

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: December 2, 2012

Give the Gift that Keeps on Giving

by Dan Trygg

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that the one believing in Him might not be ruined, rather he might have (and be having) age-type life.” John 3:16

“For the paycheck of sin is death, but the free-gift of God is age-type life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23

“...the free-gift is *not* like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, *much more* did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, *abound* to the many.” Romans 5:15

“Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!” II Corinthians 9:15

“And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful people, who will be able to teach others also.” II Timothy 2:2

“But do not neglect the doing-good and the sharing, for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased.” Hebrews 13:16

Last weekend, someone showed me a “Christmas Catalog” from World Vision. It had the appearance of many of the store ads you might receive at this time of the year. It was all decked out with seasonal trimmings in the colors and some of the themes of the Christmas season. You could actually purchase gifts for your family and friends that were made by people that World Vision was working with in other countries. **Instead of just shopping for your family and friends, however, the catalog was also set up to encourage you to shop and pick out gifts to give to other families, ...needy people** that World Vision works with in other parts of the world. **You could purchase a goat, a sheep, some ducks or chickens for another family, or a village.** I remember distinctly the ad for the ducks. You could purchase five ducks, which would then be able to provide eggs for a needed source of protein. The idea was that, with five ducks, you may even be able to establish a reproducing flock that would *continue* to provide eggs. The ad mentioned that these ducks could provide eggs for *two families for years to come!* Of course, if the flock could be *expanded*, the impact could be even *greater*. The price is very reasonable -- \$30 for the ducks, \$ 75 for a goat. **One of the largest needs in underdeveloped countries is having a reliable source of clean water. You can also donate toward the drilling of a well, or toward other clean water projects. These are tangible, easily understood projects that can be life-changing, and continue to have an impact for many years. These are truly gifts that keep on giving.**

That really impressed me. **There is something about being able to give a gift that can produce a *tangible, ongoing change that really appeals.*** You don't feel like you are just giving a check, and wondering where it really goes. You can get your head around what you are doing, and you can imagine the good that it will do. I was pondering this throughout the week, and realized that **there has been no greater, impactful gift than the gift of Jesus Christ.** My mind goes immediately to Romans 5, where Paul emphasizes the powerful impact of the free gift of God in Christ. Even after many years of sin, and generations of sin's destructive effects in this world, **Jesus' gracious act of obedient sacrifice unleashed a power that is abundant, overflowing, expansive, and is *more than enough* to swallow up the damaging effects of sin.** The dark scourge of sin and death continue to spread, but the powerful light of God's Spirit works to transform the true followers of Christ to put aside the mindset and deeds of darkness, and bring the healing, transforming grace of Jesus to liberate people from sin's pall.

This begins with the simple message of John 3:16, that **God loved us enough to send Jesus with a *purpose.*** **This purpose was “in order that we might not be ruined”.** The Greek behind the word often translated as “perish”, means to “ruin, destroy, be lost, or be killed”. **God sent Jesus to turn us back from the consuming effects of sin on our lives, characters, personalities, and our destinies.** It is a much bigger picture than just saving us from death and hell. It is about saving us from the self-destruction that comes from living as self-centered people in a world system that works to diminish us, and rob us of health, vitality and nobility. In Romans 6:23, Paul plainly states that the wage we earn by serving sin is death. **Death is our paycheck, our compensation for the investments of time and energy we put into selfish living.** Now, we have all been born into this life with the *cancer* of death within our beings. We cannot totally stop its progression in our lives by healthy living. We are all going to get old and die, if we don't get picked off by something else prematurely. This is inescapable, as long as we are in these “earth suits”. **The power of Jesus' death and resurrection will ultimately deliver those who are His from even the bonds of death,** raising and recreating us to a new existence in “spiritual bodies” (I Cor. 15:36-58). **The gift of God that keeps on giving reaches not only to the grave, but through the grave to a whole other destiny that extends into the eternal future.**

