



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Timeless Christmas Gifts

John 3:16 (LB)

December 24, 2004

Rev. Matthew J. Hook

Time's up! This is it! There's no time left. Are you ready for Christmas? All the kids say, "Yes!" All the adults say, "No!" Are you ready for Christmas? Some of you are saying, "I have meals to prepare. I have presents to wrap. (The really desperate ones are saying) I still have presents to buy." Tomorrow the whole world shuts down and they focus on a single event. The freeways will be empty. Offices will be closed. And the whole world focuses on a single event. It's a timeless moment.

Why is Christmas such a big deal? Why is it timeless? How can a baby born 2000 years ago on the other side of the world, stop traffic in Michigan in 2004? Because it was no ordinary baby. The Bible says, God came to earth. That's bigger news than when man landed on the moon. God invaded earth. He split history into A.D. and B.C. Every time you write a check, what's your reference point? Jesus Christ. 12-25-2004, years. From what? From Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, "*God loved the world so much that He gave his Son.*" It's amazing but when He entered the world He entered just like everybody else does. As a baby. But He was no ordinary baby. If He had stayed in the crib, we wouldn't be here today. He grew up and He taught some things about God because He was God and He died on the cross. He went from the crib to the cross. The Bible says, "*For unto you is born a Savior.*" And He became our Savior.

So what? Even if He was God, what difference does it make? It makes a big difference, because Jesus has given us some timeless gifts that have changed your life, or can change your life in 2005.

I want to be as simple and as straightforward and as brief as possible. The Bible says that because Jesus Christ came at Christmas time, three things can be true in your life. I want you to remember this in 2005, because Jesus came at Christmas...

1. My past can be forgiven.
2. My present can be managed.
3. My future can be guaranteed.

That pretty much takes care of your life, and your time: past, present and future.

1. BECAUSE JESUS CHRIST CAME AT CHRISTMAS, MY PAST CAN BE FORGIVEN. Romans 3:23-24 (Living Bible) "*All of us have sinned yet now God declares us 'not guilty' of offending him if we trust in Christ who freely takes away our sin.*" That's good news. The fact is none of us are perfect. I don't measure up to my own standard, much less God's. We all have regrets.

In a letter to Santa Claus, one little kid wrote, "Dear Santa, There are three little boys who live at our house. There's Jeffrey. He is two. There's David. He is four. There's Norman. He is seven. Jeffrey is good some of the time. David is good some of the time. Norman is good all of the time. I am Norman." The problem is -- none of us are Norman's. None of us are good all of the time.

We all have regrets. Guilt has a devastating effect on our lives. It robs us of happiness. It causes depression. It can make you sick. Guilt does all kinds of things to us because we don't know how to get rid of it. People will do anything to relieve guilt. They'll take drugs or get drunk or try therapy or go to Disneyworld. Thrills, travel, become workaholics. Anything to cover up the things I wish hadn't happened in my life.

But there's only one solution. And that's forgiveness. The good news is God wants to forgive you. He wants to clear your conscious. When God forgives you there's several things about it that you need to know.

- It's instant. He doesn't make you wait to forgive you. It's instant.
- It's undeserved. You'll never earn it. You can't work for it. You can't beg God for it. You can't bribe God for it. It's undeserved.
- It's complete. The Bible says, When we confess our sins to God we give them to Christ. God says, *"Their sins will I remember no more."* That's one of the most amazing verses in the Bible: that God can forget. The God who made the whole world, chooses to forget your sin once it's forgiven.

What God forgets, you can forget too. Most of us, even if we believe God forgives us, don't forgive ourselves. We hold onto guilt for years. But God doesn't condemn you, so don't drag them out again. Satan wants to keep you under guilt, but God says it's forgiven.

Have you ever been halfway through painting a room and wish you could start over? Have you ever been halfway through a meal and wish you could start over? Halfway through some project? Halfway through life and wish you could start over? *"If anyone is in Christ, he becomes a new person altogether. The past is finished and gone. Everything becomes fresh and new."* God wants you to not just turn over a new leaf, God wants to give you a new life. It's like starting again, being born all over. Jesus said, I didn't come to rub it in, I came to rub it out. If there is anything that's good news it's that God says my past can be forgiven. Regardless of who you are or what you've done or what you think you've done, you matter to God and He cares about you. He wants to forgive you. That's incredible, but that's not all.

2. MY PRESENT CAN BE MANAGED. I've met more stressed out people in the last six weeks than I have in a long time. I don't know if it's the economy or what, but I think you'd agree that life can wear you down. It gets to you. People are always looking for additional energy. People say "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." Good news. The Christ who came at Christmas 2000 years ago can give you the power to manage your present problems.

