechariah and his song of praise. Zechariah lives in this story. He knows what it means. He has been told that his son will be the precursor to the Messiah; the one who announces his coming; the one who prepares the way of the Lord. This was a prophecy given for centuries that they were looking for this prophet like Elijah who would come and announce the coming Messiah and Zechariah is told, "Your boy is the one."

So listen again to what he says and how Zechariah's song of praise fits into the story of God's people. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." He's not talking about John there, he's talking about the Messiah whom we know is Jesus. "As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets," like Ezekiel, "from of old." Verse 72, "to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant." Zechariah understands that God is continuing to write the story; he is keeping his promises that he has made by enacting this new thing among his people. He remembers, "the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we," this people of God, "being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all our days." Zechariah is praising God for keeping his promise to gather a new people and it starts with his son and the one to whom his son will point. That Messiah will come and gather his new people.

Zechariah understands where he and Elizabeth and John fit into the drama, the story that God is telling. God is keeping his promises. No matter how old they are or how long it has taken him to fulfill them, God is keeping his promise to send the one who would save his people from their sins and transform them into that people who would serve him without fear, without fear of their enemies or without fear of the wrath of God; serve him without fear, a holy and righteous people. Zechariah gets it and, oh, how I want to get it. I want to know that I am as much caught up and captured in this story as he was, though my son is not John the Baptist. It doesn't matter. Jesus said, "The least person in the kingdom of God will be greater than John the Baptist." You and I no matter how least you are in the kingdom, we are just as much a part of the story as John was, that Zechariah and Elizabeth were.

Now, here's some doctrine to help us understand this part of the story a little better. Romans 8, in Romans 8, Paul introduces this chain of events, what theologians and preachers for years have called the fancy name is the *ordo salutis*, the order of salvation, or the golden chain of salvation. He introduces this string of fancy words that are packed with teaching about how God calls and redeems and re-creates this new people. So today we're just going to focus on the part of Romans 8:29 that says, "those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined he also called." Foreknowledge, predestination and calling and you're thinking, "Good grief, what time is it? We're never going to get out of here if we talk about all those." You're right. They have written books like this on each topic that make great doorstops. Don't worry, it's okay. Relax. It's not going to take that long.

But where is my chain? I made myself a golden chain. It also comes in handy for those church parking lot rumbles. But here it is. Now, what we're going to do over the next five Sundays is look at this golden chain and talk about what it means in my life. In Romans 8, Paul doesn't use every word that could be used in that chain and I'm not going to use them either, but there are seven that we're going to look at over the next couple of weeks: foreknowledge is the first; predestination; calling; justification; and then we're going to look at adoption; and sanctification, which he doesn't mention in these verses; and then finally glorification. But Paul uses these doctrines to help us understand more about what the new covenant promise that Jesus in the Gospel are fulfilling. Let me just show you how does it apply to God calling and gathering himself a new people. These first three words, foreknowledge, predestination and calling, are all about that promise to gather to himself a new people.

Foreknowledge. Paul said, "those he foreknew." R. C. Sproul, and let me just say this, in order to save time, we're Presbyterian, did you know that? So I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time explaining to you what everybody else believes these words mean. If you want to know more about that, you come and see me and I'll give you some great things to read because there is lots to read. But what I'm going to do, I'm just telling you, I'm going to tell you what we understand the Bible to teach about these words and if you wrestle with that, even if you're Presbyterian and you wrestle with that, I understand

because I wasn't always one either and I didn't always understand these doctrines in this way. You know, we would be happy to help you unravel that but I'm just going to kind of give it to you straight right here.

Our friend R. C. Sproul clearly explains foreknowledge in a great book, "Chosen By God." If you want to read up on it, "Chosen By God." He goes into a lot more detail but listen to what he says. "The doctrine of foreknowledge means that the ultimate decision for salvation rests with God and not with man. The basis for God's choice does not rest in man but solely in the good pleasure of the divine will." And here's what foreknowledge is, "From all eternity, God foreknew his elect, his chosen. He had an idea of their identities in his mind before he ever created them. He not only foreknew them in the sense of having a prior idea of their personal identities, but he also foreknew them in the sense of fore-loving them. We must remember that when the Bible speaks of knowing, it often distinguishes between a simple mental awareness of a person and a deep intimate love of a person."

