

The Gift of Christmas

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Date: 19 December 2021

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thank you very much to our musicians and singers and also to our readers. What I'd like to do now is to talk for a moment or two on the gift of Christmas from that last Bible reading we had in Isaiah chapter 9.

Let me ask you a couple of questions. First of all, I wonder if you're still looking for that inspiration for a gift for someone this Christmas, still needing to get online after this carol service and try and see if you can beat the deadline for posting and get your gifts to those you love.

Still looking for or thinking about the perfect gift for someone. Well, this year it seems to me, I don't know if it seems so to you, but it seems that the thing that is more of a thing than ever before is Christmas gift guides.

If you go online at all or if you check your mailbox, there are so many Christmas gift guides telling you the perfect gift for the perfect person. And so let me share with you some of the Christmas gift guides that I found this year.

You're welcome. You may find them useful. And these are actual gift guides that you will find on the internet. So first one, the best Christmas gifts for him. It's obviously the most important one.

[1 : 1 6] Then there are 63 thoughtful Christmas gift ideas that your wife will love in 2021. That's equally important. There is the 12 best Christmas gifts for grandma.

I'm not sure grandma wants or needs 12 Christmas gifts, but there we go. There's the Christmas gifts for teachers 2021. I'm married to a teacher. I'm married to a teacher. Just to say Ferrero Roche wasn't on that gift list.

So any pupils out there, do not give your teachers Ferrero Roche. Nobody likes that disgusting chocolate. Anyway, another gift. This is the Lego gift ideas for kids and adults.

So it's got sets for children and sets for dads. And in the sets for dads, they had the Star Wars Lego Atat Walker at the measly price of \$699.99.

So as much as I'd like that for Christmas, I don't think I'll be getting that in my Santa sack. Some different gift guides. There's 35 Christmas gifts for coffee lovers.

[2 : 1 9] It's a nice one. There's the Theatre Lovers 2021 gift guide. Some people would enjoy that as a Christmas gift. There's the 25 gifts for neighbors that are guaranteed to spread Christmas cheer around your block.

Might be a useful one. I tell you what doesn't spread Christmas cheer around our block is people who decorate their house with lights from top to bottom. Our street is not a fan of those, just so you know.

Another one is 24 stonking vegan gift ideas for plant-based pals this Christmas. For all your plant-based pals. There's a few suggestions there.

There's sustainable Christmas gifts. 10 ideas for an eco-friendly festive season. Also another different kind of Christmas gift. There's also 24 of the best charity gift ideas for Christmas 2021.

Always good. There's also some gift guides out there for pets. So there's nine great gift ideas for your dog. I was surprised that dog shampoo wasn't on there, which it should be, because dogs smell often and lots.

[3 : 27] There's also 13 best gifts for cat lovers and their furry friend. I'm sure those gifts would be just perfect. And here are my favorite three gift guides I found on the internet.

These are a thing. 15 gift ideas for people you don't really want to buy for. Just don't buy them anything. Simple. Then there's best expensive looking presents for under a tenner.

Great idea. See me afterwards if you like that website. And there's also a final one. Where to buy secondhand gifts for Christmas 2021. Again, see me afterwards if you want details of that one.

Okay, so we do love getting gifts at Christmas, don't we? And unless we are a real scrooge, then we also love giving gifts at Christmas. It's something we enjoy doing.

And it might sound a bit twee and it might even sound a bit hackneyed to say that Christmas is about giving. But it really is. Christmas is about giving.

[4 : 28] And that is what our last reading in the Bible from Isaiah chapter 9 was saying to us. It makes it clear that Christmas is about giving. It speaks about the perfect Christmas gift.

Perfect Christmas gift for our world. Which means it's the perfect Christmas gift for you and for me. So it's the gift that you and I need more than any other gift this Christmas.

Well, what is the gift? The reading had a verse, verse 6. Matthew's going to put that up for us. The gift is, for to us a child is born.

To us a son is given. And the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

So the gift promised in Isaiah is Jesus Christ. And so that's where I like to spend a few moments just thinking about this afternoon. Because these words tell us how the gift of Jesus far exceeds our expectations for this world.

[5 : 34] But also meets the deepest longings of our hearts. Now, Isaiah, bit of context. He was a prophet. And so these words were written about 700 years before Jesus came on that first Christmas.

And they say that God would come to rescue his world and rescue his people. And so it was a message of hope for Isaiah's original readers.

But it's also a message that we need to hear too, whoever we are. Because Isaiah's readers lived amidst gloom and distress and darkness. They were led by a foolish king called King Ahaz.

And they were threatened by a powerful empire, the Assyrian Empire. So these words come from a historical context. And they were written to people who were afraid and people who lived without hope.

But their plight is really no different to the world that we live in today. Because there are so many people who live with fear and without hope.

[6 : 37] We are living at a time with darkness, gloom, doom, and distress. Just think, actually, for a moment or two. Think about the global situation. There's great fear and distress in our world right now.

