

God's Gift

Gospel presentation – The Crown, 4.12.11

Intro

That time of year again in case you hadn't noticed. Doesn't really feel like it to me because we've had such a warm November – talk of a drought, a boiling start to October (and Summer a bit of a blur to me).

The main Selfridges and Harrods London stores launched their Christmas range on Thursday 28th July! Anyway – it's almost Christmas....

To be honest what I'm talking about today isn't really Christmas as such – it's what's at the heart of it for most people in this country and around the world wherever Christmas is celebrated – giving and receiving gifts.

What's important is that gift giving is a huge part of most countries and in most cultures. But of course in each one it tends to be a bit different, with different etiquette and rules. Fascinating! Two quick examples:

Japan

- Gift-giving is a central part of Japanese **business** etiquette.
- A gift for an individual should be given in private.
- The correct etiquette is to present/receive gifts with both hands.
- Before accepting a gift it is polite to refuse at least once or twice before accepting.
- Giving four or nine of anything is considered unlucky. Give in pairs if possible

Saudi Arabia

- Gifts should only be given to the most intimate of friends.
- Gifts should be of the highest quality.
- Never buy gold or silk as a present for men.
- Always give/receive gifts with the right hand.

As a follower of Jesus I believe that at the very heart of the **Christmas** message then, is **not** the giving and receiving of gifts, but at its root is the giving and receiving of **A** gift.

As Christians we believe that Christmas is all about the coming into this world of a little baby called Jesus. Wasn't just any baby, God's son, born as a human. He was on a mission as he grew up to say things and do things that completely sets him apart from absolutely anyone who's ever lived.

Come back to all that later... but what I want to focus on is Jesus as a gift, GG. I know that this is something many of us have heard before but I really believe it's right to ram this point home today whoever you are – **that Jesus came into the world as a gift, and is still on offer today as a gift.** and a true gift is something we're chuffed with, we delight in and which brings us joy. He is something that is passed from one party – God – to another – human kind. And like with all gifts, we who are on the receiving end have a choice as to how we respond to the gift and what we do with it.

Am going to go through 3 things today:

1. The gift giver
2. The gift
3. Our response to the gift

Right from the start – I believe I'm speaking to two groups.

1. Those that have at some point accepted God's gift into their lives ... but have perhaps lost sight of the fact that He is a gift ... so much of a great gift that you absolutely didn't deserve it and couldn't earn it, but he's absolutely there to bring joy.
2. Those who for whatever reason have never accepted GG into their lives. At the end, opportunity to respond...

1. The gift giver

Victoria Beckham:. According to [UK MSN Money](#), Victoria Beckham gave husband [David Beckham](#) a luxury **Rolls-Royce Phantom** Christmas -- worth approximately £265,000. Wives out there I hope you're taking note. David returned the favour by presenting Victoria with a £1.2 million diamond necklace embellished with more than 100 glistening rubies. Husbands are you taking note??!

[Beyonce](#) – baby due this month. At her baby shower a while back, former Destiny's Child bandmate and Kelly Rowland made sure that Beyonce's forthcoming baby will be washed in style. Kelly bought Beyonce [a \\$5,200 Swarovski crystal-studded baby bathtub](#). What a gift giver!

Statue of Liberty – one of the biggest in history. To mark the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, in 1886 the French presented this statue to the United States as a gift of friendship. The Americans built the base for the statue, while the statue itself was constructed in France and then shipped over.

They all involved one person, or people choosing to get a gift and then offer it to another person or group.

The gift giver - God too is very much into giving gifts. I'll say that again - God too is very much into giving gifts. In fact, absolutely central to who He is. God is love. He is love itself. His desire is to bless us, not harm us. Wants the very best for us. One way is through giving gifts.

Couple of examples of this before going to the main one:

1.1 Different types of roles within church.

Ephesians 4 - 'he who gave some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.'

