



from the desk of . . .  
**Rande Wayne Smith**  
D.Min., Th.M., M.Div.

**#781**  
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## **Jesus At The Movies**

### **A CHRISTMAS STORY**

#### **2 Corinthians 9:15**

I confess that I like shopping for Christmas gifts. When I was a boy I used to work at my uncle's chicken hatchery on Saturday mornings. I would work 4 hours ... from 8:00 to noon. My job was to gather eggs & then wash them & then grade them according to size.

To be honest, I don't remember how much I got paid ... but when December rolled around I had saved about \$20 to buy gifts for my family.

And then on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of my Christmas vacation from school my Mom & I would go into town to shop. Those were the good ol' days, & Indiana, PA was safe, so my Mom would let me go off by myself, & then we'd meet at lunchtime at the Dairy Dell where Mom would have a grilled cheese sandwich & I had a hot dog. Tradition!

The majority of my money was spent at the 2 5&10's in Indiana. (Are you familiar with 5&10's? ...) I never got my family big, fantastic presents,  
but I took a lot pride in shopping for them.

I thought about each of my relatives as I bought their present ... hoping that they'd like it. Even as a young boy, I wanted to give each person a gift that they'd really appreciate.

Shopping for the perfect gift ... I was just reading a poll taken about Christmas shopping. The average person will spend ...

- \$983 this year on Christmas presents
  - 26 hours shopping for them
  - & walk over 30 miles in stores
- all in search for the perfect gifts.

What's intriguing though, in that same poll, what people said that they looked forward to the most at Christmas was spending time with their loved ones.

That was "the perfect gift" for many.

God delights in giving the perfect gift. Scripture teaches ... (X) "Every good gift & every perfect present comes from heaven; it comes down from God." (James 1:17)

Listen to what Jesus says about God's gift giving ... (X) "As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

(Matthew 7:11)

The "perfect gift" ... that's kind of what we'll be talking about this morning, as we continue our message series on "Jesus At The Movies."

Last Sunday we viewed a clip from "A Christmas Carol,"  
& saw how God is the God of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chances.

Today, we're going to watch a scene from a film that  
was just voted as the 3<sup>rd</sup> best holiday movie of all time ...  
"A Christmas Story." (X)

"A Christmas Story" allows us to look inside a  
family's Christmas from the 1940's. The basic plot deals  
with the obsession the main character ... 10-year-old  
Ralphie ... has with what would be his perfect Christmas  
gift ... a Red Ryder Carbine Action 200-shot Range  
Model Air Rifle. However, his wish is rejected by his  
mother, his teacher Miss Shields, & even Higbee's  
Department Store Santa Claus, with the same warning ...  
(*"you'll shoot your eye out"*).

**(video ... begin at 2:41 & end at 5:30)**

Our Scripture passage this morning is a single verse  
from Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth; & though he  
didn't know it at the time ... also to the Church here in  
Rolling Meadows.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

Let us thank God for his priceless gift. (2 Corinthians 9:15)

**May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the  
mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing  
devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen**

For many of us, Christmas is a time of giving & receiving gifts. I like the story told of the uncle who gave his nephew an electric guitar for Christmas.

The 1<sup>st</sup> time the boy saw his uncle after receiving it he said ... "Thanks for the electric guitar you gave me for Christmas, it's the best present I ever got."

"That's great," said his uncle.

"Have you learned how to play it?"

"Oh no, I don't play it," the young fellow replied. "My Mom gives me a \$ not to play it during the day, & my Dad gives me \$5 a week not to play it at night."

All of us have probably received, or maybe even given a present that was not totally appreciated.

So, what is it that makes a gift a "good" gift? ...

For some people it has to do with the quality or the cost. Others judge it to be a good gift if it meets the particular need of the recipient. Still others measure the gift by the motive in the heart of the giver.

Okay then, what do you do with gifts that you don't especially like or appreciate? ... Be honest now ...

Some put them in a closet to sell later at a garage sale. Some return them to the store to exchange for something else. Others wrap them up & regift them.

(I suspect fruitcakes fall in that category.)

This morning I want to talk with you about the all-time best gift that has ever been given. It's a gift that's available to everyone. (John 3:16) It's a gift that each of us must receive. (The Acts 16:31) And if we don't **receive** it, then we'll be missing the most important **gift** ever **given**.

