
Christmas at Bethany II (all wrapped up)

John 1:6-9 ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. ⁸ He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. ⁹ That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

Tools, John the Baptist and christmas

Presents are fun to buy for others, but let us not forget that we really like to receive presents as well. It is better to give than to receive, but to add "it's not good to receive" would be incorrect. It is good to receive, and I do like to receive. Have you ever come down for Christmas and saw a big wrapped box? Have you ever waited patiently to open that big gift, because you wanted to exercise Christmas restraint? Along the way to opening the big box you open some little boxes. You get a flashlight, a shirt, some socks, and a tool set. Those gifts are great, but now it is time to open the big one. You begin to rip through the colorful paper that has separated you from your hearts desire and when the dust settles there stands a large box with a beautiful picture of the grill you always wanted. It then dawns on you that the flashlight and tool set have a lot to do with the big gift. You will need the tools to assemble the gift if you are going to receive it fully and you will be working through the night so the flashlight will come in handy. Now I know you are wondering what this has to do with John the Baptist, Jesus and the Christmas message. Jesus is the big gift and John is the little gifts. John is not a bigger gift than Jesus, but he is a required gift. God planned that His Son would have a "tool" set to put together His arrival and John was this tool set. John's primary purpose was to bear witness to the coming of God's Son. His witness of Jesus brings many men to salvation. The same is true for each of us. We are given as a gift to others that our witness may be useful in bringing others to know Jesus.

John's promised coming

The Old Testament foretells of John's coming (**Isaiah 40:3**) and the New Testament records the filling (**John 1:23**). John's birth, response to Jesus, naming, and celebration are recorded in Luke's first Chapter. Every gospel account places John in it. He was a great man that came to us through a great birth, worked in a great ministry, attracted great multitudes, died a great death, and received great esteem from the Greatest of Men. John is one of our many Christmas gifts from God. Today I am going to proclaim that you, as a Christian called and chosen of God, are a special gift to many people as well. John was unwrapped (revealed) to his parents, the people in the temple, and then to the world. His whole ministry was to go and prepare a people for the Lord. We are called to do the same. Christmas time is the perfect time to give others the gift of you.

How can you give yourself as a gift?

- Take time and pray for others
- Search out opportunities to give charitably
- Seek opportunities to serve
- Be a bright light of joy and hope where you go
- Visit someone that is lonely
- Look for moments to share your faith

Since you have so much to offer and so many opportunities to offer what you have the list could go on. Do not hide the wonderful gift you are to the world. Imagine if God withheld His elected messenger from the world.

Dangers and delight

For Christians I believe it is easy to get stuck in one of two places. First, it is easy to get the "I'm nothing but an old sinner" mindset to the point that little is done in the power of God's proclamation of who you really are. Second, there is the danger of being prideful. Both attitudes are abundantly present in the Christian church. There is a third option and it's not the middle ground between "guilt and pride". This third option is the higher option and it is simply delighting in what God has said about you. It's not just knowing what God has said about you and acting it out. It is delighting in God, knowing what He says about you, and doing, out of delight, His

commands. This Christmas "delight" in God and sharing such delight with others.

What makes us special gifts?

Luke 1:11-17

The whole idea today is to prove that you are a special gift and to do something about it. I believe once you know that you are a gift, know why you are a gift, and then you will go to others as a gift.

I. Our Purpose that Comes from God (Luke 1:11-17)

The worst kind of gift is a useless one. My guess is you have gotten one of these gifts. There are always those who are excited to give useless gifts. They think it funny or exactly what you need and that makes the gift all the worse. It is a nice gesture to get a gift, but when the gift is useless we smile and put it in the "re-gift" pile. When you have "one" already the gift is useless. When you have a fear of dolls and clowns and you get a ceramic clown, it's useless. When you are given make up that isn't your color or clothes 3 sizes too big or small, they are useless. That is not to say you are not happy that someone attempted to get something you like, but appreciative doesn't mean useful. Christians are useful gifts with divine purpose. You are exactly what others need. You were born once with a purpose to be born again with an order to show the expression of God's love. Here is what the Angel Gabriel said about John and how it applies to you:

- a. He will give joy and gladness- (14) Our good works and attitudes will do the same
- b. His Separation will reflect the Spirit that fills him (15)- The things we do or do not do reflect the third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. This makes Christians a rare and wonderful gift.
- c. He will cause people to know God (16)- Our primary purpose is to worship God, from this flows our purpose, to bring people to know the God we worship. This is called missions in the church.
- d. His life set wrongs right (17)- Our worship and works causes brokenness in homes and society to be made right. There are results that happen when we give ourselves as gifts that we may never see here on the earth. We simply need to trust that God's word will do its job.