That is not what I want to discuss today, however. **I want to talk about the radical transformation produced by the Gift that keeps on giving.** Just as those ducks can change the lives of two families, in a small but significant way, so Jesus came to change our lives in a BIG way. **God sent His only Son in order that we might *not* be ruined,**

destroyed, lost or killed. So, what are you doing about it? Are you continuing down the old ways of darkness and selfishness, running headlong down the same pathways as your unbelieving neighbors? Are you continuing in darkness, confusion, disorientation, ...groping and feeling your way along, looking for peace and pleasure in a world that *will* disappoint? Believing in Jesus means to turn from all that to follow Him. He is the light of the world, so you would not *have to* walk in darkness, but *might have* the light of life (Jn. 8:12). **Sadly, so many who profess to believe in Jesus are not walking in the light! They continue on in the darkness.** No wonder they look like and smell of the selfishness and death of sin! That is where they continue to live. Jesus came to save us from that! *We must choose to follow Him out of its clutches!* Look again at John 8:12. **Jesus is the light to those who will follow Him.** Those following Him will no longer walk in darkness, but will have the light of *life*. **God sent Jesus to turn us away from ruin, to be a light to guide us to a transforming relationship with Him.** God is light. In Him there is no darkness, at all. He offers to not only *free us* from the darkness, but to make us sons and daughters of light (Jn. 12:36; Eph. 5:7-14). **He wants to transform us by lighting us up inside with the light of His Holy Spirit, ...to fill our previously cold, dark, empty hearts with warmth and vitality of His life-giving Spirit.** Proverbs says, "...the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble" (4:18,19). **As we are transformed by pondering the light of God's grace and truth, we will begin to live differently** (II Cor. 3:18). **The fruit of our lives will be seen in the kind and good things we do.** Our lives will then display the light of God's inner presence in tangible ways that will touch others. They will recognize God in us, and praise Him (Matt. 5:14-16). **The Jesus-Gift is supposed to go on giving, transforming, reaching-out to dispel darkness, ...the darkness in us, and the darkness in the world around us** (Phil. 2:15,16).

Consider the dark, hopeless world into which Jesus came. 60% of the Roman Empire were slaves. Most people worshiped capricious idols, attempting to appease their wrath and entice their favor. **There was a pall of fatalism and chaos that most people lived under.** Unwanted children were put outside the village to die of starvation, or be eaten by animals. **Life had little value. Immorality, corruption and injustice were rampant. Disease and sickness were commonplace.** People were crass, brutal and abusive. **The followers of Jesus have brought light, hope and life to every corner of the globe.** Modern science had its birth in the belief in an orderly God who made an orderly world. Science could not develop in a world of chaos and unpredictability. **Wherever true disciples went, they cared for the poor, the sick, the imprisoned.** The value of human life was fostered by Biblical teachings. **The work for human dignity, freedom from slavery and oppression, equality and social reform have been the direct result of the impact of Christian teaching on the world.** *Jesus said that the world would know we are His followers if we love others as he loved us* (Jn.13:34,35). Sure, human history is filled with all kinds of horrific abuses of power, wars and oppression in the name of Jesus, too. We look at the evil abuses, and wrong-headed, arrogant colonizing efforts of religion, and we recoil at the obvious "yuck factor". We grieve over these abuses. These do not represent the true heart of Jesus. In fact, we *judge* their evil by the very teachings of truth and justice taught in the Bible, and exemplified in Jesus Christ! It is because evil, sinful people did not *adequately* pursue the transformation of soul that the Jesus-Gift can produce in a person's heart that these individuals were capable of such actions. They don't represent Jesus; they represent the folly and tragedy of human sin. In general, **the impact of Jesus upon the world has been tremendously positive. The inner stirring of His Spirit continues to prompt people to change for the better, and to attempt to serve God and people in positive, tangible and healthy ways.**

I know in my life Jesus has been the Gift that keeps on giving. Since I yielded my life to Him in 1971, I have lived to serve Him. He has transformed my character and made me a better person. The better I know Him, the more I love Him, ...and the more I love others, too. The *inner transformation* has produced the *outer fruit* of sacrifice and service to help others. **Before I knew Him, I was a selfish person with a self-seeking agenda. He has filled me with the light of His love and grace, and I find that I do not want to live that old selfish way, ...and I don't!** His living presence within me enables me to see beyond my narrow self-interests. He warms my heart with love and compassion for others, that translates into practical actions to help and support others. It is Jesus in me. **As I have followed Him, He has filled and transformed me. It is wonderful, and I live to introduce Him to others. I long to help others find the Jesus that I know.** Unfortunately, there are so many who *name His name*, and *identify with Him*, but who *still seem to be going down the path to ruin*, ...pulling a bag with religious labels and stickers on it. **Where is the transforming power of Jesus? That is the message, and the inner-life, that I want to share.**

Paul talked about investing in those who will be faithful to pass along the message and life to others also. As we do *this*, those who truly know God will continue to spread across the globe, and God will raise up creative people to bring the love of Jesus to new people in innovative ways. **The impact of God's gift through Jesus will continue to set people free from ruin, ...free to discover the life that transforms. It is that life, freely given, that will continue to motivate God's people to overcome the decimating effects of sin, both in our lives and around the world.**