

## Cherishing the Gift

**Psalms 46:1; James 4:8; Matthew 28 :19-20**

Online Sermon: [http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567)

As I hear the clock screeching in my ear I roll over on my side and firmly turn off my alarm. I would like to say that I feel fresh and vibrant, ready to conquer the world, but I spent most of the night worrying about the crazy schedule I was about to endure! As I glanced at the clock panic fills my heart for, I just wasted FIVE whole minutes laying in my bed doing nothing! I leap to my feet, grab the clothes I laid out last night and within mere seconds I find myself in



the shower working quickly to put enough soap on myself to at least smell descent. After I get dressed, I comb my hair, powder my face and race to grab a banana and my brief case on the way out the door! As I am driving my car, I bury the needle just ten clicks over the speed limit with the hope that no reasonable police officer would ever stop me for such a minor infraction. As I weave in and out of traffic like an Indianapolis 500 race driver I recite in my mind the checklist

of events for the rest of the day: pickup dry cleaning at 8, meeting at 8:15 with the auxiliary club, 10 grocery shopping, 11:30 return home unpack the groceries, noon microwave my dinner and eat, 12:30 jump in the car and race to the gym for an intense workout, 1:30 go Christmas shopping and fight off the crowds, 3:30 head to the clinic to get my Covid-19 shot at the other end of town, 5:00 race home to eat supper, 6:00 give the house a quick cleaning, 7:30 visit a friend who has been struggling with cancer, 9:00 pm set out my clothes for the next day and at 10:00 kiss the husband and crawl into bed. Whew while it sounds tough, I have survived far worse! Then suddenly horror fills my mind like the waves crashing on a seashore, I HAVE A CHILD! I do a 180-degree u turn and race back home to find my teenage daughter waiting impatiently, stressed beyond all imagination! As she jumps in the car frantically, I can't help but wonder ... is life really supposed to be this hectic?

The time to rejoice in the Good News the prophets only got to get a glimpse of, and the angels continue to ponder (Micah 5:1-5) is drawing near! To keep Jesus' voice and purpose from getting drowned out in the all the chaos of life we simply must take time to be still (Psalms 46:10) and draw nearer to God so that in turn He might draw nearer to us (James 4:8)! May we intentionally carve out time in our calendars to walk by the still waters, lay down in the green pastures and as living sacrifices (Psalms 23), holy and pleasing unto God (Romans 12:1-2), have our souls renewed and restored in His glorious presence! Whether you trek up to the highest mountain, journey to the lowest valley, sitting by the still waters, venture into a prayer closet, find a field to lie down in, or take a stroll in a park, makes no differences for He who is

indivisibly present everywhere is right there with you and if you ask and are ready to submit to His will, He will remove the chaos, calm your mind, mold and reshape you into the image in



which you were created (Genesis 1:27). Out of love we plan at Christmas time to visit our loved ones whom we have not seen all year and while they will be a great source of comfort and joy how much more will be a visit with our Lord, Savior and King! As our Great Fortress (Psalms 18:2) He will take us under His wings (Psalms 91:4) and trade our heavy yokes for burdens that are not only light (Matthew 11:30), but when persevered in faith will also lead

us becoming more spiritual mature (James 1:2-4)! What a beautiful gift to have God as our portion (Lamentations 3:24) lovingly whisper reassurance into our ears that we eternally belong as heirs in His kingdom (Romans 8:17) and one day will walk and talk with Him in the restored Garden of Eden!

A voice calling out in the spiritual desert amidst our chaotic lives is inviting us to “make our paths straight” (Isaiah 40:3) by coming before our King and humbly asking Him to remove our double mindedness (James 4:8) and guide us onto the path of righteousness for His name’s sake (Psalms 23:3)! To have the Master mold these fragile jars of clay (Isaiah 64:8; 2



