

December 1, 2013  
Christmas is Not Your Birthday

*Christmas is Not Your Birthday*  
1 Corinthians 1:3-9

**Opening words:** This year's Advent/Christmas sermon series is called *Christmas is Not Your Birthday*. It was originally created by Mike Slaughter of the Ginghamburg Church (a United Methodist congregation) in Tipp City, Ohio. He is afraid we have lost the real meaning of Christmas in American commercialism. He has a point. Did you know the average American home will spend \$750 on Christmas this year? Did you know the average American child will receive \$271 in gifts this year? How can the church compete? How easy it is for our secular world to forget the sacred meaning of Christmas. This sermon series challenges us to look beyond ourselves to a world that is filled with need. God blessed us on Christmas by sending us his son, so we should be a blessing to others.

We begin this sermon series in the first chapter of First Corinthians. No one questions the fact that the Apostle Paul wrote this letter about 55 AD. He wrote this letter during his three-year stay in Ephesus. At the time, the city of Corinth was the chief city in Greece. It had a population of approximately 650,000 people, both free and slaves. Her geographical location made her a commercial giant. She was known for three things. First, there was her culture. Her Greek population valued philosophy and wisdom. Second, there was her religion. She was the home of twelve temples. Their beliefs were far and wide. Third, she was known for her immorality. The temple to Aphrodite was serviced by her world famous 1,000 sacred prostitutes. It is not surprising that the Christian congregation in Corinth began to fracture under the weight of its secular world. The theme of the entire book revolves around the topic of proper Christian conduct. That is why this epistle still speaks to our world. May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture lesson, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9. Let me call this message, *Christmas is Not Your Birthday*.

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**1 Corinthians 1:3-9** <sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. <sup>5</sup> For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— <sup>6</sup> God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. <sup>7</sup> Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. <sup>8</sup> He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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I love this story. You may remember it. In December 1903, after many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas."

Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas." He totally missed the big news--man had flown! I love that story because it speaks to our world. How often do we miss the big news? I hope you don't miss the big news. The Savior of the world is born. Christmas is not your birthday. Christmas is Jesus' birthday. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Christmas has been called the most wonderful time of the year. It is also one of the most stressful times of the year. My father spent his career in the retailing world. He spent long stressful hours at the store during the Christmas season. He spend more than one Christmas in bed, exhausted and sick. If my mother said it to me once, she said it a million times. "Don't go into retailing. It is a hard a life with few rewards." I know it is a hard line of work, but my father loved it. My father died in 1996. That was seventeen years ago. During that time period, retailing has not grown less stressful. It has grown more stressful. Just look into the faces of those sales clerks. The reason is Christmas, itself, has grown bigger. Like it or not, Christmas is big business.

Consider these facts with me. They came from the Associated Press. This is what we will spend on Christmas this year.

\*American retailers are expecting a 3.9% increase in sales this year. They are expecting Americans to spend \$602 billion. (In 2000, we spent \$400 million.

[Billion? – editor])

\*This year the average American shopper will spend \$750 on Christmas

\*This year the average American shopper will spend \$423 on family gifts

\*This year the average American will \$101 on candy and food

\*This year the average American will spend \$72 on Christmas decorations

\*This year the average American will spend \$29 on cards and postage

How much are you planning on spending on Christmas? If you find these figures overwhelming say, "**Amen!**" Let us look at this morning's scripture lesson.

We are in the first chapter of First Corinthians, verses three through nine. Over a thousand years have passed since these words were written, but we are more like the Corinthians than we care to admit. Like them, we are surrounded by an arrogant world which thought they had all the answers. Like them, our faith in Jesus Christ makes us different. Like them, our world is motivated by personal profit and personal pleasure. We are motivated by the son of the living God, who calls us to care for the forgotten in this world. Jesus expects us to sacrifice for strangers. I have said it a million times. The church is the only organization that exists for the benefits of her non-members. We are to care for the forgotten like we were caring for Jesus, himself. (Matthew 25:37-46) Like them, we understood the truth. Jesus is the greatest life that ever lived. Jesus is our only hope of salvation.

Today, I want to break this 1 Corinthians text down for you. For in these words there are three divine truths. These truths are exclusive.

