

Christmas Eve 2016

Luke 1:26-38

I. Intro

What is one of the favorite Christmas gifts you have received?

What made it your favorite gift?

Tonight as we remember the coming of Jesus into our world, I want to take a moment and encourage you to consider the idea that Jesus was a gift.

The reason this is important is because when we start to experience Jesus as a gift, it helps us to be moved by how amazing grace is.

Grace is the unmerited favor of God.

A gift is an expression of grace. At Christmas we give gifts, not because anyone has merited them, we give gifts as an expression of grace. As parents, sometimes we threaten our kids with the meriting of the gifts, but our desire is to express our love for others, our care for others, by showing them grace, in the form of a gift.

And this comes from the Christmas Story.

We give gifts as an expression of grace because it points us to the expression of grace God displayed in giving the world the gift of Christ.

Today in our passage, the angel declares that the God of grace, is going to reveal His grace in the gift of Jesus. My hope and prayer for us all this Christmas is that as we remember the first announcement of Jesus, you wouldn't just have a better definition of grace, but that you would actually experience grace.

Let me read for us Luke 1:26-38

So let's look together at three aspects of how God expresses His grace through the gift of Jesus.

1. Grace comes in a vulnerable package.

Do you like to be vulnerable?

Several years ago I had the opportunity to go through some counseling. It was one of the most challenging but transformative time of my life.

Almost every time that I would go to meet with my counselor, he would ask me, 'So want do you want to talk about today'... and many times I would say 'oh, things are pretty good'.

Here I was paying this guy to help me process some of the deepest things in my life, the complicated things of my life, and the best I have to start with is... yeah, things are good... I always started out guarded.

Why is that? Vulnerability is hard. It's exposure. It opens us up to the possibility of being broken.

God declared to Mary, many nights ago, that the savior of the world wasn't going to come as a king, wasn't going to come in His all glory but rather He was going to come by being conceived in her womb. The God of the universe became vulnerable

Look at **Luke 1:30**

The God of the universe, became breakable. God became someone who could be hurt. The God of the universe, the Most High, became the Most Low.

God's grace was given in the form of a vulnerable gift.

Why? Why do you think that is?

Martin Luther, a famous pastor from the 1500's, said:

'Are you afraid of God? He places before you a Babe with whom you may take refuge. You cannot fear a Babe, for nothing is more appealing to the human heart than a baby.' –Martin Luther

Jesus became vulnerable so you could feel safe with Him, you could take refuge in Him.

What makes something a significant gift? It's a gift you can interact with.

What if grace wasn't a vulnerable gift? Then we wouldn't have a God we could be intimate with. We would have a distant God.

Jesus became vulnerable because He wants to experience intimacy with you.

Do you struggle with being vulnerable? The power of experiencing the gift of Jesus as a vulnerable gift is not just that it is the only place you can find refuge, but it will empower you to vulnerable with others. Because as you find perfect refuge and safety with Jesus, that will transform your heart to be vulnerable with others.

Now, the angel doesn't just stop there. Because if all Jesus was as a gift was a safe place He would be an incomplete gift. He did come in vulnerability but He comes to reign.

2. Grace Comes In A Never-Ending Package

Luke 1:32-33

Jesus' kingdom will out last all kingdoms. His reign will out last all reigns.

The angel Gabriel says it very clearly... there will be no end to His kingdom.

Let your mind ruminate on that for a minute. What would it be like to be a part of a kingdom that would never end?

I played soccer for many of my years as a kid. I was on a lot of different teams. But the best team was my freshman year of High School... That was the year we went undefeated. We were the best team. We were the reigning champs. And you know how long that lasted? Till the first game of my Sophomore Year.

The angel said that Jesus and His kingdom would reign forever.

We are a baseball town right? We love our world series. Do you know what the record is for most World Series in a row? The Yankees – 1949-1953

The angel said that Jesus and His kingdom would reign forever.

