

Christmas Day 2023, Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin -- Galatians 4:4-7

Who still has gifts to open? For those of you have opened gifts, did you get the perfect gift? What's the perfect gift? I did a web search looking for the perfect Christmas gift for 2023. I've chosen six from the list of 23 gifts to mention here. Not number one on the list but number one for me was Omaha Steaks. Here is something new – Pro Power Saver -- Plug it in and save 75-80% on your electric bill. Doesn't make sense to me! Drones are on the list. There was an intriguing one which I am not even sure how to pronounce – "Atmotoys Bball" – a ball with lights that will hover above your hand and even return to your hand when you throw it. There was one that I know my wife would enjoy, but not ordered – a neck massager. There was one for the sight challenged – a pair of readers that has a button on the bow which will adjust the magnification.

But some of these gifts aren't really very practical. Most are things that no one really needs. And none of them will really last. But is there really such a thing as a perfect gift? Is there a gift that you know is needed? Is there really a gift that will last, not just for a month or a year, but for the long haul? Well, you know, of course that there is. And you know that that perfect gift is the one that God has given to you. He's given you his Son, and you need him more than you need anything! He's given you adoption into his family that you can use every day. He's given you heaven itself that will last, not just for a really long time, but for forever. Here's how the apostle Paul put it Galatians 4:4-7:

⁴But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ⁶Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. Father."

St. Paul reminds us that we have received

THE PERFECT GIFT AT THE PERFECT TIME

I. We Need It Now

God's gift of Jesus isn't on that list I found on the internet, because his gift is so radically different that any other gift. It's something you and I need right now. You see, we, like Jesus were born under the law. And though we are obligated to keep it all perfectly -- slaves to the law -- we sure don't keep it that well. We break the law time and time again. We rebel against God in our thoughts, in our words, in our actions. And having rebelled against God's law, we were slaves not only to the law, but slaves to sin, slaves to Satan, slaves to death, and slaves to hell. What we needed most was (and still is) a Savior from that slavery.

Omaha steaks have nothing on God's gift to us. He gives us what we really need. "***God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law.***" He redeemed us who were enslaved, literally he "bought us out" of that slavery. Think of the ransom paid to rescue a child who's been kidnapped. And the ransom that Jesus paid was his own life. Jesus told his disciples in Mark 10:45, "***the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.***"

That's what Christmas is all about -- that true God became true man, born of a woman so that he could die, born under the law to keep it perfectly in our place. We miss the whole point of Christmas if we separate Jesus' birth from Jesus' death. That's the whole reason he was born -- to die. That's what we confess in the Nicene Creed: "***For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human. For our sake he was crucified...***" And by that sacrifice, you and I are set free from our sin, rescued from Satan, ransomed out of hell, and given eternal life.

And not only is this gift something we need right now, but it's something we can use all year...

II. We Can Use It All Year

Some gifts we can use right now, but they're seasonal. For most Christmas gifts their value lasts a limited time. Omaha Steaks are good only once! The Christmas ornament that you receive will be packed away with the rest in another month's time. The hand towels with the snowman print, may make it through February, but will be out of place in July. But that's not the case with God's gift to us at Christmas. All year we can receive the blessings that his gifts give.

Paul says, "**God sent his Son... to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ...you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father"..."**" We are no longer slaves to sin. We are sons! Imagine the most destitute orphan living on the streets, but then a young couple finds him, takes him into their home, gives him a hot meal, a warm bath, a fresh set of clothes, and a soft bed to sleep in. Then they start the process to adopt him as their own son! What a status change that boy would enjoy!

And what a status change you and I have had! We're not God's employees, we're not his slaves or his hired hands, but his dearly loved children! And think of all the blessings that comes with that status! We have our heavenly Father's promises that he'll provide for our needs, that he'll protect us from all spiritual harm, that he'll be there to answer our prayers! We can cry out to him, "Abba," "Daddy," and talk to God like a dearly loved child talks to its father.. We can ask of him anything at any time and be confident that he hears and will answer only a way that's for our eternal good.

We have complete freedom from the law, not to go and sin, but as God's children, we have the freedom to not sin! We're not enslaved anymore! And these gifts of our adoption, or our freedom, of becoming God's dearly loved children, aren't seasonal -- here today at Christmas, but need to be packed away in storage for another year. No! We can enjoy the blessings and benefits of God's perfect gift to us throughout the year and throughout our lives! And finally, the perfect gift is one that lasts.

III. We Can Use It Forever

Some gifts are great, but eventually break, or wear out, or get too small. The gifts of food or drink, even the wine of month club, which lasts all year will eventually be all consumed and gone sooner or later. But not God's perfect gift to us in Jesus. The blessings and benefits that he gives in his Son will last forever.

Paul says, "**you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.**" Dear friends, you are God's heir. Paul isn't being sexist when he uses the gender specific word, "son," instead of "child." In his culture, sons, not daughters, received their father's estate. (Daughters were married off and received the estate of their father-in-law.) But all of you, whether male or female, are sons of God. And as such you're heirs. And the estate that God leaves for you to inherit is heaven -- the eternal paradise that will never break, never wear out, never spoil, never be consumed. It will last forever.

And finally, what makes this gift so amazing is that you can never lose it, even if you give it away. If you re-gift a fruitcake or a bottle of wine or a gift card, for better or worse, you lose the gift for yourself. But with God's perfect gift, you can re-gift it and pass it on to others without losing a bit of it for yourself. When you re-gift the good news of Jesus' ransom from sin, death and hell, you can still keep it for yourself because it really does last forever.

What's the perfect gift? It's not an order of Omaha Steaks or an "Atmotoys Ball" the moon. The perfect gift is God's Son to you. The perfect gift is knowing that your sins are forgiven and that you're an heir of heaven! The perfect gift is knowing that the one you loved who died in the Lord, is enjoying that inheritance right now. For this perfect gift is one we all need. It's one we can use all the time. It's one we can use forever. Treasure that gift, above all others. Share that gift with all others. In Jesus' name, dear friends, amen.