

“The Perfect Gift: the True Light”

By Bob Heirtzler

Sunday, December 15th, 2013

Thank you very much. Those were some awesome songs. I guess we all can say that we have many memories about Christmas. Many memories about good times, bad times, sad times, the frustrating times, but, that's the flesh side of things. The spiritual side is that there is a story, which I am going to attempt to share today, if God allows it to happen, because Christmas is pretty emotional in our family. It's a big deal for us; we talk about Christmas in the middle of summer, and we can't wait for it to get there. A lot of families are like that. So, I want to say Merry Christmas to everybody here. May God bless you, and have a very, very merry Christmas. I know that the politically correct greeting is, “Happy Holidays,” but I am from the old school, and I will say, “Merry Christmas.” I was in Starbucks in Avon, Connecticut; it was just me and my sister, standing in line. Nobody behind us, nobody in front of us, three people behind the counter talking about some show that they saw the night before. We're waiting, and we're waiting, and my sister said, “Man, you're so patient.” I'm being serious, I'm not in any rush to go anywhere. So, we got our order, got the coffee, and they said, “Happy Holidays.” My reply was, “Merry Christmas!” My sister, Michelle, did the thing that she always did all my life, smacked me on the shoulder, and said, “You are offending them.” I turned to her, and said, “They are offending me.” She said, “You're right!” “Merry Christmas,” she said to them, too. She still says, “Merry Christmas,” to everybody to this day. So, Merry Christmas! It's all about Christ. We replace Christ with an 'X' now, so it's 'Xmas,' really?

I was listening to Music on the radio. Christmas music, they call it. This is the music that I hear: “Frosty the Snowman,” “All I want for Christmas is You, Babe,” “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town,” “Santa Baby,” “Walking In A Winter Wonder Land,” “Dreaming of a White Christmas,” and so on, over and over again with just different artists singing the same songs—Nothing about the birth of Christ. What we used to hear on the radio, not too long ago, was, we heard, “Joy to the World,” “Silent Night,” “O Holy Night,” “Away in a Manger,” “Angels We Have Heard on High,” “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” “O, Come, All Ye Faithful,” ... songs that pertained to Jesus' birth! They have taken that away on the airwaves. Why would they do something like that? Any suggestions out there? Why would they do something like that? Political correctness. We're afraid to offend somebody, yet they offend us all the time, and what do we do about it? We pray; we seek God. We ask God to be a brighter light. It's easy to clock them in the head or something, or backslap them the way Gibbs does with his people, but we pray that we can be that light. We don't worship Christmas trees and lights, here, we use it as an advantage to share the Gospel with people.

We started off today with the song, “O Holy Night.” That song revealed to my mind—I'll get to that in a few minutes. We heard already about the shepherds in the Field—shepherds attending their sheep! One thing I learned about the sheep: they know their master voice; they will not follow another voice that is speaking to them. We can learn a lot from the sheep. We know Jesus' voice. We also should know the other voice that speaks to us, too, and how we verify who is speaking to us.

The other thing is, the shepherd attends to the needs of the sheep; he feeds them, protects them, and looks for the one that has gone astray, as we read in the Gospel in one of the parables (Matthew 18:12-14).

We also learn from this is that Jesus is our Shepherd, and we are his Sheep!!

Mark 6:34 *And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: ...*

So, what did He do after that?

Mark 6:34 ...and he began to teach them many things.

We go through life, here. Our coworkers and friends might not understand the Christmas story. That's why we're there to share with them, by the life that we live, or the words that we share. Just our presence, sometimes, brings things.

The angels appeared to the shepherds. The first song that I have here is:

Hark The Herald Angels Sing (verse 3)

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings
Ris'n with healing in His wings
Mild He lays His glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

"Born to give them second birth." That hits me like baptism in Jesus' name, right there. God gave us a chance to get salvation. You wonder why they take that off the airwaves. That could cause people to seek.

