



Christmas: God Came In the Darkest Night

The Only Gift Everyone Really Needs

Luke 1:78-79

Christmas is all about gifts; gift giving, gift buying, and gift receiving make up so much of these weeks of the year. Many are looking for the most “wanted” gifts; so much so that often these gifts are sold out and become even more sought after. As we open to the last dozen verses of Luke chapter one this morning, think about...

THE MOST WANTED GIFTS

One of the world’s largest retailers sent out a beautiful, full-color glossy flyer a few weeks ago with the “gifts everyone wants this Christmas.”

I was driving as my wife read through the items offered: diamonds, home theaters, complete “dream vacation” packages to be with music stars backstage, and on went the list. Then the “ultimate” gift was presented—a \$1.5 million personal jet that seats four!

Just what we all really want—diamonds, dream vacations, and private jets, right?

Christmas in America is mostly about the gifts I give and receive. Billions and billions of dollars of sales attest to the fact that for these four to six weeks we flood the retail outlets and search out and buy the gifts that are most wanted, most sought after, most unique, most memorable and so on.

But the real Christmas was the very first one, when God confronted the world with *the only gift everyone really needs*.

Christmas is about the gift not everyone seeks but everyone needs to find.

In fact, God came to provide the only gift that everyone absolutely, critically needs—the substitutionary death of His Son, who came to meet our deepest need prompted by our sins.

To help us understand Christmas from God’s perspective we need to: **look over** the holiday crowds that always seem to get in front of us everywhere we want to go these days; **look beyond** our house, our street, our city, our state, and even our planet—and **look above** and remember to see our God on His Throne.

GOD IS ON HIS THRONE

This very moment—as the billions of souls on this world go through their routines of eating, sleeping, working and living—our God is enthroned in the Heavens; He is sitting in power and majesty; He is surrounded by countless angelic hosts bowing before Him and reverently crying 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 God sits enthroned in Heaven, as Ruler over the entire universe.

As the Lord looks down from His Throne upon this planet overspread with people—it looks pretty dark down here.

Listen to one picture that God left us; this is 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 NKJV*

WE ARE LOST IN DARKNESS

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

Christmas is the story of the Lord God Almighty, motivated by His great love, sending Jesus to provide the way of salvation to lost humanity sitting in that complete darkness.

Jesus came to earth as the sunrise from God, to shine the light of God upon all of the lost and sin-darkened people of this world.

It is always darkest just before dawn, and that is just how it was. The Roman world of the 1st century had reached the highest levels of science, literature, culture, engineering, transportation and medicine known since Adam and Eve stepped from the Garden.

Yet, with all that advancement, most people were still hopelessly lost and endlessly troubled by an inability to even control their own fears and desires—let alone know how to come to know the Awesome God of the Universe.

So, in that darkest hour, God sent the only gift everyone really needs. Please stand with me and listen to the entire song of Zacharias in Luke 1:67-79; especially hear these closing two verses, and experience the reality of why Christ came, as we see how hopelessly lost and critically in need each of us are before God upon His Throne this very moment.

Pray.

GOD VISITS US

Christmas is all about God sending the Dayspring, a heavenly sunrise to sin-darkened humans on earth.

Christmas was God responding to meet our eternal needs; it is all about the critical care needed because we were born in such a desperate condition. Without forgiveness, justification, redemption and adoption we would be unable to live with God forever. Rather, we would spend eternity separated from God. God surveyed His creation and found that the crown of creation, the only creatures made in His image had a soul threatening, terminal illness called sin. In every aspect of Christ's coming (Christmas) there are clues describing what we needed as exactly what Jesus came to offer us. If you sift through all God said in the Christmas story, we find that God on His Throne determined that He had to change seven critical areas in our lives to save us.

As the Christmas story unfolds, we see more and more of God's plan to come and rescue lost humanity.

We have already seen in Matthew 1:21 Jesus came to "save His people from their sins." And this is God meeting our first and greatest need, which is **forgiveness**. Then we saw that all the rest of the critical needs we have in our lost and fallen condition are compressed into the next truth in Matthew 1:23. When Jesus came as God with us, "Immanuel" was a declaration that we would be justified—or God could never live with us. Our redemption, adoption, and so on, were all also reflected by the very statement that God would ever be able to be with us.

Now Luke notes the timing and purpose of Christ's coming.

This Christmas, we need to see ourselves as God saw us.

We are 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).