1.2 Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Other way we can see he has given us gifts is of course in terms of what we call spiritual gifts, or the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Tongues, prophecy, healing, discernment, - we're told to eagerly desire these (1 Cor 14: 1). Why? Because they build up ourselves and the church.

1.3 Jesus

*John 3:16: For God so loved the world that **he gave** His one and only son. That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

But as good as these are, the main gift God has given us, the main one which shows just what his character really is - how incredible, awesome, loving he really is → His son, Jesus.

2. The gift

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves – it is the **gift** of God – not by works, so that no man can boast. Ephesians 2: 8-9*

hold that thought...

Quiz time!

Think about some of the most popular Christmas gifts over recent years. (technically US but pretty much the same here). Great opportunity to do a little quiz...

1. 2007: iPod Touch - The first touchscreen and Web-enabled iPod
2. 1997: Tamagotchi - Japanese, digital pets required feeding and poo-cleaning. 70m sold
3. 1985: Care Bears – weren't so popular until they had their own cartoon show
4. 1980: Rubik's Cube – Russian

5. 1993-1994: Mighty Morphin Power Rangers – Five teenagers with superpowers fought evil aliens. NZ story!

As great as those things are – even the Tamagotchi, they don't come anywhere close to the gift on offer to you today. God's greatest gift to us; His Son, Jesus. Those toys and those gifts come and go. They come and they go. They're things. They need batteries, they break. After a while we move on. But 2000 years ago GOD sent his SON, his only SON.

So what? WHY? Why such a big deal? We have to go back a bit....

- God's perfect. He's love itself. He designed and created the world. And he designed us – you, me, whoever – to be in a two way relationship with him. To know him, relate to him, love him. And him to us.
- But when we look around us, when we turn on the news and open the paper, we realise pretty quickly that the world isn't perfect. It's not how God intended it to be, or how he wants it to be. We realise that most people, most of the time aren't bothered about God. They're living not for God, but for themselves.
- Best way of seeing this is when we look at ourselves. Think how often we let ourselves down. Just think back over the last week. Can you think back to anything you did when you think, you know what, I shouldn't have said that, I shouldn't have thought that, I shouldn't have done that. That was stupid. Certainly I can for me.
- The posh word for this is sin. Anything that God wouldn't do.
- The truth is that sin stops us being what we're meant to be. It means we fall short of even our own standards. And if we fall short of our own standards, think how far we've fallen from Gods'.
- Us as humans, just because of the way we naturally are, we've turned our backs on God and are separated from Him.
- Such is the mess we're in, that we are **totally incapable** of changing ourselves! We can't get right with God by our selves,

- “The prostitute, the liar, the murderer, are short of God’s glory; but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the top of a mountain but you are as little able to touch the stars as they.”
BISHOP HANDLEY MOULE 1894.
- The gulf is that big that it takes God to reach down to us.
And he did that in the only way possible – coming down in the form of his Son.
- So God sent his son Jesus as a **gift**, to bridge the gap between us and Him. He didn’t come to rub it in, but to rub it out. To save us from the mess we’re in.
- And the only way that could be done was for Jesus to take all of our sin onto himself – he who was totally perfect! Every bad thought, every bad deed you’ve ever done. As he was being horrendously crucified in front of a watching massive crowd, he took on all the sin of you, me, the person sat next to you, your next door neighbor, the world.
- And we get a glimpse of the anguish he was under when Jesus cries out ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’. His father, the one from whom he’d been in perfect relationship and union with forever, couldn’t even bear to look at him and turned his face away. Jesus couldn’t even say ‘my father, my father’, it was ‘My God, my God’.
- The gift had to die – be executed - in order to totally take the death penalty we deserve for everything wrong we’ve ever done. Jesus rising from the dead 3 days later meant that he totally and utterly defeated the power of sin. It means that through Jesus we can be forgiven, we can start again and we can have a proper relationship with God – what each of us were designed for. Incredible!
- And in the new testament Paul writing to the church in Ephesus which is in modern day Greece, summed this all up nicely when he said

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves – it is the **gift** of God – not by works, so that no man can boast.*

Ephesians 2: 8-9

3. Our response to God's gift

Like any gift, there are loads of ways we can receive / **respond** to it.