In our Scripture passage, the Apostle Paul makes a statement that's amazingly powerful, even though it's only 8 words long. He writes ...

"Let us thank God for his priceless gift."

Have you ever received a priceless gift? ...

What would it have to be to be called "priceless"?

MasterCard spent 9 years & 160 different commercials attempting to tell us what priceless gifts were.

Every December the Today Show features some gift ideas that might be considered priceless ... these are "extraordinary" gifts that I suspect are not likely to find their way onto our Christmas giving.

- A Jaguar 220. (X) It goes 0 to 60 mph in 3.6 seconds. It retails for a cool \$643,000. The Jaguar 220 is a limited addition model, only 275 were built.  
... (By the way, if you're still looking for a gift idea for your Pastor this year ...)
- Now if we were to purchase one of those cars, we might want to get the specialized car wax, which retails for a skimpy \$3,400 for an 8 oz. can.

- Now if that doesn't suit your fancy, how about considering (X) the \$300,000 gold & silver toilet, inlaid with precious stones?
- Okay, assuming those gifts are a little too pricey for you, what about the \$18,000 frisbee? the \$12,000 mousetrap? or the \$57,000 pair of sunglasses?
- And, for the proud great-grandparents, the Calcari's, there's that \$28,000 pacifier that every new great-grandbaby needs!

We shake our heads at the ridiculousness of those items. Nevertheless, they're "not" priceless. There are astronomical price tags on each one, & if you have the money, you may purchase them.

And apparently ... some people do.

So, what can possibly make a gift priceless? ... Well, it's obviously something that we're not going to find at Wall-Mart, Target, Meijer, or even the Woodfield Mall.

When Paul wrote that statement, he was thinking about something that points beyond words; something that'll make us happier than any earthly possession.

(Matthew 6:19)

In the context of this passage Paul was dealing with the temporal gifts that the Corinthians were giving to the poor in Jerusalem ... which led him to think about God & the gift of Christ to His people ...

which was the greatest of all gifts.

When Paul describes Jesus as God's priceless gift he's not just playing with words or simply exaggerating to attempt to make a theological point.

I mean, if we were to have to purchase our salvation ...  
**what price tag would be placed on it?**

We Americans always look at price tags. We usually buy what we can afford. Be it homes, cars, clothes, restaurants where we eat, our entertainment, etc.

But Paul's talking about something completely different.

So, what makes this "gift" priceless? ...

1<sup>st</sup> of all, it's the nature of the gift itself. The gift is **Christ**. Talk about a priceless gift! ... So, in order to pay for it, we would have to **buy** Jesus, & what He has done for our salvation ...

which, should come as no surprise, we cannot do.

Ponder for a moment what He's done. An angel appeared to Joseph & told him ...

"Do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a son, & you will name him Jesus." (Matthew 1:20-21)

At which point the Gospel writer, Matthew, adds ...

"Now all this happened in order to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, 'A virgin will become pregnant & have a son, & he will be called Immanuel.'" (Matthew 1:22-23)

And the same message was given Mary, herself. The angel, Gabriel, came to her ... "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant & give birth to a son, & you will name him Jesus." (Luke 1:30-31)

The name "**Jesus**" means "Jehovah saves." The name "**Immanuel**" means "God is with us."

If Jesus is **God** ... then how can we put a \$ value on Him?

We have another problem if we attempt to put a price tag on Him. Because the gift consists not merely of who Jesus Christ is ... the infinite, eternal, unchangeable God (John 10:30) ... but also what He **has done**.

Jesus came to provide salvation for us by His sacrifice on the cross (1 Peter 1:19) ... & come on, how are we ever going to financially pay for that? ...

Stop & think about it? ... How much did that cost? ... Obviously we're not talking about a \$ amount here.

And, it was a lot more than simply Jesus' earthly life!

Let's go back to the cross for a moment. Jesus has been hanging on it for about 6 hours. His suffering is unimaginable. "At about 3:00 Jesus cried out in a loud shout, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why did you abandon me?'" (Matthew 27:46)

What's that all about? Did God actually "abandon" Jesus? Was there some kind of temporary division between the Father & the Son? ...

