

Written Copy: Titus 3:4-7 “The One Christmas Gift Liberally Given” Christmas Dawn

Christmas Eve December 24th, 2021 - 3:00 PM Service

Text: Titus 3:4-7

⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Exegetical Statement (the text’s context)

We were all like the Gentile Church on Crete before Paul came with the Gospel, gluttons for the pleasures and values of the world, and of our own sinful desires. We were unworthy to any kind of gift from our God. But on Christmas morn, the goodness most needed by mankind, filled with a love that desires what is best for us appeared in the birth of Jesus, the gift from our Savior God. Through that gift He saved us. And that salvation comes not from any work we might do, not even from those works that have God’s divine approval. Our salvation comes from the divine work Jesus Christ, our Savior accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection. And this gift was delivered to you, poured out liberally and abundantly on you through the washing of regeneration that makes us born from above and the lifelong renewal of your heart and mind that His Holy Spirit continues to work out in us. By this free gift we are declared to be in right standing, acquitted of all charges of sin, and therefore made worthy to receive our last day inheritance of Eternal Life.

Focus Statement:

Our Saving God gave to us the very best gift on Christmas morn. It was only one baby born one time in the most humble setting, but it is the richest gift that we could ever receive. He earned for our forgiveness of sins, salvation, and right standing with God that makes us good enough to inherit eternal life. This is poured out liberally, abundantly, and continually through the washing regeneration of baptism that makes us born from above. The Holy Spirit works the rest of your life to renew your heart and mind so that eternal inheritance will be yours on the Last Day

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

Like the Church on Crete, we live in a society that revels in sinful abundance. The “merriness” of our Christmas is in direct correlation with how many presents we receive and how many are gathered around our table. We long for gifts that do not last and cannot satisfy in the long run. Those who must isolate or who are alone think that Christmas and its joy have passed them by.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Revel and praise God in the wonder that is this one gift, given so long ago, in the humblest of settings, that has eternal benefits of the greatest amount that are given to those who cannot and do not earn them.

Subject Sentence: Our Savior’s One amazing gift that keeps on saving

Introduction: Our Desire for the Christmas of Excess

We wish you a Merry Christmas! Have yourselves a Merry Little Christmas! All I want for Christmas is You! Most people in our culture today, within and without the Church I believe really do think they mean what these Christmas Classics sing about. Most really do wish that their fellow man enjoys a Merry Christmas, peace on earth, and good will toward men. But how do we really define what is a “Merry Christmas”? We certainly have some mental images and expectations that a “Merry Christmas” brings to mind. A Merry Christmas has a beautiful tree that has many beautifully wrapped presents beneath it. *[show picture of beautiful tree with presents]*. On the other hand, you would not consider this to be part of a Merry Christmas, *[show Charlie Brown Christmas Tree]* unless you are watching “A Charlie Brown Christmas”. We might happily sing “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” with Frank Sinatra, but we don’t really mean that; we really don’t want a “Little” Christmas. We want a big whopping Christmas all decked out, with tons of presents and tons of food. And sure, we want that one special someone to be by our side, the one we might sing “All I Want for Christmas is You” to. But what we really want is for them and us to enjoy a house full of family and friends gathered around us enjoying food, fellowship, and a ton of presents. Maybe something like this, the Clark W. Griswold Family Christmas extravaganza *[show picture of dinner scene from Christmas Vacation]*. But like this with a dried-up turkey *[show picture of dried-up turkey being cut into]*. Well, you get the picture.

In our culture today more is always better. We may not want to admit it, but we all have a touch of this girl’s attitude in our hearts. *[Show video of girl whining for more presents]*. There you go! Merry Christmas everybody! We can’t help ourselves; we’ve been conditioned by a society that says more is better. However there are exceptions; one present is good enough when it’s the right one, the extra special one. *[Show GMC Holiday Commercial w/ Puppy and Truck]*.

Paul’s Message to Titus’ Church and To Us

We are not the only people who have been programmed to think this way. In our Epistle Lesson, the Church on the Isle of Crete, where Paul left his disciple and Gospel co-worker Titus to minister, was a lot like we are today. The inhabitants, called Cretins, were known for their love of excess and indulgence. They were sinners; sinners that Paul lumps himself and Titus in with in his description of the life they once embraced. **Titus 3:3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.** We too struggle with our culture’s worship of the god of excess. That’s why this particular reading from this particular Epistle is perfect for this sermon Christmas Eve.

We've heard sermons from countless Christmas' Eve's past that the baby Jesus is God's Christmas gift to us. That's because it's true. But this truth doesn't help with the overuse of the imagery, or the fact that the god of excess makes it fall on deaf ears sometimes. It's one tiny baby, who was born over 2,000 years ago in a stable, placed in an animal feeding trough. The very humbleness of the setting: no giant tree, no pile of presents, no elaborately decked out room, or fancy dressed guests, all hides the real magnificence of this gift.

