

Gifts

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December 22, 1957

There are three texts which I would ask you to note. The one is the familiar, John 3:16. Suppose that we just repeat it together. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The next is a less familiar, Matthew 20:28. As many as know it, repeat it with me. Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many. Then, Acts 20:35: We ought to remember the words of the Lord Jesus when He said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Now in these three texts, there of course, is hidden or lying, a world of diversified truths. But there are four truths which I would ask you to note. One is that the Father, out of His love gave His Son. And the second is that the Son in humility gave His life. And the third, that the Father and the Son, in their kindness, gave, but gave to supply an existing need. They gave not promiscuously, carelessly, lightly, but the Father gave His Son in order that men might not perish. The Son gave His life in order that we might be ransomed. And the fourth thing is, that it is more blessed to give than it is to receive.

Now, from our Lord Jesus Christ we have received much. The older I get and the more I know the Lord and the more I appreciate what He is doing and has done and is promising to do, the more I see that words won't express what we're trying to say. God has to add something to words or else they fall down. Can you imagine this statement? From our Lord we have received much, much, unmodified and yet, what could you say? How can I express what we have received from Him? But I want to think this morning about what we can offer Him and show you from the New Testament, specially gathered round the birth scene, what they gave Him and then ask, what can we give Him?

Well, we'll begin where the New Testament begins with those wise men. We don't know how many they were, probably three. Traditions says that they were representatives of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. That sounds too neat to be true, although, it could be true. But they came from afar; they were the Magi. Milton called them the star-led wizards and said they came with odor sweet. But they brought to Him three things symbolic of about all that anybody can bring Him. They brought Him gold; obviously, they had gold to bring.

They were of the upper class. They were learned and they may even have been kings. We sing, We Three Kings of Orient Are and we're speaking for these three men. That's tradition, but it could also be true. They brought Him gold, and gold of course stood for a lasting treasure. There is one

thing about gold and that is this, you can't destroy it. I do not think or do not believe that there's any way known that gold can be destroyed. You can burn it. You can melt it down. You can mix it with other metals, but the gold always remains the gold because it is one of the basic elements in nature. And this is a lasting treasure, this gold and they brought it to Jesus.

Then they also brought frankincense, and this frankincense stood for worship. It always has in Old Testament times, and where it is used in the New, it stands for worship. It stands for the sweet fragrance of prayer that goes up from the heart that is offering something, however little, to the Lord Jesus Christ. But then also, they must have had some kind of Biblical teaching. They must have gotten some light other than we believe the heathen then had because they brought also myrrh. And myrrh was an ingredient of the Old Testament sacrifices. When they came with their incense, part of it was myrrh. And myrrh always stood for the bitter element. It stood for the suffering. And thus, they brought the gold, the lasting treasure and the frankincense of worship with a little remembrance that they were in a world of darkness and sin, and that there must be myrrh there also.

Then there was Mary. Now what can I say about the one they call the blessed Virgin Mary? Too much is said by some people and not enough is said by others, and I would try to be in the middle, where I could say enough without saying too much. But it would take ten sermons, a series of at least ten to say what ought to be said about Mary and to unsay what has been said too much about her, that Mary didn't have any gold. And I think she also didn't have any frankincense.

Mary came from the plain people. And we know little about her except we know her lineage and that it went back to David by way of Nathan not through Solomon, but by way of Nathan. If she had been a descendant of Solomon, she could not have been the mother of our Lord, because God said to a descendant of Solomon who was a king, Coniah, cursed be this man, He said. Not one of his descendants shall ever sit upon the throne of David. And yet the lineage that we trace right on back through to David and on back to Abraham goes through the line of Solomon, but not Mary. Mary goes through Nathan, another son of David, so that the curse does not apply to Mary. And Christ could be king, because the curse did not prohibit it. If she had been a descendant, I repeat, of any of Coniah who was a descendant of Solomon, she could not have been the mother of the King.

Well, she had no gold, and she had no frankincense. So, she gave Him all that she had or could give that He wanted. She gave her mortal body to be the cradle where in the mystery of gestation, Jesus Christ was made flesh to dwell among us. All this is so holy and so chastely wonderful, that I think it had not never to be made the subject of theological controversy. I would never raise my voice to debate with any man about the virgin birth of Jesus.