Whether it's about climate change and the cries to act now before it's too late. Or about COVID and the rapid spread of the Omicron variant.

So that's our global situation. But scale it down a bit and think about our national situation. There's darkness and doom and gloom in our nation. Whether it be the divisions in our land.

Or the lack of confidence that we have in our politicians. The hypocrisy that we see. Perhaps it's the increase in poverty. Or it's the rise of drug-related deaths.

Or domestic abuse. And we could go on and on and on. Things don't look good in our nation. But scale it down a bit more. Global, national, to personal.

[7 : 37] Just think about your own personal situation. I'm sure, if you're like me, there is plenty doom, gloom, despair, distress, darkness in our lives. Whether it be in our relationships.

Or maybe with our families. Or even at work. Perhaps we live our lives with some regret about mistakes or failures in the past. Or maybe we just fear the future for what lies ahead.

At the very least, we're aware that we are not the person that we could be or should be. But like the people in Isaiah's day, we've got to realize that the biggest problems facing humanity aren't environmental or political or economical or social or even a combination of all of those.

Because humanity's greatest problem, the Bible reading tells us, is spiritual. The root cause of all of our problems in this world, in our land, in our lives, is our human sin and rebellion against the loving Creator God who made us.

And so the consequence of turning our backs on God means that we live in a broken world and our lives are also broken too.

[8 : 55] And that's why there is so much disorder, disease, decay, distress, darkness, and death. It's because we have rejected our loving Creator God.

Now, J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series, has been in the news a lot recently. I wonder if you heard that there's going to be a Harry Potter reunion where all the cast and the crew of the movies are coming together and they're going to have a special celebration.

And it's called Harry Potter 20th Anniversary Return to Hogwarts. And it's on TV in the new year, I think. And it features the stars Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, and Rupert Grint.

But there is one glaring omission in this celebration of Harry Potter because J.K. Rowling won't be appearing. Apparently, she is not welcome because of her views on women's rights.

So the creator of the Harry Potter franchise, the person who helped make all of these actors and actresses rich and famous, is not even welcome at a party for the thing that she created.

[10 : 03] And yet that is how we treat our loving Creator God. We would not exist without Him. Our breath would not be coming out of our lungs.

Blood would not be coursing through our veins had it not been for the fact that God made you and me. And yet we have chosen to turn our backs on Him, wanting to live in this world as if the world revolves around us instead of around Him.

And so God must rightly judge us for the way that we have treated Him because we've treated Him in such a shameful way. And yet, rather than leave us in the darkness, rather than leave us hopeless in fear and in despair, in gloom and doom and distress, these words from Isaiah point us to the tremendous hope that God promises.

Because they point to a future day when God will save this world and it needs saving, and when God will also save His people. And that's why Isaiah speaks about the future as if it's already happened.

So in the reading, he speaks of darkness turning to light, of fear turning to joy, of oppression turning to freedom, of war turning to peace.

[11 : 21] So Isaiah is promising light, joy, freedom, peace. But how can such great promises ever be a reality? Because whether you live in Afghanistan or even Annie's land, it all sounds too good to be true.

It can't be real. Now this year, like every year in the shops, we're going to hear John Lennon singing, Happy Christmas, War is Over. And while we all love the sentiment of a peaceful world and a perfect world, Isaiah promises a true and lasting peace that will come one day.

And he speaks with certainty, because it will be a reality. And it won't come because we, as human beings, are so great that we are able to bring about some kind of utopia ourselves by the things that we do.

That's not how it's going to happen. Isaiah says it will happen because of God coming to us. The fantastic promise from Isaiah is that God says help is on its way.

Just like when you're needing help, you're injured, and you hear the ambulance coming along the road, the lights are flashing to say, you will be helped. It's coming soon.

[12 : 41] That's what Isaiah's words are like for the world. It's a fantastic promise because God is giving his manifesto for how this world will be. And not just for people away back then in Isaiah's day, but for all people in all places at all times.

And that includes us. Isaiah is anticipating a divine ruler who comes from outside of this world and steps into this world like a great light that shines upon the dark horizon of human history.

Isaiah says, For to us a child is born. To us a son is given. Did you get that? A child is born. So we're talking about a human baby.

A baby being born into this world. But also, to us a son is given. So we're talking about God's gracious intervention in doing something, in coming into this world himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

So the child that Isaiah speaks of is both human and he is God. Of course, he is talking about Jesus Christ, God's perfect gift to our world and to us.

[14 : 05] And what he'd do for us is spelled out in the names that are given to him. Four names. The names are Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

So the promise is he is Wonderful Counselor. Now, we all need wise counsel. And these days, wise counsel is offered from multiple sources.

Politicians, scientists, teachers, authors, journalists, even celebrities, telling us how we should live and in some cases even how we should think.

And so, who do you listen to? Where does your counsel come from? Because Jesus is the source of true, wise counsel to guide us out of the darkness of this world and into his light.

So Jesus is Wonderful Counselor. He is also Mighty God. Jesus displayed the mighty power of God when he was on this earth, when he walked and when he taught, when he healed, when he controlled nature, when he controlled death.