Christmas from the Divine vantage point as explained in the Bible should make us see ourselves as worse than we think, rather than better; because Christ's death is only for the guilty, only for the hopelessly stained, and only for the helplessly lost. It is in that condition that we find God's grace.

DO YOU SEE YOUR CRITICAL NEEDS?

All sinners (so that means all humans who have ever lived on planet earth except Jesus Christ) have seven basic biblically described critical and soul threatening needs.

If you listen to the messages that God gave about His purposes in sending Jesus to the earth you find the critical needs we have:

Matthew 1:21 is forgiveness of our sins.

Matthew 1:23 is justification so God can be with us.

Galatians 4:4-5 is redemption and adoption for us who are slaves to sin and strangers to God.

Luke 1:79 is peace with God and life to us at war with Him and dead in sin.

Briefly summed up, all humans are hopelessly lost, sitting in the dark and awaiting destruction unless seven critical needs are met by God through Jesus. These are forgiveness, justification, regeneration, reconciliation, adoption, redemption and sanctification.

THE ONLY GIFT EVERYONE REALLY NEEDS

As you think about Christmas, gifts, presents, giving and receiving—why not check and be sure that you have received the most important of all gifts?

Only if we have received Him, Jesus who came to save us from sin, do we really have anything in our possession that matters. Every other possession and gift can be stripped away from us by death, disease, or disaster. Only Jesus will never leave us or be lost; only He can save and keep us forever.

Have you received the one and only gift that you (and everyone else) really needs?

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS—CRITICAL NEED #1

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

So Christmas is all about Jesus coming to live and then die the substitutionary death to take the hopeless debt we owe to God and pay with His own life what sin has caused us to be responsible to pay—**that’s forgiveness**. A sinner stands before God as a debtor and that debt is forgotten by His payment.

*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 NKJV*

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins,
according to the riches of His grace.
Ephesians 1:7 NKJV*

*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 NKJV*

Forgiveness means that we can offer people the “remission of sins” in Jesus’ name (Luke 24:47) which brings “life through His name” (John 20:31). We can then come asking our Father 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.

Have you **experienced the relief of knowing that all your sins—past, present, and future—are GONE?** Your sins are paid for, and your eternal life with God is purchased. You have the receipt in your hand, written in the very blood of the One who paid the price. Christ's record of that payment is forever settled in this book, the Bible!

That is the first part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas

THE GIFT OF JUSTIFICATION—CRITICAL NEED #2

Because of our sin—we are all guilty convicts in God’s sight; so we need justification.

During the past few weeks the newspapers of the world have been examining the problem we have in America of not knowing what to do with all of the restless, convicted lawbreaking inhabitants that live in our borders. We have the dubious recognition of being the most incarcerated people of the world. Here are some headlines from Britain.

U.S. has the most prisoners in the world¹

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Tough sentencing laws, record numbers of drug offenders and high crime rates have contributed to the United States having the largest prison population and the highest rate of incarceration in the world, according to criminal justice experts.

A U.S. Justice Department report released on November 30 showed that a record 7 million people—or one in every 32 American adults—were behind bars, on probation or on parole at the end of last year. Of the total, 2.2 million were in prison or jail.

According to the International Centre for Prison Studies at King's College in London, more people are behind bars in the United States than in any other country. China ranks second with 1.5 million prisoners, followed by Russia with 870,000.

¹ By James Vicini <http://news.scotsman.com/latest.cfm?id=1832552006>

But the reality is actually vastly greater than one in 32—ALL of the inhabitants of the USA are convicts in God's sight; and so are all of the other people alive around the world this moment.

So Christ died to take guilty convicts and destroy any record that someone ever committed a crime and take their place in the punishment—**that's justification!** A sinner stands before God as accused and is declared righteous by His imputed righteousness.

*For **I** acknowledge **my** transgressions, and **my sin** is always before me. Against You, You only, **have I sinned**, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.*

Psalm 51:3-4 NKJV

***All we** like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, **every one**, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

Isaiah 53:6 NKJV

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, **we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Romans 5:1 NKJV

But justification is only for those who confess their crimes (sins) to the judge (God) and ask for His pardon and forgiveness. All of those who refuse to believe they are guilty, hopelessly sinful convicts in Christ's eyes are denied any relief from the penalty of their sins—both now and forever.

Have you experienced **the peace of justification, all guilt removed, all punishment forever taken away from God's sight?**

That is the second part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF REGENERATION—CRITICAL NEED #3

Because of our sin—we are all dead in our trespasses and sin; so we need regeneration.