This, if it's true, and my heart knows it's true, this is as richly beautiful as the stones of fire over which once the seraph stretched his golden wings. This is too beautiful to be debated before the

public. Mary knew not the man. Mary was the virgin mother and Jesus Christ was born of the Father who is God and of the mother who is Mary, that He might be to us God and man. That He might be human and divine joined in one, indivisible, an everlastingly permanent and fixed union, Christ, was born into the world in time. And Christ, never born, never created, but begotten of the Father before all ages, joined forever in one Man. This is our Christ. And Mary, Mary gave him all she had. She gave Him her mortal body.

Then Mary was married and had this Joseph as her husband. Now Joseph had no gold. He was a carpenter, and he was a peasant, we would say, he belonged to the working class. In that time, they did not drive big automobiles and have country homes as they do now. But he belonged to this simple people. And he had no gold and no frankincense, which was very expensive. But you know, Joseph gave something. It took a man like Joseph to give. Joseph gave faith.

And he gave faith where it was needed. When he was talking to his espoused wife, she had to admit her condition. And Joseph got up quietly and walked away, hoping that he could somehow release himself from her, and yet save her from disgrace. And then an angel spoke to him in a dream and said, don't be afraid to take to yourself the woman Mary, for that which is begotten is of the Holy Ghost. And Joseph believed it. And Joseph went right back and said, I'm sorry, Mary, I'm sorry, God has revealed the truth.

And so, Joseph gave faith at a time when faith wasn't a very proper thing and when there was no precedent for it. There was nobody else whom had ever had this situation happened to them. He couldn't open the Book and say, well, saint so and so had a situation like this, or the apostle had it or some reformer or evangelist had a situation like this, some missionary. Nobody ever had had a situation like this. Joseph had to have faith in God and in his betrothed wife when nobody else in the world would have believed that story. And he did. And he is today called by the world St. Joseph.

So, he had faith in understanding, and he gave them, and he gave them. I said on the radio yesterday that I think he was not a brilliant man, but he had a certain, salty understanding and he did give that, and he gave protection. Now think of it my friends. Joseph gave protection, for remember, that the Son of the world once lay in the manger. Not in the stable as they say, but in a manger, which is something altogether different. The sweet, fragrant hay was in that manger? The cattle were not tramping there. They were eating out of that. It was up at head level, and it was clean and smelled pure and sweet. I've put hay into mangers, and I know how beautifully fragrant it smells.

And that Jesus was laid in that manger. And there lay all the hope of the world in that manger. Can you imagine it? Man doesn't put all his hopes in one tiny, tiny place like that. We protect ourselves. We have our SAC, Strategic Air Command all over the world. Did I read that we had 65? Is that the

right number. Is that an understatement? We have at least that many great bases from which we can go if they destroy one to 10, 20, 30, we still have more. And rich men put their money not in one bank or not in one place, but they distributed it around. They buy stock here and stock there and stock at the other place, so if the bottom drops out in one place, they'll still have plenty.

But God put all in one manger. And when He lay there, He, a tiny baby, you could have taken your thumb and pressed real hard on the top of His head and He would have been gone. You could have neglected him for a day or two, and the infection would have come, and He would have been gone. He needed protection. And Joseph gave it. Of course, Mary gave the loving, motherly care, but Joseph gave the protection. He was a rough carpenter, and his hands were rough. But he would look in with a smile and fatherly protection. And he gave patience, and he gave care, and he gave all this and he gave hard work.

We'll have Joseph to thank for this, my friends, give him the world to come. We can hunt people out and say, I want to thank you. If we can, we'll have Joseph to hunt up before we've done our duty and done what our hearts require. And we'll say Joseph, thank you for taking care of Mary, and thank you for believing in her when nobody else would have accepted her story. Thank you for the patience and protection and care you gave to her and gave to the little boy. Thank you, Joseph. We'll say that. Joseph gave that.

Then there were the shepherds. Now the shepherds couldn't give what the others had given. They couldn't give gold or frankincense or myrrh. They weren't in a position where they could give care nor protection. And only one was in a position where she could give her mortal body.

