

Sermon Series: Finding The Perfect Gift

Sermon Title: The Gift God Gave and the Gift We Give Back!

Sermon Text: 1 John 4:9-19

Sermon Presenter: Pastor Larry

Sermon Summary:

John's first letter is a powerful reminder of the Love God has for us and how we should let that love motivate and inspire the way we live for God! God gave us the gift of new life through Jesus and the life we live is the gift we give back to Him! In this message we unpack the contents, found in our text, of God's perfect gift to us and our perfect gift to Him. The reason I say the contents found in our text, is I know there are other aspects to God's gift to us and our gift to Him to be found elsewhere in Scripture. Also, when I say our perfect gift to Him, I'm not saying we live perfect lives, but seeking to live our lives for Jesus is the most perfect gift we could give to God. It's the gift He most wants from us.

"What a beautiful Name it is The Name of Jesus Christ, my King" The Name of Jesus is so beautiful for many reasons, but one of the most important is the fact that when I hear the Name of Jesus I think of the amazing gift God gave to us when He gave His One and Only Begotten Son so we might live and have everlasting life! His gift was perfect! What could we possibly give to God in return? Let's pray and then we'll try to answer that question! Prayer!

Why do we look for the perfect Christmas gift for our loved ones? The answer is found in the question! Because they are our loved ones! When you love someone you want to give them things and at Christmas time especially, you want to give the perfect gift! The reason I bring that up is because one of John's purposes for writing the book we call 1 John, which may have been a sermon rather than a letter, one of his purposes was to let his readers be assured of God's love for them. And John wanted his readers to remain faithful in loving God and each other! John had a unique way of expressing this emphasis on love. He used the greek noun Agape, which means God-like love, 18 times. More than any other book in the New Testament! Our text is found in 1 John 4:9-19 if you want to turn there in your Bibles! By the way, I only have two points today! But don't worry, I've got plenty of sub points!! Point number one: we find the perfect gift when we discover....

I. God's Perfect Gift to us is Jesus!

What are the Contents of God's Perfect Gift to Us?

A. His Love

1 John 4:9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

John wanted us to understand the extent of God's love for us shown to us by the sending of Jesus to this world on our behalf! This was no small thing for God to do. John knew of the

perfect fellowship that had existed between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He speaks of it in his gospel...

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

A few verses later John quotes John the Baptist when he said...

John 1:32 Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.

John knew that perfect fellowship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, was broken when Jesus went to the cross, and yet God allowed it to happen! John tells us this in his Gospel, and we've heard this verse several times in the last few weeks, but it never hurts to hear it again...

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John speaks of this gift of love in an extraordinary way in his letter, 1 John 3:1-4...

1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are...

I once had someone ask me if God loved us so much then why did He send His Son rather than coming Himself. Well, let me first remind you that Jesus was God in the flesh. As a part of the Triune Godhead, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Jesus was fully God, and yet He was also fully man. He was fully God, but He was the Son, one with the Father, yet a distinct person of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus was the Son. With all that said, God could have given no greater sacrifice than to send His One and Only Son. Any loving parent here knows that it would be a much greater sacrifice to give one's child than to give oneself! Although we know this from Scripture...

2 Corinthians 5:19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

What are the Contents of God's Perfect Gift to Us? Certainly His love for us but also...

B. His Life

1 John 4:9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

What does it mean to live through Him? It means Jesus not only gave His life for us, He lived His life for us! Jesus was an example to us of how to live a Godly life! Tonight, if you're able to come or join live on the internet, you will be reminded of the events surrounding God sending His One and Only Son to the earth! The Christmas story! It's going to be amazing. I'll be joining online with my wife, because after the service today, I'll be taking a few days of vacation. But let me just remind you of what the Prophet Micah had said about Jesus the Messiah, God's gift to humanity, as quoted in Matthew's Gospel...

Matthew 2:6 " 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

A Shepherd shows the way, and leads the way! That precious little baby boy, the perfect lamb of God would grow up to become the Shepherd of God's people. A good Shepherd who would live His life in such a way that we could see a perfect example of how to live life. Jesus gave us mighty principles to live by and showed us how to live those principles by living them Himself! This was part of God's perfect gift to us! In fact, let me give you a quick example of His teachings from His sermon on the mount, which Jesus not only taught, He lived!

Matthew 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

Matthew 5:39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.

Matthew 5:40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.

Matthew 5:41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.

