this copy of

The Most

Valuable Gift

is presented to:
The Most Valuable Gift
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A Gift from the Heart

There is a legend about the famous Timur Ruby in Britain’s Royal Collection. In 1851, when the Sultan of India was just a boy, he presented the priceless ruby—then the largest in the world—to Queen Victoria as a gift of gratitude. But some years later when the Sultan had grown, he visited the Queen while in England and asked to see the ruby he had given her when he was a boy. Fearful he would ask her to return it now that he was older and wiser, she acquiesced. The Sultan examined the ruby and marveled at its splendor, and then turned and addressed the Queen.

“When I presented this ruby to you,” he
said, “I was just a boy and ignorant of its value.”

The Queen, anxious, didn’t respond.

“But now I am a man, much wiser.” The Sultan kneeled and continued, “I realize it is a priceless treasure; and I would like to present it to you once again as a token of my gratitude for all you have done for India.”

While it would be difficult to verify the legend, it does demonstrate an important truth. There are some things—like love and gratitude—that are more valuable than a priceless ruby. Perhaps there is someone in your life you wish you could show your love to with that kind of priceless treasure. Then, I’m certain you’ll realize how much the person who gave this book cares about you. While the paper and ink used to print it are quite affordable, its contents are in fact priceless. The gift contained in this book is special because no one can actually afford to buy it; yet, no one can ever afford to live without it.
What One Man Missed

I once gave a valuable gift to someone I really cared about. It wasn’t extremely expensive, like a Rolls Royce; but its rich heritage made it valuable—a collector’s piece—especially to those who are familiar with the product line. Not realizing its heritage and subsequent value, the recipient nonchalantly dismissed it, laying it aside with other party gifts that had been presented on his special occasion. I was disappointed. Not because I felt slighted. Rather, the person missed out on something special because he didn’t comprehend the value of the gift he was given. Had he perceived its rich history, the gift wouldn’t have ended up discarded, like an insignificant trinket.

The gift you’ve been presented may seem insignificant given its size, but if you’ll stick with me and allow me to unwrap it with you, I’m certain you’ll appreciate its rich heritage and subsequent value. And, you can be sure you won’t miss out like this guy did.
An Unforgettable Tragedy

I sometimes feel like a perma-student. It was an enlightening day when I learned learning never ends. And often things we learn shape our understanding of life in unexpected ways. That happened for me when I discovered my ancestors didn’t swing from trees or evolve from an amoeba. Actual recorded history tells us what happened.

After the Earth was formed, our Creator placed the first man and woman in a garden called Eden located in the heart of modern Iraq. He gave them authority to develop and cultivate the earth as they saw fit. And each day He would spend time with them, enjoying their company. Things were literally perfect for the man and woman. They were happy and did not know evil, pain, or sadness.

In the midst of that vast and beautiful garden, the Creator, God, placed a special tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He also placed there a tree called the tree of life. And he gave the man and woman
only one commandment to follow. They could eat from any tree of the garden, but not from *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. God gave them this law, not to tempt or taunt them, but to show them He is moral and honest. He did not want their love, artificially; He wanted it, authentically. At this point the man and woman only knew *good*. God warned them if they ate of the forbidden tree, they would die.

Soon tragedy struck all creation. While Adam and his wife, Eve, roamed the garden, a rebel called Lucifer disguised as a serpent, spoke to Eve. (You can imagine how quickly a talking snake would have grabbed her attention.) Lucifer convinced Eve God was holding out on them. He told her a lie that if she ate fruit from the forbidden tree, she and her husband would not die; they would become gods. Eve succumbed to the temptation. Sadly, she ate the fruit from the tree and gave some to her husband. Immediately their eyes were opened, not to “god-hood,” as the serpent promised, but to
evil. For the first time, they realized they were naked. And for the first time, they felt shame. Immediately, their spirits died and their bodies began the process of aging. Thus, death entered the world—just like God had promised. Their disobedience placed the entire earth under a curse. Even their posterity, the entire future human race, was horrifically impacted.

**The Mess Sin Made**

God, the righteous Creator and Judge of the universe, condemned the man and woman’s disobedience. Yet, in an act of mercy, he drove them from the garden so they would not eat of the *tree of life* and live in their fallen and depraved condition, forever. Before putting them out, He did something shocking! He killed an animal and covered them with its skin.

They had never seen death before. God used the animal to cover their shame and show them the horror of their sin. He taught them about the price of their transgression.
And then God made them a promise that he would provide a Seed from a woman to crush the head of the seed of the serpent.¹ In fact, throughout history the sacrificial system would be a reminder of that promise God made Adam and Eve in the garden sacrifice.

