

Christmas Day

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[0 : 00] Well, Merry Christmas everyone. Good to see you. My name is Nick. I'm the pastor here at St. Mark's and we're going to spend some time looking at God's Word as we remember all that he's done for us. Well, guess what I have with me? A Christmas present. And you know whose it is? The first kid to come stand here.

There you go, Olivia. Well, I today want to talk about Christmas presents. Because what would Christmas be without Christmas presents? Right?

Kids, if you got no Christmas presents today, would you be fine with that? No. Of course not. But the question I want us to think about is, well, why do we get presents? Why do we get presents if it's Jesus' birthday? Think about that, boys and girls.

If you had a party and it was your birthday and all your friends came along but they gave each other presents instead of giving you presents, how would you feel? That would be quite silly, wouldn't it? But that's what we do with Jesus, don't we, on his birthday.

We give each other presents. We don't give him presents. But you know what? I don't think he minds. He's already got everything he would want, so he doesn't really need any presents from us. And besides, I think he likes it when we give each other presents on his birthday.

[1 : 23] You know why? Because on Christmas, the reason we give each other gifts is to remember that on the first Christmas, God has given us the best gift we could ever get.

And that's what Christmas is all about. Not so much us giving and receiving gifts from each other, but Christmas is about remembering and understanding the gift that God has given us.

And I want to tell you today what that gift is by reading a verse from Romans. That's a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to explain why Jesus came to earth, to help us to understand the significance of Jesus.

And it's Romans 6.23. So have a look. It's up on the screen behind me. Just read that carefully. See what it says. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. So we give each other gifts today to remember that God has given us a gift. And it's called a gift because what God gives to us is something we don't earn or pay for.

[2 : 32] If we did, it wouldn't be a gift, right? Did Olivia have to pay anything for that gift I gave you? Alright, you've got to give me a hundred grand for that. You see, it wouldn't be a gift. Imagine boys and girls that you had to pay your parents for the gifts they gave you at Christmas.

They wouldn't be gifts, would they? Gifts are when you get something without paying for it, without earning it. And so when the Bible says that God gives us a gift, it means that we don't actually have to pay for it or earn it or do anything to get it.

And that is a big misunderstanding people have about the gifts that God gives us. You know, man-made religions tell us that we need to do things to earn God's reward, keeping rules to get into God's good books.

People see God like that video showed us, like Santa. You have to impress him to get stuff from him. But that's not what the Bible teaches about God at all. God doesn't have a list and check it twice to see who's been naughty and nice.

And the reason he doesn't is because, well, we've all been naughty, haven't we? Now the kids are going, how does the pastor know that? I thought only I knew that. Well, how do I know that?

[3 : 46] Well, don't worry. It's not because I see you when you're sleeping and I know when you're awake. That would be pretty weird and illegal. I know that because the Bible told me that.

The Bible says this. All people have sinned and have together become worthless. It's quite harsh words that the Bible says all people on earth, without exception, have sinned and have become worthless.

Which, that word, worthless, is actually what naughty means. You know that? Naughty literally means having naught. That's where the word comes from. Having no value or usefulness to anyone.

Now, sometimes my kids will come to me with a toy that's broken. Typically an electronic toy from China. I'm sure, boys and girls, have you had a toy that's broken before?

Right? And when it's broken, it's not really doing much for you. Right? It's not useful. It's not doing what it was made to do, is it? So it doesn't have any value to you anymore if it's broken.

[4 : 54] Nobody would want to buy it from you. And you wouldn't want to get a broken toy for Christmas. Hey, imagine you opened a Christmas present today and it was a broken toy. Would you be happy? No. Because what's the point of a broken toy?

It's not doing what it was made to do. Well, the Bible says that we humans are broken. By nature, we don't have any usefulness to God. Because we don't do what he says.

We don't live the way he made us to live, which is what sin is. This is another thing that lots of people don't get about sin. People think that sin is just doing some naughty things we shouldn't do. But sin is not just doing things we shouldn't do. It's actually living a life where we're not doing what we should do. Where we're not living for the purpose that God put us here as humans in this world. We're doing what we want and we're not listening to what God wants. Even though he's the one who gives us life and breath and everything and keeps our hearts beating. And everything we have comes from our creator.