But the shepherds were the first to come in fear and wonder and praise. They were the first ones to come. Scripture says that they came in fear, but it wasn't the fear that men felt when the satellite was thrown into its orbit; it wasn't the fear of impending destruction. It wasn't the fear that the superstitious people feel for black cats on Friday. It was the godly fear, the fear that heals your heart. It was a wholesome, healing, reverential fear, and wonder. And these shepherds when they came, set the mood for all that will come and see, all the world, all the years. They came in wonder.

And the Christ at whose feet I could not kneel, and wonder is a Christ I would not worship; I could not worship Him. I might pay some dutiful tribute to Him, in keeping with the way the church does, but I could not worship if I could not wonder.

But the shepherds wondered. They said, this is beyond us. We've been out under these stars until we've counted every visible star. We know the constellations. We know all of these various forms that are etched against the blue green sky of the night sky. We know all that. And we've heard all the strange stories and tales that are told; we know it. The long, long night watches as we kept our

sheep and talked together. We've heard many wonders, many strange things, but nothing like this we have ever heard before. We've never heard angels. We've never heard a multitude of the heavenly host saying, glory to God in the highest. They wondered and they brought Jesus what is more precious to Him than any talent you might bring.

The man can sing, or a woman, we say, oh, she ought to give her voice, he ought to give his voice to the Lord. If the man has ability to stand up and talk, we say oh, that man ought to give his oratorical ability to the Lord. The man is making great money, we pray, convert Mr. So and so. He has \$2 million. Think of what he could do for missions. Let me say to you, that more precious to God than all the money in the world, more precious than all our gifts and talents and abilities is wonder. Bring wonder to Him. And in your wonder, you come to Him and say, O my God, my Lord, my Lord, I know not. I only know, here I am Lord and there Thou art. O Lord, receive me. He'll receive it with greater joy than if you could bring \$1 million and lay it at his feet.

Well, then there was Lazarus later on and his sisters Mary and Martha. They gave Him something too. They gave him this; they gave Him a welcome. There were a lot of places Jesus wasn't welcome in those days because they were afraid of Him. Lots of Pharisees would never have taken Him into their homes. They said, well, this man's a fanatic, and we can't take Him in. We've got to keep our doctrine clean and clear. And we don't dare compromise the synagogue. They wouldn't have taken Him in.

But Jesus had a welcome at the home of Lazarus and his two sisters, and He had what they now say, a home away from home. And wherever Jesus was, and he got around anywhere near to Bethany, why, He always knew the latch string was out. He didn't have to write ahead and say, I will be coming, would there be a place for Me? They saw to it that that one place never was taken by anybody else. That was His place. They didn't quite know why. And you know, sometimes I think that some of our religious acts that are performed for reasons that we can't quite fathom are more valid and more precious than the ones we can figure out.

When I studied the life of Jesus, the Savior, and the people that were all around Him, I saw them doing things and heard them saying things that they didn't quite know what they were saying or doing. But they did it out of a not to clearly defined impulse of the heart. And God made human hearts, my brethren. And He loves the human heart more than He loves the human intellect, though the human intellect, when it becomes fused with the human heart, and we think with our heart, as the old Greek fathers used to say. When we think with our heart, then the human intellect can rise to be that of a Luther or an Augustine.

But when the intellect is separated from the heart, God hasn't much good to say about it. But He lives for our hearts. Behold, I stand at the door and knock, and He didn't say what door, but the whole church has believed that it's the door of the heart. So, the home away from home was the

heart of Lazarus and his sisters and the home there. They entered Him into their hearts; they gave him their hearts. And this is more desirable than anything else.

And then there were the women, and we don't quite know who they were either, these women. They gave one thing to Jesus; they gave him a robe. And it was an unusual robe, in that robes have seams, even the garment you're wearing now and that I'm wearing, you could take it apart at this at the seams and lay it out again, as it once was cut to a pattern. But this seamless robe had no pattern. And they must have, these women, looked at Jesus with a very critical and appraising eye. And they must have met and whispered and put their heads together and said, now, he's about, I think, five foot 10, wouldn't you say, 10, maybe 11? And what would you say, He takes middle size or larger, we just went with you. They figured it all out. And then when they had gotten him down so that they had His size and they knew that he would be able to wear it, why, they wove Him a seamless robe, a robe without seam. And they gave that to Jesus.