Titus 3:4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared.

This is the "one time" gift that was promised long ago by our Creator God to His creation, the creation that we humankind spoiled with our selfish desire to be like Him. He is not only God our Creator, but He is God our Savior. And He had been planning ever since the Fall to deliver this very special gift. It is a gift of goodness: a goodness that is designed to fulfill the most urgent needs we His fallen creation have. It is a gift of lovingkindness filled with mercy and care for all of humanity who do not deserve such a wonderful gift. This is the gift that was revealed in the birth of the Child of Bethlehem, baby Jesus.

Titus 3:5-6 ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

His birth signaled that God's plan of salvation was in full operation. He, our Savior, God the Father, made it all happen when He sent His only Begotten Son to earth be our Savior incarnate. God the Son came to take on our human frame and our body, our will and our mind, so that He could win for us such wonderful gifts; gifts that we, even doing good works that are God-pleasing, could never do enough to accomplish. He earned for us the gift of forgiveness of sins, so that all our loves of excess and love of ourselves that is sin are no longer in the Father's record book. They were taken by Him as He suffered and died on the cross, and they were buried in the tomb with Him. In their place He gives to us the credit He earned with His perfect life He lived out upon this earth. Because of what He has done you and I are saved from God's wrath now and for eternity. That in itself is a gift beyond price, better than anything you could wish to find under your tree.

The gift includes personal delivery by Spirit to right now, it came in your baptism:

It's the "one time" gift doesn't stop there. He delivers it directly to you. It won't come a day late because Fed Ex, or UPS, or the Postal Service is backed up. It won't be delayed by the problems COVID has wrecked on the supply chain. He delivered it to you already in your baptism, your washing of regeneration. That too is all part and parcel of this most wonderful and gracious gift that is Jesus Christ your Savior. He delivered all these wonderful things when the Holy Spirit entered your life in baptism. The Spirit came and created faith in your heart and life. By that faith you and I hold that all Jesus came to accomplish, making it "for you" and "for me"!

Now, your baptism was also a “one time gift”. But it’s a big “One Time Gift” that keeps working long after the fact. It’s working in you today. Have you forgotten about this gift in the busyness of the holiday? Has it been pushed aside by the love of excess the world encourages you to have? The Spirit is still at work in you, regenerating you, cleaning out all the sinful ties that creep in, constantly changing your heart and your mind to focus not on your desires, but what the Heavenly Father desires for you. He remains at work through the Word I am preaching and, in the Sacrament that we will partake of shortly. He is at work right now to renew your faith and your love for Him.

The gift that is Christ Jesus: His birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection, may indeed be a one-time event that happened long ago. And your baptism may also have happened long ago, so that you don’t even remember it. But both are gifts that still are blessing you to this day and every day of your life. They are filled with the grace and mercy of the Heavenly Father that has been, is, and will continue to be poured out liberally and abundantly into your heart and your life for the rest of your days upon the earth with one special end result.

Titus 4:7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This one-time gift has declared you to be justified: you and I who still love the excesses of this world. We are given Christ’s right standing that He earned, and we stand in that to this day. And because we do, we have become heirs, inheritors of the most fantastic of gifts that never ends: eternal life. Those gifts waiting under the tree will wear out, grow old, become broken, or obsolete. But not the gift of eternal life. It is better than the gift to any vacation paradise, because even those aren’t really paradise, just ask those who go and wind up sunburned, or with Montezuma’s revenge, or with their valuables stolen. God’s gift of His son provides the true paradise that is Eternal Life. He came to provide your ticket to the restoration of the paradise of the original Creation, where all that has gone wrong with this world and has gone wrong in us is gone, including death. And He gives all that to you by faith.

Conclusion: Living With This Gift

That's the gift that God your Savior has for you, this Christmas, and every Christmas, this day, and every day. It's the glorious gift the angels announced that dark night. It's here with you whether your tree is beautiful [*show picture of beautiful tree with presents*], or more Charlie Brownish [*show Charlie Brown Christmas Tree*]. It's here whether you have a house full of guests or even if you are by yourself. It's here whether your Christmas dinner is set to perfection [*show picture of dinner scene from Christmas Vacation*], or you end up with the Clark W. Griswold Dried Out Turkey Dinner [*show picture of dried-up turkey being cut into*]. It's yours given and protected by the Spirit of the Living God, and no one can take it away from you. It's a gift for you, a wonderous gift liberally and abundantly poured out right this moment. But it's not a gift for you to horde. It's a gift that is best shared with others, especially those who don't have a beautiful tree to gather around that is full of presents, who don't have a full table with a family gathered around it. It's a gift that can be shared through an invitation to join you, or just a phone call that is the gift of your time that shares love and faith with another. I wish for you a Merry Christmas tomorrow, one filled with love and joy, and most especially thanksgiving for God's very special gift of baby Jesus. And the best part is still to come, that celebration that will end all celebrations in Eternal Life. Amen.