[5 : 53] We still often just don't want to listen to him. And the sad truth is that if we're not living God's way, he's really got no reason to keep us around in his world, does he?

If you're not going to keep a broken toy taking up space in your room. And that's a toy that's not doing what it was made to do. You'll eventually throw it away, won't you?

If it's not doing what it was made to do. Well, that's why we all eventually die as human beings. And that's what Paul means when he writes, the wages of sin is death.

In that verse. Wages is the opposite of a gift. Do you know what wages are? It means something that you pay someone. Something that they deserve. So while a gift is something that you get that you don't earn, wages is the opposite.

Wages is something that you do earn. That is due to you. That is right and fair that you get. And the Bible says there's something that we've all earned. But it's something we don't want.

[6 : 58] And that is death. That's what that verse behind me means. The wages of sin is death. That's something we've earned. And we can't stop it. Because that is fair payment for sin against God.

It is right and fair that we get that if we've sinned against God. But hey, this is Christmas. What's the preacher doing talking about death and sin? I'm not supposed to be talking about that, am I?

I'm supposed to be making you happy and giving you the Christmas spirit. But don't you see that I've got to talk about that for a little while if you're going to understand why God's Christmas gift to us is so amazing.

Because it turns out God doesn't actually want us to die. You know that? That's what the Bible says. God doesn't want us to die. He didn't make us. He didn't create us to live a very short life on this earth and then die.

And grow old and die. He made us to live and enjoy life to the full. And he always intended for us to live in a world that isn't broken. A world that works properly.

[7 : 59] Living like he made us to live. Loving each other perfectly and loving him and enjoying his gifts forever. That is what God created us for. And we know, we look around, we know this world is not what it's meant to be.

Even though we've never seen what it's meant to be, we know this is not it. Well, God has put that concept in our minds. A concept of a world that it is meant to be, even though we've never experienced that.

We know this, surely this is not it. And the Bible says, no, it's not. This is not God's ultimate intent. In future, the world will be what it's meant to be.

The Bible makes that clear. A world where we can enjoy all that God has made us to enjoy without limit. And that will be possible.

That world will be possible for us to live in. Why? Because God has chosen to give us a gift. A gift we could never earn and we could never get for ourselves. The verse tells us what it is.

[9 : 00] What is the gift? Eternal life. Life. That God intended for us to live. A life without end.

A life without death. And not just more life in this world like we know it today, but life in a world after God has fixed it. God is going to fix this world.

We can't fix it, no matter how much we've tried. We've been trying for thousands of years. God has always planned to fix this world that we've broken. And the way God is going to fix this world is by taking away, taking out of it all the things that don't belong in it.

Like when you clean your room once a year, if it's our kids. You know, you take out, if you want to clean your room, you take out all the stuff that doesn't belong in it.

All those dirty plates and all those wrappers and pieces of paper that aren't supposed to be there. You've got to remove the things that don't belong in it to tidy it up.

[10 : 02] Well, God is going to do that. God is going to fix this world one day by removing all the things that don't belong in it. So why hasn't he done that yet?

You might ask, well, because we don't belong in it. If we're sinners and we're broken and we're not doing the purpose for which God made us, we don't belong in his perfect world. And so before God comes to remove all that doesn't belong in his world, he has given us a way to become valuable again.

To fix us and to make us into the people that he always intended for us to be. And that is what the Bible is about. That is why Jesus came to this world.

So that we can have a place in his world again, living the way we should in his restored creation forever. That's what God made you to be.

That's what God made me to be. He made you to be valuable, not valueless. He made you to be worth something, not worthless. And that is the real gift that God wants to give you this Christmas.

[11 : 02] Not just eternal life, but restoration, being fixed so that you can have eternal life. And be the person God made you to be.

And the way he gives that gift of eternal life to us, the verse also tells us. How is it? Have a look. It's in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see, God wants to give us the gift of eternal life, but there's a problem. The problem is he also must give us the wages we have earned, which is just and fair to give us, which is death.

