

THE DAWNING OF  
INDESTRUCTIBLE

# JOY

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## ADVENT 2020

DECEMBER 14-20

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**DECEMBER 14**

# The Mercy He Promises

I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

**ROMANS 15:8–9**

God's gifts are precious beyond words, and we will sing of them forever. But the most precious gifts you can think of are not ends in themselves. They all lead to God himself. Ultimately, that is what all his gifts are for.

Take forgiveness, for example. When Christ became our servant as a ransom, he took away the curse of the law and the threat of punishment for all who believe. But to what end? That we might enjoy sin with impunity? No. That we might enjoy God for eternity! Forgiveness is precious because it brings us home to God.

Why does anyone want to be forgiven? If the answer is just for psychological relief, or just for escape from hell, or just to have more physical pleasures, then God is not honored.

Romans 15:9 says that the aim of Christ's serving us is that the Gentiles "glorify God" for his mercy. But if we exploit God's mercy as a ticket to enjoy sin—or even just to enjoy innocent things—God gets no glory from that. God gets glory for showing mercy when his mercy frees us to see him as the best gift of his mercy—as the most enjoyable person in the universe.

So it is good for us that Christ came on behalf of the truth of God, because the essence of the mercy he promised was himself.

It is good for us that Christ came on behalf of the truth of God, because his coming this way shows that God is true first and foremost to himself; and he confirms the promises of God, and that the promises are promises of mercy; and he shows that the essence of the mercy he promised is himself.

This is the meaning of his coming. This is the meaning of Christmas. Oh, that God would waken your heart to your deep need for mercy as a sinner! And then ravish your heart with a great Savior, Jesus Christ. And then release your tongue to praise him and your hands to make his mercy shine in yours.

DECEMBER 15

# Our Truest Treasure

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

MATTHEW 2:10

Worshipping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with sacrificial gifts. We ascribe to him. We don't add to him. God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything (Acts 17:25).

So the gifts of the magi are not given by way of assistance or need meeting. It would dishonor a monarch if foreign visitors came with royal care packages. Nor are these gifts meant to be bribes. God tells us in Deuteronomy 10:17 that he takes no bribe. Well, what then do the gifts mean? How are they worship?

The gifts are intensifiers of desire for Christ himself in much the same way that fasting is. When you give a gift to Christ like this, it's a way of saying something like this:

*The joy that I pursue is not the hope of getting rich with things from you. I have not come to you for your things but for yourself. And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things in the hope of enjoying you more, not the things. By giving to you what you do not need and what I might enjoy, I am saying more earnestly and more authentically, "You are my treasure, not these things."*

I think that's what it means to worship God with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

May God take the truth of this text and waken in us a desire for Christ himself. May we say from the heart,

*Lord Jesus, you are the Messiah, the king of Israel. All nations will come and bow down before you. God wields the world to see that you are worshiped. Therefore, whatever opposition I may find, I joyfully ascribe authority and dignity to you and bring my gifts to say that you alone can satisfy my heart, not these.*



**DECEMBER 16**

# Freed to Be Part of God's Family

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

MARK 10:45

The reason we need a ransom to be paid for us is that we have sold ourselves into sin and have been alienated from a holy God. When Jesus gave his life as a ransom, our slave masters, sin and death and the Devil, had to give up their claim on us. And the result was that we could be adopted into the family of God.

Paul put it like this in Galatians 4:4–5: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” In other words, the redemption, or the ransom, frees us to be a part of God’s family. We had run away and sold ourselves into slavery. But God pays a ransom and redeems us out of slavery into the Father’s house.

To do that, God’s Son had to become human so that he could suffer and die in our place to pay the ransom. That is the meaning of Christmas. Hebrews 2:14 puts it like this: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself like- wise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death.”

In other words, the reason Christ took on our full humanity was so that he could die and in dying pay a ransom and free us from the power of death. And free us to be included in his own family. The ransom is ultimately about relationship. Yours to God, your merciful Father.

DECEMBER 17

# He Came to Serve

Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

MARK 10:44

Jesus expects his disciples to be radically different from the way people ordinarily act. They are to serve each other and unbelievers. In that service they are to drink the cup of whatever suffering it will cost. And it will cost.

But if that were the only message of Christianity, it would not be good news. There would be no gospel. I need more than for someone to tell me what I should do and should be. I need help to be and to do. This is why Jesus says what he says in Mark 10:45: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” What a horrendous mistake it would be if we heard Jesus’s call to be the servant of all in verse 44 as a call to serve him.

It is not.

It is a call to learn how to be served by him. Don’t miss this. This is the heart of Christianity. This is what sets our faith off from all other major religions. Our God does not need our service, nor is he glorified by recruits who want to help him out. Our God is so full and so self-sufficient and so overflowing in power and life and joy that he glorifies himself by serving us.

