



CHRISTMAS DAY

Sermon Text: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”*

Dear Receivers of our gracious God’s most precious Gift, our Savior, Jesus Christ,

This is the time of year when most people in our country, both Christians and non-Christians alike, are preoccupied with the so-called “spirit of gift-giving”.

That this “spirit of gift-giving” is appropriate at this time of year because it serves to remind us of the miraculous gift of the baby Jesus, to the world so long ago in a lowly manger in Bethlehem is generally accepted by most people who would call themselves Christians.

But what about “Gift-Living”?

Do we live our lives as though we have the peace and good will of God, first proclaimed so long ago to sinful man’?

At this time of year, many who profess to be Christians give to their favorite charities. They may set up and decorate the evergreen tree, give expensive gifts in fancy wrappings to their spouses, children and friends; they sing *“Joy to the world the Lord is come...”* and *“Come all Ye faithful...”*, and maybe put a little something extra in the collection plate; but then live the rest of the year as though 6-days out of the week, God is ‘on vacation’ somewhere. As though God is – *at least in their minds* – properly and completely “out of the loop” when it comes to how they are to live their lives.

Some of these same people cheat and steal from their employers, taking longer breaks than they are suppose to, falsifying time cards, or by taking company property home with them. As employers, some refuse to give their employees an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work, and in their business establishments and stores, many are dishonest with their customers as well.

Then, on the one day they have ‘set aside’ each week for God, they make themselves feel good by getting all dressed up in their best Sunday “go to meeting clothes”, and make the obligatory trip to a beautiful church building complete with stained glass windows and a brand-new pipe organ towards which they “so graciously” donated.

There they often occupy their time gossiping about the people in the next pew, until the service starts, and then obligingly they sit for an hour to make a good impression on the rest of the people in their community.

Not caring about faithfulness to God’s Word, they expect, and even demand, to get a warm fuzzy feeling from what the pastor has to say.

And he just better not say anything to make them feel bad about anything they’ve done during the past week. After all, they say: “we hired him!”

And most church leaders, in exchange for the security of their positions and material gain, are willing to go along with the ruse; telling their parishioners what they *want* to hear, instead of what they *need* to hear for the salvation of their souls.

And so “church” for many has become a once-a-week social event where they put on a good show, and the rest of the week they’re busy quieting their consciences and hardening their hearts against what the Word of God has to say to them about their sinfulness and their need of a Savior from the condemnation and eternal punishment that is theirs on account of their sin.

They act as though the Word of the Most High God is just so much pretty Christmas wrapping paper to be tossed aside or stored away in a box somewhere until another Christmas season.

And oh, it looks so good to house guests to have the Bible sitting on the coffee table. And they’ll say: “It’s so nice that the Bible contains such a warm story about the baby Jesus and it makes me feel good to hear about it once a year, because it takes me back to when I was a child, but I need to be realistic! Its not something that really affects my everyday life, I mean, Christmas is for children after all, isn’t it?”

These fool themselves when they call themselves Christians, but they certainly are not fooling God.

Then there are the lukewarm, “feel-good” Christians, who knowingly tolerate false doctrine and false teachers within their churches. Foolishly they reject the counsel of Almighty God in Romans 16:17-18 and II Timothy 3:5 to turn away from such organizations and evil men because it would be inconvenient for them, or it will cause division within their families or among their friends.

Jesus himself said of these in the tenth chapter of Matthew :

“If you love father or mother more than me, you are not worthy of me; and if you love son or daughter more than me you are not worthy of me. If you don’t take your cross and follow me, you’re not worthy of me.”

And it is these of whom the Lord God also speaks in Revelation 3:15&16: *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would that you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.”*

The true follower of Christ, is called upon to remember, not just the Christmas miracle of the Son of God coming to this earth in the form of a helpless human baby, clothed in poverty; but also the very reason for the Incarnation of the Son of God into human form.

Our sermon text tells us the reason for the birth of Jesus Christ.
“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to men.”

Jesus Christ came to this sinful Earth to live a sinless life, to become sin itself, to shed His precious life’s blood in horrible torture and a criminal’s death on the cross of Calvary in our stead; to take upon Himself the full wrath of God against sinful man in order that all mankind might be reconciled to God once and for all; then to rise again on Easter morning, so that all people might have the Gift of God’s Peace and good will, and go to eternal life with Him in heaven at the end of this earthly life.

But there is some confusion today, in this sinful world of ours, about the peace and goodwill our text speaks about. Based on Scripture today we will examine:

‘GIFT-LIVING’

1. To whom are these gifts of God’s peace and good will given?
2. How do we receive these gifts of peace and good will, and
3. What shall our response be for these gifts from God?

