

God Is Not Santa Claus

#0153

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—December 10, 1976

Our text this evening is James, the 1st chapter, and the 17th verse. And if, when you look at it, you say, “We studied that text a few evenings ago,” I’ll agree with you. But I like whole-wheat bread, and beans, and apples, and several other things, even though I’ve had them before, don’t you? I want you to see something more as we study this text.

This is the Christmas season. Many are thinking of giving gifts. I’m sure that many are thinking of what they might receive. Our text says:

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” James 1:17.

Every good gift is from above. Do you believe that?

Ah friends, if we’re looking for gifts, we will look to God. My subject tonight is: God is not Santa Claus. He is not some jolly old man pouring out candy canes and sparkling trinkets. He’s a wonderful Father with a heart filled with love that longs to impart the richest gifts.

In Bunyan’s allegory, he pictures Christian in his journey from the city of Destruction to the Celestial City, coming to the house of the Interpreter, where he spent some time viewing various acted parables. Among them, he saw a man in a great cage. At the bottom of the cage was straw. This man had a rake, and he was raking around in that straw. Every now and then he would find something and hold it up with a grin on his face. It was some little trinket he had discovered. Bunyan says, “And all the while there stood One above his head holding out a golden crown.” But he never saw the crown because he was so busy raking through the straw hunting for little trinkets.

I repeat: God is not Santa Claus scattering toys and trinkets. He has rich gifts, infinite gifts, marvelous gifts. Every good gift is from above.

In this season of giving and receiving, I pray that whatever we may give to our dear ones and to the poor, whatever we may receive from loved ones, shall be included in this repertoire of gifts that come down from above, from the Father of lights.

There’s one of these gifts that I wish to study especially with you tonight. It’s mentioned in Philippians:

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake” Philippians 1:29.

This is talking about a gift. Do you like the package? Does it look attractive? Is it done up with Christmas paper and tinsel? What is it? What does it say that is given to us? Not only to believe but to what? To suffer.

Can suffering be a gift? Paul says it is. And someone who doesn't understand might say, “Well, Paul, it's all right for you to talk that way. You're an apostle, and people think a lot of you. After all, you've been a rich man and had a lot of education and standing. It's all very well for you to talk that way.”

Do you know where Paul was when he wrote this? He was in a jail in Rome. He was imprisoned for Christ's sake. To whom was he writing? What is the name of the book? Philippians. Did Paul have some interesting experiences at Philippi? Did he get beaten? Put in prison? The Christians to whom he was writing perhaps included that jailer that was converted and baptized that night that Paul, with Silas, spent in the prison. Yes, we cannot charge Paul with speaking mere theoretical ideas. He was talking from experience. He says that one of the wonderful gifts that God gives to those He loves is the gift of suffering.

I wonder how it rates on the list of our Father's gifts?

“Of all the gifts that heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor” *Ministry of Healing*, page 478.

You can begin to see that God is not Santa Claus. He is not some jolly old fellow passing out trinkets that glitter and candies that tickle the palate. He has precious gifts, beautiful gifts, delicious gifts. He has foods for us to enjoy. He has wonderful experiences in answered prayer, in miraculous healing. He has wonderful gifts of fellowship with Him in walking beside the still waters and sharing in the green pastures. Yes, beautiful gifts, lovely gifts, happy gifts. But

“...of all the gifts that heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor” *Ibid.*

Someone called me on the phone the other day and asked me what I would like for Christmas. I couldn't think of anything. God has been so good to me in so many ways. Of course, if God were to ask me what I wanted for Christmas, I could think of several things. But I wonder if we would ask Him for the suffering of Christ? It “...is the most weighty trust and the highest honor.”

Did you know the apostle Paul asked for that? He had such an understanding of God's will and way. In this same book of Philippians, the third chapter, beginning with the seventh verse, Paul tells in the preceding verses something of the things that he used to have—the positions, the advantages, that men count great. Then he says:

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death”
Philippians 3:7–10.

What did Paul long for? To know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, “being made conformable unto His death.” If we love someone enough, we want to be where they are, particularly if they're in pain of any kind. And Jesus, our blessed Lord, carries the weight and burden of the sin and sorrow of this old world. And how happy it makes Him when someone on this planet begins to understand and appreciate that and begins to long to share that burden with the Lord. This is the experience that Paul had, and he knew that this was the greatest gift that Jesus could share with him—the gift of fellowship with Him in His sufferings, this longing for souls, this desire to help others. I pray that every one of us may share, at least to some degree, in what the apostle longed for. What do you say?