The other part of that story was about the two people that were in the Temple (Luke 2:21-40). Parrish shared recently about Simeon and Anna. Simon was going to see the child before he passed away, and Anna was faithfully working in the church there. The song that came to my mind was:

Silent Night (verse 3)

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth

He was already Lord at His birth. He wasn't voted into office, like the king at that time was. He was already the King. Already Lord, at Thy birth. And you wonder why they take that off the airwaves.

Another one: We talk about the wise men, how that they came to the house where the child Jesus was! Did you catch that? they didn't come to a manger; they came to a house. How long after the birth? I don't know, but we do know that Herod put a hit out on anybody that was two years or younger. We read about that (Matthew 2:16), so up to two years, maybe? I don't know.

Isaiah 60:1-6 *Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear,*

and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the LORD.

I heard in band practice this morning—Andy was getting all fired up this morning—it took a lot for those kings to get there. They didn't just pack up and go; they took an army of people with them, based on that Scripture—they took a multitude of camels! It took a lot—preparation—I mean, if you're walking around downtown Chicago with enough loot to support us for the rest of our lives, that's very tempting to 'borrow' that from them, right? So, they had to be protected where they were going. They traveled all that distance (I don't know how long that took, but we do know that Jesus was already in the house at that time), and they came across Herod, the king, thinking that maybe he knew about this king. Apparently he didn't. But they kept going until they found the star sitting over the house, and walked in and worshipped the King. I like what Parrish said, "They were wise enough to listen to God." We, here, are wise enough to listen to God. Even when they were warned of God to take another route home, they did. So, the song that came to my mind, of course, was:

We Three Kings of Orient Are

(Verse 1)

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star

(Verse 5)

Glorious now behold Him arise
King and God and Sacrifice
Alleluia, Alleluia
Earth to heav'n replies

(Chorus)

O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to Thy perfect light

God was that perfect light for us. We're talking about Christmas, we're talking about the gift, we're talking about that light. We as Christians, we celebrate the death, burial, resurrection, and the birth of Christ every day of our lives. We need to be at our best during this time because there's a lot going on around us, there's people that the only time they come to church is Christmas and Easter. That was me; I did the same thing. my dad and I and mom and kids, we went to church on Christmas and mostly on Easter.

Then I thought about the Drummer Boy. I've got little history about the drummer boy—Parrish mentioned how that song ministered to him. Anything that we have can be used by God! for me, a fishing pole—Do you know how many doors have been opened for me and those that have gone fishing with me? A fishing pole opens up so many doors to share with people. It's no different than Rob Severance going to McDonald's and eating a Big Mac. I don't know if he eats a Big Mac when he's there, but, that's just an example—there's no difference than somebody going to the coffee shop, having a cup. It's something that we can use to talk to people. I went to Bass Pro Shop yesterday, and I ran across

Santa Claus. I looked at him, and I go, “I know I know you.” I think he’s one of the employees there. I think he is. I thought about getting a picture with him, posting it on FaceBook, and see what my family says, but, naaaah. We can use anything to reach out to people. Here’s this drummer boy, with a drum. Oh, by the way, I was a drummer boy in a play once, back in the early 70’s. I remember walking down the aisle of the church there, beating the drum all the way, not knowing, wondering why I was chosen for this. I didn’t ask for it but I was volunteered. Back then, when you were volunteered by an adult, you listened, you didn’t talk back. You know?

Philippians 4:11 *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

So, regardless of what we’re going through, (I heard that this morning) we have to be happy where we’re at. God’s got us here, in the middle of this, for some reason. To be a light—we could be a light, with somebody else watching our lives.

Philippians 4:12 *I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

So, Paul was talking about that he’s gone through a lot of things, ups and downs. One thing he said in verse 13:

Philippians 4:13 *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

The drummer boy had a drum. That’s all he had. He used that, and that particular song ministered to our brother, who’s is visiting his family today. It ministered to him—a song—ministered to him. You know?

