

Christmas Day

December 25, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, grant that the birth of your one and only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old bondage under the yoke of sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law to redeem those under law. Alleluia! (Galatians 4:4-5)

Sermon Text: Hebrews 2:14-18

So, did you get it? The perfect Christmas gift? That “big-ticket item” you scribbled down on your wish-list? Maybe you haven’t opened your gifts yet... Still, you may have in mind the “perfect” gift. So, let me ask: What makes a gift “perfect?”

For a gift to be “perfect” means it touches life on so many levels, right? This gift meets your interests— matching your likes and avoiding your dislikes. You want this gift to mean something, to be an item that reveals the great lengths of care, time, and concern the giver endured just to get it to you. You want this gift to bring you satisfying happiness today, tomorrow, always. The “perfect” gift touches your life physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Does the “perfect” gift actually exist? Something that (1) meets your interests forever, (2) that always reveals love, and (3) brings your everlasting happiness? Gifts I so dearly wanted as a child now sit in my basement (trust me, I still have some— just ask my wife). Even the gifts you get this Christmas will eventually be put away. You may outgrow it. It may no longer meet a need. You might even forget about it. While you treasure the memory of receiving it today, those memories eventually fade away. A gift that appeared so “perfect” really may not have been as “perfect” as you once thought.

Today you get the absolutely perfect Christmas gift. I’m not talking about the presents you are receiving for Christmas. God gives you something you will never outgrow, never shove under your bed, something you will never forget. He reveals the great lengths of care, time, and concern he endures just to get this gift to you. **JESUS BECOMES YOUR BROTHER** *to render death ineffective and to free you from all fear.*

Hebrews 2:14-18

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

It is no secret what you celebrate on Christmas Day. The birth of Jesus! Just last night [Christmas Eve] the angels sang to you: *"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger"* ([Luke 2:11-12](#)).

Peer into the manger; what do you see? A disembodied spirit? The righteous glory of One who has finally come to judge? No, you see a child— a baby with soft skin, with a voice to speak and eyes to see and ears to hear, with heart pumping life-giving blood. You see Jesus, who comes to **share in [your] humanity**.

It sounds so simple, so insignificant, doesn't it? Jesus is wrapped in flesh and blood. So what? Yet, the writer of Hebrews is not merely stating the obvious or giving you an anatomy lesson. He tells you: Jesus is born for a purpose. Jesus must take on flesh and blood because we, **the children have flesh and blood**. That's true. Skin covers our bodies; blood courses through our veins. More than that— our flesh ages. We get wrinkles and cuts and bruises and infections. Our blood weakens. Eventually we reach an age where life ends. The "flesh" and "blood" we have marks our mortality. And death—well, it stirs up uncertainty.

Over the past few weeks, millions of Americans scrambled to find the "perfect" gift. They look for something that shows thoughtful, heart-driven love. They search for something to lift the heart up for months. They scour the nooks and crannies of every store shelf, looking for that one gift that meets a need. Yes, you may be showered with many tremendous presents; you may form new memories. Yet, no gadget can fix the hurt you wreaked on others. No jewelry can guarantee a life of eternal love— that you will be argument-free every waking moment, every year. No movie can draw you into its world so that you can escape your world of terrorism, civil war, and political tensions. No matter how hard you try, your mortality reminds you that you are running headlong to an end. No gift can perfectly stop death.

Death would not be so terrifying if we not for the fact the devil teaches you why you die. Every time we choose to step outside of God's Word, there he is, dancing around like a courtroom jester, pointing a finger right at you. *"Ha! You thought it would be great to think that way about your spouse? See how God tells you to love unconditionally!" "Ha! Your curse words are something God hates!" "Ha! Your self-love reveals how little you can trust a God with a perfect track record!"* The minute we transgress a holy and righteous God, the sentence of death slams down on us ([Romans 6:23](#)).

The devil beams declaring: *"Ha! Ha! Look what God says you deserve! Sin once; death forever!"* He's right; *the wages of sin is death* ([Romans 6:23](#)). How fearful to know that you and I deserve to die, to be buried, and open our eyes in the unquenchable fires of hell!

But here's the real reason for the Christmas season: **JESUS BECOMES YOUR BROTHER**. You are celebrating something more than just another birthday. Jesus comes to do something. **JESUS BECOMES YOUR BROTHER ... so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil**. No, the devil does not choose when

you die. God holds your life in his hands ([Psalm 31:15](#); [Hebrews 9:27](#)). Jesus is born to remove the truthfulness of the devil's accusations.

