

Ready for Christmas 2 - A Christmas Birthday Gift for Jesus

1. Merry Corban!

As we enjoy the Christmas season, people greet each other with "Happy Holidays" to which a good response might be "Merry Christmas." But, of course, with the way some people treat Christ at Christmas time a more honest greeting could be "Merry Corban." So what is "Merry Corban"? Corban was the Hebrew word for offerings which was covered in the whole book of Leviticus. The Pharisees depended on the Mishna, (the oral law, or rabbinical traditions) to develop the application of offerings to the Lord. Jesus showed up their hypocrisy when they confronted Him about the laws of hand washing. He pointed out how, by their traditions in the Mishna, they violated the commandments, specifically the fifth commandment to honor father and mother.

Mark 7:5-12 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?

6He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me.

7Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

8For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.

9And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

10For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother,

let him die the death:

11But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is Corban*, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; *he shall be free*.

12And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;

The idea of dedicating something to God should have obligated one to give the devoted thing, or the corban, to the Temple, but the *practice* was not necessarily so. Swearing by God or by the Temple was done so rashly that people would violate the fifth commandment by merely saying something was dedicated to God. People abused corban by saying they were observing the Law but used it for themselves instead. When it comes to Christmas, there are too many who treat it like corban. Christmas is supposed to be a celebration of the birth of Christ, so imagine how a conversation might go today with a character we will call "Cosmo," which is short for *Cosmos* the Greek word for *world*, about a birthday party for Jesus:

Cosmo: Hi...I haven't seen you in a long time.

Jesus: Oh, you should have come to my birthday party. Didn't you get my invitation?

Cosmo: I did, but I couldn't make it. I scheduled a party of my own...but I did it in honor of you.

Jesus: Oh...I never got the invitation.

Cosmo: I didn't send you an invitation. My friends and I thought of you, though, sort of. I do have something for you.

Jesus: Oh, how nice. Is that shiny new thing for me?

Cosmo: No, I bought that gift for myself.

Jesus: How about that gift card?

Cosmo: Well sort of, I guess. My mom needed some new shoes so I got this gift card and dedicated it to *you* so I wouldn't have to get the shoes. I already have plans for that gift card for a new iPhone case in your honor.

Jesus: Oh, yeah, I get it. It's corban.

That's an impressive pile of gifts, are *any* of them for me?

Cosmo: No, they're all for me, actually. There *is* a piece of cake left..and it's *all* for you! I'm sure you don't need it so I'll take care of it for you. Oh, and, Happy Birthday!

Jesus: Yeah, Merry Corban.

The world holds many Christmas parties in the name of Christ, but their parites are *corban*, they are done in honor of Christ but serve selfish desires instead. Charles Schulz dealt with this attitude when he was called upon to collaborate on the *Charlie Brown Christmas Special*. Instead of using the season for self-centered commercial benefit in the name of the season, Shulz made sure that this was going to be used for Jesus. The story behind the special is amazing.

Charles Schulz insisted on one core purpose: "A Charlie Brown Christmas" had to be about something [specific]. Namely, the true meaning of Christmas. Otherwise, Schulz said, "Why bother doing it?"

Mendelson and Melendez [who came up with the idea] asked Schulz whether he was sure he wanted to include Biblical text in the special. The cartoonist's response, Mendelson recalls: "If we don't do it, who will?" [Schulz's stand was, 'No Bible, no Christmas Special.']

To Coca-Cola's credit, Mendelson says, the corporate sponsor never balked at the idea of including New Testament passages. Neither, he says, did the network execs. The result — Linus's reading from the Book of Luke about the meaning of the season — became "the most magical two minutes in all of TV animation," the producer says.

In writing about the "Peanuts" special in "*Manhood for Amateurs*," [Michael] Chabon — a self-described Jewish "liberal

agnostic empiricist" – shared: "I still know that chapter and verse of the Gospel of Luke by heart, and no amount of subsequent disillusionment with the behavior of self-described Christians, or with the ongoing progressive commercialization that in 1965 had already broken Charlie Brown's heart, has robbed the central miracle of Christianity of its power to move me the way any truly great story can."¹

What many have noticed as the most climactic moment in the whole special might slip right past you. Linus is the philosophical Peanuts character and who is, also, appropriately insecure as a child in the world. Linus is the one who explains what the real Christmas is about as he shares Luke 2, the story of Christmas. You could almost miss his singular gesture when he shares the angel's salutation to the shepherds. At the moment he says the words, "Fear not," *he drops his security blanket!* He later picks it up but he puts it around the foot of the Christmas tree. The symbolism is beautiful. It is, after all, a Christmas Special, but for the Christian it is ripe with significance. We recognize the meaning of the tree because that is one of the ways the cross of Christ is described in the Bible. It is at the foot of the cross that we lay down all of our insecurities, our fears, our frustration, and, most importantly, our sin where Jesus bore them as He hung on the cursed tree.

2. A gift for the One Who actually *does* have everything

This presents a little bit of a

¹https://www.washingtonpost.com/blog/s/comic-riffs/post/a-charlie-brown-christmas-the-gospel-truth-behind-how-a-humble-peanuts-holiday-classic-defied-the-odds/2011/12/02/gIQA0NNPWO_blog.html

dilemma. What do you get for the person who actually *does* have everything? David addressed this when he wanted to build the Temple for the Lord. He had been prohibited from being the one to build it because he was a man of war, but he *was* allowed to *provide* for the building.

- God is *worthy* of glory and so we can say that He is *deserving* of the gift of a Temple

1Chr 29:10-18 Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed *be* thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever.