Now, I know what you are thinking... that's sports Brian... Ok, do you know who longest reigning Monarch or King was? I looked it up on Wikipedia... Sobhuza II in Swaziland Africa. 1899-1982. 82 Years and 254 Days.

The angel said that Jesus and His kingdom would reign forever.

Grace was displayed in vulnerability. We need that first. We need a gift that is vulnerable and real and safe. But this gift is also a never-ending King. It's never ending power and authority. This king will rule forever because He is the greatest King.

Not only is it relational, but it's power.

Which leads us to the third aspect of this gift...

3. Grace comes in a supernatural package.

Sometimes in our world we lose sight of the supernatural. Because it is harder to see.

When the God of the universe came into the world there was a ton of supernatural activity!

Angels were appearing, a virgin became pregnant, Kings were travelling far ways because of a star.

Luke 1:34-35

Why is it so important that the gift of Jesus is supernatural?

Because the resolution of man's problem couldn't be fixed by man.

Years and years of rulers... some good some bad, and the world is broken and a mess.

We needed a supernatural intervention.

And so God... entered our world... He entered into our world, because the only way for you to experience hope, life, joy and grace is if it comes supernaturally.

And although the experience of Mary is descriptive of a one-time event, the fact is that when we recognize the beauty of the gift of Jesus and put our trust in who He is and what He has done, a supernatural moment transpires in our lives. We become born again. We become part of a kingdom that will never end.

And the way we experience the supernatural gift of Jesus, is the same way Mary experienced it, and the same way we experience any gift... is we receive the gift.

Mary didn't receive the gift because she had merited it.

Mary experienced the supernatural gift because God is gracious and He gives good gifts.

And God the Father wants you to experience His gracious gift as well.

Friends, today, in this moment you can experience that gift. Many nights ago Mary first heard the wonder of the coming of Jesus and today you can experience Him too. By receiving the vulnerable, never-ending, supernatural gift.

II. Conclusion

Two responses...

1. We respond with prayers of thanksgiving...

Take a moment and be thankful.

2. We respond with prayers of candor...

Take a moment and be candid... and if you would like, put your prayer in the offering and we will pray with you.

Kids Moment

What was the first thing you did today? What was the first movie you ever saw?

What was the first thing you were for Halloween? What was the first tooth you lost?

What was the name of the first pet you had? What was the name of your first homecoming date?

Who was the first Avenger? Captain America

Who was the first Cardinal to hit 50 home runs in a season? Mark McGuire

Who was the first...President – Washington

Ok... here is a tough one... who was the first Christian?

Mary is the first person to ever hear the actual Christian message, that Jesus, the Son of God, was going to descend to earth, he was going to be born a human being, and he was going to take up the kingdom of the Father and he was going to make everything in this world right. She's the first one to hear the message.

So I want to suggest that she was the first Christian.

She became a Christian, not because she was Jesus' mom... She became a Christian because she received the gift of Jesus. And today we are celebrating Jesus as God's gift.

When you get a great gift what do you usually do? Tell everyone!!

And when we receive Jesus as a gift He wants us to be lights in the world around. Now at the end of the service we are going to light candles to remind us to be a light to others and tell them about this gift.

So... to remind you guys to be lights I am going to give you this glow stick! And you can hold it up high as a reminder to be a light to the world and tell them about the gift of Jesus.

Lighting of the Candles

In **John 8:12** Jesus says:

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Jesus was the light of the world and He came into the darkness. As we light these candles tonight they symbolize for us, that we, having believed, now have the light of life and as we go into the world carry His light. As we join together in the singing of O Holy Night we will pass the light throughout the room.

Turn the unlit candle...

IV. Benediction

Now may God Almighty, the Great Giver of Gifts, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, grant you the peace and joy of Christmas in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of His great Gift, His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

"May you be filled with the wonder of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace of the Christ child. Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever."

Amen and Merry Christmas!