

Accepting the Gift

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Introduction

Clara Null had just finished a lesson on Christian behavior. “Now, Billy,” she asked, “tell me what we must do before we can expect to be forgiven for our sins.”

Without hesitation, Billy replied, “First we gotta sin.”

Citation: Clara Null, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. *Christian Reader*, “Kids of the Kingdom.”

He’s right, isn’t he? Unfortunately, each of us has already done that! We’re like a man, who according to an ancient legend, became lost in his travels and wandered into a bed of quicksand and couldn’t get out by himself.

Confucius (Con-foo-shus) saw the man’s predicament and said, “It is evident that men should stay out of places such as this.”

Next, Buddha (Boo-da) observed the situation and said, “Let that man’s plight be a lesson to the rest of the world.”

Then Mohammed (Moe-ha-med) came by and said to the sinking man, “Alas, it is the will of Allah.”

Finally, Jesus appeared on the scene and said, “Take my hand, brother. I will save you.”

There is only One who can provide salvation from sin. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.” (John 14:6) Only Jesus has the power and authority to forgive sins and give us eternal life. The bible says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Jesus loves us so much that He gave His life to save us. This morning we will spend some time looking at the plan of salvation. As we think about God’s work on our behalf, we’ll discover ways that God loves us.

1 Creation

The first way we can see that God loves us is Creation.

Why else would he create you and me? He wanted to love. Even the act of creation shows that God designed us to love. He created male and female so that man would not be alone. He gave the garden along with all of its beauty. He also gave us the Sabbath. Why

would God give a special 24 hr period to do no work, except that he wanted to spend time with us? Now which of you when you fell in love with your spouse or fiancé' wanted to spend all of your time with them? Or which of you have children that will never leave you alone because they are constantly bugging to play with them. We even see this love between friends. I love to hang out with my friends. I'm always asking my mom and dad if I can go do something with one of them. If I didn't love my friends, I wouldn't want to be with them all of the time. Everyone who loves wants to spend time with the one they love. And God is no different He wants to spend time with you constantly.

2 Jesus's Ministry

Another way we can see that God loves us is how Jesus treated people while He was living as a human on earth. He gave a lot while he was here on earth. He did tons of things. He healed several diseases that the people in the city were dealing with. He also fed the miraculous five thousand with just 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. How miraculous was that? He also gave life to the dead like his friend Lazarus. The story of Lazarus is one of the biggest ways that shows God's love for us. Let's jump to the story of Lazarus in the Bible. Turn to John 11. I want to read verses 35 and 36. **Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"** God loved him so much that he sobbed. I can't image that joyous face pouring out with tears of sorrow. It just doesn't go together. Have you ever lost someone you loved dearly? Can you see how much he loved him? Can you see how much he loves you? He cries every time one of us suffers or dies. He hates to see us hurt. One of my friends lost her parents. She was crying and mourning all of the time because her love for them was strong. It was that exact same thing with Jesus. He mourned when he lost one of his friends.

3 Jesus's Sacrifice

But the greatest testimony that God loves us is Jesus died for us. When sin separated humanity from God, God decided to come to earth and die for us. And that, my friend, is the ultimate act of loving. Jesus himself said, **"Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends.** (John 15.13) and he did just that.

But why did he give his life for you? In Romans 6:23- **For the wages of sin is DEATH . . .** . It tells us that sin results in death. Everyone who sins is put under a death sentence. But who has sinned? Who is put on that death sentence? In Romans 3:23- **For ALL have sinned . . .** Does that mean you have sinned? (PAUSE) Of course! Every single one of us has committed some kind of sin. We all have done some wrong, which means we are all under that death penalty. Our destiny is death. We have something to really look forward to in life, don't we? To just die. Well, let me tell you friends, we do have something to look for in life. The Bible tells us that, if we have a sinless sacrifice, we maybe released from that death sentence and have eternal happiness. That's what we call in the Bible redemption- when someone pays for something else. Well, that very special event took place a couple thousand years ago. God came down in the form of a sinless man to die and redeem all of humanity.

[Follow with illustration.]

It reminds me of a story of this pastor in a small New England town.

Story of the Pastor

There was a pastor in a small New England town. One morning he came to church carrying a rusty, bent, old birdcage, and set it by the pulpit. Eyebrows were raised and, as if in response, Pastor Thomas told this story.

I was walking through town yesterday when I saw a young boy coming toward me swinging this birdcage. On the bottom of the cage were three little wild birds, shivering with cold and fright. I stopped the lad and asked, *"What you got there, son?"*

"Just some old birds," the boy replied.

"What are you going to do with them?" I asked.

"Take 'em home and have fun with 'em," he answered. *"I'm going to tease 'em and pull out their feathers to make 'em fight. I'm going to have a real good time."*

"But you'll get tired of those birds sooner or later. What will you do?" *"Oh, I got some cats,"* said the little boy. *"They like birds. I'll take 'em to them."*

The pastor was silent for a moment.

