

Unwrapping the Gift of Salvation: The Gift of God is Jesus

Matthew 1

This Christmas season, in the midst of the blur of activities, why not set some time aside to unwrap the greatest gift of all: the gift of salvation. Please start by opening your Bibles to Matthew 1.

The Gift of Salvation is Jesus

Since God so loved the world, that He GAVE (Jn. 3:16).

Every human is a sinner earned the wages of death, but the free gift of God is eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

By grace, we sinners God loved are saved, not by works, because it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9).

That is the Gift of Salvation; and the Gift of Salvation is most associated with Christmas, because that is where it all began.

Christmas is when God gave the greatest gift, the gift that no one can afford, no one can earn, and no one but God can give.

Christmas is actually about this gift that no one really seeks after, yet desperately needs. What is that gift? The substitutionary death of God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ, Who came to meet our critical, eternal, life-threatening needs prompted by our sins!

The Gift of God of Salvation is not a package, it is not a gift card, or a new gizmo: salvation is a person. We could best say that salvation is:

The Only Gift Everyone Really Needs is Christ

Only as we open the New Testament, we can start to unwrap the Gift of God.

Our gift is Jesus, and the Scriptures unwrap Him for us.

Only a born-again believer can unwrap the wonders of Jesus.

Only redeemed and regenerated eyes can see and savor the beauties that we are looking at together. That is why we invite the Lord to open our eyes, because all of these truths about Christ are only seeable by salvation's opening our eyes.

If we look closely at each Gospel, only two of the four actually record Christ's arrival, so we begin with the first, Matthew.

So, please stand, and with Matthew 1 open before us, listen to God speak, and then join me in inviting Him to open our eyes even further into the truths of Jesus our Gift of Salvation.

Matthew 1:18-21 (NKJV) Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was

betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

As we back up to the start of this chapter, it is very fitting that the New Covenant (or testament) account begins with the arrival of a person, our Savior Jesus Christ.

Matthew 1:1: "the genealogy of Jesus", is how our Bibles open into the New Covenant. Then v. 16 "born Jesus who is called Christ". Then v. 18 "the birth of Jesus Christ".

Jesus was born to be God's Gift. God so loved the world that He gave. The gift that God gave was His Son who came to be the Savior of the World. But He came to give His life. Jesus was given as the gift of death in our place, and by that substitution, we live.

In Matthew the very opening of the Gospel's first chapter overflows with Christ's coming. As we trace through this first chapter note the description of Christ's coming is two-fold: v. 21 Jesus saved from sins; and v. 23 Jesus makes us possible to become God's home.

The Gift of Forgiveness is in Jesus

First we see that the Gift of Salvation that came at Christmas is all about Forgiveness. The very first way that Jesus is introduced by Name is with a reference to our desperate need to have all of our sins forgiven.

As we turn to v. 21 we begin to focus upon those words to Joseph. Though he is not very long or very much in Scripture, Joseph was very honored. Above every other human, Joseph was given the duty at Christ's circumcision to utter aloud the most precious, beautiful, and powerful name ever uttered.

Joseph is told by God to, "**call His Name Jesus**", because He will be the One who saves us from our sins. So Forgiveness is the greatest, most vital, and first need of mankind.

So that is the first truth about Christ's birth, and Christmas that we learn as we enter the New Testament. How can we unwrap the gift that these truths about Christ give to us from God.

Unwrapping the gift of Salvation is what we are doing this Christmas season. To unwrap what we just learned from Matthew starts with:

Seeing God on His Throne This Christmas

We have been carefully examining each portion of Revelation for months now. But, to unwrap the gift of salvation we need to see our plight from God's perspective, we must **look past** the holiday crowds that always seem to get in front of us everywhere we want to go these days; we must **look beyond** our house, our street, our city, our state, and even our planet—and instead **look above** to see our awesome God on

His throne! To unwrap the wonder of salvation turn back with me to Luke 1:78, because the only way to understand the magnitude of salvation is to see that:

The Gift of Salvation Started from God on His Throne

At this very moment—as the billions of souls in this world go through their routines of eating, working, living, and sleeping—our God is enthroned in the heavens, sitting in power and majesty, and surrounded by countless angelic hosts bowing before Him as they reverently cry out “Holy, holy, holy!”

