

THE SON OF GOD HAS COME
SELECTED SCRIPTURES FROM 1 JOHN

What gift are you going to give to that special person in your life? Five years ago Alan McCutchen ended his relationship with his girlfriend, Mary Jo Smith, and he thought the relationship was completely over. Not quite. Two weeks ago Mary Jo came over to McCutchen's home with a "Christmas gift." She drove across his yard multiple times leaving deep ruts in the yard, drove over his Christmas decorations, hit his truck, damaged his mail box, and drove into his above ground swimming pool. And when he came out of the house to see what was going on, she tried to run him down and he had to take cover behind one of the trees in the yard. All the while she was driving around the yard, she yelled, "Merry Christmas" at McCutchen. Police officers say she was drunk at the time (surprise). [<http://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2016/12/07/police-motorist-tried-to-run-over-ex-as-he-put-up-lights/>]

Now we've all received (and given) bad Christmas presents. But that's a *bad* Christmas gift!

Christmas invariably includes the hunt for the perfect Christmas gift. Observations are made, questions are asked, and lists are made (I have finally started keeping a potential gift list for Raye Jeanne in my calendar on my phone). And then we had to the stores (or to Amazon and the internet), looking for the item that will be "just right" for our beloved.

Of all the gifts I've given Raye Jeanne, apart from her diamond engagement ring, I can probably count on one hand the number of gifts that I've chosen really well or perfectly. That's not because of Raye Jeanne's ingratitude, but because of my ineptness to evaluate, listen, and plan well.

And my guess is that I'm not the only person in this room with that inadequacy at gift-giving time. Most of us wish we had thought a little better about the gifts we've given others. But there is one Christmas gift that is always acceptable, perfect, and exactly what the recipient needs, and it is the gift of Christ.

You know that and believe that, but the apostle John asserts that it is not just Jesus that is the perfect gift and provision for mankind, but it is Jesus *in His humanity* that is exactly what man needs. It was *because* Jesus was incarnated and in the flesh and on this earth that we derive benefit from Him. His humanity was not incidental to Him or us; His humanity was essential for us to derive any benefit from Him.

And that is one of the primary messages about Christ in the book of 1 John. John was writing against two primary groups of heretics. Some of the heretics had claimed that Jesus was just a man and that at His baptism, the "divine" Christ was "joined" to the "human Jesus" and that the divine Christ left Jesus prior to the crucifixion. And others taught that Jesus only *seemed* to be human, but He was not genuinely human because all material things are inherently evil and Jesus could not be evil, so He must not have been human either. John is refuting these ideas, and many more. So among the things he says about Jesus are:

- ✓ Christ is from the beginning — 1:1; 2:13
- ✓ He is the Word of life — 1:1
- ✓ He is the Son of God — 1:2, 3, 7; 2:22, 23, 24; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 10, 14, 15; 5:1, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20
- ✓ He is the Christ — 2:22; 5:1
- ✓ He is Jesus Christ — 1:3; 2:1; 3:23; 4:2; 5:6, 20
- ✓ His life (as the Messiah and God) was manifested — 1:2; 4:2
- ✓ He is at the Father's right hand as Mediator — 2:1
- ✓ He was testified to by the Spirit — 5:6, 8
- ✓ He was testified to by God — 5:9, 10
- ✓ And He was a man. One of the things that John emphasizes the most in this letter is the appearance of Christ — sometimes John says Jesus came, other times "He appeared," or "He was manifested." But the emphasis always is that Christ existed prior to the incarnation and that in His incarnation He was genuinely a human being. Jesus was God in the flesh from birth to ascension.

As we prepare for Christmas this week, I want to direct our thoughts to the book of 1 John and see the uniqueness of Christ and how His humanity is essential to us and beneficial for us. [Aside: this is not to diminish His deity in any way, for Christ was and is and always will be part of the Triune eternal godhead; it is simply to assert that for Christ to be a benefit to us as Redeemer, He also had to be a man.]

This morning I want to consider *what we gain* through Christ's incarnation; on Saturday evening I want to consider *what Christ gave up* in His incarnation; and next Sunday morning, I want to consider *what Christ gained* through His incarnation. Here is the theme that we will find in 1 John this morning:

CHRIST'S HUMANITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS BELIEVERS RECEIVE FROM HIM.

What gifts do we receive through Jesus' humanity? John reveals at least six gifts in this letter. Let's unwrap those gifts one at a time...

1. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us **FELLOWSHIP** (1:1-4)
2. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us an **EXAMPLE** (2:6)
3. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us **FREEDOM** from **SIN** (3:5-8)
4. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us **ORTHODOXY** (4:2)
5. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us **TESTIMONY** (5:6)
6. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us **UNDERSTANDING** (5:20)

1. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us **FELLOWSHIP** (1:1-4)

- John's first letter begins very much like his gospel (**John 1:1-4, 14, 18**). In both writings, John is reminding his readers that what was known about Christ was *experienced* by many others. Jesus not only *appeared* to be human, but He really *was (and is)* human. He denotes that three ways in v. 1 —
 - ✓ **What we have heard** — he is talking about not only hearing the message one time but the message that was heard and still resonates within us 60 years later. They heard Jesus' message and they continued to meditate on it and find it to be true. The message of Jesus had authority and power when it was spoken (Jn. 4:42; Mk. 1:22, 27), and still did all those years later for John. The words of Jesus affirmed His deity and humanity.
 - ✓ **We have seen with our eyes** — They saw many events while Christ was on earth and still saw them in the eyes of their minds, and the deity and humanity of Christ were very real in those recollections.
 - ✓ **What we have looked at and touched with our hands** — To look at Christ does not mean a quick glance or a one-time event; it means a long, calm, contemplative examination. After scrutinizing Jesus, He passed the tests of their examination — He was very much a real man and also divine (Jn. 1:14, 29, 41, 49; 14:8-11; 21:24-25; Mt. 16:13ff).
 - ✓ And they also **touched** Him with their hands. They personally experienced the reality of His bodily presence. Jesus touched the blind man when He put clay on his eyes to make him see; He touched the children when He took them onto his lap; He wept genuine tears at the grave of Lazarus; He bodily walked on water and fed 5000 and then 4000 from a few pieces of bread and fish. They ate meals with Him. And John leaned back on Him at the last supper. And Thomas and others had the opportunity to touch the hands and side of the resurrected body. They **touched** Him and there is no doubt that the eternal and infinite second member of the Trinity was a real man.
- And John emphasizes the reality of Jesus' humanity in v. 2 — the life (eternal life, v. 1b) was **manifested**. That is, Jesus' life was revealed. They saw His real life — notice **and we have seen and testify...what we have seen and heard** (v. 3). John can seemingly hardly contain himself with excitement over the incarnated Christ. He cannot get over that God took on flesh.

"The glory of the incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze not a humanized God or a deified man; but a true God-man — one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is [yet without sin]; one on whose almighty arm we can rest, and to whose human sympathy we can appeal." [B. B. Warfield, quoted by Kress, 19.]

- ✓ But notice this also — John says Christ **was manifested to us** — in other words, someone revealed Christ to the disciples and all mankind. And the One who revealed Christ was God Himself — we could not know Him on our own, but God was pleased to make Him known to us.

- ✓ Christ was previously hidden and unknown, but through the advent, He becomes known. In fact, without the advent, we not only would be hampered from knowing Christ, but we would be limited in our knowledge of God as well (Jn. 1:18). God manifested Christ so Christ could explain God.
- And what was the benefit of Christ's appearance? Notice verses 3-4 —
 - ✓ We have fellowship with one another — John says that he proclaims the news about Christ so that others would have fellowship with the 12 disciples who knew Christ (**us**). And fellowship isn't just "food" (though it often seems that we use it that way!); it means communion and intimacy. There is a vital bond and close partnership between two parties when they are in fellowship with each other. This is very similar to what Paul talks about in Eph. 2:14-16; 4:1-4; Phil. 2:1-2.
 - ✓ And that fellowship is not only with other believers; our fellowship is ultimately with God Himself — **with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ**. If the readers are in fellowship with John, then they will also be in fellowship (union, partnership) with God and Christ. The readers (including us) could not have the same experience with the incarnate Christ that John did, but by belief in Christ they can have the same fellowship with Christ that John and the disciples had.
 - ✓ And that fellowship is also **joy** (v. 4).
 - ✓ Why did Christ take on manhood? Why did Christ come to earth? In part, for the sake of fellowship and unity and joy. At this season when so many are so lonely, here is good news — when you are bonded to Christ, you have a kind of fellowship that you cannot have with anyone else. Like no one else, Christ can rightly say, "I know. I care. I can do something about your hurt and circumstance. I came to be like you so that you could be forever like Me and with Me."
- Let's unwrap a second gift of the advent of Christ —

2. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us an **EXAMPLE** (2:6)

- In this verse John notes that Jesus "walked" on earth. The word **walk** as John is using it is not a reference to literal walking, but a figure of speech that means, "to live life." And John says that the believer in Christ (the follower of Christ, the one who **abides** and lives **in Him**) should live in the same way that Jesus lived. There are two simple principles that we should notice here:
 - ✓ Jesus really lived a human life on this earth.
 - He had a true body of flesh and blood, demonstrated by His natural birth (Luke 1-2), relationships with brothers and sisters (Mt. 13:55), and recognition as a Jew (Jn. 4:9), and had a human name, Jesus (Mt. 1:21).
 - He had a normal development (Luke 2:52)
 - He had the characteristics of a human being: He became hungry (Mt. 4:2), thirsty (Jn. 4:7; 19:28), and tired (Jn. 4:6). He experienced the pain of the scourging (Jn. 19:1), and the physical torment of the crucifixion (Jn. 19:18).

- He experienced human emotions: He wept over the death of His friend Lazarus (Jn. 11:34-35); felt compassion for the people because they had no capable leaders (Mt. 9:36), experienced grief and wept over the city of Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37; Lk. 19:41), and was grieved over the influence of sin on humanity (Jn. 11:35).
- ✓ It is possible for the believer to live in the same way that Jesus lived. Of course Jesus lived sinlessly and that isn't possible for us. So in what way are we called to (notice John says we **ought to**) live like Christ? All that Christ did on earth (teaching the Word of God, confronting sin in others, resisting sin Himself, suffering without complaint, serving others, evangelizing, and praying) could be summarized in just 7 words: *He obeyed the will of His Father*. Jesus' life was a life of obedience (Jn. 6:38; 8:29; 10:17-18; 14:31; 17:4).
- This verse teaches that not only did Jesus give us an example to follow, but He also made it possible for us to live according to that example.
 - ✓ The remarkable thing about Christ's advent is not that Jesus perfectly obeyed God and didn't sin, but that He obeyed God and didn't sin *in His humanity*. He couldn't sin because He was God, but if His sinlessness was only because He was God that's not beneficial to us and that's not an example that we can follow. Because we're not God. We don't have an ability not to sin.
 - ✓ But Jesus' sinlessness was not simply because He couldn't sin; His sinlessness was because He fought sin in the same way we do, through the filling of the Spirit and the Word of God. One example: Lk. 4:1 — Jesus resisted Satan's enticements by being filled by the Spirit and using Scripture. And we have the same filling of the Spirit and the same Word available to us.
 - ✓ So Jesus came to earth, lived life on earth, called us to live like Him, and made it possible for us to live like Him — He gave us everything we need to be able to live like Him!
- There is a third gift that John indicates came through the advent of Christ —

3. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us **FREEDOM** from **SIN** (3:5-8)

- One of the most straightforward statements about Christ's purpose in coming to earth is given in 1 Jn. 3:5 and 8 — **He appeared** (He came from Heaven) **to take away sins**.
 - ✓ When John says that Jesus **appeared**, it is an affirmation of His literal, physical life. But it also communicates something else: John doesn't say, "He was created," or "He was born." Some were emphasizing the humanity of Christ and denying His deity; when John says, **He appeared**, it implies that Christ was already existing and that when He came to earth that was not His beginning point. It is to stress the deity and eternality of Christ. And that is essential for what John says next.
 - ✓ One of the fundamental purposes of Christ was to deal with man's infinite problem with sin.