As we keep going here, the song that ministered to e, that I’m going to talk about now, is, “What is the Gift/Light?” Back in December of 1978, I know most of you weren’t around, I watched this show every year when I was a kid. I started going through the same emotions as this show went through, too. The show was, “Charlie Brown’s Christmas.”

Charlie Brown: “I think there must be something wrong with me, Linus. Christmas is coming, but I’m not happy. I don’t feel the way I’m supposed to feel. I just don’t understand Christmas, I guess. I like getting presents and sending Christmas cards, and decorating trees and all that, but I’m still not happy. I always end up feeling depressed.”

I realized that I was fit in the same mold as that, too. I know I’m not alone in that. I know a lot of us here, or maybe you know some people that have, there was such a big build-up for Christmas, and the very next day, or an hour after we opened our gifts and had the big meal that day, it was over. You know? There was no substance. But, in 1979—my first Christmas as a Christian, it was here at this church. I remember that day, clearly, that night. It was a gym like this not much bigger, it had a basketball court. I remember the sanctuary had a basketball hoop with a star of David in bright, blue lights!! I sat about where, that guy in the back row, where he’s sitting at, and I aid, “Okay, what’s all this about Christmas?” They had the whole sanctuary decorated—I think it was the YMCA or the YWCA, I’m not sure, near the library of Waukegan at that time... I don’t know if any of you were there that night, it was December of 1979... I remember being there, and all of the sudden, the choir started singing this song:

O Holy Night

O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining.
Till He appeared and the Spirit felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, the night when Christ was born;
O night, O holy night, O night divine!
O night, O holy night, O night divine!

I said, "Okay, I've heard this song before." They went to the second verse:

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
O'er the world a star is sweetly gleaming,
Now come the wisemen from out of the Orient land.
The King of kings lay thus lowly manger;
In all our trials born to be our friends.

Now it's hitting home.. This hit home.

He knows our need, our weakness is no stranger,
He knows exactly what we're going through. It's not strange to God. He knows our needs.

Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!

Truly He taught us to love one another,
His law is love and His gospel is peace.

This next part reminded me of last week's service.

Chains he shall break,...

When the youth did that thing last week, there was such a powerful, powerful healing. The kids probably don't even know. They were just holding a chain and breaking it. I imagine some kids do know. As they're growing up, and looking to us as examples. We've still got to be the examples to the young people across the hallway. The chains that were broken.

(Back to 1979) Now I'm malting down. Now my hands are in the air—praising God like crazy now, because, after all those years of not knowing who He was, He was coming to me, now. At the end of that song, I was weeping, I was at the altar with my hands raised, I was praying, "God, I truly started to understand Your birth, and why You came and walked among us." I knew I had a lot more to learn, a lot more to read about. Man, I was reading about the birth like crazy after that. More, more, more. You know? Amen?

...for the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.

Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
With all our hearts we praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
His power and glory ever more proclaim!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!

Then we heard Parrish talk about Black Friday. I started thinking about it. I heard it three times, so I thought maybe I should look into it. They say that Jesus Died on a Friday! I wasn't there, so I'm not sure what day it was, but they're saying it was a Friday.

Hebrews 10:9-11 *Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:*

I remember running to the pastor of the town there all the time, telling him all f the things that I had done wrong, and he said, "You're forgiven," not knowing that I walked out with them still on me. God didn't forgive me; God didn't wash me in His blood at that time. I remember it was an emotional time, but it would only last for a few days, and then I would get right back into trouble again.

Hebrews 10:12 *But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;*

John the Baptist said this:

John 1:29 *The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

He knew His mission, why He was there: to give us the gift of salvation.

Hebrews 10:13-17 *From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*

He came to sacrifice, that through baptism in Jesus' name, we put the blood of Christ on, and our sins are remembered no more. What an awesome gift that God's given us. Correct?

Hebrews 10:18-19 *Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,*

They said there was three hours of darkness on that day (if it was a Friday)! Two thousand years later, the saving power of Jesus is still alive and well today. The best saving power you can get on a Black Friday!!! You know? What He did for us that day, it doesn't cost us anything at all.