11Thine, O LORD, *is* the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all *that is* in the heaven and in the earth *is thine*; thine *is* the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.

12Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all.

13Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

- But the problem is, what can we *give* God since anything we could give we got *from* Him?

14But who *am* I, and what *is* my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things *come* of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

15For we *are* strangers before thee, and sojourners, as *were* all our fathers: our days on the earth *are* as a shadow, and *there is* none abiding.

16O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name *cometh* of thine hand, and *is* all thine own.

- Then David identifies what we actually *can* give God: our hearts.

17I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee.

18O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee:

David also speaks of this in Psalm 51:

Ps 51:16-17 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it*: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

17The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

If you think twice about this, vs. 16 could sound a little bit odd. David points out that God does *not* desire sacrifice and yet isn't that exactly what the whole book of Leviticus is about? Isn't the whole Old Testament filled with sacrifices? What David is doing here is making a theological statement. Animal sacrifices can't *actually* take away or pay for sins. That is not their purpose in the Bible. Animal sacrifices were only there to make a statement about our need for the perfect sacrifice that Jesus would make of Himself. Paul covers this in the book of Hebrews which is culminated in Hebrews 10:

Heb 10:1-10 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2For then would they not have

ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3But in those *sacrifices there is* a remembrance again *made* of sins every year.

4For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

5Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

6In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

7Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

8Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are offered by the law;

9Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

10By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

Going back to David in Psalm 51, he points out what God *does* desire from us: a broken and contrite heart. When our pride is broken and we realize how grossly insufficient it is for us to offer up our own tainted righteousness before Him, *then* we are ready to offer Him our heart. It is at that point that we are made, as it says in Eph 1, *accepted in the beloved* (Jesus Christ is the beloved).

3. A Christmas gift for Jesus

To start off with, then, the perfect gift for Jesus is your heart. But Christmas keeps coming. What can you do year by year?

In the spirit of avoiding corban, we take up an offering for our missionaries at the Christmas Eve service, and not for

the church. But that is not what is meant here. There is something that we can give Jesus year by year. Also, since celebrating Jesus is something that should be done *every* day, there is something we can give Him *each* day. What we can actually give God according to the Bible is our faithfulness. Paul described the Macedonians in their faithful support of Him after they had first given *themselves* to the Lord.

2Cor 8:1-5 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;

2How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

3For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they were* willing of themselves;

4Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

5And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

Paul described the house of Stephanas in Achaia as being *addicted* to the ministry of the saints.

1Cor 16:13-16 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

14Let all your things be done with charity.

15I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and ***that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,***)

16That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with *us*, and laboureth.

Stephanas example was one who

acquitted, or proved himself as a man...that is he was a responsible adult. He was filled with love and charity. He then served in the church faithfully in his labors.

Demas and Mark were examples of the importance of faithfulness. Demas had started off well and finished poorly. Mark started off poorly, but finished well.

2Tim 4:10-11 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

11Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

Demas went down in history as having forsaken the ministry. Originally, Mark abandoned Paul while on his first missions trip with him. This became a bone of contention between Paul and Barnabas later that caused them to separate work from each other. But now, here, we find that Mark got back into the ministry and ended up being considered *profitable* to the ministry.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he challenged them with the importance of faithfulness as he described his own ministry.

1Cor 4:1-5 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

3But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

4For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

5Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and

will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

Paul was willing to leave the judging to God. The one thing he knew to do was be faithful. One thing that is very common is for people to not realize how significant they are to ministry. Paul had those who judged *him*, but regularly people judge *themselves* in ministry. So many wish they could do more, had more to give, or wish they had more ability. I find that one of the most common things I need to do is point out that what people bring to the ministry actually *does* make a difference, but more important and far more appreciated is people's *faithfulness*. Part of the definition of being responsible is being faithful. Our success as a church and each one's success as an individual is dependent upon *faithfulness*. In fact being faithful *is* the success, not what we produce.

Gal 6:8-9 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

Don't faint, keep going. Can we be faithful even when other Christians disappoint us? Can we be faithful when we don't understand what God is doing? Can we be faithful when the world is falling apart?

It's kind of fun when someone asks me how long I've been here. It's not common at all for someone to spend so long a time pastoring a church and so it is not unreasonable that they are surprised. What is the secret of lasting 42 years in the ministry? There's no big secret. Every day Nancy and I get up and go to work for God. If you do that every day for 42 years then you can last that long in the ministry.

This church is here because of people being faithful in their support. The sweetness of fellowship takes people

faithfully putting in the time with each other in the services, the work, the outreach, and hanging out with each other. It takes faithfulness to take care of the facilities that God gave us. If we want Bayonne to hear the Gospel, it takes faithfully going out and sharing it with as many people as possible. People don't just come to clean, go soul winning, or work, they are built on the bonds of fellowship that accompanies our work together. Are we disturbed with the riots, rise in crime, societal failure? If we want to spare our children of that part of the world, it takes faithfully bringing our kids to church and raising them up with the challenges of the Bible. Do you want to know the Word of God? The most important things about eternal salvation can be understood very quickly, but to really know God and the rest of His Word requires faithful study.

The perfect gift you can give Jesus is you and your faithfulness.

Rom 12:1-3 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.

2And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

3For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Luke 9:23 And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

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2. A gift for the One Who actually does

have everything 1Chr 29:10-18, Ps 51:16-17, Heb 10:1-10

3. A Christmas gift for Jesus 2Cor 8:1-5, 1Cor 16:13-16, 2Tim 4:10-11, 1Cor 4:1-5, Gal 6:8-9, Luke 9:23