- When John says that Jesus came to take away **sins** (v. 5, pl.), he is talking about the real sins of men. He is not talking about Christ taking away the sin nature, but he is talking about taking away the real penalty of God against all the sins of those who believe in Christ. It is akin to what John the Baptist says at the baptism of Jesus — **behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world** (Jn. 1:29). This is the effective removal of the penalty of God against all our sin. It's freedom from sin!
- And then John also notes in v. 8 that **the Son of God appeared...to destroy the works of the devil**. Christ came to abolish the devil's works. He undoes and dissolves what Satan has done. Satan's works of blinding men from the gospel and putting men in bondage to sin and corrupting the minds of the unbelieving are all undone. Christ frees those who believe in Him from all those things (and more).
- But what is significant about these statements is that Christ had to appear on earth to do this.
 - ✓ Christ had to be eternal and infinite to absorb God's infinite wrath against sin. So Christ had to be God — and He was and is.
 - ✓ But Christ also *had* to be a man for His death to have relevance and significance for us. If He was not a man He could not die in our place. To be our substitute He had to be like us. He had to take on manhood and flesh. If there is no incarnation, there is no substitution, and if there is no substitution then there is no removal of sin and Satan's works are not destroyed and we are hopeless and condemned.
 - ✓ But Christ *was* both God and man and He could remove our sin. This has been John's message throughout this letter (epitomized in 1 Jn. 2:22). "God, as God, cannot die. But God the Son, as man, died indeed." [Ware, 124] And because He died, He took away our sins!

"...if the Son of God was to be the Last Adam, to undo the fall, to be the head of a new humanity, to be one with his people, his bride, then he needed to become human. He needed to be — in real, pinchable reality — what had so long been promised: the seed of woman. The Word become flesh....Our salvation is only as good as it is *because* Christ is who he is. Make him less than God and you make the gospel less than good: no free access to know a fatherly God as his beloved children." [Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ*, 43, 49.]

- Christ appeared to take away our sins. And there's a fourth gift He gives us through His advent...

4. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us **ORTHODOXY** (4:2)

- How do you know if someone is a genuine believer? What does one have to believe about Christ to be saved? John tells us in 4:2 — every person (**spirit**) that **confesses** (acknowledges and affirms) that Jesus was God who came in human flesh is a believer (from God).
- In other words, John says a test for who is a follower of God is quite simple — does that person believe in Christ who is both human and divine? Or does the teacher or "believer" emphasize one and diminish the other? The one who diminishes Christ in either his deity or humanity is not a follower of Christ.

- This is where so many cults go wrong — either lies about Christ are taught, or Christ is de-emphasized and perversions about the work of the Spirit are emphasized. If a teacher and teaching are true, then the true Christ will be magnified and exalted. No matter how elegant, passionate, or popular the preacher, if He denies Christ and distorts the Spirit, he is saying nothing and is, in fact (John says), ***of the spirit of the antichrist***. To deny Christ's deity or humanity is a satanic teaching.
- The reason that this truth is so essential is because Christ is given to us as sufficient for all things; if He is denied, then we are left looking for something to supplement or replace Christ. But Christ is all and He is in all (Col. 3:11). He — and He alone — is our propitiation (1 Jn. 2:2). With Christ, we have all that we need.
- So in Christ's coming we have a test of one's orthodoxy — do they believe rightly to produce salvation?
- There is a fifth gift of Christ's advent in 1 John —

5. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us **TESTIMONY** (5:6)

- Again, as John often does in this letter, he says that Jesus ***came***. He *was* born, but by saying that He came, John emphasizes Jesus' choice in coming and His heavenly origin. And He came, John says ***by water and blood*** and those two serve as a testimony and authentication of Christ and His work.
- These two attributes — water and blood (notice John mentions them twice) are probably references to two of the great events of Jesus' ministry, the inauguration and culmination of His work.
 - ✓ ***Water*** almost certainly is a reference to the baptism of Christ (Mt. 3:13-17) in which God the Father authenticated the person of Christ and His ministry. And along with that, at His baptism, Jesus identified Himself with the people He came to save. John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance that meant the people were to turn from their sin and ask for God's cleansing (Mk. 1:4; Acts 13:24). Baptism became an external sign of the inward reality of a changed life. Jesus was identified with that repentance. So while Christ Himself did not need repentance, in baptism He was identified with the message of John and sinners who need salvation. Thus, His baptism (***water***) authenticates His Messianic role (He is the Savior of Israel and the world).
 - ✓ And another testimony of Christ is the event that culminates His ministry — His ***blood*** and the cross. If you want to see the unique work of Christ, then look to the cross and appeal to His blood.
 - One the cross, Jesus absorbed the infinite wrath of God against sin (Mt. 27:45-46).
 - But also on the cross, Jesus satisfied the wrath of God — at His death He was in fellowship with the Father (Lk. 23:46) and accomplished all that the Father intended (Jn. 19:30).
 - The cross is bloody and grotesque and ugly and shameful. But Christ embraced that cross and through His blood shed on that cross gave us life.