Before Him, the Ancient of Days—burn seven fires, reflected in the mirror-like surface of the crystal sea.

Around Him, the King of Glory—peal endless claps of thunder and flashes of lightning as angelic hosts and saved sinners rise and fall in adoration.

In front of Him, the Almighty God—rises the constant incense of prayers and worship songs from His redeemed creatures.

Our great God sits enthroned in heaven as the Ruler over the entire universe!

Now, glance down at Luke 1:78, while God Almighty was sitting in Absolute Light, Power, and Holiness when He looked down upon this planet filled with darkness and overspread with people, this was His analysis of our human plight:

“Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the **Dayspring from on high** has visited us; **to give light to those who sit in darkness** and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78–79).¹

The Gift of Salvation Came While We Were Lost in Darkness!

From God’s perspective, all of humanity is hopelessly lost, sitting in the dark, and awaiting destruction.

Thus Christmas is all about the Lord God Almighty, motivated by His great love, sending Jesus as the gift of God, to provide the way out of that complete darkness.

It’s always darkest just before dawn, and that was exactly how it was in the first-century Roman world. Although they had reached the highest levels of science, literature, culture, engineering, transportation, and medicine known since Adam and Eve stepped from the Garden of Eden, most people were still hopelessly lost.

They were all endlessly troubled by an inability to even control their own fears and desires—let alone figure out how to get to know the Almighty God of the Universe.

¹ Emphasis added to some verses in this chapter.

So, in that darkest hour, God sent *the only gift everyone really needs!*

The Gift of Salvation Means that God Visits Us

Christmas is about God sending “the Dayspring from on high,” a heavenly sunrise, to provide the critical care that sin-darkened humans need because of having been born in such a desperate condition. God knew that without forgiveness, justification, redemption, and adoption it was impossible for men to survive and live forever.

When God surveyed His creative work, He found that the crown of His creation, the only creatures made in His image, had a soul-threatening, terminal illness called sin. And in every instance that described Christ's coming to Earth, there were clues revealing that what we needed was exactly what Jesus came to offer us. If you sift through the entire Christmas story, you will find that God on His throne determined that He had to send a gift that could touch those seven critical areas in our lives that needed to be cared for in order to save us.

As the Christmas story unfolds, we can see more and more of God's plan to come and rescue lost humanity. In Matthew 1:21 we learn that Jesus came to “save His people from their sins,” which was God meeting our first and greatest need—**forgiveness**.

Luke noted the timing and purpose of Christ's coming, and thus the necessity to see ourselves in the same way God does. We are all born spiritually blind, and grow up sitting lost, helpless, and hopeless in the darkness of sin; as sinners who have sinned even once in God's sight, we are guilty of breaking all of God's commandments (James 2:10).

From the divine vantage point as explained in the Bible, Christmas should make us view ourselves as worse than we think, rather than better—because Christ's death is only for the guilty, the hopelessly stained, and helplessly lost. It is in recognizing that condition in ourselves that we will find Jesus, and God's everlasting grace.

The Gift of Salvation Meets Our Most Critical Needs

All sinners (all humans who have ever lived on planet Earth except Jesus Christ) have basic biblically-described, critical, and soul-threatening needs.

If you pay close attention to the details of the birth of Jesus, captured by God, just for us, we see that every detail of Christ's birth reveals His purposes in sending Jesus to the Earth. As we unwrap Christ's Birth we see that God sent Him to provide for us what every one of us needs:

- We desperately need: Forgiveness of sins (Matthew 1:21). That's this week's unwrap.
- We desperately need: Justification so that a holy God can be with us (Matthew 1:23). That's next week's unwrap.
- We desperately need: Redemption and adoption, because we who are slaves to sin and strangers to God must come to a place of peace with God; and eternal life for us who are at war with Him while dead in sin (Luke 1:68-79). That's the final two week's unwrap.

Briefly summed up, all humans are hopelessly and forever lost unless we receive the gift of God, salvation, and Jesus meets these seven critical needs: (1) forgiveness, (2) justification, (3) regeneration, (4) reconciliation, (5) adoption, (6) redemption, and (7) sanctification.

The Gift of Salvation is the Only Gift Everyone Really Needs

Even if your mind is pre-occupied with thinking about Christmas and the giving and receiving of gifts, be sure to take time out to discern whether you have personally received the most needful of all gifts!