"How much do you want for those birds, son?"

"Huh??!!! Why, you don't want those birds, mister? They're just plain old-field birds. They don't sing. They aren't even pretty!" The pastor reached in his pocket and took out a ten-dollar bill. He placed it in the boy's hand. In a flash, the boy was gone. The pastor picked up the cage and gently carried it to the end of the alley where there was a tree and a grassy spot. Setting the cage down, he opened the door, and by softly tapping the bars persuaded the birds out, setting them free.

Story of Satan and Jesus

One day Satan and Jesus were having a conversation. Satan had come from the Garden of Eden, and he was gloating and boasting. *"Yes, sir, I just caught the world full of people down there. Set my trap, used bait I knew they couldn't resist. Got them all!"*

"What are you going to do with them?" Jesus asked.

Satan replied, *"Oh, I'm going to have fun! I'm going to teach them how to marry and divorce each other, how to hate and abuse each other, how to drink and smoke and curse."*

I'm going to teach them how to invent guns and bombs and kill each other. I'm really going to have fun!"

"And what will you do when you get done with them?" Jesus asked.

"Oh, I'll kill 'em," Satan glared proudly.

"How much do you want for them?" Jesus asked.

"Oh, you don't want those people. They aren't good. Why, you'll take them and they'll just hate you. They'll spit on you, curse you and kill you. You don't want those people!!"

"How much?" He asked again.

Satan looked at Jesus and sneered, *"All your blood, tears, and **YOUR LIFE!**"*

Jesus said **"DONE!"** He then paid the price.

Now that is one tough price to pay. Who in here would give up their child to save some people who in the end will hate you? Would you do it? How many would have given their life to save people who are ungrateful and filled with hatred? I know not many of us would if any. But God did because he loves you so much. He paid the highest price ever paid for you. The Shepard was willing to risk his life for the safety of his sheep so that one day we may be able go to that greenest pasture.

He loves you so much that He accepts you.

No matter what you have done he will still accept you. Isn't awesome who will always accept you and will love you even if you have committed the worst sin ever? I mean what would you give to have a friend like that, no matter how bad you mess up that friend will still love you and accept you? I would give everything but God doesn't ask us to give everything, He only asks that we have faith in Jesus Christ and have a personal relationship with Him.

In Ephesians 2:8-9- For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

That seems like nothing but let's not rush by it. It's a gift. And because it's such a great gift, people can't accept it. They feel like they need to do something in order to gain eternal life. But it can't be bought by our puny efforts—it's too big of a gift.

[Follow with illustration.]

The Pearl Diver

There once was an American missionary named David Morse. He was sent to India to

hold a series of Evangelism meetings. Well, he had such great success with the meetings that he decided to start a small church there so that he could reach more people with the good news of the Gospel.

Now, in the particular part of India that the missionary was targeting, one of the main means of income was diving for cultured pearls. And he had become good friends with an old pearl diver named Rambhau. Rambhau came to the very first meeting and continued to attend almost every meeting that David conducted. The missionary often went to Rambhau's cabin and read to him out of the scriptures of God's love for His children. The old pearl diver even built a chair especially for his friend to sit in as he read to him about the wondrous things that God had done for His people.

Even though Rambhau totally believed in God and His awesome power, of His majesty and His love for us. ... he always declined the missionary's offer to baptize him into the faith. One night after reading to him, David said; "Rambhau, you have been so faithful in coming to church for two years now, and you love to hear the word of God. ... please tell me why you do not want to get baptized and accept Christ as your Lord and Savior."

The old man looked up and said; "Your way to heaven is too easy for me! If I should ever make it into heaven that way, I would feel like a pauper there—like a beggar let in out of pity. I have been a proud man all of my life, so you must understand that I must work for it--I must do something to deserve it."

Try as he may, the missionary could not make Rambhau understand that Jesus had earned our place in heaven and that the only way in is just to accept His work on our behalf. The next day the old pearl diver showed up at David's door. He had a small strongbox in his hands. The missionary invited him in and asked what was in the box. With a look of determination, the old man said; "Sahib, I have decided that I am ready to begin my journey into your heaven."

The missionary said; "That's great Rambhau! I will baptize you tomorrow!"

"You don't understand Sahib" the old man said. "I will begin my journey to earn my place in heaven. I have decided to go to Delhi on my knees."

A look of shock came over David's face as he said; "Rambhau, it's over nine hundred miles to Delhi! Your knees will be torn into shreds and you will have blood poisoning or leprosy before you reach Bombay!"

"No, I must go to Delhi. The immortals will be pleased with my work and it will gain heaven for me."

The missionary pleaded with the old man and again quoted to him from the scriptures telling Him that Jesus had already paid the price. But the proud old pearl diver would not be moved. His mind was made up.

He said; "Sahib Morse, you have been my dearest friend on this earth the last few years. You have been with me through many trying times in my life; you have never once denied me of anything that was in your power to provide for me. And most important of all, you have introduced me to your God whom I will now serve."