Saying you have purpose may sound redundant, but it is truth. Accept your purpose and act in your purpose so you can enjoy your purpose this Christmas.

Ask yourself: Are you celebrating, living in, and sharing the Purpose God has giving you?

II. Our Pleasure that Comes from Jesus (Luke 1:39-44)

Every Christmas Tara and I buy toys for our children. They unwrap them, put batteries in them, and then slowly or quickly destroy them! The pleasure in our bought gifts is short lived. Scripture says pleasure in sin is short lived. All of our pleasures are short lived, but our pleasure in Jesus is eternal. John found pleasure in Jesus before his birth and in his death. His life long pleasure was found in preparing the way for Jesus. Here are instances where John's pleasure caused him joy, motivated him, sustained him, and made him a gift to the world

- a) *Before His Birth (Luke 1:41)*- The Holy spirit in a person will always cause joy in that person when Jesus is brought up.
- b) *In His preaching (Matthew 3:1-2)*- John's preaching of repentance was fueled by His joy and pleasure in the Lord.
- c) *In His proclamation of Jesus (John 1:29)*- John waited and watched with patience until the day Jesus showed up at one of his messages. Then he proclaimed "Behold the Lamb of God!"
- d) *In His baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:14)*- John stood in awe of Jesus and found pleasure in humbling himself before the Son of God. Although John was asked to do great things he never allowed pride to take place of his pleasure in Jesus.
- e) *In the growth of Jesus' following (John 3:29-30)*- John rejoiced when people knew who Jesus was. He did not come to build his kingdom and found joy in Jesus.
- f) *While in Prison (Matthew 11:3)*- While in prison the only thing that would satisfy John was being reminded of who is. Jesus being Jesus made John's stay in prison manageable.

The pleasure that began before birth lasted a lifetime and left an example to all of us that there is no greater pleasure than the pleasure that we have in

Jesus. Jesus called John “much more than a prophet” and “none born greater than John”. When our pleasure comes from Jesus we give a gift to others that is unique and useful.

Ask yourself: Have others experienced the joy you have in Jesus?

III. Our Power Comes from the Spirit (Luke 1:15)

How did John live a holy life separate from sin, separated from God, and turn many to God? How is one man supposed to accomplish so much with so little? The answer is the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit that empowered John to be a great gift and accomplish great things is the same Spirit that has been given to each believer (**Romans 5:5**). We now operate in the power of the Spirit displaying the Fruit of the Spirit. What does the power of God produce that is a gift to others in us? **Galatians 5:22-23**

Love

Joy

Peace

Longsuffering

Gentleness

Goodness

Meekness

Faith

Temperance

We have every reason to make much of Jesus. The world needs the Fruit of the Spirit that is in the church. Such fruit can convert the soul and alter the social course of an area. If you want to change the social morality in your area, start by giving yourself as a gift. You can change the way people view and treat each other. You can affect how people go about their lives for the glory of God, but it does not begin in a march or demonstration. Such change begins in the giving of Christians to the world. Be the light, be the salt, affect the world!

These good gifts are in us and need to be shared with others; if they are not shared then they are not what they are. This Christmas unleash the power of the Spirit of God that has been given to you.

Who to Give Yourself too?

My first inclination is everyone, but my spiritual inclination tells me to warn you not to cast your pearls before swine. Be prayerful and cautious but willing to give yourself to everyone. God has not given us the Spirit of fear but of a sound mind! Go forth and spread Christmas cheer for the glory of God and sake of man. Who are you giving yourself to this Christmas season?