This is the only time in Scripture where Jesus refers to God as "God" ... on every other occasion, every other time ... it's "Father." What did it "cost" the Father to have Jesus die on the cross for our sakes? What did it "cost" Jesus to die on the cross for our sins? ...

It cost **division** in the **Godhead**. Incredible!

The nature & work of our Lord Jesus Christ is beyond our full comprehension. It is priceless.

But the gift of God is also priceless because of the **grace** by which it is **given**.

Most of our gifts have nothing to do with grace.

We give because the recipients have some claim upon us

- they're members of our family
- they're people who have helped us in some way
- or they gave something to us last year

Even when we give to someone who has no special connection to us, someone who is perhaps just in great physical or material need, we usually do so because of some recognized obligation due to both of us being members of the human race.

But God isn't a member of the human race ... what's more, our humanity is in rebellion against Him. We're His enemies. (Romans 5:10) Yet, & this should knock our socks off ... (X) "but God has shown us how much he loves us - it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us!"

(Romans 5:8)

I'm not sure that we ever totally appreciate what that means. Jesus was **crucified** for us. ... Andrew Blackwood, (X) a former Professor of homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary put it as well as anyone ...

"The great gift of Christ is granted not to God's friends, but to his enemies, to those who in their sins have risen up against God & declared war against the Almighty.

To every one of us, suffering, as we & our world are, under the destructive powers of sin, God offers his gift of 'priceless' grace. Christmas does not offer rejoicing to a selected few; it cries out, 'Joy To The World!' We stand before that supreme & saving truth, the holy of holies of our Christian faith, the blessed assurance that 'Christ Jesus came into the world,' not to build big & costly churches, not to give his followers earthly power & rule, but ... & this is why the angels sang their praise ...

"to save sinners.' He came, not to establish social service, social consciousness, social justice, but 1<sup>st</sup> & foremost he came to seal our salvation.

No wonder that the apostle calls the mercy of God as shown by the gift of Christ 'priceless'; it goes beyond the limit of human speech. Just as beholding the glare of the sun, men lose their power of vision, so raising our eyes to the brilliance of Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, we are blinded by the splendor of the greatest Gift that God himself could bestow.

Christ came to save - blessed assurance!  
 But more: he came to 'save ... to the uttermost,'  
 so that no sin is too great, no sinner too vile,  
 to be blessed, when penitent & believing, by this Gift."

So, it's not only the gift but also the gracious manner  
 in which the gift is given ... which makes it priceless.

A 3<sup>rd</sup> reason the gift of God is priceless  
 is the **effect it produces.**

Jesus brings **forgiveness of sins**, according to the  
 riches of God's grace. We're in rebellion against God ...  
 & God has loved us while we were still sinners.

But God doesn't merely love us & let it go at that.  
 He also forgives our sin through Christ's sacrifice.  
 That means **removal** of sin so far as God is concerned.

Scripture teaches ... that God "will trample our sins  
 underfoot & send them to the bottom of the sea!"

(Micah 7:19)

God states ...

"I have swept your sins away like a cloud." (Isaiah 44:22)

David wrote ...

"As far as the east is from the west,  
 so far does he remove our sins from us." (The Psalms 103:12)

God proclaims ... "I will forgive their sins  
 & I will no longer remember their wrongs." (Jeremiah 31:34)

God knows everything ... but according to these verses, the only thing He has ever forgotten are the sins of those who believe that Jesus died for them. If we've received God's gift, we don't need to fear that our sins will ever rise up again to haunt us.

2<sup>nd</sup>, the person who has come to faith is **justified** according to God's justice. **Forgiveness** is a **negative** thing; it **forgets** the **past**. ... Justification is **positive**; it brings us into a new standing before God that we didn't have before, & could never have **achieved** ourselves.

Scripture speaks of it (X) as being clothed with the righteousness of Christ ... we're now wearing "a new outfit" of clothes. (The Revelation 3:5) Before, we were dressed in the filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) of our own unrighteousness.

Those were taken off, & we're given new garments.

3<sup>rd</sup>, we are **adopted** into God's **family**. "At that time we were apart from Christ. We were foreigners & did not belong to God's chosen people. We had no part in the covenants, which were based on God's promises to his people, & we lived without hope & without God."