For only if you have received Jesus, Who came to save us from our sins, do you have anything in your possession that really matters.

Every other possession and gift can be stripped away by death, disease, or disaster. Only Jesus will never leave you or be lost—only He can save and keep you forever!

Now then, let's look at the first element of what Christ freely gives us in the gift of God called salvation.

Have You Unwrapped the Gift of Forgiveness?

Because of our sin—we are all debtors to God's righteousness; so we need forgiveness.

Christmas is about Jesus Who came to live and then die the substitutionary death that was necessary to pay for the hopeless sin debt we owed to God.

With His own life, Christ paid that eternal-death debt we were responsible for because of our sins—**that's forgiveness.**

As sinners, we stood before God as a debtor, and had that debt is forgotten because of Christ's payment.

Like David we see what our gift means: “Blessed is he whose **transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.** Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1–2).

Like Paul we see what our gift means: “ “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the **forgiveness of sins,** according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

Forgiveness means the end of fear: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

Understanding forgiveness means that we can have the “remission of sins” in Jesus' name (Luke 24:47), and that brings eternal “life in His name” (John 20:31).

Understanding forgiveness means we can then come to our Father asking for help in Jesus' name as we pray (John 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–26).

Because we've been forgiven, when we ask the Father “in the name of Jesus Christ,” it is as though Jesus

Himself were asking it. As we remember this, it should prompt us to only ask the Father for that which is worthy of Jesus' name.

Understanding forgiveness means we can over and over experience: the relief of knowing that all your sins, everyone of them—past, present, and future—are GONE!

Rest in the Sure Gift of Forgiveness

As a born-again believer, our sins are paid for, our eternal life is purchased, and we have the receipt in our hand—written in the very blood of the One who paid the price. And Christ's record of that payment is forever settled in His Book, the Bible!

Jesus promises that forgiven ones can rest: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and *I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28; see also 29–30).

Jesus promises that forgiven ones can hope: “I am the light of the world; He who follows Me *shall not walk in darkness*, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Jesus promises that forgiven ones can have confidence: “who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, *when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down* at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . .” (Hebrews 1:3).

His Forgiveness Brings Peace

One of Christ's Old Testament promised Names was the name "Prince of Peace". This is the Hebrew *Shar Shalom*, which means "the one who removes all peace-disturbing factors and secures the peace."

This automatically sets Jesus apart from most human rulers whose reigns often depend on bloody conquest. His rule rests on His *own* bloody sacrifice! What a contrast to such biblical kings as Nebuchadnezzar, and even David, whose rule was established on might, but not necessarily on right.

The name "Peaceful Prince" helps to explain why Jesus disappointed His countrymen when He came! They did not want a peaceful prince. They wanted a monarch who would annihilate their foes and establish again the glories the kingdom of Israel knew in the golden days of Solomon. They wanted Rome taken away and all their other oppressors with them.

Jesus came in Person subduing every foe, and He will reign someday over a restored earth with no war and absolute peace. How can He do that? By removing the cause of war— human sin.

How can human sin be removed? By making peace between God and man. How is that possible? Remove the enmity—the fallenness. How? Through the embodiment of peace—the Prince who conquered sin, death, and hell!

Trust Jesus Who Saves Us From Sin

By trusting in Christ as your Mediator and Savior, you have an assurance by God that flows out of a right

relationship with Him. Once you are in Christ, the Prince of Peace will show you that He can bring peace wherever He rules. He can bring:

What an everlasting treasure is yours in Isaiah's predicted Messiah! He is your Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace! May you give Him the glorious worship He truly deserves as you ponder the great and awesome God that He is!

Now, to enjoy this gift we've just unwrapped, why not take a hymnbook with me, turn to #101 and join me in telling tell the Gift-giver Himself what a great gift He's given us.

His Name is Wonderful

His Name is Wonderful,
His Name is Wonderful,
His Name is Wonderful,
Jesus my Lord.

He is the mighty King,
Master of everything,
His Name is Wonderful,
Jesus my Lord.

He's the Great Shepherd,
The Rock of all Ages,
Almighty God is He,
Bow down before Him,
Love and adore Him,
His Name is Wonderful,
Jesus my Lord.