

God's Inexpressible Gift

Thomas Robinson, *The Great Gift Exchange 2*, December 2, 2012

2 Corinthians 9:10-15

¹⁰ He who “*supplies seed to the sower and bread for food*” [Isa 55:10] will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way **to be generous in every way**, which through us will produce **thanksgiving to God**.

¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your **confession of the gospel of Christ**, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the **surpassing grace of God upon you**.

¹⁵ **Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!**

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶ For to us **a child is born**, to us **a son is given**; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Romans 8:31-32

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Isaiah 55:1-2, 10-11

¹ “**Come, everyone who thirsts**, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk **without money and without price**. ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and **eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food**.... ¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, **giving seed to the sower and bread for food**, ¹¹ so shall **my word** be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall **accomplish that which I purpose**, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

John 1:14, 16-18

¹⁴ And **the Word became flesh** and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... ¹⁶ For from his fullness **we have all received, grace upon grace**. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; **the only God**, who is at the Father's side, he has **made him known**.

The Great Gift Exchange

Advent – the arrival. The coming of what? Who? Santa? *The Night Before Christmas* (written here in NYC by Clement Moore, 1823). A different arrival. A baby's birth. *To us a child is born, to us a son is given. But a miracle beyond comprehension. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*" The creator becomes creature. Climax of the ancient story of God.

Christmas is the season of giving gifts. Everybody gives to everybody. A symbol of this great story. God is the great giver. All creation flows out of his self-giving love. That giving reaches its climax in Jesus' gift of himself. We learn giving in order to be like him.

Paul is helping the Corinthians to learn that way of life by helping others – learning from God's generosity. He cites Isa 55, taking them back into God's promises of the Suffering Servant (Isa 53); Renewal of life and covenant (Isa 54); God's free gift of life, delight and abundance by his Word (Isa 55). They are opening their lives to be shaped by the life of God fulfilled now in Jesus – *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

What does this mean? The gift is inexpressible, but not because nothing can be said. Rather it is inexhaustible, there is always more to learn, more to perceive – the heart of God.

The Gift of the Inexpressible Word

Irony – the inexpressible gift is the Word. How God expresses himself. God had sent many words through the prophets. His word of promise and covenant had shaped his people. He promises to Abram for the world (Gen 12:1-3); he covenants with Israel for the world.

But the ultimate Word / Logos, that is light and life, the expression of God that is God himself (Jn 1:1-3) cannot be put into prophetic poetry and shouted in the Temple. The Word is inexpressible and must become embodied, incarnate, flesh – Jesus. He comes in time and history. He lives, dies and lives again. Particular, solid, with edges.

Our world loves general spirituality, personal morality, the interior private faith, the general guidance for life shared by most wisdom traditions. But the inexpressible Word becomes flesh. He does not point the way to God. He is the way. He is God. He breaks our idols.

A Gift We Don't Want to Talk About

Some gifts are indescribable in a different sense. Cleaning supplies. Canisters of deodorant. It's insulting. We don't need it. It says something we don't want to hear or talk about. Jesus didn't stay in the manger. He came calling us to repent – change mind and action. He frees the enslaved, raises the dead, forgives the wrong-doers, strengthens the weak.

But aren't we good enough? As good as others? We don't want charity. We're in control of our own lives. The gift brings clarity and honesty about our own brokenness and need. In faith we receive Grace upon Grace. The gift lets us know ourselves and become whole.

A Gift from Depths Beyond Describing

The gift is inexpressible because it takes us into God. The God of the Bible is the one and only living and true God, creator of all. The incarnation revealed in Jesus takes us into the wonderful community of love at the heart of that one God. The gift reveals the giver.

God empties himself. The Word becomes flesh. God at the Father's side reveals God. We learn in wonder, not knowing what to say. Thankful that passionate love is God's reality.