And that seamless robe was considered to be of such value that the soldiers cast dice to see who would get it when they nailed Him on the cross. And don't forget, that just as when Jesus came into the world, Mary and Joseph had a layette ready for Him. Don't forget that when He went out of the world, the women had a seamless robe that they took from Him when He died. He had his friends.

And we'll have to hunt up Joseph to and Mary and those shepherds, and there'll be identified no doubt. And we'll find Lazarus because Lazarus had an experience nobody else had to have much, not many at least. He had died and been raised from the dead and had eaten with Jesus after his resurrection and had died again and he's still sleeping, waiting for another resurrection. And of course, everybody will gather around Lazarus and say, tell us about that Lazarus. I only got raised once and you got raised twice. And Lazarus will say, don't feel bad about that because my first resurrection that I got was only temporary. And this last one that I got along with you, it's permanent--immortality. But he didn't get immortality when Lazarus came forth, but he got raised from the dead simply for a time.

And these women, if we ever find who they are, I don't know whether we'll ever know who they are or not. A great preacher one time preached a sermon on the unknown saints, who they were, I think it was T. Dewitt Talmage, the great Brooklyn orator of a past generation. He said that Paul was let down in a basket with a rope fastened to the basket and was let down over the wall. And he said, now who made that basket? And he said, If the fellow that made that basket had been a shoddy workman, the apostle might easily have been killed. And he said, who made that rope? Nobody knows who made that rope. But whoever made that rope made a good rope. And if he had been careless and left a weak place in it, the apostle weight might easily have broken that and dashed him on to the rocks below and killed him. But somebody had done good work.

And again, I say, though this I suppose is Thanksgiving material, really, but I don't know why we should wait till November to be thankful. I think we just owe so much to everybody. And I think we owe a lot to these women.

And then there was that other Joseph Arimathea. And I might also add, before I leave those women, that the church owes an awful lot to the women today. There are some people who don't like the idea of women having any part in religion. A man they believe there, can save their souls, you know. They think they're at least above the animals. You can save their soul, believe in Christ and be saved and then keep their mouths shut. And one time a man came to this church and a woman testified and he stalked out and said, they're blaspheming God in this church, letting a woman talk.

Well, I was reading the gospels the other day. And I heard of some women that went to the tomb and saw that Jesus wasn't there. And the angel said to the women, He's not here, He's risen. And they raced away to tell everybody. Did you know that the first persons who told of the resurrection of Christ were women? Did you know it? We owe the women a lot. I think it's entirely possible to get all sentimental and dewy-eyed about this. But I also so think that it's possible to get wrong about it.

I'm not dewy-eyed about the women. I know that usually, they give their husband's money and spend it. I realize that. But we owe the women an awful lot, an awful lot. We ought to thank God for the women, the Christian women, the simple women, the plain women, the women who serve God, and who manage somehow out of their household budget to lay enough aside, they can make a missionary pledge. And they can give where needs are, as well as to say nothing about persuading the old gentleman, that he can afford to give that extra \$100 this year to the Lord's work. Well, that's assuming that the old gentleman isn't very zealous. I know that some of you men are equally zealous with your wives. But I thought I wanted to say that about the women because it's true and this is the opportunity.

And then there was Joseph, that other Joseph, Joseph of Arimathea. I don't know much to say about Joseph, only that he went and claimed the body of Jesus. That body wasn't dirty to him. There was nothing repulsive about that to him. That was a dead body and it was the body of an executed criminal. Don't forget it, we might as well face up to it and call it by its right name. This was the body of a man who had been executed by the Roman state.

Once I went through Sing Sing prison, and I sat in the chair in Sing Sing, and had a young man strap me in the way they strap in the criminals. He didn't put the electrical thing on my head, but it was there. And I sat there in the chair. And I said to him, a handsome young, blonde, good looking blue eyed fellow. And I said to him, are you one of the, are you, and I couldn't get it out. And he said, yes, I'm one of these legalized killers. Well, I said, what do you do? What's your job? He said, my job is

to wheel them away and put them in the ice box. He said, this is the ice box out here, and we went out and saw a whole list of places where they were put, just big enough for a human body. They were put in there and kept on ice until they were either claimed by their relatives or buried in a potter's field.