After the fall, mankind only continued to become more evil. At one point, things were so bad God washed the entire earth with a flood. He only spared eight people, Noah, and his family.² But as Noah’s children began to repopulate the earth, they continued in their natural course and sin abounded more and more. God even sent prophets (heralds of truth) to the nations to remind them of His sovereignty and goodness, and to warn them to return to Him. But, throughout all of history, mankind has only continued to reject God for his own evil ways. Have you noticed how there is a propensity in all of us to be our own god?

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¹ Genesis 3:15
² Genesis 6:5-13
The Greatest Event on Earth

Fast forward to the year 4 B.C.—about 25 years after the death of Cleopatra. The Mediterranean world is united under the Pax Romana. Herod the Great is king in Israel. Unexpectedly, Magi, called wise men, acting on a 400-year-old prophecy, arrive in Jerusalem searching for a special child “that is born King of the Jews.” ³ Herod is troubled by this and consults the local religious rulers who direct the wise men to Bethlehem based on another prophecy of the ancients.⁴

Here’s where it gets good! God had not forgotten about mankind’s need for a Savior and it is time for Him to make good on His promise.⁵ About 18 months earlier a Roman tax policy forced a man and a woman, engaged to be married, to travel to the city of Bethlehem to pay their taxes. What is so intriguing is the bride-to-be is a young

³ Matthew 2:2 & Daniel 9:24-27
⁴ Micah 5:2
⁵ Galatians 4:4-5
woman pregnant with a child, having never known a man. In other words, she is a virgin carrying a baby (something that had never happened before—or since).

While Joseph, and his betrothed, Mary, are in Bethlehem, Joseph is visited by an angel in a dream (that’s something else quite unusual) and told she is carrying the Promised One, called Messiah, the Innocent that would die for the guilty. She is carrying the Seed that will crush the serpent’s head, according to the promise of God.\(^6\)

Because the city is full of people and the time of her delivery arrives while they are in Bethlehem, she is forced to give birth to the baby in the likes of a barn. Surely, not the place we might expect to find a king.

As you can imagine her situation was unique on a number of levels. And while some accused her of immorality,\(^7\) she was actually part of God’s miraculous plan to fulfill

\(^6\) Isaiah 7:14
\(^7\) John 8:41
his ancient promise.

By the time the Magi find Joseph and Mary, their son they named Jesus is nearly two years old. So Herod, insecure about his position as King, orders every male child in the region, under the age of two, murdered. By the providence of God, being warned of the danger, Joseph flees Bethlehem and takes Jesus and Mary to Egypt to hide. The remarkable story of Jesus’ birth and life can be read at length in the Bible.\(^8\) I highly recommend it.

When Jesus is about 30 years old, he starts his public ministry. He performs signs and preaches that the Kingdom of God is near and that the people need to repent to enter it.\(^9\) Given the spiritual climate of the world at the time, particularly in Israel, his message is not well received. One particular religious group, called the Sanhedrin, made up of Jewish aristocrats and religious leaders, fear

\(^{8}\) Matthew 1-2, Luke 2
\(^{9}\) Matthew 4:17
their power will be threatened by Jesus’ message. Using connections to the Roman government and religious rhetoric to stir the people, they organize Jesus’ execution.

First, they pay one of Jesus’ disciples, named Judas Iscariot, to help them arrest Him. Then they try Jesus in a mock court and find Him guilty of blasphemy and political dissidence. Finally, they beat Him nearly to death and take Him to a place called Golgotha, or Calvary, a small hill outside the city where they crucify Him.

The details of crucifixion are too gruesome to share here. But suffice it to say, it was the cruelest way the Romans could imagine torturing a person to death. Victims of crucifixion would literally suffocate in their own body fluids. Jesus died hanging on a cross and was buried in a borrowed tomb following a hasty preparation of his mangled body. Roman guards were paid to guard the tomb, but three days after the crucifixion, on the first day of the week, Jesus was raised to life conquering sin and death.
This event is called the resurrection. *It’s the most significant event in all of human history.* After the resurrection, Jesus spends 40 days with his disciples teaching, equipping and commissioning them. Then he ascends to Heaven to sit on the right hand of his Father.

**Something You Should Know**

Having just read the shortest anthropology course in history, you might be asking “So what? What does this have to do with me and my life?” The answer is, plenty! Have you ever considered why most historians divide the calendar at the birth of Christ?\(^\text{10}\) It’s because of something called *the gospel.* It means “good news.” The gospel is the good news that Jesus was crucified, buried and then resurrected for our redemption.\(^\text{11}\) He purchased the most valuable gift—for us.

