

“GOD’S GIFT EXCHANGE”
Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve Services
December 24, 2012
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On this Christmas Eve, and for some of you on Christmas Day, there are many wonderful gifts that will be given. And yet, as they say, the most important thing to remember is not the gifts you give, or how nicely you wrap them. The most important thing to remember is to save the receipts so that these gifts can be exchanged.

And that’s the focus of my message this evening—God’s gift exchange. In a couple days many of us will inevitably be standing in long gift exchange lines. We will be taking some of these presents that were so carefully chosen and wrapped for Christmas, and exchanging a frying pan for a crock pot, or a sweater for a new shirt.

Now did you know, my friends, that God also has a gift exchange program? Ah, but his system is incredible; for we bring him our worst and God gives us his best. It’s kind of like walking into a store with a used DVD and they give you a huge plasma TV in exchange. And yet it’s even better than that, for God’s exchange is focused on what he wants to do in your life.

So tonight we’re going to look at three specific things that God wants to exchange in us. The first is that God wants us to give him our worry so he can in turn give us his peace. And that exchange is amazing. Jesus says in Matthew 6:34, *“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow.”* And yet we all struggle with this because it is part of our human condition.

One of the reasons we worry, especially this time of the year, is because of all the things we’ve crammed into these days. There has been decorating, cooking, parties, kids home from school, and trying to find the perfect gift. And perhaps tonight, and tomorrow, as well as these days and nights through January 1, we are overbooked with places to go and people to see.

And yet, my friends, what is the real problem with anxiety? The problem is that most of what you worry about is never going to happen. I read a statistic someplace that stated that only 8% of what people worry about actually happens. An old Swedish proverb says, “Worry casts a long shadow on small things.”

I read onetime that 165-tons of headache pills are taken each day in the United States. Perhaps you need one right now? And many of these headaches are because of stress, anxiety, worry. So because we all struggle with this, what do you do?

Well God says, “Get involved in my gift exchange program. You give me your worry and I’ll give you my peace.” 1 Peter 5:7 says *“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”* It’s an incredible exchange.

When you give God your worries; when you say, “God, here’s what I’m facing and feeling,” it does two things. First, it helps you realize that God is in control. The reality, my friends, is that our lives and our worries are completely out of our control. So it is so important to give my worries to our God who is in control.

The second thing this does is to remind me that God cares. God cares, my friend, about whatever you are worried about. It may be the silliest little worry in the world and yet God cares about it. And that’s the message of Christmas, for Jesus came to this earth as a baby to proclaim that he truly cares for you.

And yet how do I exchange my worries and find peace instead? Well, a practical step is called prayer. Tell God about what is going on in you. Philippians 4:6 says, “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition... present your requests to God.*” In other words, until you tell God your need you’re not going to receive his peace.

The second exchange is that God wants us to give him our hurts so he can give us his healing. I hope you realize that everyone of us here this evening is hurting in some way or another. We all have hurts. It may be an emotional hurt, a physical hurt, a spiritual hurt, a relational hurt. The Bible is clear that in this world there is no such thing as a problem-free life.

So if you’re going to exchange your hurts for God’s healing, you need to realize again that our God cares deeply about the troubles you are going through. The old phrase is true, “Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional.” I can choose to put my hope in God.

When Mary, in the Christmas story, learned that she was going to have a baby she said these words in Luke 1:48, “*he has been mindful of the humble estate of his servant.*” In other words, Mary was amazed that as a lowly young girl God cared for her. In fact, God cared enough to use her for his mission.

And God cares for you, my friend. I hope you’re amazed by that. It is amazing with all the billions of people on this earth he cares for you and me. Ah, but our God is great enough, is powerful enough, to care about every person on this planet every moment of the day. And he cares personally about whatever you are going through.

When we bring God our hurts and give them to him, God is willing to heal us. And yet he does something more. Not only does he heal you but he heals you in such a way that helps you serve other people. In fact, you really know when you’re healed of a hurt when you’re able to serve and bring healing to others who are facing the same hurt. God wants us to help heal someone else.

The third exchange is that God wants us to give him our grief so he can give us his joy. The truth is, my friends, we’re all going to grieve. If you love, you will grieve. The only way not to grieve in this world is to decide not to love.

I know that Christmas is a time when many of us face grief. In fact, some of you are going through your first Christmas without someone you love. It is a grief. I certainly know what this

is like as I remember my father, my mother-in-law, and many other loved ones who are in heaven but no longer with us here. There is grief and love in many hearts tonight.

Now I used to think that if I just waited long enough that this grief would go away. And it is true that time does heal some wounds. And yet for most of us, waiting is not enough. You need to learn to give your grief to God. You need to realize that this is the truth of Christmas—for Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. He is with you in your grief.

The good news is that our God wants to take our grief and pains and turn them into joy. And yet how does he do that? Well, that again is what Christmas is all about. Look what the angels said at that first Christmas:

“The angels said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.’” That’s what the joy is all about. Our Savior has been born.

And yet what exactly does it mean when we talk about a savior? A savior, my friends, is someone who comes when you’re in a desperate situation and does something for you that no one else could do. You’re rock climbing, you slip, and you’re holding on by one finger. A friend reaches down, grabs your arm and pulls you up. You would have died if that savior, that friend, would not have been there.

Or say that you need a heart transplant and a heart becomes available that is compatible with your body. They put that heart into your body and you live when you would have died. That’s probably the best illustration of a savior in that someone had to actually die for you to be saved.

In the case of Jesus Christ, of course, he chose to die so he could be our Savior. Jesus came. He was born into this world. He lived his life for us. He died on the cross and was resurrected to be our savior. He said in essence, “I’ll take your sins, I’ll die for the wrongs you have done so that you can live.” And to realize that truth turns our grief into joy.

I know there are all kinds of grief in life. It may be a job situation. It may be a dream that has been lost. It may be a relationship or family communication that is not going well. It may be a grief over something in our past that we wish now we would have done differently. And yet Jesus wants to be Savior over your past and wants to give you a whole new future.

I need a Savior, my friends. You need a Savior. Everyone needs a Savior. And that’s what Christmas is all about. Jesus is our Savior. I need healing. You need healing. Everyone of us needs healing. That’s what Christmas is all about. I need peace. You need peace. Everyone needs the peace that only God can give. And that’s why we celebrate this Christmas Eve.

May we all pray: “Jesus, I need you. I need you to forgive me for the wrong things I have done. I need your direction and leadership so I can live the abundant life you created for me. So, Lord Jesus, this night, as I exchange gifts with you, I accept your gift of forgiveness, your gift of peace, your gift of healing. And most of all, I accept your gift of joy.