- Even the world loves a cooing baby Jesus. The world loves a helpless infant — even if His name is Jesus. But the world hates a crucified and bloody and risen Christ that demands their allegiance.
- There are many declarations of Christ's power and uniqueness in the Scriptures, but John points to these two — His baptism and cross — as standing in unique position to affirm the uniqueness of Christ.
- If Christ came as a Teacher, that would be nice, but it would be of no benefit to mankind. For Christ to benefit us, He had to be crucified and resurrected for us. And He was.
- And the events of that baptism and crucifixion stand as a perpetual testimony to the greatness and power of Christ. As one theologian says,

“Every time we worship, we should be self-consciously committed to the ministry of John the Baptist: ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’ Remarkably, even in heaven the majestically enthroned Son is the slain Lamb. We never outgrow the cross. We never get beyond the need for mediation between God and ourselves — not in this life, nor in the next.” [Horton, *We Believe*]

- As John thinks about Christ, there is one more gift that he says came from Christ's appearance —

6. Christ Appeared — and Gave Us UNDERSTANDING (5:20)

- Again, when John says, ***we know that the Son of God has come***, he means that when Christ came, He came as the infinite and eternal God-Man; Christ is fully God and fully man, with no diminishment of either in His incarnation (1:1ff; Jn. 1:14).
- And in connection with His coming, John says that Christ ***has given us understanding***. But this is not just any kind of understanding — it is understanding ***so that we may know Him who is true***. In other words, Christ has come so that we might know God.
 - ✓ This understanding includes mental comprehension (***understanding*** His nature and appearance) but it culminates in ***knowledge*** of Him that could be called fellowship and union. We are in Him and we are with Him.
 - ✓ The believer in Christ is connected to God (***Him*** in v. 20) and Christ (***His Son Jesus Christ***) and ***knows*** Christ; John has spoken often in this book of the things we know (that we are in Him, 2:5; this is the last hour, 2:18; that we will be like Him, 3:2; that we have received the Holy Spirit, 2:20; that Christ came to take away sin, 3:5; what love is by Christ's death, 3:16; how the Spirit operates, 4:2, 6).
 - ✓ But what the believer supremely knows is God (1:3). In fact, John says in His gospel that a fundamental reason for Christ's advent was to explain the Father (***Jn. 1:18***). We can't see Him and we can't know Him on our own, but now that Christ has come, we can know Him.
 - ✓ And we know God through Christ (2:3-4, 13-14; 4:7). He is our Redeemer, friend, and companion. We are designed to know Him and live for Him. There is nothing else. And the incarnation makes that knowledge and fellowship possible. For us to know God demanded that Christ take on humanity.

Since Christ is the incarnate Son of God, we can enjoy the fellowship that He has with the Father (Jn. 17:20-26): “Now here’s the wonder of the Son of Man: the loving relationship that the Son has always enjoyed with his Father *he now brings to us*. When he becomes a man, for the first time *a human being* enjoys the Son’s own fellowship with and standing before the Father. In Jesus, for the first time there is *a human being* living in perfect fellowship with God. Loving God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, loving his neighbor as himself, he is the first ever to keep and fulfill the law of God.” [Reeves, 52.]

CONCLUSION:

On Thursday night, two families in our church had family members enter into eternity. Shortly before midnight, Lee Slaughter’s father passed away after falling earlier that day and suffering extensive hemorrhaging in his brain. And about three hours earlier, Don Heep’s son Brandon died in a work accident.

I suspect that both those men had been making Christmas plans — purchasing and wrapping presents and preparing events for the week ahead. But in just a few moments, none of those gifts mattered; the only gift that mattered was the gift of Christ. He came. God took on flesh and gave Himself so that we might have all that we need.

- ✓ He gives us fellowship with the Father and Himself
- ✓ He gives us an example (and power) for how to live
- ✓ He gives us freedom from sin
- ✓ He gives us orthodoxy — a standard of the truth
- ✓ He gives us an accurate testimony of Himself
- ✓ And He gives us an understanding of Himself

If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ today, you must believe. You must turn away from your sin, and you must embrace Christ as the only Gift worth receiving this Christmas season. Christ came to earth. He was God. But He was also a genuine human being who gave *Himself* to you. This Christmas, won’t you take the gift of Christ by trusting in Him and living for Him?

BENEDICTION: John 20:30-31