Matthew 5:42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Now I do not believe Jesus was saying to give or lend to someone if you know it's only going to enable them in a life of addiction or to continue making poor financial choices! But if someone is in true need and you have the ability to help them, and it would be giving them a hand up and not just a hand out, I think we need to be willing to make sacrifices and trust that God will take care of us! Jesus continued...

Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

Matthew 5:44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Matthew 5:45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Matthew 5:46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

Matthew 5:47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

What a gift! If you want to know how to live a life that is really life, look at Jesus, His teachings, and His life. He didn't live a long life, only 33 ½ years, but wow, what He accomplished in His 33 ½ years changed the world! The little glimpse we have into Jesus' childhood, shows us that He

was loving and respectful towards His parents. Michael J. Wilkins, dean of the faculty at Talbot School of Theology put it this way...

“During His ministry Jesus had perfect fellowship with the Father. Jesus obeyed the Father’s will perfectly. Jesus had unswayable determination to fulfill the work which the Father had sent Him to accomplish. Jesus always displayed a strong love for humans, regardless of whether they were lost, sick, sorrowing, or sinful. Jesus’ love was demonstrated by freely giving up His life for us.”

And I would add that when He died, He practiced what He had taught, showing His disciples and us how to live by praying for the very people who had falsely accused Him, mocked Him, spit on Him and nailed Him to the cross...

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing...”

Is there any way you and I could ever take the high road in such a sacrificial and loving way? The answer is yes if we realize Jesus was not only an example to us, but in a supernatural way He lives in us and we in Him. How does this happen? Unpack the gift and you’ll find...

C. His Spirit!

Jesus gives us the power to live a Godly life through His Holy Spirit!

Look down in verse 13...

1 John 4:13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.

Do you remember what Jesus told His disciples before He died and ascended back to the Father?

John 16:7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor (The Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

Paul described this part of the gift of God in an illuminating way in Romans...

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 8:14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

Romans 8:15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

We know it is by the Holy Spirit that we can confidently say with Paul these words he wrote to the followers of Christ in Galatians 2:20-21...

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

But what if we've sinned and haven't been living in Christ? I've got some really good news for you today, the answer for that question is also found in the contents of God's perfect gift to us.

Within the contents of God's perfect gift to us is His love, the ability to live through God graciously included in the package...

D. His Forgiveness!

Jesus gives us forgiveness for sins so we can have life!

1 John 4:10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

John had already alluded to this part of the package back earlier in his letter...

1 John 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

1 John 2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

1 John 2:2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

What a gift! What a sacrifice! One of the most stunning descriptions of this part of the gift is found in Paul's letter to the Romans...

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Romans 5:10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Saved through His life! What a gift! Jesus lived the perfect life in order to forgive us for our imperfect lives. And aren't you glad this is a gift of grace? You don't earn this gift, and this gift is not for sale, it is strictly a gift! I'm so glad it says "while we were still sinners Christ died for us" and not "get your act together, become righteous and then I'll give you the gift!" If it said that I would have no hope of salvation! No hope of forgiveness! No hope of eternal life! But God is a gift giver to all who will receive His precious gift! What does God's Word say about this? John tells us in his gospel...

John 1:12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

John 1:13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

What does it mean to be born of God? C.S. Lewis explains by noting the difference between "begetting" and "making." Charlie W. Starr is Program Chair Humanities at Kentucky Christian University and he elaborates on Lewis' words saying...

"A sculptor can make a statue, but he begets children. To beget is to make something like you. The Bible says Christians will become sons of God (Galatians 3:26)."

Galatians 3:26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,

Starr goes on to say...

"At first, Jesus is the "only begotten Son" of God (John 3:16). He is the only one who is like God. We are made by God but only become begotten of God when we enter into the life of Christ, when we become part of His living body. Apart from Christ we are like the dead statues, though lovingly made by the sculptor's hand. The promise of sonship, though, is the promise that the statues will come to life! We become begotten of God by becoming like Him, by entering into His life, His body. We become little Christs."

And in case you didn't know, the word Christian means, "little Christ!" Christian. At one time a derogatory term for those who were followers of Christ and seeking to live like Christ. You might hear a Roman citizen or a Jewish religious leader make the remark..."Oh you're one of those little Christ!" And little Christ we should be. I'll never be Jesus, but I want to be more like Jesus in the way I live my life so others can see Him in me! I want to live my life for Jesus because He lived His life for me and then gave His life for me on the Cross. So God's gift to us was His Only Begotten Son. John had put it this way early in his letter...