And don't forget that that's exactly what Joseph of Arimathea did. Jesus had died as men die in Sing Sing. They die because they've committed crimes against the world. He died, because we had committed crimes against the world and against God, and He had never committed any. He became sin for us, but the world didn't know that. And Peter said, if the world had known it they wouldn't have crucified the Lord of Glory. They thought they were lugging out a criminal. They thought when they took Him down, one more criminal is dead. They put thousands of them to death over the years. But Joseph didn't feel that way. He knew. He knew. He knew that sacred body, that sacred body was not going to decay. He knew Mother Earth could never claim it.

So, Joseph said, would you mind if I claimed it? They said, you're not next of kin. Well, he said, would you just miss a point there and jump a point and let me have Him anyhow. They said, oh, sure, take him. You're saving us burying him. So, Joseph took His body reverently away, and laid it in his own, new grave that he himself had had just as people now buy cemetery lots. Joseph had bought himself a place where he might be buried. Well, I don't know too much about Joseph. But I wonder where they buried him, finally? In that same grave where Jesus had lain? I'd hate to think that. And I don't suppose that our Christian sentiment would allow us to think that. But anyway, Joseph gave what he had. It was rather grim. But it was what Jesus needed just at that time.

Well, that's what they gave Him. That's what they gave Him. And we ransomed sinners, should we let anybody else outdo us in giving? Is there anything anybody gave that we shouldn't try to give if we can. If we have gold, we can give it. If we have not frankincense, we can give worship. And we can as Mary, give our mortal bodies unto the Lord. And we can as Joseph, give patient, tender care and faith and understanding to His church, if not to the Savior, then to the ones the Savior came to save.

We can with the shepherds stand in fear and wonder and awe and sing praises on the plains at night to the Lord. We can with Lazarus and the sisters, give a welcome to the people of God and particularly, open our hearts. We can with the women provide Him with what He needs. I can't give a garment to Jesus, but I can give a garment to some poor orphans somewhere. And Joseph of Arimathea, ah, there is one, there is one gift we can't match. There's a gift nobody else ever matched. There's a gift He doesn't need anymore. Nobody can give Jesus a grave, for death hath no more dominion over Him.

So we won't offer him a grave, but we'll just offer Him the equivalent of it, whatever it might be, we ransom sinners. I say, we should let nobody outdo us in our giving. And yet, when we've gone

over our poor treasures, when we've counted them and weighed them and placed what value we can upon them, what can we give Him? What can we give Him who owns every star? What can we give Him who owns the pearls of all the oceans and the diamonds of all the mines? What can we give Him who holds all the treasures of a vast universe in His right hand? What can we give Him?

Well, we can't give Him anything really, but we can do what they did. Could the wise men give Him anything, this baby? No, He owned the wise man and all their gold and frankincense, but he lay still and quiet and didn't let on. Could Joseph give him anything? No. Joseph really couldn't because He created the very stuff out of which Joseph's body was made. He was the Word and by him all things were made, and nothing was made except by Him. Could the shepherds bring Him anything or Lazarus or the women or Joseph of Arimathea? Really, no, because He owned it already.

It's like a three-year-old boy giving his father a present which he first had to, he bought by first getting the money from his father. So actually, there isn't much that we can give Him. And yet we can only satisfy our hearts by giving Him all. So, we bring Him our little human toys such as they may be. We think they're so weighty and so valuable, but actually, they're not much and we got them from Him, or we wouldn't have had them. And then when we do come and bring Him everything, we go away laden with His gifts for He won't be outdone. Bring Him what you will, and He'll send a bigger, bigger basket away with you.

Come with this great a treasure as you have, and you will take a greater treasure away. Come with your heart and you go away with forgiveness. Come with your faith and you go away with eternal life. Come with your trembling fears and you go away with reinstatement in God's grace. Come with your timidity and you go away with assurance and safety. Come with your dying and your sickness and your weariness and you go away with peace in death and immortality and heaven at last.

Say, wrote the Poet, say, shall we yield him, in costly devotion, Odors of Edom and offerings divine? Gems from the mountain and pearls from the ocean, myrrh from the forest or gold from the mine? No, vainly we offer earth's richest oblation, vainly with gold would his favor secure, Richer by far is the heart's adoration, Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor. And this, we can give Him.