God is a very just God. We often don't like that idea. We love it when human judges do justice in a courtroom, when they put bad people away. But we don't want God to be a judge, and yet he is far more perfect and just than any human judge.

And so because God wants to give us this gift, but he must also give us our wages. Do you know what he did? He sent Jesus, his son, who was the only person who ever deserved life and not death.

[12 : 07] And he gave Jesus our death, our wages, so that we who only deserve death can have his life in us.

And that's what happened when Jesus died on the cross for the sins of his people. A great, amazing, cosmic swap took place between Jesus' life and ours, our death that Jesus took, the penalty for our sins.

And even then, the amazing thing is that three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. Death couldn't hold him once our price was paid. And then, he sent his spirit from heaven to help his people now to live new kind of lives, fit for a new world to come, and have new resurrection life in us, so that we can have eternal life.

And so the reason that God can give us eternal life as a free gift, even though we've done nothing to earn it, is because Jesus has done everything that is necessary.

And that's why it's a gift that you don't have to do anything for. You don't have to pay for. Jesus did everything that was needed in our place. And that is why Christmas is so important, and Jesus coming into the world is so important.

[13 : 22] I mean, we wouldn't normally, would we, celebrate 2,000 years later in South Africa, celebrate the birth of a Jewish carpenter in, you know, 2,000 years ago.

Why do we celebrate the birth? Not just because he was a good teacher or because he lived a good life, but because he came to swap places with us. And he came to do everything that was needed so that we can have eternal life.

Boys and girls, I bet you don't like chores. Who likes doing chores at home? Now, imagine you had a chore to do. Imagine you had to wash the dishes, right? But then you walked into the kitchen, and

the sink was just piled up to the ceiling with dirty dishes.

And you realize there's so many dishes that it's going to take all afternoon to clean them all. And you won't be able to play like you were planning and see your friend like you were planning. But then you walk away, and you know you have to do this chore later.

And you walk in a bit later, and suddenly they're all clean. Because you realize that your big brother did it all for you. Now, I know this sounds like a fantasy story.

[14 : 30] But you know, that's kind of what Jesus did for us, but on a much bigger scale. Jesus did everything we needed to do but couldn't do so that we can have eternal life for free.

And that life is the gift that God wants to give you. But, like any gift that you receive, you've got to open it if you want to have it, right?

Do you think Olivia's going to leave that gift wrapped the whole day? Are you going to leave it wrapped? No. What's the point of keeping your gift wrapped? Imagine Christmas, you just sat down and looked at all your wrapped gifts under the tree and then walked away.

What's the point of gifts if you don't open them, right? You've got to open the gifts that you get. And it's the same with the gift that God gives us. We can't just think about it or look at it and talk about it. We've got to open it. You can't have and enjoy gifts unless you actually open them. And it's the same with the gift that God has given you.

[15 : 33] You can't leave it. You can't walk out and not think of it again until next Christmas. You'll only benefit from it and receive the gift of eternal life God wants to give you and created you to have if you open the gift.

And you do that by trusting in Jesus and becoming one of his people by being baptized. It's not a work that you do. It's something that God freely gives you to allow you to become one of his people. And you trust in him. You trust in what Jesus has done for you. And if you have been baptized, it means you keep on trusting and listening to Jesus and following him because he will show you the way to eternal life.

And when you do that, when you're one of his people and you're following Jesus, not only does he give you his spirit to help you live the life that God made you to live, but you can know for sure that what he did on the cross counts for you and that your sins have been paid for and that you have eternal life.

That is what it means to open the gift that God has given us. And it is the greatest gift that you can ever receive, ever. And so as you go home and you open up all your other Christmas gifts, remember God's gift to you and don't leave it closed this Christmas.

[16 : 57] Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you so much that you are a God who gives gifts and you've given us the greatest gift that we could never earn for ourselves, the gift of eternal life.

Thank you for sending Jesus to make that possible, to swap places with us, to die for our sins. And we pray, Lord, that we will not leave that gift sitting there under the tree unopened.

But help us, Lord, to respond, to accept the gift you've given us, to trust in Jesus and follow him.

And thank you, Lord. Help us to look forward to the new world that you have planned.

Amen.