So Christ died to take dead and rotting spiritual corpses and make them vibrant, full of endless life and brand new—**that's regeneration!**

*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.
Ephesians 2:1 NKJV*

*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.
John 10:10 NKJV*

*...But according to the power of an endless life.
Hebrews 7:16b NKJV*

Have you **experienced the power of a redeemed life** and what it's like to daily partake of the powerful presence of the very Lord God Almighty?

That is the third part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF RECONCILIATION—CRITICAL NEED #4

Because of our sin—we are all enemies of God; so we need reconciliation.

So Christ died to take enemies and make them friends—**that's reconciliation!** A sinner stands before God as an enemy and is made a friend by His peace.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Romans 8:7 NKJV

*For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, **having been reconciled**, we shall be saved by His life.*

Romans 5:10 NKJV

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

John 15:14 NKJV

Have you experienced **the wonder of friendship with God?**

That is the fourth part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF ADOPTION—CRITICAL NEED #5

Because of our sin—we are all strangers to God; so we need adoption.

So Christ died to take strangers and make them part of the family—**that's adoption!** A sinner stands before God as a stranger and is called a son by His choice.

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Ephesians 2:12 NASB

*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, **that we might receive the adoption as sons.** And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"*

Galatians 4:4-6 NKJV

Adoption is not our entrance into God's family, the way a homeless child would enter an adoptive family in our society. Rather, our only hope of getting into God's family is by *regeneration* or "the new birth" (John 3:3). In New Testament language, the word used by God for *adoption* means "placed into a family as an adult son." This denotes our *standing* in God's family of God: we enter God's family not as little children but we enter as adult sons with all the privileges. **Entrance** into God's family is by regeneration, but **enjoyment** of God's family is through adoption.

Have you experienced **the joy of being adopted into Christ's family?**

That is the fifth part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF REDEMPTION—CRITICAL NEED #6

Because of our sin—we are all slaves to unrighteousness; so we need redemption.

So Christ died to take slaves and make them free forever—**that's redemption!** A sinner stands before God as a slave and is granted freedom by His ransom.

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin."

John 8:34 NASB

*Therefore if the Son makes you free, **you shall be free indeed.***

John 8:36 NKJV

Have you experienced **the thrill of being liberated, set free and rescued by God forever?**

That is the sixth part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF SANCTIFICATION—CRITICAL NEED #7

Because of our sin—we are all defiled; so we need sanctification.

So Christ died to take our soiled and spotted lives that always get wasted and make them clean, focused and fruitful—**that's sanctification!**

Just before we read Romans 6:13b, may I again remind you of the two sides of the coin of salvation. To best understand what God has done, let me contrast and explain justification and sanctification. Because we are saved (justified) this is how we should live (sanctified).

- **Justification** is what Christ did for me on the cross. **Sanctification** is what Christ is doing in me because of the cross.
- **Justification** is immediate and was completely finished in me the instant I was saved. **Sanctification** is an ongoing process never completed on earth until I meet Jesus face to face at death or His coming.
- **Justification** is activated the moment I trust in the Person of Christ Jesus and His finished sacrifice of the cross. **Sanctification** grows with each obedient choice I make empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- **Justification** is my position declared right in God's sight. **Sanctification** is my practice made right by becoming more conformed to His image.

And so sanctification is the final part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

So what's on your list of gifts this Christmas? That million-dollar jet, the diamonds, a dream vacation or home theater? Maybe nothing that extravagant. But have you considered the gift that's a guaranteed perfect fit?

Indeed, this is a wonderful season for pausing, reflecting and being thankful for those things made available to us through the original gift of Christmas—God's perfect gift of Jesus.

If you haven't received the gift of Jesus, it's a good time to think about what is keeping you from doing so.

If you have received Christ, then you might want to think about whether you've been, in a sense, keeping that gift on display.

Amid the cares of everyday living, it can be easy to let God's gift get pushed aside. Christmas offers a perfect time to ask ourselves: Are we growing? Are we following through? Are the regeneration and sanctification processes at work? If not, then we're not enjoying the full power God wants us to have in this life.

Make this the year you show a true Christmas spirit. Talk with friends and family about how you think that meaning can best be reflected. What kinds of gifts should you give? What outward expressions of love can you show? The season is certain to offer us all something far more fulfilling and enduring than even the most spectacular of earthly gifts, if we keep our focus on God's loving gift of Jesus—the only gift we really need.