He does this by taking on humanity and seeking us out and then telling us that he did not come to get our service, but to be our servant.

Here is a general truth to ponder and believe: every time Jesus commands something for us to do, it is his way of telling us how he wants to serve us. Let me say it another way: the path of obedience is the place where Christ meets us as our servant to carry our burdens and give us his power.

When you become a Christian—a disciple of Jesus—you do not become his helper. He becomes your helper. You do not become his benefactor. He becomes your benefactor. You do not become his servant. He becomes your servant. Jesus does not need your help; he commands your obedience and offers his help.

Christmas. He came to serve, not to be served. He came to help us do everything he calls us to do.

DECEMBER 18

# Graciously and Tenderly Frustrating

God put [Christ] forward . . . to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

ROMANS 3:25–26

The story of Martin Luther's conversion illustrates a point. He had almost been struck with lightning and made a vow to God to become a monk. But as a monk he was utterly unable to find peace with God. He sought God in every way the church of that day taught him—in good works, in the merits of the saints, in the process of confession and absolution, in the ladder of mysticism. On top of all this, they appointed him to the university to study and teach the Bible.

Listen to the way Luther later described his breakthrough. How was he prepared to see and receive Christ for who he really is?

*I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.*

*Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.*

In the monastery Luther had come to the end of himself. He had despaired of salvation by his own hand. But by the grace of God he did not give up his longing and his hope. He directed his attention to the one place he hoped to find help—the Bible. He said, "I greatly longed to understand." He said, "I had a great yearning" to know what it meant. And he said, "Night and day I pondered."

In other words, God prepared Luther to see the true meaning of Christ and accept it, by stirring up a deep and powerful longing in his heart for consolation and redemption that could come only from Christ.

And this is what God does again and again. He may be doing it for you in this Advent season—graciously and tenderly frustrating you with life that is not centered on Christ and filling you with longings and desires that can't find their satisfaction in what this world offers, but only in the Godman. What a Christmas gift that might be! Let all your frustrations with this world throw you onto the Word of God. It will become sweet—like walking into paradise.

**DECEMBER 19**

## The Gift You Cannot Buy

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

ACTS 17:24–25

God does not want to be served in any way that implies we are supplying his need or supporting him or offering him something that he does not already own by right. “Who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” (Rom. 11:35). “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine” (Ps. 50:12).

Therefore, we simply cannot negotiate with God. We have nothing of value that is not already his by right. We cannot service him. His car never breaks down. It never runs out of gas. It never gets dirty. He never gets tired. He never gets depressed.

He never gets caught in traffic so that he can't get to where he wants to go. He never gets lonely. He never gets hungry.

In other words, if you want what Jesus has to give, you can't buy it. You can't trade for it. You can't work for it. He already owns your money and everything you have. And when you work, it is only because he has given you life and breath and everything. All we can do is submit to his spectacular offer to be our servant.

And this submission is called faith—a willingness to let him be God. Trust him to be the Supplier, the Strengtheners, the Counselor, the Guide, the Savior. And being satisfied with that—with all that God is for us in Jesus. That's what faith is. And having that is what it means to be a Christian.

Christmas means: the infinitely self-sufficient God has come not to be assisted but to be enjoyed.

DECEMBER 20

# Receive His Reconciliation

More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

ROMANS 5:11

How do we practically receive reconciliation and rejoice in God? Answer: *through Jesus Christ*. Which means, at least in part, make the portrait of Jesus in the Bible—the work and the words of Jesus portrayed in the New Testament—the essential content of your rejoicing in God. Rejoicing without the content of Christ does not honor Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4–6, Paul describes conversion two ways. In verse 4 he says it is seeing “the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” And in verse 6 he says it is seeing “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” In either case, you can see the point. We have Christ, the image of God, and we have God in the face of Christ.

Practically, to rejoice in God, you rejoice in what you see and know of God in the portrait of Jesus Christ. And this comes to its fullest experience when the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

Not only did God purchase our reconciliation through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:10), and not only did God enable us to receive that reconciliation through our Lord Jesus Christ, but even now we exult in God himself through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus purchased our reconciliation. Jesus enabled us to receive the reconciliation and open the gift. And Jesus himself shines forth from the wrapping—the indescribable gift—as God in the flesh, and stirs up all our rejoicing in God.

Look to Jesus this Christmas. Receive the reconciliation that he bought. Don’t put it on the shelf unopened. And don’t open it and then make it a means to all your other pleasures. Open it and enjoy the gift. Rejoice in him. Make him your pleasure. Make him your treasure.



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