

Title: “That little present”

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Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

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Lesson: *We celebrate the joy of his birth, but not as an event isolated unto itself, but an even that points to what is to come. That child will grow into a man and live a life in perfect obedience to God, his father. He will fulfill the prophecies of old and establish the new kingdom of God here on earth. He will be arrested for it, beaten and crucified on a cross. And there he will receive the punishment of our sins and be forsaken by God. And he will give up his life, all for our sake. But then he will rise again and hand that victory over to us. This is the source of our freedom. This is what really excites us. This is what the baby in the manger means to us.*

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Imagine if you will a 16-year-old boy on Christmas morning. Sitting in the living room of a house he grew up in, he gathers with his parents and the rest of the family to open gifts. It is a joyful ritual that they perform every year and this one is no different; well, it actually *is* a bit different, but the teen does not know it yet. What he *does* know is that this day, this moment has been planned for months; all activities in and around the house have prepared them for this morning, this time of celebration. They have authored their wish lists, decorated their tree, attended and even hosted parties leading up to this day. And as wonderful as all of those events were, they all point to this morning. They all prepared them for this day. As impressionable as they were, *nothing* can serve as a substitute for what has finally arrived.

And so, with great anticipation they begin to distribute the presents that lay under the tree. One by one they are brought out and handed to the waiting recipient. Eagerly and with growing enthusiasm the gifts are moved from where they once lay to the growing piles at the feet of each family member. All, except for this teen. He has yet to receive a single gift. He looks around and sees his younger siblings, slowly disappearing behind an ever-increasing wall of wrapped boxes; he even sees his parents with a few gifts, but for him, there is nothing. But as the last gift is pulled from under the tree, a small box about the size of a deck of cards, his parents intercept it before the name can be read. They hold it close and then turn their gaze to him and with a smile they explain that what is contained in the box is more valuable than anything that he has received in years past and more valuable than anything he recorded on his wish list. And with that they all take turns opening their gifts and he chooses to go last. He wants time to contemplate exactly how something of such value could be contained within a box so small.

Many moments later, it is finally his turn. Everyone else has opened their gifts and with each unwrapping the volume of the conversations seemed to increase, the laughter became louder, and

the excitement filled the air. But although that increase was gradual, the decrease was immediate. For when it was his turn to open his single gift, all speaking ceased; all movement froze; all eyes fixed upon him and his present. Very slowly, very deliberately he removed the wrapping from the box and setting that aside he focused his attention on lifting the top and peering inside.

The Gospel of John begins in a very similar fashion. Its opening verses set the stage for what is to come, for what is about to happen. Listen to the first few verses again:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

We now know the landscape, we know the opening scene, and we even have a hint at what is about to happen. Verse 5 tells us that “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Something is about to happen that will cause darkness to enter into the story but then something else will be introduced that will defeat it.

What is that something? For the teen, he peers inside this small box to find it filled with cotton; from corner to corner not a space can be found void of it. And sitting on the top, in the very middle of that white cloud is a single silver automobile key. It is nothing fancy, just an ordinary looking key that could fit into almost any car. One could be forgiven if they found it on a kitchen counter and discarded its importance, because it wasn't all that important to those who didn't understand what that key *meant*. Those who saw it as just another car key in the world could never understand why it brought such joy and excitement to the teen. And they *really* could never understand why it brought such anticipation to him, as well.

We can find parallels to Christmas morning, can't we? John records in verse 14 that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” This Word that became flesh was simply a child born into the world in the cool of an evening. To those who didn't understand the context, the backstory it was an event not worthy of recording. A child was born. He was born in a manger. So what?

And you know, in a way, they are right to ask that question. So what? It's just a baby. And for the teen, it is just a key. Why get excited about either of those things? The answer, of course is that the excitement is placed in the *anticipation of what is to come*. The teen knows what the key represents. That key leads to a car and that car leads to freedom. And what unimaginable joy he will experience with that newfound freedom! You see, it's not the key that really excites him but what the key represents, what it *points to* that means the world to him.

And, again, we find parallels to Christmas and baby Jesus, don't we? We celebrate the joy of his birth, but not as an event isolated unto itself, but an even that points to what is to come. That child will grow into a man and live a life in perfect obedience to God, his father. He will fulfill the prophecies of old and establish the new kingdom of God here on earth. He will be arrested for it, beaten and crucified on a cross. And there he will receive the punishment of our sins and be

forsaken by God. And he will give up his life, all for our sake. But then he will rise again and hand that victory over to us. This is the source of *our* freedom. This is what really excites us. This is what the baby in the manger means to us.

The teen received freedom in the form of a car; we receive freedom in the form of Jesus Christ. Neither of us had to do anything to earn this freedom; neither of us could even claim that we deserved it; but it was earned for us and given to us freely out of love.

This is what Christmas is about. There is excitement that we experience as we peer into the manger and behold the baby child of God but the true joy is in anticipation of Easter and the true freedom that it brings.

Let us pray,

Lord,

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Lord we celebrate your birth this morning and look forward to the celebration of Easter but we look forward to your return when heaven and earth is made new and we live forever more in your presence.

In your name we pray. Amen.