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

1 John 3:3 All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

How powerful is that? We are becoming like Him because once we receive the gift of Jesus into our hearts the lives we are then able to live through Him and become the perfect gift for God! So it stands to reason that...

2. The Perfect Gift for God is to Live for Him!

So while we're not perfect, giving our hearts to Jesus and beginning to live our lives through Him, is the perfect gift for God! It's the gift He wants this Christmas! Nothing could make Him happier. And though we are not perfect, we are nonetheless clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ so when God looks at us, He sees that righteous covering! John tells us in our text that this gift of God's love we've received will change the way we live our lives!

What should be the contents of our gift to God?

A. Loving One Another

1 John 4:11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

One of the most important things to God is that His children love one another and live in unity. This coming year we're going to spend the whole year looking at what it looks like to love God and to love others! Jesus was so concerned with this that it was a huge part of His prayer He prayed not long before His death. We find His words in John 17. Some say this is actually "The Lord's Prayer" and the one we call the Lord's Prayer is more like the "Model Prayer." Those are just titles, but listen to what our Lord prayed in His prayer for His disciples and for us...

John 17:20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

John 17:21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:

John 17:23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

And then these extremely important words from Jesus He had told His disciples just a little while earlier...

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The world is not going to know we are Christians by the clothes we wear, or how often we attend church, but they are going to be watching the way we live our lives and especially how we treat one another!

Is there anything else we should include in our gift package to God? How about...

B. Letting His Spirit fill us

1 John 4:13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.

1 John 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

When a person accepts Jesus as their Savior, Jesus comes into their hearts and lives by way of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is really a gift and He is the Spirit of Christ in us! When we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, we are able to live lives that truly bring honor and glory to God and being filled with the Holy Spirit is not us getting more Spirit, but the Spirit getting more of us! It's us allowing The Holy Spirit to influence every aspect of our lives all the way down to our thoughts and attitudes! When we refuse to allow God's Spirit to influence and control any part of our life, that area becomes an area of disobedience and gives the devil a foothold in our lives. This grieves the Holy Spirit. Paul told the Ephesians this...

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children

Ephesians 5:2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Letting His Spirit fill will naturally lead to the next thing that should always be in our gift package to God...

C. Acknowledging Jesus is the Son of God

1 John 4:15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.

This is really tied into allowing His Holy Spirit to fill us! You see we love God by loving His Son and when we acknowledge Jesus is the Son of God, we are acknowledging that He is Lord! Lord of our lives, Lord of our actions, Lord of our attitudes, Lord of our possessions, Lord of our relationships, Lord of everything! Paul said this in his letter to the Romans...

Romans 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Romans 10:11 As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Romans 10:12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

Romans 10:13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

D. Relying on the Love of God

1 John 4:16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

1 John 4:17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

A part of our gift to God is no longer relying on ourselves for purpose in life, or relying on things for our satisfaction in life, or relying on our popularity and acceptance with others to find meaning in life, but relying on the love God has for us! Folks this is really the secret to finding joy even in the midst of unspeakable hardships, trials and tragedies. John says we rely on the love God has for us and that love is made complete among us and this gives us great confidence even on the day of judgment. Why, John tells us...

1 John 4:17 ...In this world we are like Jesus.

Jesus relied on the Father when He was on this earth as an example for us to rely on God! Jesus had amazing confidence in The Father, and John says we are like Jesus! That means we can have that same amazing confidence Jesus had when He was tempted by Satan in the desert, when praying in the Olive Garden, when being arrested, grilled by His accusers, and then when facing the cross! Jesus relied on The Father’s love and He knew He was going through the things He was going through for a reason, and that reason was to bring the Love of the Father to you and to me....

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

And finally, included in the contents of our gift to God is us...

E. Letting Love Drive out Fear

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

How beautiful it is to God when His children are living their lives no longer fearing punishment for sin, because we have completely placed our trust in the work of Christ on the Cross to completely remove any stain that was left by sin. How does this happen? John said at the very beginning of his letter...

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Let me close with this. Here's how we present our gift to God...

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Offering our bodies as living sacrifices means living our lives for Jesus! It's the perfect gift for God this Christmas, and we can do that because God has given us the perfect gift of Jesus who lives in us through the Holy Spirit! Let's pray!