What is the Gift and Light to us? Anybody want to answer that? Forgiveness. Salvation. Remission of sins. Truth. Grace. Life everlasting. Jesus.

I heard a song last night—a country singer sang it, I don't know his name—but, he was singing it from Joseph's perspective. He said, "A strange way to save the world. He came down, was born in a manger. The shepherds came. I'm just a normal man. She's just a normal girl. It's just a normal child." Not knowing what this child had. The song goes about from Joseph's perspective. What a strange way to save the world. I think Joseph understood, of course. God walked among us. He went through the terrible twos, and threes; He went through teen-age years. Hormones, probably, I don't know. He went through all kinds of stuff like we do. He went through it all, so that He could share with us all, so that He can work with us all, to know what it's like, so that when we go through those things, we can go to God and ask for help. If he had chosen a different way, it might not have worked out. He realized, "You know what? I've got to go down there and do something." And He came down. A miracle birth, you know? Amen? I know that it's quiet today, but I think it's because it's a crock-pot type message; it's slow-cooking, you know?

So, being that light to shine out the gift on our lives! Being that light in the darkness of the world during this season. Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving!!! We as Christians do this twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, anyway. We use these holidays to take the opportunity to share the Gift of being that Light!! We're being that light. As Jesus told, in the Gospels:

Matthew 5:14 *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

Letting our light shine, so that they may see the good works that God is doing in us to everybody around us, during this time. The talents: God gave us talents—He gave us one, two, and five. The first talent—the drummer boy just had one talent. He played the drums. The person that wrote that song was a teacher named Katherine Kennicott Davis in 1941. That song ministered to somebody here, who's not here today, he's with his family. That song ministered, "The Drummer Boy." I grew up with that song. He just had a drum.

We know the story of how the two became four, and the five became ten (Matthew 25:14-30), with the gifts and talents. God wants us to multiply the talents in our lives. It could be anything from creating, ushering, cooking, fishing... whatever we lay our hands to do, God can use that to minister to people. I'm a QA rep (Quality Assurance representative) at work, and I train new people. I've had new people ever since the summer, now. God's opened a door that, every one of those classes, I share my faith. They say, "There's something about you is different. You're not like the rest." Sometimes I just pawn it off, to see if they'll grab the bite; you know, if you're fishing, and you cast out the lure, and it's the first strike, and you say, "Okay, I'll set the hook the second time," and you let it go again, and it hits again. If they ask again, then I share about my faith, about God, and how I give God credit in everything that I do. God does it. Anybody that knows me knows that I can't read or write, or spell anything more than four words. God took this country boy from Hartford, Connecticut, and used him. You know?

I realized that there's people hurting this time of year. I noticed a picture this morning that my cousin posted of my Aunt Betty that passed a couple of months ago. I know he's going through a hard time. There's people at work that, within the last year, lost their child. It's usually the other way around; usually the parents go before the child, but, in this case, both of them lost their child in that season. I just felt a heaviness to pray, because I don't know how that feels, I really don't. All I can do is pray for them. We have people round us that will be hurting this time of year, too. It says, "They're not going to be around the Christmas Dinner table this year..... seems to be harder around Christmas time, because Christmas is the BIG event for them." So, what do we do with these people that are around us, that need a hug, or a smile, or a Christmas card, or a little bag of cookies, or goodies, or something like that. We can do anything to minister to the people around us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

God comforted us, now we can turn around and minister to other people. We know what it is to be ministered to by God, and then turn around and use that opportunity. To use this time to comfort those around us. I sit right by these two people that lost someone in their family in the last year, and I don't know what to say. I'll be honest, I don't know what to say. I can pray—that's all I know. I just pray, and pray, and pray that God will give me words—and it might not be—actually, there's three, there's another lady right next to me that lost someone—and I realize that I might not be able to talk to them at Christmastime, but maybe it will be in the Spring that God opens up that door to talk to them. I want to be ready to walk through that door. I don't want doors opening and I don't go through—I've been guilty of that. It's not a comfortable feeling, when God opens a door to share and we don't. That's just—I try to do my best to walk through the door at all times. So, we as Christians, we celebrate this BIG event all year around.

