

#283 “The Greatest Gift”

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Sometimes the most important truths about life and eternity are right in front of our faces, and yet we miss them. This is definitely the case when we consider what the human heart most longs for, or, this being the Christmas season, what the greatest gift might be.

Some people chase material things, others ideas, others status, and others various lusts and passing pleasures. Some pursue some form of human effort driven religion or self-help philosophy to fill a void. The fact remains that there is indeed inside of every person a need, a longing, and a desire that begs to be met, filled, and satisfied (Ecclesiastes 3:11). So many options are presented, but ultimately there is only one answer. The answer is given in John 17:3 which says, “This is eternal life, *that they may know You*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (italics mine). The gospel actually means “good news” because it actually is good tidings of great joy which shall be for all people (Psalm 96:2, Luke 2:10). **This is because God has extended grace, hope, and the ability to know and be known in the fullest, sweetest, and deepest capacity through a living relationship with a loving Savior in Jesus Christ.** Not everybody chooses to receive this relationship and become part of God’s family, but the choice has been made available to all people. This is why the message of Christmas is relevant for every ear to hear. Christmas is about Christ being born and offering the world a chance to know God more intimately and personally than He had ever revealed Himself before. In the past He had spoken through prophets and through the law, but now He spoke through His very own Son and with a message of grace (Hebrews 1:1-2, John 1:17). He, the Author of history, delivered the best gift to the world, a free one at that. All the Christmas presents in the world cannot do for the soul what one little baby would be able to do some two thousand years ago. Really, that is not that long ago, not that distant, and not that deeply removed. Yet the world knows that Jesus doesn’t sell products, so He is brushed aside. Jesus moves people to give rather than to get because He knows that the greatest joy of all is to give rather than to receive (Acts 20:35). The Father’s joy was full in giving His Son to the world to eventually die a perfect and sinless sacrifice. He would rise from the dead, proving His victory over sin and the grave. If any man, woman, or child wishes to have joy now and forevermore and a gift worth sharing with others which only gives more joy, they must receive this free gift of grace from God. The gift is under the tree, so to speak, but it is up to each person to take it in faith, open it with repentance, and trust Christ to forgive them, to love them, to know them, and to save them.

Paul referenced the idea of knowing and being known in the context of perfect love in 1 Corinthians 13:12 when he said the following: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; *now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known*” (italics mine). Upon receiving Christ by believing Him to indeed be the Son of God sent into the world to save it and upon trusting Him to take our sins away and

become our Friend forever (John 15:15), we are known fully by the One Who made us and knows us better than any human ever will. When we meet in heaven, we will see Jesus face to face, and then we will know fully just as He knows us fully now. Our joy increases now as we study His Word and walk in faith and obedience, learning more about His heart and how He loves us. But still on earth our knowledge is only partial when it comes to Christ, but later it will be full. **Essential to loving God is knowing God, and essential to knowing God is loving God.** Knowledge and love go together (1 John 4:7-8). This is why, for example, the deepest and most wonderful human relationship is between a man and his wife because the knowing and loving goes deeper and more personally than other relationships. Indeed, the husband and wife marital union is even presented as a metaphorical picture of Jesus and His love for those who belong to His family (Ephesians 5:32). As wonderful as the marriage relationship is, He knows us even better and more fully. That is not to say that we should abandon seeking out a loving earthly relationship because knowing Him is even more wonderful; rather, we learn more about how He loves us and what it is to be loved as we let Him teach us to love and be loved by others. Loving others is actually the necessary and powerful outcome of knowing and being loved by God (John 13:34-35). When He fills the heart and soul with its deepest need of knowing and being known in the context of perfect love, those who have received of the greatest gift can freely give it (Matthew 10:8).

The Christian is the receiver of the greatest gift. We are Christ's friends because He has told us what God told Him (John 15:15). With Him, we have true friendship, true safety, true knowledge, true love, the inside scoop about God's plan and purpose, and reassurance and confidence that He delights in us. Christianity is not merely a prayer prayed, a list of rules and principles to give assent to, a confession of words that don't touch the heart, or a commitment made without trusting the One we are supposed to be committing to. **Rather, it is a relationship with the God of the Universe, a grand friendship, a perfect spiritual marriage, knowing and being known at the deepest level, and loving and being loved to infinity and to perfection.** Jesus doesn't forget us, He always has time for us, and we are His most prized and special present (John 17:9, 18:9). We are His gift, and He is ours.

Perhaps the greatest compliment we could give our spouse is to say that he or she is a gift worth opening anew each and every day. Jesus is such a gift, the greatest gift of all. We must not leave Him under the tree (God knows no present under the tree has ever been left abandoned except for the Reason for the season Himself), but we must treasure Him just as Mary did, pondering all these things in her heart (Luke 2:19). To know and be known in the context of perfect love- what a gift He has given and what a gift we can freely share!