Corinthians 4:7-9) one must confess one’s sins (1 John 1:9) and then be bathed in a single-minded devotion to accept His right and our joy to have Him rule over our promised new hearts (Ezekiel 36:26)! While lots of soap can clean the outside and make one smell pretty what it fails to do is clean the inside of the cup (Matthew 23:26)! Through confession the guilt and shame of falling short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) is washed away and driven as far as the east is

from the west (Psalms 103:12)! What a beautiful gift it is to be washed by the blood of the Lamb and be truly right in the sight of our Creator! Confession though does not come without first taking the time to intently and with the aid of the Spirit examine one’s soul (Psalms 139:23). During the chaos of this Christmas season, we need to slow down so that we might reflect on the truth by which we have been set free (John 8:31-32)! The Babe lying in the manger (Luke 2:16) freed us prisoners to sin (Isaiah 61) through His atoning sacrifice of the cross (John 3:16) not so

that we would choose to be enslaved by the rigidity of overbooked calendars but so that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). To truly be washed by the blood of the Lamb requires us to perceive God's commands not as a burden but a source of joy (1 John 5:3) for what the prophets search intently for, and the angels ponder ... we get to experience! Upon confession we get the wonderful gift of meditating, studying, and taking the empty voids where sin used to crouch and lie (Genesis 4:7) and replace these vain and destructive broad path wanderings (Matthew 7:13) with God's righteous decrees that are holy and pleasing in His sight!

To take time to be holy at Christmas also means spending time in reflection to understand and appreciate the life of our Savior. Imagine what it would have been like to be a shepherd watching your flocks at night and the angel of the Lord appears unto you and tells you the Messiah has been born (Luke 2:8-21), or to hear Jesus as a boy telling His mother the reason He stayed back at the Passover was to remain in His Father's house listening and asking questions (Luke 2:41-52), or to be present when Jesus called Peter and Andrew or James and John and to



see them immediately drop their nets and follow Him (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:19-21), or Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17), or Jesus being tempted in the desert after 40 days and nights without food and Him telling Satan to go away for He would worship God only (Matthew 4:1-11), or Jesus giving the Sermon on the Mount where He redefines the blessed

not as the rich, famous, and powerful as the world does but the poor in spirit, meek, merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers (Matthew 5-7), or when Jesus said "young man get up" and the widow's son came back to life (Luke 7:11-17)! I especially would love to have been amongst the crowds and be taught by Jesus the parables of the Wheat and Weeds, the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl, the Net, and the Landowner (Matthew 13)! Imagine what it would have been like to be in the boat that Peter climbed out of and walked on water (Matthew 14:29) and to be one of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish (Matthew 14:13-21). Above all I would love to witness Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane in anguish with His sweat like drops of blood (Luke 22:44, Jesus being mocked and flogged (Matthew 27:26-31), and His crucifixion (Matthew 27:26-56) so that I might better understand the best I can the depth of His love and the enormous amount of grace that I have received!

And above all may we not only take time to be holy but to go and tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ was born and sacrificed His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45)! Many will open their gifts on Christmas morning and even though the gifts may be a sign of being loved,

economically privileged and a source of temporal joy, they will still leave the recipients enslaved to sin (Hebrews 12:1) and ever looking for but never finding the truth by which they can be set free (2 Timothy 3:7)! How can they be lifted out of the muck of their desperation and have their feet planted firm on the solid foundation of the Lord (Matthew 7:24) if we as Christ's



ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) choose to remain silent and hide our Light under the bushel of indifference or fear of persecution (Matthew 5:15-16)? Surely in taking time to be holy this Christmas we will become compelled to share the same comfort that we have received with those (2 Corinthians 1:4-7) who will forever remain restless,<sup>1</sup> fearful, and incomplete until they rest under the wings of Christ who purchased them at the price of His very life (1 Corinthians 6:20)! How many times have we searched

diligently to get a loved one a gift only to have them open it and try to hide the best they can their indifference or worst yet absolute disgust that we knew them so little? This Christmas offer them the very best gift you can, the truth concerning the Babe lying in a manger. Those whom God formed in their mother's womb need to know they were fearfully and wonderfully (Psalms 139) made not to live apart from but in a close relationship in the bosom of their Creator, Redeemer, Lord, Savior and King! And if by the grace of the Lord and through their faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) they open the precious gift called salvation rejoice for the miracle of passing from death to life and eternally entering God's family as an heir is the opening of a gift that both you and they will never forget!

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<sup>1</sup> Partial quote taken from St. Augustine.