\(^{10}\) B.C., *Before Christ,* and A.D., *Anno Domini,* Latin for *Year of our Lord,* were the terms used until recently replaced with *C.E* and *B.C.E.* meaning *Common Era* and *Before Common Era.*

\(^{11}\) 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

14
Missing the Bull’s-eye

Unfortunately, none of us seem to grasp the extreme value of this gift until we first understand some bad news. What I’m saying is, in the absence of context, sometimes we don’t have the ability to really appreciate good news when we hear it. We need both sides of a story to have a clear picture.

For instance, if I told you while walking together with my friend, he suddenly grabbed me and threw me to the side of the road, you might think less of him. But, if I were to tell you that his actions had just rescued me from an unseen semi-truck traveling at a high rate of speed, directly in my path; you would likely change your mind about my friend. Understanding the degree of the bad news allowed you to appreciate the good news in a much better way.

In this case, there is bad news that has to do with your standing before God and it’s not going to be comfortable to hear. Really, it’s down right painful! You need to hear it though—to fully appreciate the good news,
the gospel! Remember when Adam and Eve fell to the temptation of the serpent? We learned the curse on their actions affected even their unborn children. Well, you and I are their offspring. And we’ve acquired a birth defect from them called a *sin nature*. That’s why, even when you want to do right, you sometimes find yourself doing bad things you regret. The Bible is God’s recorded word to us and it declares in Romans 5:12, "*Wherefore, as by one man (that’s Adam), sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned* (that means you and me)."

Since the bad news is *we all sin*, it would probably be advantageous for us to define what that means, specifically. The Bible defines sin as lawlessness, or breaking God’s law: "... *sin is the transgression of the law.*"\(^1\) Interestingly, the word sin is an archery term that means to miss the bull’s-eye. Spiritually speaking, God’s law is the bull’s-eye. God’s

\(^1\) 1John 3:4

16
law “is holy, … and just, and good.”\textsuperscript{13} So when we fail to be holy, or to be good or to be just, we miss the bull’s eye. We sin.

And, there’s something else. Our standing with God cannot be determined by the amount of sin we commit, or how often we commit it, because we are not sinners as a result of our sinful actions. It is the other way around. We sin because we \textit{are} sinners. Remember, we have a spiritual birth defect. For instance, my dog is not more or less of a dog in accordance with how many times he barks in a day. My dog barks—some days more and some days less—because he is a dog and that is what dogs do. They bark! And, sinners sin!

The fact that we sin is just evidence of what God has revealed about the heart condition of the human race. Let’s consider how many of the 10 Commandments you’ve broken. Have you always, and without exception, put God first in your life? Have you ever used His

\textsuperscript{13} Romans 7:12
name in a blasphemous manner? Have you ever lied, stolen, hated someone, or lusted? Have you ever cheated on your spouse, cheated on your taxes or cheated your neighbor? If you answered, yes, to any of those sins, consider God’s chilling indictment:

“For the wages of sin is death…” and “…every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”\(^\text{14}\)

God’s standard for acceptance is perfection and anything less than His standard is sin. That means you would have to be perfect for God to accept you. And trying harder to do better is not going to cut it. Even if you achieved perfection, what would you do about all your past sins? I know, you’re probably thinking, \textit{Well who can live up to that}? And therein lies the rub, as Shakespeare would say. That is the point. No one since the fall, and yes, I mean \textit{no one}, can live up to God’s standard. Again the Bible declares,

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{14} Romans 6:23a & 3:19

18
“Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?” 15 Additionally, it says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;” 16

If we were each to be honest with ourselves we would have to admit we have missed God’s bull’s eye; we have failed to keep His law. We have sinned. We are sinners. And, we are in trouble…

**You May Not Like Justice**

I was stopped by the police once for speeding (Okay, actually more than once). After pleading with the officer for mercy because I had extenuating circumstances (don’t we all?), he wrote me a ticket because the law required justice. It was bad enough that I was caught breaking the law, but receiving a ticket from the police officer wasn’t the end of the story. The courts

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15 Exodus 15:11
16 Romans 3:23
imputed a monetary fine and several hours at traffic school. Then, my insurance company raised my premiums. Additionally, I lost time and productivity at work to go to court and attend traffic school. My transgression cost me more than I ever anticipated and there was no mercy offered at the justice center because I had not gone before the judge with an advocate or attorney, just a ticket in my hand and guilt on my face. I was not abused at the court; nor did I experience injustice for my actions. I got exactly what I deserved, exactly what the law required.

