

## The gift that keeps on giving

Text: Galatians 4:4-5



Hi everybody,

With only a few days left before Christmas the streets of Stockholm are literally crowded with busy Christmas shoppers trying to get all their final shopping done. In fact for the past few weeks I have received tons of Christmas mail advertising and Christmas catalogues in the letterbox offering

everything from the latest smart phones, to the trendiest lap-top computers, to luxury appliances and holiday packages to exotic countries as the perfect Christmas gift. Each catalogue seems to outdo the other. One very exotic place to visit over Christmas seems to be the ice hotel (a mind-boggling art project and also a hotel made of ice and snow) situated in Lapland in Northern Sweden.

Well, maybe a visit to the ice hotel in Lapland isn't at the top of your wish list this year, but perhaps you too have certain expectations of what you hope to find waiting for you under the Christmas tree. The point I am trying to make is that if you and I put our hope in what Christmas offers we will inevitably be very disappointed. On the other hand if we can get past that to what Christmas is really all about, it truly can be the most wonderful time of the year. We are told by the gospel writers that the three wise men travelled from the east to bring the rather unusual gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus. Important as these gifts may seem we need to understand that the first Christmas gifts were *not gifts to the Child*. The first Christmas gift in essence was *the gift of the Child*.

What we need to realize is that Christmas, at its best and purest state, is a promise of something else, something that no holiday or experience or earthly thing we purchase can truly satisfy. Galatians 4:4-5 reminds us, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons". Isaiah 9:6 offers a description of what God has given to us: ***"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"***.

The interesting thing with this statement is that each of the above names of Jesus actually deals with an important area of our lives. They are like five Christmas gifts that we can open and each gift is special and unique:

*First, we are told His name is Wonderful.* That in itself can certainly brighten up our lives. “Wonderful” actually comes from the root word “wonder.” The word used here could also be translated as *amazing, surprising or awe-inspiring*. And as I contemplate the fact that the God of the Universe made this incredible sacrifice for me, it will produce in my heart a sense of amazement, awe, and finally, if we will let it, it will produce worship.

*Second, His name is Counselor.* That takes care of the decisions of life. We all have very important decisions that we have to make all the time. The beauty with this statement is that the very same God who is wonderful and amazing actually wants to give us counsel in our lives. The point is God has a plan and a purpose for each of our lives—an individual plan, not a one-size-fits-all plan. So when you and I are overwhelmed with the decisions of life, remember that there is a God who wants to guide you.

*Third, He is the Mighty God.* That takes care of the demands of life. Once again we desperately need to be reminded that Jesus was not just a good teacher, a good man that lived on earth two thousand years ago. He was, according to the Bible, the God-man. And this God who is Wonderful, this God who wants to be your Counselor, will give you the strength to live the life He has called you to live.

*Fourth, His name is Everlasting Father.* That takes care of the destiny of life. We believe in an Everlasting Father with no beginning and with no end. It reminds us that life on Earth is temporal, that there is another dimension we call heaven that is so much better than anything this world has to offer. Also, this hope of an Everlasting Father resonates with those of us who have never had the privilege of getting to know or spending time with an earthly father. Because of what Jesus did for us, we can now refer to the Almighty God, Creator of the universe, as our Father who is in heaven.

*And finally Isaiah reminds us that His name is the Prince of Peace.* That takes care of the problems of life. Life is filled with problems and obstacles and, if we are truly honest, Christmas can be one of the most stressful times of the year for many of us. Old problems and hurts are often brought back to the surface. Friction, stress, and problems that you are having with various family members and work mates can be at the forefront of your life at this

time of year. But here is One who actually specializes in bringing about Peace, One who will help you with the problems and set backs of life and who promises never to leave or forsake you.

So, just remember that whatever gifts you may have waiting for you under the Christmas tree this year, they pale in comparison to God's gift for you. It is better than anything NK, Åhlens, H&M or Claes Ohlsson catalogues can offer. Because according to the Bible it is the only gift that truly keeps on giving: the gift of eternal life to those whom are willing to trust the One called "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace".

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

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