Philippians 4:13 *"I have the strength to face all conditions by the power Christ gives me."* You don't know what '05 holds, but you can face them all. God assumes the responsibility to meet your needs. That's amazing. When you give your life to Christ, He assumes responsibility to take care of all your needs. *"God gave us His own Son. Can we not trust such a God to give us everything else that we need?"* He says He'll supply all your needs. If He supplies all your needs, what else is left? Nothing. He takes care of my past, He takes care of my present.

3. MY FUTURE CAN BE GUARANTEED. Hebrews 2 *"Jesus became like us to set free those who were slaves all their lives because of the fear of death."* The fear of death is a universal problem. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, educated or uneducated, white, black brown, whatever, we're all going to face death. It's a universal problem. It is an inevitable fact of life that we're all going to die. The mortality rate in America is 100%. Since we're all going to die, it seems foolish to go through life unprepared for something you know is inevitable. That just doesn't make sense. I know someday I'm going to die. Everybody else in history has, so I guess I'm going to. So it makes sense to be prepared for it. You're not ready to live until you're ready to die.

I can stand before you and say in absolute sincerity, I am not afraid to die. I'm afraid of pain but I'm not afraid to die! I have fully claimed Christ's promises. I've already settled that issue. I don't even worry about what would happen to Leigh and the kids, because I've decided to claim God's faithfulness. For a Christian, death is just a homecoming, a transition to better things.

God has some gifts for you at Christmas time this year. They are three gifts, but they are wrapped up in one big gift, Jesus Christ. When you receive Jesus Christ, the gift, you get the three benefit gifts.

- 1) The gift of forgiveness. *"Let us praise God for the free gift he gave us in his Son we are set free, our sins are forgiven."* That takes care of my past.
- 2) The gift of strength. That takes care of the present. Jesus said, *"I'm leaving you with a gift, peace of mind and heart So don't be troubled or afraid."* He says, I'm with you. I'll handle it. I'll help you. You don't know what's going to happen but I'll help you.
- 3) The gift of eternal life. Romans 6:23 *"The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

When you look at these gifts there are several things you notice:

- 1) They are very personal. They come in a person, in Christ.
- 2) They are practical. They are exactly what you need. they take care of your past, your present, your future.
- 3) They are priceless. They cost Christ His life. They cost God His Son. That shows the worth of you. When you receive a gift that expensive you realize somebody really values you. God says, You are valuable.
- 4) They are permanent. I've received a lot of gifts that didn't last til New years. This is a permanent gift; timeless.

Two questions:

1) Have you received God's Christmas gift of Jesus Christ? The tragedy is many people celebrate Christmas, year after year, and they've never received God's Christmas gift. That doesn't make sense! Have you accepted God's gift of forgiveness, strength and eternal life through His Son, Christ? You can't celebrate Christmas. You're not going to find it under the tree until it's in your heart. Have you ever received that gift?

I heard the story of a father who gave his daughter some plastic pearls. She wore them for years. When she turned 13, he said, "I want you to give me those plastic pearls you're wearing." Why? "Just trust me, just give them to me." As he took them back with one hand, he pulled from his pocket a string of real pearls.

God is saying to you, "Give Me the cheap plastic thrills, give Me the things you think satisfy but really don't, and I'll give you something genuine. I'll give you something real, something that lasts if you'll trust Me."

2) How do you receive God's gift at Christmas? You receive God's gift by faith. That's belief in action. It means more than just having head knowledge. It's belief in action. Laying it on the line, make a commitment and say, "Jesus Christ, I receive Your gift of forgiveness, power for today, promise for the future with You. In exchange for that I want to trust You with my life." That's what it means to believe in Him.

People come here for many different reasons. You came for many different reasons. Some of you came out of habit. Some of you came out of tradition. Some of you came because a friend invited you. Some of you came to hear the music. Some of you came because "It's the thing to do". But regardless of why you think you're here, God brought you here to say to you, "I have a gift for you at Christmas. You matter to me." Maybe you felt close to God in the past but you've drifted away. Or maybe you've moved to this area and have never found another church. We invite you to become a part of our church family. There is a place for you here.

More than that, God has a gift for you. I challenge you to not waste another Christmas by refusing this gift.

Prayer: As we close, would you pray this in your heart, "Dear God, I don't understand it all, but I believe that You love me. Sometimes I have a hard time believing that, but I believe You love me. Thank You for

sending Jesus Christ at Christmas. This Christmas I want to receive Christ, Your Christmas gift to me. Jesus Christ, as much as i know how, I ask You to make Yourself real to me. Come into my life. Please forgive my past, help me to manage my present problems, and give me the assurance that I'll be with You when I die. Thank You. In Jesus' name. Amen."