Now, the truth is, as a sinner standing before God’s court, you’re not as bad off as you might think—you’re even worse! Scripture teaches, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” 17 Because of your sin, the wrath of God awaits you right now.” 18 In other words, God is angry with you

17 Hebrews 10:31
18 John 3:36
20
for sinning even as you read this.\(^{19}\)

The penalty for sin is much greater than you may realize or prefer to contemplate. The penalty for sin is a place the Bible calls the Lake of Fire, or Hell. It is a place created for the devil and his angels. But because you have sinned, you have condemned yourself to the same fate.

The Bible teaches that “…the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”\(^{20}\) The word death here is speaking of more than physical death. Remember the garden. Adam and Eve eventually died, physically; but on the day they sinned, they died spiritually. Also notice that in the Bible passage just presented, the second clause refers to \textit{eternal} life. That indicates the death referred to in the first clause is \textit{eternal} death. Put simply, when you die as a sinner you will spend eternity separated from God in Hell, the place

\(^{19}\) Psalm 7:11  
\(^{20}\) Romans 6:23
prepared for the devil and those who follow him in sin. Consider one more verse which explains the sinner’s fate so clearly: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

**Perhaps God is a Professor**

No doubt, this whole issue of sin and Hell raises questions in your mind. Likely, you’ve never killed or raped anyone, never robbed a bank—or anything like that. So, maybe you’re asking: *Really? What have I done so wrong that God would be so angry with me; is God such an angry tyrant that He anxiously sits around looking for opportunities to punish people?*

Let me assure you, God is gracious and God is love. But God’s character demands that He is also just. This is often a difficult concept

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21 Revelation 21:8  
22 1 John 4:8  
22
for people to conceive. Because we all fail so much we expect a certain amount of deviation from perfection. Like the professor that grades on a curve, we expect God to cut us some slack. *I mean, we’re all human, right?* Well, God is not; He is Holy. This means, characteristically, He is distinctly set apart from all sin, whatsoever. Therefore, His nature requires absolute holiness.²³

Because the Bible is very clear about the state of things as they really are, many reject what it says. It seems too difficult for some to accept the truth. However, we don’t usually apply the same logic to other areas of our life that are difficult to accept because it seems harsh. Can you hear a father telling his frightened child to not listen to her mother who is warning her of the dangers of playing in the street, only because he doesn’t want her to be scared? That would be irrational. There *is* a real danger that playing in the street will result in a child getting hit by a car.

²³ Leviticus 19:2
Regardless if the truth is scary, the child must be warned. It would be negligent not to.

To think there is no danger because God, the Creator of the Universe, is good and kind is an unfortunate misconception. We suspect that most judges who rule in courts of law are good and kind, but are fulfilling a moral responsibility to the law when they condemn a criminal to his just sentence. God’s judgment seems harsh because sin is so harsh; but, he is never unjust and He is always good.

As a matter of fact, God is exceptionally merciful and full of grace and not pleased to punish sinners, per se. While he is a righteous judge pleased to judge sin righteously, he gets no pleasure out of sinners perishing.\(^{24}\) He does not desire for sinners to leave this world separated from Him. That is why he patiently and graciously offers the most valuable gift, the gospel, the good news, to anyone who will receive it. That is why He has not yet

\(^{24}\) Ezekiel 33:11

24
executed His just judgment on the whole of mankind.\textsuperscript{25} God’s gift is redeeming people from the penalty and power of sin and He won’t cut short the opportunity to redeem even one who will receive His gracious gift.\textsuperscript{26}

\textbf{The Self-help Approach to Sin}

In my lifetime I’ve seen a myriad of self-help and DIY books. I’m sure you have too. There are books and programs available to help people do everything from remodel a house to diagnose kidney failure, from getting rich on a four-hour work week to learning optimism. And because people generally recognize they have shortcomings, they often search for a self-help remedy to their sin problem, too. But \textit{Self-help for Sin} won’t help!