We are not only to share in the sufferings of Christ by meditating upon His death for us, and the present burden that He carries. But as a part of His loving gifts to us, God Himself rebukes, disciplines, and corrects us, and this is a precious gift:

“For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” Hebrews 12:6.

This too, is not found on the Christmas tree from Santa Claus. No, this is a gift which we have to have anointed eyes to discern and appreciate—the gift of correction, the gift of rebuke, the gift of discipline. This is echoed in Revelation. Both Paul in Hebrews and the message in Revelation are echoing this same assurance as given in the Old Testament, both by David and Solomon in the Psalms and Proverbs. The message is one from Genesis to Revelation, that those whom God loves, He works with, corrects them, rebukes them, reproves them, disciplines them. Why? Because He loves them.

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” Revelation 3:19.

Does Jesus love me? Oh, yes. Oh, what a wonderful gift this gift of love is! But as many as He loves, He rebukes and chastens. Then if Christ *reproves* me, it's a precious gift showing that He *loves* me.

Have we learned to take it that way? Have we learned to take each experience of pain, disappointment, trial, correction, reproof, and rebuke as evidence that our Heavenly Father loves us?

If we have this image of the permissive jolly old Santa Claus as being the ideal, being the most wonderful thing in the world, we will be disappointed in God. God forbid that our children should get the idea that the sweeter the dessert, the greater is the evidence that Mother loves them; that the more money that's spent on useless trinkets, the greater the evidence that Daddy cares for them. Thank God, there are ways to reveal our love to our children in giving them gifts that are attractive, but worthwhile; that which can minister life to them instead of adding to the excitement and the pride and the display which are eating the vitals out of the Christian experience of multitudes of professed believers in Jesus today.

You and I have the great privilege and the great responsibility of so revealing this aspect of our Heavenly Father's love that our children shall understand that when we correct them, it's because we love them. Oh, if we have not learned to do that, let us seek God and study His instructions in the Bible and Adventist Home and Child Guidance in Education in Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, until we have learned how to be parents that reveal the Heavenly Father's love in correction and reproof as well as in appreciation—love that's expressed in giving discipline as well as in giving tangible presents that delight the eye and please the heart.

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me” Revelation 3:20.

You remember that wonderful walk to Emmaus that Christ took with the two disciples that afternoon after the resurrection. As He opened to them the Scriptures, although they did not recognize Him, their hearts burned with them. When they arrived at their little, humble home, what did they ask Him to do? Come in. The Scripture says that He acted as if He would have gone on, but they said, "Oh, abide with us. It is toward evening.”

So He went in. After the simple meal was prepared, He took His place at the head of the table and spread forth His hands in blessing, and they discerned the print of the nails. Thank God, the One that they had invited to come in, shared the blessing of His own presence, the revelation of His own love, with them! You remember that, immediately, they went back to Jerusalem to tell the good news to the other disciples.

The One who walked with them on the road to Emmaus is walking our roads. That One is waiting for our invitation to come in.

Someone was telling about an experience that happened over in Japan after World War II. The Americans were there, and someone decided to get up a Christmas party. They had quite a celebration. One of the little fellows seeing it, thought it must be a birthday party. He began to inquire whose birthday it was. Then he saw this fellow dressed up in red with white whiskers, and the little fellow found whose birthday it was; he was satisfied.

I wonder: will Christmas be to us a reminder of Santa Claus, or will it be, as the servant of God, the messenger to the remnant, said:

“Christmas day, precious reminder of the sacrifice made in man's behalf...” *Review and Herald*, December 11, 1879.

I submit to you that any effort to mix the two visions can only lead to disappointment. If we are thinking of Jesus, let's invite Him into every home, to every experience. Let's be sure that every gift we give is one of those good and perfect gifts which comes down from above. Let us be sure that among those gifts we receive is this special gift—the gift of Jesus Himself.

I want Jesus to come and give Himself to me now more than ever before. What do you say?

Yes, Jesus says He's standing at the door and knocking. If one of you hears Him calling and opens the door, He will come in. Thank God.

No, Jesus is not a Santa Claus stealing down the chimney! He's the *Savior*, standing at the door knocking. Let's open the door and let Him in. He will bring the true joy, the true happiness, to every hour of this season.

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W. D. Frazee Sermons
435 Lifestyle Lane, Wildwood, GA 30757
1-800-WDF-1840 / 706-820-9755
www.WDFsermons.org
support@WDFsermons.org