Yes, if we wish vengeance on our neighbor, we deserve God's eternal vengeance. If greed chokes out love for God, we deserve to spend eternity without God. Yet, your Jesus dresses himself in human flesh; blood pumps through his veins. That little baby lying in the manger is like you. He too is expected to *Love the Lord his God* above any other thing ([Matthew 22:37](#)). He too is expected to *Love his neighbor* just as he loves himself ([Matthew 22:39](#)).

He does! Jesus, true God and true human, the One like us, is the One without sin! He stands out as a brilliant light radiating the perfection God wants to find on us! When Jesus marches to the cross, he is not carrying his faults; he carries your faults. God strikes him dead for your sin, for my sin. Then, on Easter, the other great day, Jesus breaks out of the tomb—alive!

JESUS BECOMES YOUR BROTHER *to render death ineffective!* Picture grabbing a cobra, and with a pair of pliers in your hand, you grab those poisonous fangs and tear them out. When you release the cobra, it's still alive. He still arches its body up, puffs up its intimidating "hood," and strikes at you. But without fangs, it cannot bite. It doesn't poison. It doesn't kill. He hisses and strikes, but nothing happens. Because Jesus lives, it means death cannot hold him! It means he can raise you and me back from dead to eternal life!

What an incredible Christmas gift! **JESUS BECOMES YOUR BROTHER** *to render death ineffective.* You will never outgrow that gift, you will never shove it under your bed, you never forget what he has done! **JESUS BECOMES YOUR BROTHER** *to free you from all fear.*

It means that Jesus **free[s] those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.** If Jesus came back to life, if his life can cover over your sins, what is there to fear? If you owe \$100,000,000,000,000 (one-hundred trillion dollars) and Jesus paid the debt off in full, what do you have to pay? Nothing! If Jesus paid off the wages of sin, what wage must you pay? None! You and I have the guarantee of life in heaven!

It means that you do not fear God as an angry Judge who comes to damn. **JESUS BECOMES YOUR BROTHER** *to free you from all fear!*

Yes, even though the devil cannot accuse you of deserving hell, he still tries. How he loves to still play the jester and tempt you to think that Jesus could never forgive you! "*Do you feel forgiven?*" "*Are you sure Jesus can forgive those terrible things you said?*" "*Can you really believe Jesus has done it all— and he does not expect you to save yourself?*"

Look to the manger. Remember what you see. **JESUS BECOMES YOUR BROTHER** *to free you from all fear.* Be sure of this! God himself says: **[S]urely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.** Just think about that— Jesus is not born for the benefit of the angels. God doesn't send people to preach to the angels. God sends angels to proclaim peace to you! The descendants of Abraham are those who believe in the same God and same Savior that Abraham did. Abraham looked ahead to the day when Jesus would wipe out his debt of sin. You and I—we get to look back and see Jesus did just that!

In the Old Testament, the high priest would sacrifice a bull and a goat for the sins of the individual. You watched him place his hands over the goat, confessing your wickedness, announcing your secret shame and public guilt (Day of Atonement— [Leviticus 16](#)). He laid his hands on the goat's head— symbolizing your sins transferred to the animal. Then that animal suffered sin's wages: It died. The priest slit the throat; the blood spilled out— and with the blood went the life. You, the temple worshipper, could leave with the assurance God is at peace with you.

Yet, we don't have animal sacrifices today. We don't need to. A sacrifice better than an animal appeared. A perfect sacrifice. A sacrifice that can cover not just one person— but all people. Jesus is **a merciful and faithful high priest**. In mercy he exchanges his life for your death. You can trust his death brings you eternal life.

He brings you a perfect gift: *Atonement*. In the word: "atone" are two words: "at-one." Jesus makes you "at-one" with God. You are reminded of that in our worship service. We confess our sins and plead for God's mercy. You hear how *God has been merciful to us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins...* Jesus brings peace between you and God. No more fear that you will spend eternity in hell. No fear that if you do bad, then God will afflict you with trouble. No fear that God plugs his ears to your prayers. Communication has been opened! Heaven is your home. Peace is restored. Friendship bonded. Look at the manger and see how **JESUS BECOMES YOUR BROTHER** *to free you from all fear.*

You will receive many wonderful Christmas gifts. Some of them you might use for the next year. You might see care, time, and concern packaged in something special. You may remember this gift for a while.

As December turns into January, winter into spring, 2016, into 2017, those gifts may lose a little of their luster. As you change, the significance of those gifts will also change.

Today you get the absolutely perfect Christmas gift. God gives you his Son, who steps into your place and gives you the forgiveness you need. He *renders death ineffective and frees you from all fear*. You will never outgrow this. You will never shove it under your bed. You will never forget it. Remember why Jesus is born. **JESUS BECOMES YOUR BROTHER** *to render death ineffective and to free you from all fear.*