Even if you improve yourself and have your best life now, there remains a nagging guilt

\textsuperscript{25} 2 Peter 3:9
\textsuperscript{26} John 6:37
that will not subside. The guilt is the knowledge—or consciousness—of sin and its looming penalty. Other ways people attempt to solve their sin problem is by trying to ignore it, or using mind-altering substances, or finding religion. Some bring suffering upon themselves trying to atone for the wrong they have done. In other cases, they seek relief through prayer, baptism, lighting candles, giving money or engaging in religious activities. Still, others attempt to balance the scales with good deeds hoping to cancel out their bad deeds. In each of these cases, and others similar to them, it’s about people doing something to get God’s forgiveness and favor. Jesus even talked about some who thought they were good enough or religious enough to go to Heaven on their own, but were horrified to find out otherwise. He said to them: “…Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:”\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{27} Matthew 25:41

26
God’s plan is different because man cannot do enough good to remedy his condition. As a matter of fact, God is so disgusted by our attempts at righteousness, he uses some pretty awkward language to communicate our shortfall. He basically tells us the best we can do amounts to nothing more than menstrual rags and manure.\textsuperscript{28} I know it sounds awkward, but please don’t be offended; let the word pictures communicate the reality of our depraved condition.

\textbf{Unpacking the Most Valuable Gift}

So here we are. You’ve come this far with me. That’s commendable. With a promise of a priceless gift and only hearing bad news compounded by awkward hopelessness, you may be wondering if you’ve wasted your time reading this far. You have not—if you’ll attend the few remaining pages.

The most valuable gift we have been speaking of is the “good news,” \textit{the gospel}.

\textsuperscript{28} Isaiah 64:6 & Philippians 3:8-9
We needed to put the good news into perspective by explaining the bad news that awaits all people who do not have this priceless gift.

While there are at least a million different religions in the world (Okay, full disclosure: I’ve never counted, but the list is pretty big and growing fast), each telling you that you must **do** something to fix your problems, God has already **done** everything necessary to resolve the sin issue. Recall He promised to provide an Innocent One to die for the guilty. That’s what He did when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. The Bible tells us that while we were lawless sinners, He showed His love toward us by sacrificing His own Son in our place.\(^{29}\) He provided Jesus, the Innocent One, for you and me, the guilty ones. Scripture says, “*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God…*”\(^{30}\)

\(^{29}\) Romans 5:8  
\(^{30}\) 1 Peter 3:18  
28
Martin Luther, a famous 16\textsuperscript{th} century reformer, called this “the great exchange.” There is no one who can do any more for our situation than what Jesus did on a cross 2000 years ago. Acts 4:12 says, “\textit{Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved}.” Before Jesus prayed to the Father to receive His spirit while He hung on the cross, He cried out to the world, “It is finished!” Do you see? It is \textit{done}! While man is still \textit{doing}, God is calling him to trust in what has been \textit{done}. Consider this verse we read earlier, “\textit{For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord}.”\textsuperscript{31}

After Jesus died, he rose again to life. The resurrection is significant because it demonstrates Jesus is God. If Jesus had not been virgin born He would not have been able to die for our sins because He would have had a sin debt of his own. If He would

\textsuperscript{31} Romans 6:23
have remained in the grave He would have been just like others before Him who were taken captive by death. His virgin birth, death on the cross, and resurrection on the third day, proved He was God, proved He was victorious over sin, death and Hell, and proved He can save all that call upon him for salvation. The gift of salvation has been paid in full. There is nothing left for you to do but receive the gift! That simply means believe what God has done for you and repent—turn to Jesus and embrace Him and Him alone.

**Paid in Full**

Friend, God doesn’t owe you—or me—anything. Yet, he graciously offers this gift of reconciliation through the shed blood of His Son, Jesus, as the full satisfaction of His wrath on sin and the substitute for your eternal death in Hell. He loves you that much!

You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. As you consider the gift of the gospel, I

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32 Hebrews 7:25

30
encourage you to consider these final words:

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, Ye shall be devoured with the sword: For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”\(^{33}\)

God cares enough about you to redeem you with His own blood, and someone else who cares gave you this gift of the gospel. So what are you going to do? I’m not asking if you’ll start going to church. I’m wondering, what will you do with Jesus? If you receive Him by faith, He will never reject you.\(^{34}\) But, if you reject Him and His gift, He remains unmoved about his just judgment on sin; yet He is grieved, for He fully knows your end.

\(^{33}\) Isaiah 1:18-20
\(^{34}\) John 6:37
Please Don’t Litter

If you have questions about what you’ve read, or if it’s made a difference in your life, please contact the person who gave you this book. Here’s their number:

If you choose to just throw this book away, please be respectful and don’t litter. Or, you could always just return it to the person who gave it to you. That would be the best choice.

If I can be of help to you, personally, please feel free to contact me. My email is: scott@scottpostma.net. Or, visit me online at http://scottpostma.net to learn about more helpful resources. God’s grace unto you!

About the Author: Scott Postma is a writer and church planter living in Las Vegas with his high school sweetheart and four amazing kids. He is passionate about encouraging people to live authentic and significant lives by seeking to join God in the renewal of all things.