They only apply to you if you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior. They sound like foolishness to our non-believing world. On the day you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you were given grace gifts and gall. You need to embrace these divine truths during the season of Advent. They will help you experience the true meaning of Christmas. After all, Christmas is not your birthday. Christmas is Jesus' birthday. So if you are ready to continue say, **"Amen!"**

### **We are Given Grace**

First, on the day you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you were given grace. 1 Corinthians 1:4-6 says, *"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way--in all your speaking and in all your knowledge-- because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you"* You have heard it said in the past, we are saved by grace and by grace alone. It is impossible to earn your salvation. That grace came in the name of Jesus, who died for our sins.

In 1830, George Wilson was convicted of robbing the U.S. Mail and was sentenced to be hanged. President Andrew Jackson issued a pardon for Wilson, but he refused to accept it. The matter went to Chief Justice Marshall, who concluded that Wilson would have to be executed. "A pardon is a slip of paper," wrote Marshall, "the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon." For some, the pardon comes too late. For others, the pardon is not accepted. Have you accepted the pardon, or are you still trying to earn your salvation? I hope you have accepted the truth. We are saved by grace and by grace alone. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

### **We are Given Gifts**

Second, on the day you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you were given gifts. 1 Corinthians 1:7 says, *"Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed."* What is Paul saying? He is not talking about earthly gifts, like Christmas presents. There is nothing wrong with Christmas presents. It is important to give presents. It is important to receive presents. (If you want to give your pastor a big gift for Christmas, then I will accept it.) However, this is not the kind of gift that is on Paul's mind. He is talking about the kind of gifts that are needed when you are building the Kingdom of God. We are to use these gifts generously. How generous are you with your gifts?

On April 6, 1999, a Louisiana church had her Easter services interrupted by a gunman wearing a ski mask. The robber held a gun to one of the church member's head. He told them he would shoot the man if he didn't collect enough money. The money was collected, but the gunman wasn't happy. As the gunman left he was disappointed, grumbling about too many one dollar bills. One of two things seems evident in this robbery. Either most of the people just came with a few dollars to give, or they thought that the life of their fellow parishioner was not worth the cost. Either way, their priorities seem to have been in the wrong place.

How much are willing to sacrifice for a fellow church member? How much are you willing to sacrifice for a stranger? If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

### **We are Given Gall**

Third and finally, on the day you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you were given gall. What does gall mean? It means brazen boldness coupled with stubborn assurance. It means remaining fast in the faith while the rest of the world is telling you to compromise your faith. 1 Corinthians 1:8-9 says, "*He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*" How much of your faith have you compromised?

The other night I was up late. That is not unusual. I was channel surfing. I have countless stations, but there is never anything to watch. The things I have watched in the past didn't interest me. The new things looked foolish. I was just jumping from one station to the next. I came across one of those Hallmark Channels. They were showing one of their Christmas movies. I can't remember which one. It was either *A Christmas Bride*, *A Bride for Christmas* or *Grandma's Christmas Wedding*. Maybe you know the movie? It was the one where the cute girl meets the cute guy. They are interested in each other, but life keeps them apart. In the end they have some kind of revelation and chase after each other. In the end they meet, express their true feelings and embrace. As they are kissing, the snow begins to fall and all their friends show up on time for Christmas diner. I will be honest with you. It was hard to fight back the tears.

The scene that caught my attention was the community Christmas pageant. What caught my attention in that scene was the music. The children's choir was singing *Silent Night*. You know it. We sing it every year on Christmas Eve. We hold our candles high because Jesus, this newborn baby, is the light of the world. There is history and depth to that song. It was completed in 1818 in Austria. The words were written by Joseph Mohr. The tune was written by Franz Gruber. When I heard the song, I wanted to see how Hallmark would handle the birth of Jesus. In their version, Jesus was eliminated. In their version, as the children's choir sang *Silent Night*, Santa was on the roof delivering presents. I was numbed by the scene at first. Then, I began to question, how can you have Christmas without Jesus? Christmas is not really about gifts; Christmas is about Jesus. Christmas is not your birthday!

The fact that we understand that truth makes us different from the rest of the world. Christmas is not your birthday. Christmas is Jesus' birthday. You are not just an American. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ! You have been given **grace** and are saved by that grace. You have been given **gifts** to do the work of Christ in this world. You have been given **gall** because the faith was never meant to be easy. Charles Wesley once penned these words, "*Hark the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born king." Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"* May we prepare for the birth of our Lord and Savior. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"