I'm coming down the main line, now. I'm closing right now. We are the Children of the LIGHT!!

John 8:12 *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness...*

The word, 'shall,' is pretty strong. When God says, 'shall not,' that means it's not going to happen. It's not a should or could, it's a shall.

John 8:12 *...shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

We have the light of life in our lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-5 *But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.*

Once again, Paul admonished the people who are of the light. You're not in darkness, anymore. Be that testimony. Let God shine *through* you. Let God use you.

We also read this earlier this month; God's talking to everybody in this room and those that didn't make it today:

1 Peter 2:9-10 *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.*

Once again, God came and walked among us to give us this light. He lights us up. He lights a path for us to go. Christmas is an emotional time; I know that. I sense a lot of feelings in this room; I know that. God is with us; God is going to comfort us; God going to use us in a mighty way. God's going to bring us through whatever we're dealing with in here. God's going to bring us through. He's our source; He's our light-source; He's our light.

My last verse:

Philippians 2:12 *Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

I think about the young kids there that go to school, and mom and dad's not around watching them. God wants you to behave when you're at school, too. You may not know that those around you are watching you, but, then again, they see everything. God wants you to be that light wherever you go. In school, at work...

Philippians 2:13-14 *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings:*

I hear a lot of that at work: Murmurings and disputings.

Philippians 2:15 *That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;*

We're in the midst of darkness all day long. We have people around us that, they have an experience with God; they get emotional, teary-eyed this time... I was watching a program last night where the singers were singing Christmas songs that are on my second list, here. You see them all swollen up in their eyes because they know. They know that what they've been singing isn't really what they should be singing. The gift that they got might have been singing, but they've buried it in the world to do worldly things with it. No God is moving with them right now, dealing with them at this time, and we, as Christians, need to be on guard, and ready to talk to them, share with them. We can't dismiss this time of year—we're going through things... I have learned that when I'm in the middle of a battle, when I'm in the middle of a trial, that's when God uses me the most to share with people, and it encourages me. I've told stories in the past about times when I didn't want to be bothered, and yet, I was bothered the whole time I was there, talking to people. We've heard how Pastor Paine just wanted to sleep all the way home on his plane ride, but somebody sat down next to him that he wound up sharing with. God doesn't go by our schedule. He doesn't. We go by His schedule. If He wants us to talk to somebody, he's going to open that door, and it's our choice whether to walk through that door or not. Right? That is our choice. Believe me, it's a whole lot easier if you do go through that door than if you don't.

I'm very thankful today. I'm very thankful, and I'd like to close in a prayer. It's not the closing prayer, but I'd like to close in prayer. Bow our heads, please?

God, I want to thank you, Jesus, for this great day that you've given to us, God. God, as the world celebrates Christmas, Jesus, in their own ways, and, us, as Christians, God, we take this time out to celebrate your birth, that you walked among us, God. God, I pray that you would use us for this next couple of weeks, during this holiday season to reach out to people. God, if any of us, here, that need a healing touch from you, Jesus, that, God, you would just touch our lives through this season, and comfort us, Jesus, that we're going through some things this time of year too, also, God. God, I pray, Father, that You would minister to everyone's needs in this room. Everyone that didn't make it today, that You would bless them with a big blessing. Give everyone here a big hug, God, and let them know, Jesus, that You love them, and that You know that they love You, Jesus. God, I want to thank You for the gift that You gave on Christmas, which is salvation, God. Thank You, God, for carrying out Your gift all the way to the cross and the shedding of the blood, God, that we can have salvation, and baptism in Your name, Jesus, that we can walk upright before You, God. God, the day is coming when You are going to take us home. We're going to walk down streets of gold, Jesus, and that would be the ultimate gift—just to make it to heaven, God. I want to thank You, in Jesus' name. Amen.