So when you read, "those whom he foreknew," think, "those whom he fore-loved." He loved us before the foundation of the world. But the common argument is that foreknowledge means God saw beforehand who would choose him and therefore he chose them. Understand, that puts you in the drivers seat, not God, and so listen to Prof. Wayne Grudem's explanation of Romans 8:29 and how that understanding of foreknowledge doesn't work. He says, "Romans 8:29 can hardly be used to demonstrate that God based his predestination on the foreknowledge of the fact that a person would believe. The passage speaks rather of the fact that God knew persons, those whom he foreknew, not that he knew some fact about them such as the fact that they would believe. It is a personal relational knowledge that is spoken of here. God looking into the future thought of certain people in saving relationship to him and in that sense he knew them long ago. This is the sense in which Paul can talk about God's knowing someone, for example in 1 Corinthians 8. But if one loves God, one is known by him. Similarly Paul says in Galatians 4, 'but now that you have come to know God,' or rather to be known by God, when people know God in Scripture when God knows them, it is personal knowledge that involves a saving relationship. Therefore in Romans 8:29, 'those whom he foreknew' is best understood to mean 'those whom he long ago thought of in a saving relationship to himself.' The text actually says nothing about God fore-knowing or foreseeing that certain people would believe, nor is that idea mentioned in any other text of Scripture." So what? I'll tell you so what: you and I as this new people were fore-loved before the foundation of the world. That's good.

Predestination. He goes on to say, "Those whom he foreknew he predestined." Sproul again explains, "In the Reformed view of predestination, God's choice precedes man's choice. We choose him only because he has first chosen us. Without divine predestination and without the divine inward call, the Reformed view holds that nobody would ever choose Christ. The Reformed view believes that all whom God has thus foreknown, he has also predestined to be inwardly called to be justified and to be glorified. God sovereignly brings to pass the salvation of his elect and only of his elect." So if he lovingly knew you from before time, then he predestined you and that's the next question:



predestined what? "To be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brothers." He predestined you to become conformed to the image of Jesus so that Jesus and we as his brothers and sisters, might be a new people together.

Then this idea of calling, because if you've been foreknown and predestined, you will be called. There are two ways of understanding calling briefly. There is the general call of the proclamation of the Gospel: preach the good news to everyone. That's a call. That's the external call. But what Paul is referring to here in Romans 8 is the effectual internal call, effectual meaning it has an effect that God wants it to have. Our Shorter Catechism answers it beautifully. What is the effectual calling? Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit who convinces us that we are sinful and miserable, he's the one who convinces you of your sin, who enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and who renews our wills. This is how he persuades and makes us able to receive Jesus Christ who is freely offered to us in the Gospel. Jesus said in John 6, "No one can come to me unless the Father draws him." Lydia in Acts 16 was listening to Paul, listen to what Luke says, "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was saying. And afterwards she was baptized." In other words, God opened her heart to understand the Gospel that Paul was preaching and she was converted. That's the call that Paul is talking about. This is how God gathers his new people, he knows them lovingly from before all time and predestines, "they will be like my Son and in fellowship with him and me as my family, predestined." And so then he at some point in their life, in your life, calls. That's how God gathers his people. That's good news because that means it's not up to you. It's not up to me.

So what about directions? How does that help us to live in the story of Jesus to know that we are foreknown, predestined and called people of God? Well, these verses talk about our purpose. What is our purpose? Look at the chart in the middle again. The drama of Ezekiel 36 and the doctrine of Romans 8 tell us who we are, what our purpose is. We are foreknown, predestined and called by God to be his new people who will have a new purity because we have been justified in Christ; a new passion for God because we have been given the spirit of adoption; a new power to live the Spirit-filled life of love for God and others; and a new partnership with God that will be perfected when we're finally glorified, one in which we participate right now. That's where we're headed in the next few weeks.

So if that's our purpose as the new people of God, how do we live? How do we live in that story? How do we live in light of that purpose? Well, we go back to Luke 1 and what Zechariah said. Why did God send Jesus, the son of David, to be our salvation? Why did he do it? He says in verses 74 and 75 of Luke 1, "that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." That's how we live in this story as the new people of God. We serve him without fear, without fear of our enemies and without fear any longer of the wrath of God because we've been forgiven and we can serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days. That's how you live in God's story. As individuals and as a body, Metrocrest, we are called to live in holiness and righteousness as God's people before him all our days.

