

The Gift for Regifting
Christmas Eve 2007

Well, I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is there are now NO SHOPPING DAYS LEFT TILL CHRISTMAS. The good news is there are now NO SHOPPING DAYS LEFT TILL CHRISTMAS! So no more stressing over what gifts to buy. Starting tomorrow, thoughts will turn to regifting. Are there any regifters in the house tonight? Did you know there is a website called 'regiftable.com'? There was evidently a study done in which more than half the people surveyed admitted to regifting. If you find some items under your tree that you'd like to regift, check out *Regifting 101* on that site. When I go Christmas shopping, I like to try to find the perfect gift for each person on my list. That's a lot of pressure – perfection. But I really want to find something that they will like and will use, something that will be just right for them.

What do you really want for Christmas this year? I know, I know, there's the plasma TVs and the iPods, the game systems, and the leather jackets. Have you seen those car commercials? Does anybody really give their wife or their husband a new BMW for Christmas??! Of course, Jesus is the real gift of Christmas – God with us. Jesus is God-with-skin-on. The Bible says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Jesus Himself said that to see Him was to see the Father.

Jesus is the real gift of Christmas. But I guess I'm preaching to the choir. After all, you're here in church on Christmas Eve. But what does that mean? What does God give us when He gives us Jesus? When God gave us Jesus, He said two things, and the first is this: **You are loved.**

God loves you. That's such a simple message, and yet it may be the most profound thing I could say. **God loves you. God loves you. God loves you.** Now, some of you may have a hard time really believing that tonight. Some of you think that God loves other people, but He couldn't love you. I know, some of you have done some really bad stuff, maybe are involved in some really bad stuff right now. We clean up real nice when we come to church on Christmas Eve, but there's stuff going on in some of you that's not so nice. So maybe you think that God couldn't possibly love somebody like you. But He does. The Bible tells me so. "God loved the world so much that He gave..." God *loves* and God *gives*. And what He gives is Jesus, "His one and only Son..." Now, God doesn't love everything you *do*. But He loves *you*. He knows everything about you – all the good, the bad, and the ugly – and He loves you anyway. "God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son..." God loves and the way God shows us His love is that He gives Jesus. That's what Christmas is all about.

"Jesus loves me, this I know..." **Listen:** If you ever get a hold of how much God loves you – of what it means that God loves you so much He gave His Son to die *for you* – if you ever get a hold of that – your life will never be the same. How do I know that? I know that because it happened to me, and it's happened to so many others I know and it will happen to you, if you will just believe it and receive it. Let go of your guilt and let go of your shame and let go of your fear and just let God love you tonight. Receive the gift of God's love in Jesus tonight. It's Christmas. God sent Jesus to be born in that cave-stable to show *you* the depth of His love for *you*. Not just for some faceless mass of humanity out there somewhere. Not just for the good people. Not just for the religious people. *For you.* God loves *you*.

And because God loves you, **there is hope**. Hope for your life and hope for the world. Maybe you feel hopeless when you look at your job situation, your marriage, your kids, all the poverty and violence in the world, the AIDS pandemic. Let's face it: We've got problems. And sometimes things can look really hopeless, when we look at them only through our human eyes.

But God sends Jesus who is **Wonderful Counselor**, and there is hope. There is guidance and wisdom for any and every situation. Through His powerful Word He will advise you on any problem you have. *Receive the gift of His counsel tonight.*

He is **Mighty God**, and there is hope. Not only is He wise, but He is powerful. Not only is He powerful, but He is good. He is always at work for good in the lives of those who love Him. I know it may not feel like that to you. But trust me. And you don't have to take my word for it. You can look it up. *Receive the gift of His power tonight.*

And He is **Everlasting Father**, so there is hope. He loves you with a perfect Father's love that will never end. He will never abuse you or abandon you. He's the only one who will never disappoint you or let you down. *Receive the gift of His love and faithfulness tonight.*

And He is **Prince of Peace**, so there is hope. It's peaceful here, tonight, in this beautiful place. But I know that out there – out in the 'real world,' out in your real life – things aren't always so peaceful. Some of us live lives that are full of chaos and fear and anxiety, depression and confusion. There is war in the world and sometimes war in our families and often war in our hearts and minds. So maybe peace is at the top of your Christmas list this year. Peace of mind and peace of heart in the midst of the chaos and uncertainty of your life. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. The night before He died, Jesus said this, in **John 14:27**: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." *Receive the gift of His peace tonight.*

The message of Christmas is that God comes to us in Jesus. We don't have to figure out what to do to get to God. **God comes to us**. He comes to tell you that **you are loved**. He comes to be *with you* so that you will know – know that you know that you know – that **there is hope**. Hope for any and every situation or circumstance in your life that looks hopeless to you tonight. No matter how things may look or feel to you. There is hope because God is with us in Jesus.

These are the gifts of Christmas. Jesus gives them. But you have to receive them. You have to open the gifts. And not only do you have to receive the gifts and open them. These are gifts that are meant to be regifted. Some years ago, a writer started a spirituality newsletter called *SoulCafe* and sent sample copies to a couple hundred thousand people whose names he purchased from a mass mailing list company. One of the responses he received on the "No Postage Necessary" return postcards was this scrawled message from Florida explaining their disinterest in the newsletter: "We're not Christians. Kindly keep Jesus to yourselfMerry Christmas."

We're not supposed to keep Jesus to ourselves. Being a Christian is not just about you and Jesus. It's not even just about going to church, getting your blessing, loving God, and loving one another. The gift of Jesus is the gift that is meant for regifting.

God gives Jesus to us, and through our relationship with Jesus we receive love and hope and so much more. And now God's plan is this: We are supposed to give these gifts to others. God comes to people through people. If you know God's love and live in the hope of Jesus, then God has somebody He wants you to regift to. Maybe it's someone in your workplace or your school. Maybe it's a friend. Maybe a stranger. But there's somebody you now or will encounter who needs the gift of Jesus.

But if you do not know – really know – God's love for you and the hope that you can have through a relationship with Jesus, I pray that you would receive that gift tonight. All you have to do is ask. Ask God to help you believe. Ask God to help you receive. Ask God to give you Jesus this Christmas.