

The Purpose for Christmas  
First Sunday After Christmas  
2 Corinthians 5:18-20  
December 29, 2019  
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (CEB)

<sup>18</sup>All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. <sup>19</sup>In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation.

<sup>20</sup>So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!"

Through Advent, our mid-week Bible study group (shameless plug:) Thursdays at 11:45, bring your lunch and your Bible. We'll be restarting in mid-January with a study of the book of Philippians. Hope you'll join us.)

(Back to our regular programming:)

Through Advent, our mid-week Bible study group used Rick Warren's book The Purpose of Christmas for our discussion.

It is a short book – only THREE chapters!

And they were packed chapters. And we had great discussion.

There are still some study books on the table in the study room if you'd like to take a look. Give us a good will offering and take it with you.

Rick Warren has a good way of making difficult things a lot simpler. He wrote:

"Regardless of your background, religion, problems, or circumstances, Christmas really is the best news you could get. Beneath all the visible sights and sounds of Christmas are some simple yet profound truths that can transform your life for the better here on earth and for forever in eternity".

As I mentioned on Christmas eve, I have been praying that this Christmas changed more than *just the balance of your bank account!*

I hope you didn't spend too much.

But know this: God sent us the most extravagant, expensive gift – in Jesus Christ as a baby to live and grown among us.

It was more than expensive. It was priceless – Jesus paid for it with his life.

That's a big start for a gift, right?

Well, add to it that the Gift is the *only* gift that will last forever.

There's no batteries, no parts to lose, no warranty card to fill out.

And it will we can use it EVERY SINGLE DAY, FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES.

So – for starters: Christmas is a time for celebration!

Even the angel shared THAT with the shepherds. Remember:

*“I bring you good news [SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE] of great joy that will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10)*

The celebration is a party – that's what Christmas is...a *birthday party* – for Jesus, and birthdays are meant to be celebrated. It's why we say “Merry Christmas!” Isn't it ironic thought that most Christmas parties IGNORE the person whose birthday we're supposed to be celebrating?

Christmas is a time to celebrate that God loves us... that's why God became a man! But, as I said earlier, the gift of that Love, came with a cost. When Jesus went to the cross, his arms were stretched out. The Romans who put him there wouldn't have noticed, but with his arms wide open, Jesus was physically demonstrating, “I love you this much! I love you so much it hurts! I'd rather die than live without you!”

Christmas is a time for celebrating that Love.

And celebrating that OUR lives have been saved from the ravages of sin and evil...and that we're given ETERNAL LIFE with Jesus.

Christmas is also a time for salvation!

The angel shared THAT message too. Remember?

*“Today... there has been born **for** you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11)*

Jesus saves us *from* sin and ourselves.

Warren wrote this powerful sentence: *“The middle letter of sin is I, and whenever I place myself at the center of my life, I sin. It is any attitude or action that denies God his rightful place as first in my life.”*

Jesus saved us from evil and sin - *for* His purpose.

And finally –

Celebration

Salvation

And Christmas is a time for reconciliation!

*“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will” (Luke 2:14)*

Jesus came at Christmas to reconcile with God.

And to turn us into peacemakers.

What’s more, as we grow into the Peace of God, we are able to offer that gift to others.

Our response to the grace that is given to us IS TO GIVE grace to others!

This gift of reconciliation is the one that imbedded in me during Advent.

What is reconciliation?

The dictionary defines it as “having a broken relationship restored.”

Reconciliation – ‘cause I don’t want to quit the Christmas celebration which is “peace on earth, good will toward all humankind.”

Warren wrote:

“There will never be peace in the world until there is peace in nations.  
There will never be peace in nations until there is peace in communities.  
There will never be peace in communities until there is peace in families.  
There will never be peace in families until there is peace in individuals.  
There will never be peace in individuals until we invite the Prince of Peace to reign  
in our hearts.  
Jesus is the Prince of Peace.”

We discussed, in our group three kinds of peace.

First, there's peace WITH God.

We have a relationship with God – we should have! But, when we try to live our lives WITHOUT God, we're at war (that's the opposite of peace.)

We need a peace treaty!

Paul wrote to the Romans – *“Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Rom. 5:1)

How do we make peace with God?

We can't do it by just “promising” to be good.

We can't make ourselves perfect.

We try to not sin but we do.

How then?

By making peace, Scripture says, BY FAITH...and that faith is in God's grace.

*“For by grace you have been saved THROUGH FAITH. And this is not your own doing, [PAUL SAYS TO THE EPHESIANS] it is the gift of God.”* (Eph. 2:8)

God keeps giving!

Amen?

Then, there's the peace OF God.

“Well,” you might be saying, “that sounds like the same thing.”

Nope.

The peace OF God comes when we've made that treaty and made peace WITH God.

In life, it's about choices.

We can panic. Or we can pray.

We can worry. Or we can worship

It says in Philippians (4:6) *"Don't worry about anything. Instead pray about everything!"*

If we prayed as much as we worried we'd have a LOT less to worry about!

Warren said in a video: "Worry is "stewing without doing."

So.

We've got peace WITH God.

We've got the peace OF God.

And we've got peace with others. Again – it's about relationships. First with God. Then, with each other.

And all wrapped up in the celebration and salvation of Christmas God gives us another verse that explains this. I'll read our Scripture passage again...

*"God...reconciled us to God's Self through Christ and gave us the MINISTRY of reconciliation...And God has committed to us the MESSAGE of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors." (2 Cor. 5:18-20)*

See God doesn't give us a gift without showing us how to use it!

When we exercise our peace WITH God...

...and are filled with the peace OF God...

God wants us to USE the peace – by the way we treat others; the way we behave toward others. They may be standing beside us or be in our thoughts. Either way, when we became disciples of Jesus Christ, God gave us both A MINISTRY and A

MESSAGE to us IN the ministry...and it's about reconciliation – to help each other find (and hold onto) peace with God and peace with one another.

*“Blessed are peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God,”* Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount.

Dear Ones, the greatest need our nation and the world needs is RECONCILIATION. Before we box up and put Christmas back into storage – let's remember the message of Christmas...the *reason for the season* if you will – of Reconciliation...of Peace on earth, good will for all.

Who do we need to rebuild a relationship with?

Whose face or name comes to mind?

It ain't easy.

Jesus didn't ever promise easy.

But he did promise to be with us. He walked the earth to know how difficult it would be make “peace” with others.

We're going to have to let Jesus FILL us with HIS love...

And FILL us with HIS forgiveness.

As we finish this year...and this decade (!) let's practice reconciliation into the new year and new decade. This is the perfect time to offer the gift of grace (that God has given to us) to others

And take this gentle reminder.

These are Rick Warren's words to wrap this up:

*“If you sacrificed all you had to buy me a priceless and personalized Christmas gift and I never took the time to unwrap and open it, how would you feel? You'd be disappointed, hurt, and angry at my callous rejection of your generous love. And for me, the gift would be worthless if I left it wrapped and sitting in the corner. There would be zero benefit to me.*

*Well, it's astounding that so many people have celebrated Christmas every year of their lives without ever having opened the greatest and most expensive Christmas gift.*

*Jesus Christ is God's Christmas gift to you. Wrapped up in Jesus are benefits and blessings and so much more! In Jesus, your past is forgiven, you get a purpose for living, and you get a home in heaven. You get a mission and a message to share.*

*Why celebrate Christmas if you're not going to open the best gift of all?"*

Amen!