[15 : 15] Jesus was and is Mighty God. And so he alone has the power to turn our fear into joy, to bring freedom from oppression for us.

Jesus can do what we are powerless to do ourselves. But he's not just willing to fix our broken world and our broken lives. He's able to do it because Jesus is Mighty God.

He is also Everlasting Father. So Jesus, we're told, protects and he provides for his people. He came into this world so that we could be brought into God's family as his adopted children.

So that we can have an everlasting father who loves us and cares for us despite what we are. Who is the best of fathers possible, who is gentle and caring, who comforts, who forgives, and who promises to be with us forever.

Jesus is Everlasting Father. And he's the Prince of Peace. And we all want peace in this world on a number of levels. We want peace between people, between warring countries.

[16 : 26] We also want inner peace amidst the turmoil of our lives. But Jesus brings us peace with God. Because by nature, we are God's enemies because of the sin in our hearts.

And so because we've turned our backs on God, we need to be reconciled to him. And Jesus, as the Prince of Peace, came to reconcile you and me to God.

And he does it through his death on the cross. But that's not all. Because one day, the promise is that Jesus will bring lasting peace to our world.

Because he is the Prince of Peace. And that's why Jesus is God's perfect gift to our world and for us. But you may be asking, well, if Jesus has come, then why is there still darkness in our world?

Why is my life such a struggle, even though I believe in Jesus? Well, while Jesus has come in history, we're still waiting for his kingdom to come in its fullness in the future.

[17 : 33] But one day, we're promised it will come. And when it does come, this broken, sick, twisted world will be restored. And everything will be made new.

And God will bring in his perfected kingdom. It will be a new creation. Oops. And that's why Isaiah speaks of the future here with absolute certainty.

So verse 7 says, Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. So we're being told the baby we celebrate at Christmas will rule as king forever.

One Christmas Carol puts it this way. He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all. But why did he come?

[18 : 35] Well, how do we celebrate Christmas? Why are we all here? Why did God enter into this world as an embryo in a human womb?

Well, he became human because only human flesh can die. So Jesus came to die out of love for you and for me.

And so in turning away from God, we are under God's judgment for our sin and rebellion against him. But Jesus came to pay the price for our sin by dying on a cross, to take that judgment on himself.

Because that's the only way that we can be accepted by God. So God has not just given us the perfect gift in Jesus.

He has also given us the costliest gift ever. Last week, I was reading about the English author Dorothy Sayers.

[19 : 36] I don't know if you've heard of her. Sayers was one of the first women to go and study at Oxford University. And she was a crime writer. And in 1923, she began a series of detective mysteries.

And they were called the Lord Peter Whimsey stories. So Lord Peter Whimsey was an aristocratic, as you can guess from his name, he was an amateur sleuth. And as the novels continued, Sayers, she introduced a character called Harriet Vane.

And interestingly, this character, Harriet Vane, she was also depicted as a crime writer. And guess what? Harriet Vane was also educated at Oxford University, like the author Dorothy Sayers.

And then eventually, as all good stories go, Peter and Harriet fell in love. They got married. And then they solved mysteries together. And so the comparisons between the author, Dorothy Sayers, and the character that she created, and the character that she created, Harriet Vane, are so obvious that it's thought that the author wrote herself into her own story.

She entered, coming in this subtle way as a minor supporting character. But as she got into the story, then she married the hero and ultimately saved his life.

[20 : 55] And it's a great illustration of what God has done. Because Christmas is about God coming into the world to save us.

God wrote himself into his own story, as it were. God came in the flesh as a man. Jesus Christ, the God-man. He was born in order to die.

So that's why Christmas matters. That's why Christmas is about giving. Not about all the other gifts that you will give and the gifts that you will receive, but about God's gift to us.

The Son of God was given to us so that we can become sons and daughters of God. So that we can know the warm embrace of the everlasting Father.

And so Christmas tells us that we're lost in darkness. But the great news is the light has come in Jesus. But Christmas also tells us we're so loved that we're worth the birth, the life, and the death of the Son of God.

[22 : 11] That's how much God loves you and me. That he would come as a man and be ready to die for you, for me.

Why? To save us. For to us, a child is born. To us, a son is given. So Jesus is the perfect gift for our world.

And Jesus is the gift that you and I need above all other gifts. And he reaches out to us, to you, to me, to be our wonderful counselor, our mighty God, our everlasting Father, our Prince of Peace.

So one question. What have you done with this gift? What have you done with the gift that God has given to our world? Because a gift will only be ours if we receive it.

So the child born to us, the son given to us, must be received by us. And so whatever else you receive this Christmas, please don't miss the perfect, the costliest, the greatest gift of all.

[23 : 23] The gift of Jesus Christ. I'll be all yours up to you. Thank you. For the gift of Jesus Christ. For the gift of Jesus Christ. The question of Jesus Christ is very real for the gift of Jesus Christ.

Let's **■■■■■** Him.

To men and Healt himself, they love His family.