And the apostles pick up on this. They know this and what I love about the letters the apostles wrote in the New Testament is that what they do is they take the story God is telling and they doctrinally explain it and then they tell us how to live in it by giving us directions. Look at all of Paul's letters, look at Peter's, look at John's, that's what they are doing. They are unwrapping the Gospel story with doctrine, explaining this is what this means and here's how you live in it. So in Ephesians 1, you have Paul saying that God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." He's almost quoting what Zechariah said. We were chosen in him, not to say, "Look at us, we're chosen," we're chosen to live in holiness and righteousness before God all our days as his people. That was Israel's problem, they knew they were chosen and they sat on their chosen laurels and didn't serve God.

So you go to 1 Peter and Peter is saying, "He who called you is holy so be holy in all your conduct. You shall be holy for I am holy," God says. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into this marvelous light." Then you get to Colossians and Paul says, he is unpacking the Gospel and he starts to tell us what it looks like to live as the new people of God when he says, "Put off the old self. Take off that old nasty sweater you've been wearing with its practices, put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, since you are chosen and holy and beloved by God, put his sweater on. Put on compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another. If you have a complaint against another, forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven so you must also forgive. Be the loving community of God. Put that on. Unwrap the Gospel, take it out and put it on."

You'll see that that I have quoted this guy called Walter Marshall. He was a Puritan pastor from the 1600s who wrote a great book and this is how he put this first one, and I'm almost done. "You see God first created you to live a holy life. This is what he wanted when he first made humans in his image. Now God is re-creating this kind of holiness in your life through the new birth and through sanctification in Jesus Christ. God's image is now being restored to you and it will be finally perfectly complete when you are glorified with God in heaven."

Over the next few weeks as we unpack the rest of these gifts, there is no way that you can be this new people of God, that you and I could be anew holy righteous and serving God without fear of people unless God changes us fundamentally. So that's what justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification, that's what that's all about.

So how do you respond today? What kind of response should you have? I think you and I need to ask the question: have I been foreknown, predestined and called by God into this new people that he is creating? And how do I know if I have? The Bible says you know that you have if you have responded to that message, the message of the Gospel, by faith; if you have responded to the announcement of the good news of great joy that Jesus Christ was born for you, lived a perfect life in your place, died as the perfect sacrifice for

your sin, was raised from the dead, is seated at the right hand of God the Father controlling everything and one day coming back to judge the living and the dead and establish his reign permanently, perfectly forever. If you receive that and go, "Yes, that's true, he did that for me! I want to live in that story!" That's the response we should have.

I have a gift here. It's a cute little snowman gift and I'm going to set it right here. Whoever wants it, come and get it. I'll say that again: if you would like this free gift, come and receive it. I have no plants in the audience, the congregation. If you want it, come and get it. Pam! Okay, now hang on. Are you planning to open it? Eventually. Are you planning to use whatever's inside? That's a good idea. Do you trust me that I would give you a good gift that you could use? Well, open that thing up and show the people what you've got. Turn around and show everybody. M&Ms but unwrap that lower ribbon. That's \$20. You can buy Margaret, she can get 2 cups of coffee at Starbucks with \$20. Thank you. Merry Christmas.

Walter Marshall said it beautifully and I'll close with this, "Christ and all of his salvation are freely given by God's grace to everyone who believes in him for as Ephesians 2 says, you are saved by grace through faith. It is the gift of God. A free gift tells you this: take and receive. If you pay one single penny to earn that gift, then the gift is no longer free. Christ freely offers his salvation to you. By faith you freely receive Christ and his salvation is yours. Because you receive Christ by faith as a free gift, you can see what faith really is. Faith has no power in and of itself, it is just the way you receive Christ. Faith is the hand that receives Christ and all of his blessings."

So each week we're going to talk about what does it mean to receive these gifts that God has promised, open them up, unwrap them, and put them to use. And I want to just say this: if you have never ever responded to God's offer, free offer of salvation from your sin into life with him and his people forever more, if you have never never done what I did when I was 10 years old and sat in a service like this and I heard a preacher say for the umpteenth time that I was a sinner and I needed Jesus and finally lights went on and I went, "You're right. You're right." And the Spirit called me and he said, "You are a sinner and you are lost without Jesus. You need him." And I said, "I'll take him. I'll take that gift." If you've never taken that gift before, I beg you come down here. I'm not going to make you walk down here now, after the service, come and see me, come and talk to there will be some elders down here afterwards, come and talk to us. But if you've been a Christian forever it seems like and you've forgotten that Jesus has offered you the gift that you are part of his new people, that he called you before you ever, before anything existed but him, if you have forgotten that and you have forgotten that he has called you to live together with his people in holiness and righteousness serving him without fear all your days, receive that gift.