



Group Leader Guide - Week 3

Sermon Recap

Evan explores the concept of receiving seemingly unwanted gifts, correlating this with the Christmas story of Jesus' birth. He highlights how both Mary and Joseph faced challenging and misunderstood gifts, reminding us that God's gift of Jesus was not just for forgiveness but for saving from sin's bondage. Evan emphasizes that while forgiveness alone may not feel compelling, the true gift of salvation offers freedom from sin and its masterful hold on us. Ultimately, he concludes that the world and each one of us still need Christmas, embodying God's love and the promise of salvation through Jesus.

Ice Breaker

What is the best Christmas gift you've ever received? The worst?

Discussion Questions

- ▼ The gifts of the wise men (gold, frankincense, and myrrh) to Jesus may seem odd or unhelpful (especially in our culture today), similar to unwanted gifts we may receive in our lives.
 - Can you think of a time when someone gave you a gift that you didn't like at first but grew to appreciate? What did that experience teach you about value and intention?
- ▼ Mary and Joseph found the gift of Jesus initially confusing or difficult to accept, having struggles and misunderstandings about the situation they were in, especially concerning the pregnancy and its implications.
 - How do you react when you feel that something challenging in your life is a gift from God? Reflecting on Mary and Joseph's initial reactions to the unexpected and challenging circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth, how can we learn to trust and embrace 'unwanted' gifts or situations from God in our own lives?
- ▼ Jesus came not just to forgive sins but to save people from sin. In Jesus' time, many expected a political or military leader, while Jesus offered a different kind of salvation focused on spiritual freedom.
 - In what ways do you think society today misunderstands the type of salvation or help that people truly need? How can we effectively communicate the message that Jesus offers a deeper, spiritual freedom from sin? How can understanding this aspect of Jesus' mission transform the way we view our personal struggles and the struggles of those around us?

Read Scripture

Matthew 1:18-25 NIV

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Romans 6:1-23 NIV

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

¹⁹ I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Discussion Questions

▼ Matthew 1:21 emphasizes the purpose of Jesus' coming and how it redefines the meaning of Christmas beyond just celebration. 'He will save his people from their sins.'

- How can understanding Christmas as a time of salvation rather than just a holiday change your personal traditions and celebrations? What is one thing or idea you can begin to act upon today?

▼ Gratitude plays a major role in receiving gifts. Our response to receiving gifts can help shape our experiences.

- Can you think of a situation where practicing gratitude changed your perspective on a difficult situation? How can you incorporate gratitude into your daily life? How will you be especially grateful this Christmas?

Prayer

- Ask for prayer requests from the group.
- Pray for the ability to recognize and appreciate the gifts God has given us, even when they may not seem ideal at first.
- Ask for guidance in applying the message from the sermon to our daily lives.
- Pray for those in our lives who need to experience the freedom that Jesus offers from their sins.

Rewatch the sermon

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