

## Carol service gospel message: John 3:16

There is a regular conversation that Lynn and I as Christmas draws near, I am sure you have had this conversation yourself. 'What do you want for Christmas?' Or, 'What do you need?' We have gotten into the habit of asking so that the person gets what they want or what they need. Nothing worse than getting a gift that is unwanted or unneeded. So each year as Christmas approaches it is usually a case of wishlist fulfillment, what is that thing that I have wanted the most; that is what I will get for myself from the other for Christmas. Sometimes we even order it ourselves and the other wraps it. This makes Christmas painless, because we don't have to go through the process of dropping hints, and trying to mind read. But this year we are doing it differently, we have given ourselves a \$50 cap and we have to get what we think the other would like or need. I have yet to see whether my gift will be successful this year.

Gift giving is a central part of Christmas and can be a sense of great joy, or frustration. How many times have we given or received gifts that are useless? Neither needed nor wanted? How many gifts have been agonized over only to be rejected or despised? It is with this aspect of gift giving in mind that I would like us to consider what Christmas means. It is an interesting thought experiment. If I had to ask you, if you could have anything, what would you ask for? Take a moment and think about it. This is an interesting experiment because it reveals what we think we need or want. We all love the idea of Aladdin's lamp because we all want a genie that will make impossible things possible, enabling our wildest dreams to come true. We all want our hearts desire to be satisfied, and very quickly as children discuss the problems of how they will spend their three wishes they work out that 3 is not enough and they in some way strategize to ask for infinite wishes. Some of us might make a good choice and get something that will last, something that might help our families. But how many horror stories have we heard of people who thought they knew what they wanted, and wished for things that ended up destroying their lives. Think of the story of King Midas, he was granted a wish and he wished that everything he touched would turn to gold. The story goes that he began to turn the flowers in his garden to gold, and was very pleased, but then when he sat down to eat any food he touched turned to gold and he could not eat. On top of that when his daughter came running to him sad because the flowers in the garden had been turned to gold, when he tried to comfort her, she turned into a gold statue. His desires killed her and then himself as he starved to death.

I am sure that you have done what I have tried, you have thought about how you can get around the restrictions of the three wishes. Or get around the problem of the golden touch. Maybe if you get others to feed you.... Driven by our desires we all think that we can escape the outcome of our Faustian bargains. Tragically this what our lives giving into sin are like. We think we know what we need, and we think we know what we want. We trust our own wisdom, and we trust our own hearts. And as a result we turn from God and His wisdom.

Now I want you to think about another question. We have seen that when it comes to getting what we think we need or want, we don't get things right. Here is my question: if God were to give you one gift that you didn't know you needed or wanted, what would it be? The greatest gift that we need and God has given is Jesus Christ. The greatest gift that we did not know our hearts wanted, because we have hearts that are broken and want all the wrong things, is Jesus Christ. At this Christmas time as we think about giving, we should remember the

gift of Christ. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.’

Because of sin, Christ is the gift we need. We have all sinned, we have all broken God’s law, we have all turned our backs on him, and are a ceaseless stream of sin. One of the reasons for God sending the flood in judgment upon the world was because the thoughts of men’s heart was only evil continually. Looking at our lives we are an endless source of sin in thought, feeling, motive, word, deed, desire. Instead of the good we want the bad, instead of the natural, the unnatural, instead of the holy we want the unholy, instead of the right we desire the wrong. And there are consequences, there will be a reckoning, a judgement. But God loves sinners and does not seek to punish them but to save them. And that is what this verse is telling us. Our greatest need is not more money, not satisfying your greatest desire, or fulfilling your greatest ambition, it is a sin bearer. Jesus was born of a virgin, in order to be sinless; lived a perfect life of law keeping on our behalf; and He went to be executed like all those who sin against God deserve. But God is gracious and He sent His Son to be received. Like a gift we do not buy, indeed we cannot buy the forgiveness we need in Christ. Christ is offered freely to any who will see their sin and turn from it, calling upon God for mercy because of the death Jesus has died to pay for our sins.

But Jesus is also, unknown to you the gift you want. You think you know what you want, but our desires lead us astray. If you have any life behind you, you have already experienced the way you have self-deceived, willingly believing the lies of sin and turn to sins that have not satisfied, that have harmed you and the ones you love. God made you to be in a relationship with Himself, and you will never be satisfied until you are doing what you made for.

So at this Christmas time as you think about the gifts you want and need, and the gifts your loved ones want and need, think about the gift God gave in Christ as the one who you need and want.