When 10 I received a birthday present I basically didn't want and responded to it in a bit of a stupid way. **Have you ever had that?**

Was my first CD player, a portable CD, tape player and radio. Could lift up and carry around. Didn't cost a huge amount but I remember getting really upset thinking 'what a waste of money', as if I'm ever going to use that! I hardly used it for ages. Ridiculous! Irrational.

The reality was I was being silly, a bit of pride was in there. I basically turned my back on what in reality was a fantastic gift, something that would have seriously have enjoyed, way better than anything else I had at the time. In time I did...

And in a small way that shows how we as people can respond to Jesus.

Another well known verse for you:

- *Yet **to all who received him**, to those who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God John 1:12[13]*

Nothing has changed! *[Repeat but in present tense].*

To receive him means to accept the gift of God that's Jesus, to **honour** the gift giver God through the way we live our lives.

To make a conscious decision to turn from our old way of life, admit we've messed up and take up the offer of the gift that's available – God then brings us in close, gives us a new start, and makes us part of his family. Doesn't matter who you are, where you're from, this is the offer of a lifetime and something not to be missed!

Have you received the gift of God that's on offer? Have you believed in his name?

opportunity in about 5 mins to accept the gift of God.

I also want to say this about our response to the gift of God – to receive him the right way goes back to that thing **grace**.

What grace basically means is that this is a gift we absolutely don't deserve and have couldn't earn.

I wonder if you've ever been given a gift that you felt you totally deserved? I definitely used to feel that way when I worked at a hotel back home before I moved to Birmingham.

From Kendal – worked in the best hotel in the town, which isn't saying much, as a waiter and general dogsbody. I served Duncan Goodhew the Olympic swimmer burnt toast and I took a room service breakfast up to Robert Plant from Led Zeppelin. The hair, dressing gown – quite a shock!

Because I was general dogsbody, but also being a lad, I had to always help move people's luggage for them. Take from reception to their room, to their car, etc. The deal was that I would tend to get a tip, perfected the art of sheepishly behaving if not given one. If not given one I'd get a bit peeved off! Perhaps you could say I did deserve it and I had earned it.

GG – completely different!

To receive him the right way means to understand in our head and our heart that nothing you can do can make Him love you more, make Him love you less. Doesn't matter how many old ladies you've helped across the road this week, how much you've given to charity, how many times you go to church, how many areas of the Crown you serve on - Jesus is a gift. Away with any sense of legalism or religion! Knowing this liberates us and frees us to enjoy the gift of God so much more.

Reaching the end but in closing I want to speak to two groups of people.

1. Anyone here that knows there's never been a time when you've accepted GG – Jesus – into your life.

Think back if you can to that present you were given once but which at the time, if you're honest, you didn't really want. For me it was my first CD player when I was 10. Maybe you thought the present was just a bit pointless, maybe you flat didn't like it, maybe you couldn't be bothered with it, maybe you just thought 'I've no need for it'.

It could be a similar reason as to why you've never taken up the offer, of inviting Jesus into your life.

This morning God is extending the offer of the gift of his Son to you afresh. He loves you more than you could ever know. So can I urge you, with everything I've got, don't turn down the offer.

2. Anyone here who has previously accepted Jesus, but at some point perhaps you've lost sight of the fact that he's been given as a gift.

Let me tell you it's easily done! Thinking about this talk – I've been very convicted.

And I think particularly if you were fortunate enough to get to know Jesus when you were younger - it becomes easy to forget the truth that Jesus is a gift / a present we've been given, one we absolutely haven't earned, one we absolutely have done nothing to deserve. God's grace.

we don't honour a giver by trying to pay them for the gift; we honour them by enjoying the gift - same with us; Christmas is a good time to remind ourselves that we can't repay God - all we can do is enjoy His Gift

RECEIVING JOY.