"I am leaving tomorrow probably never to return. That is why I want you to have my most cherished possession." Looking thoughtfully at the box, the old man continued; "I once had a son. He was a pearl diver just like his father. How I wish you could have met him Sahib, He was the best diver on the entire coast of India. He had the swiftest dive, the keenest eye and could hold his breath longer than I could-- even in my youth. We both dreamed of finding the perfect pearl; one that was of good size and without blemish or defect. We shared so much together, oh how I loved him."

The old man's eyes begin to tear as he continued. It was the eve of my sixtieth birthday and my son wanted so badly to find me a beautiful pearl for a gift. One that would remind me of his love for me and that I would cherish forever.

Well Sahib, he found that pearl on his last dive of the day. But even when he first saw it, he had been under too long. I watched in horror and disbelief as I saw my only son floating lifelessly up to the surface. When I finally got him on board..... I knew he was dead.

Handing the strongbox to the missionary, Rambhau said; "In my son's still clinched hand I found this, his gift to me."

David opened the box to find one of the largest pearls he had ever seen. Through his own tears, he said; "Rambhau it's beautiful!"

"That pearl is perfect Sahib," the old man said. It is yours now, because of your love for me and as a token of the love I have for you.

For a moment, David couldn't speak. But then he said; "I must have this pearl Rambhau, I know that I might be proud, but I have to pay you for it.....how about ten thousand dollars?"

With a look of confusion, Rambhau said; "Sahib Morse, you don't understand.....my son gave his life for this pearl! No one on this earth has enough money to "buy" it from me. But I wish to give it to you as a gift." Please, do not insult me by asking to pay me for it!

The missionary gripped the old man's hands and said; "My brother, don't you see?.....for these last few years, you have been trying to buy something from God, something that His Son laid down His life for that we might have it as a gift. It's true, no man has enough money to buy this beautiful pearl from you...but yet you are willing to give it to me because of your love for me.

"Rambhau, you can crawl around the world on your knees but that will never even begin

to be enough to win you heaven. Heaven has already been purchased for you with the lifeblood of Jesus. All you need to do is gratefully accept it.”

Out of joy, they cried together as Rambhau finally realize the extent of God’s love for him. Rambhau was indeed baptized that very night and he humbly served the Lord the rest of his life.

Sometimes we can be like the pearl diver. We think we have to do something to gain the favor of God. But, really, wouldn’t God be offended if we were to try to buy eternal life when it’s more than we could ever pay for. God’s plan to save you and me is so simple that we sometimes can’t grasp the idea that it’s a gift. It’s hard for us to believe that all we have to do is have faith in Him and love Him with all of your heart and that’s how we get our ticket to heaven and experience eternal happiness.

You see, God will accept you no matter what your past life was, even if you choose not to have faith and love Him, he still loves you and stands today offering you your ticket to eternal life. But, if you want eternal life, you must accept the gift, the ticket to heaven. He is your ticket to that eternal happiness and if you have that faith in Him, He will give you that ticket.

Ephesians 2:8 said that we are saved “BY FAITH.” To get the ticket you simply believe. Trust God to open the door of our prison called sin and death.

This morning you have the opportunity to accept that gift.

Take out the little card in your bulletin. It’s titled, “MY FREE GIFT.” Just take that out right now and let’s look at it together. The first statement is, “I believe that salvation comes only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.” If that represents your belief, would you check that box for me right now? Thank you. Praise the lord!

Now some here this morning may be like so many others. Maybe you once had a close walk with Jesus, but over time drifted away from the Lord. Today would be a good time to recommit your life to Jesus. If that’s your desire, would you check the box next to the statement, “I once knew Jesus, but have drifted away. I recommit my life to Jesus.”

Maybe you’ve never taken that step of accepting Christ. But you’d like to do that now. If that’s your desire, check the box next to the statement, “I repent of my sins and accept Jesus as my personal Saviour, believing that my sins are forgiven and His gift of eternal life is mine.”

Perhaps, you’re not ready to make that decision. Maybe you’d like to learn more about Jesus and what it means to follow Him. If that’s the case, check the last box on the card.

Thank you. Now, I’m going to ask you to do one more thing. As we sing our closing hymn, would you bring your card up front and lay it down on the altar and kneel with me for prayer? We’ll sing the first and last stanzas of “I Surrender All,” number 309, so just

as soon as we begin singing the last stanza, make your way down front with me and let's talk to Jesus.

[Sing] [People come forward]

The Prayer

Lord, you see every heart here today. We stand together because we want you in our lives. Forgive us all the sin we've done against you and each other. Please save us in your kingdom, by your blood and love. Help us, Father, to not squander the gift and be the sons and daughters you desire us to be. Amen.

Thank you. You can take your seats.

[Music playing]

Isn't it wonderful that God loved us so much that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life? Amen?

It's been a delight to share with you this morning. On behalf of the Pathfinders, thank you for giving us the opportunity to share with you this morning.