(Ephesians 2:12)

That's another great concept to ponder.  
Almighty God wants us to be His children!

(X) "See how much the Father has loved us!  
His love is so great that we are called God's children."

(1 John 3:1)

As children, we have the privilege of coming to God at any time with any matter, knowing that He cares for us as a father cares for a beloved son or daughter, (The Psalms 103:13) & that He will always answer our requests according to His own great wisdom. (1 John 5:14-15)

4<sup>th</sup>, we have a peace that takes us through all the difficult circumstances that we come in contact with in life. A peace "which is far beyond human understanding."

(Philippians 4:7) Talk about priceless!

5<sup>th</sup>, we have a place in Heaven that's being prepared for us by Jesus Himself. Now that's exciting!

On the final night of Jesus' earthly life, He said this to His disciples ...

"Do not be worried & upset, believe in God & believe in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house, & I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. And after I go & prepare a place for you, I will come back & take you to myself, so that you will be where I am." (John 14:1-3) ... Can't wait!

6<sup>th</sup>, as God's children we are His heirs. Paul writes, "Since we are his children, we will possess the blessings he keeps for his people, & we will also possess with Christ what God has kept for him." (Romans 8:17)

Do you understand what Paul just told us? ... We're going to possess that which Christ has.

Talk about priceless!

One of my favorite stories is about the wealthy English Baron Fitzgerald who had only one child, a son, who understandably was the apple of his eye, & the center of his affections. And because he was an only child, he was the focus of this little family's attention.

The son grew up, but in his early teens his mother died, leaving him & his father. Baron Fitzgerald grieved over the loss of his wife,  
but devoted himself to fathering their son.

In the passing of time, the son also became very ill & died in his late teens.

In the meantime, the Fitzgerald financial holdings greatly increased. The father had used much of his wealth to acquire art works of the "masters."

And with the passing of more time, Fitzgerald himself became ill & died. But prior to his death he had carefully prepared his will with explicit instructions as to how his estate would be settled. He had directed that there would be an auction in which his entire collection of art would be sold.

Because of the quantity & quality of the art works in his collection, which was valued in the millions of English pounds, a huge crowd of prospective buyers gathered, expectantly. Among them were many museum curators & private collectors, eager to bid.

The art works were displayed for viewing before the auction began. Among them was one painting which received little attention.

It was of poor quality & done by an unknown local artist. It happened to be a portrait of Fitzgerald's only son.

When the time arrived, the auctioneer gaveled the crowd to attention & the attorney read from Fitzgerald's will, which clearly instructed that the 1<sup>st</sup> item to be auctioned was the painting of ... "My Beloved Son."

The simple painting didn't receive any bidders ... except one! It was an old servant who had known the boy & loved him & cared for him, & for sentimental reasons offered the only bid. For an English pound ... about \$1.62 ... he bought the painting.

The auctioneer stopped the bidding & asked the attorney to read again from Fitzgerald's will. The crowd was hushed as the attorney read ...

"Whoever buys the painting of my son gets all my art collection.' The auction is over!"

"Whoever takes my son ... gets all my fortune!"  
And while that was certainly true for Baron Fitzgerald ... it's even more so for those of us who have come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Whoever has the Son of God, becomes an heir to God's blessings & Christ's riches & has an eternal home! (John 14:2)

(X) "The testimony is this: God has given us eternal life, & this life has its source in his Son. Whoever has the Son has this life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 John 5:11-12)

(X) "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life."  
(John 3:36)

So, what do we do with this priceless gift? ... Well, the 1<sup>st</sup> thing is we must thank God. Isn't that what Paul is instructing us to do? ...

"Let us thank God for his priceless gift."

Have you thanked God for His great gift of salvation? ... At Christmas you & I thank all kinds of people for all kinds of gifts. "Thank you for this" & thank you for that." But what of God? ...

Is it not wrong & even offensive to be thankful for socks & cups & games ... & overlook the one gift that alone is beyond anything else we could possibly imagine?

If that gift is as great as Scripture says it is & as wonderful as our spirits acknowledge it to be, then we should literally cry out with Paul ... "Thank you God for your priceless gift! Thank you God for Jesus!"

And don't forget, you can express your thanks by service. Let God's gift be the pattern for your giving & His service be the pattern for your service.

**MARANA THA**