The philosophy of the secular humanist currently being taught in our public schools and universities, and accepted by many leaders of our nation’s liberal churches today, try to tell us that all people, everywhere, regardless of our “belief-system”, whether we be Buddhists, Christian, Jew, Islamic, or even Atheist, “...are all on our way to the same place, we’re just on different roads because God won’t really be so mean as to send anyone to hell.”

Such political correctness is the devil’s doctrine! For Jesus, Himself tells us otherwise. In John 14:6 we hear Jesus speaking, He says: *“I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.”* And in Acts 4:12: *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”*

Does this mean that God doesn’t want everyone to be saved?
Or that He is to blame for a person’s unbelief?

Scripture’s answer is ‘No’.

So to whom are these gifts of God’s peace and good will given?

We read in First Timothy 2:4,5: *“God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.”*

What it **does** mean, is that there is only ONE way that we stand cleansed from the stain of our sins, justified, before God; and that is this: *through faith in the grace of God, made manifest in Christ Jesus.*

As we read in Romans 3:24: “*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*”

No, it is the impenitent and unbelieving person who is to blame for their own damnation and not God. It is **unbelief** that damns.

It is the unbelieving heart of the person himself that rejects the gift of the forgiveness of sins and justification freely offered them in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And what foolishness it is, to reject a gift of such value – the gift of being at true peace with God! For without the forgiveness of one’s sins, there can be no real peace of mind, body and soul concerning one’s eternal salvation.

How does one receive the gift of God’s peace and good will?

The Bible tells us in Ephesians 2:8,9: “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*”

And in Romans 5:1: “*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

True peace with God, then, comes *only* through the forgiveness of sins received *by faith* in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, the individual that rejects the free gift of the forgiveness of sins, rejects the gift of the baby Jesus and rejects true peace and any possibility of reconciliation with God. In rejecting the gift – *by his unbelief* – the unbeliever does not benefit from the gift. Without the hand of faith, he does not personally receive or apprehend the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation which has been secured for him by Christ, but instead brings down upon himself the righteous anger and condemnation of Almighty God.

So then while the forgiveness of sins is indeed a gift meant for all mankind – ***Is indeed here and now for all men*** – the true peace of which our sermon text speaks is actually received only by such as claim absolutely no merit of their own towards salvation, but rather *by grace alone through faith alone* fully trust and believe in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

These have truly received the free gift of the forgiveness of sins, and so are personally justified – *and thus reconciled* – to God.

And being justified – *made righteous in the sight of God through the gift of faith in Christ Jesus* – we are become the children of God and heirs with Christ. **This** is the ‘good will’ of God of which our text speaks.

In Galatians 4:4-7 We read: “*When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying Abba, Father. Wherefore you are no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*”

Now, because we are – *by the grace of God in Christ alone* – sons of God and heirs with Christ, we have God’s promise that we may approach Him without fear and trembling and that just as godly earthly fathers know how to give their children good gifts, our *heavenly* Father hears all our prayers offered in faith and will supply everything we need, both physical and spiritual blessings for this life.

In First John 5:14 we read: “*This is the confidence we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.*” And in Mark 11:24: “*I tell you, anything you ask for in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you shall have it.*”

Furthermore, We know because of the victory over sin and death won for us by the sinless life, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ, we have in our possession great joy – *unspeakable joy!* – and the sure knowledge that all of this world’s trouble, all this world’s tribulations and all the physical and emotional suffering we might have in this body on this earth, cannot even come close in comparison to the everlasting glories that await us in heaven!

What then shall be our response to these many wonderful gifts included in the peace and good will which God gives us through faith in the redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus?

We will of course first of all give thanks always to God for everything that he has done and continues to do for us through Christ our Lord and Savior.

Secondly, we will with a thankful and believing heart created within us as a fruit of faith sincerely desire to live a sanctified life. This will be manifested in our lives in the words that fall from our tongues in our everyday conversations and in our behavior; in humbly asking those we have sinned against for forgiveness, by forgiving those who have sinned against us; by seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness first – putting God’s Word and God’s Will above our own sinful feelings, will and desires – by being faithful witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ, motivated to tell others of the gospel of Jesus Christ; by the faithful teaching, hearing and regular study of God’s Word, in private devotions at home, in Sunday school, Bible classes and church services, by the faithful use of the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and by working to bring increase to the Lord’s kingdom in our homes, communities and the world through the Gospel with our prayers, financial support, time and talents – everyone according to what has been given as a trust to them by our loving God.

Now then, Dear Christians, Let us be about '*Gift-Living*'. Let us go out from here today and live as a people who truly know and understand that we have received the precious gift of the forgiveness of our sins, a truly new life in Christ and that we can look forward to eternal life in heaven because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Is this not our reasonable service?

*ALL GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST AND
ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN!*

+++++++

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, given to you through the forgiveness of sins, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.