

The Gift that may never be opened

Every year in Britain, millions of pounds sit in unclaimed estates. The money is real. The legal right to it is real. Somewhere there is a rightful heir whose name is on the paperwork, who could walk in tomorrow and receive everything. Yet they carry on scraping by, utterly unaware, or worse, vaguely aware and never bothering to claim what is already theirs.

I fear that many people treat Jesus Christ exactly like that. They admire him from a safe distance. They bring him out at Christmas and Easter, sing about him, perhaps feel a warm glow towards him, and then leave the inheritance unclaimed for another year. So let me put to you the most searching question you may face all year: have you actually received the gift?

The gift is a Person

Scripture leaves us in no doubt that Christ is a gift. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Notice the order. God so loved that he gave. Love in heaven always turns into giving on earth. James tells us that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights" (James 1:17), and the greatest of all his gifts was not a principle, a programme or a philosophy. It was a Person. Paul, a man rarely lost for words, simply runs out of them: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

And the gift did not stop at Bethlehem. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Heaven's wealthiest became earth's poorest so that spiritual paupers like us might inherit everything. Paul presses the logic home: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). The greater gift guarantees every lesser one.

Free to you, costly to him

Here is the wonder of it: the gift cost God everything, and it costs you nothing. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Wages are earned; gifts are given. Isaiah heard the same invitation centuries earlier: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat... without money and without cost" (Isaiah 55:1). Grace is free to us precisely because it was infinitely costly to him.

Now for the challenge, and I make no apology for it. Many of us are still trying to pay for what has already been purchased. We strive, we perform, we keep religious accounts, quietly hoping our record will tip the scales. Hear Paul's severe mercy: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (Galatians 2:21). Every attempt to earn your salvation is a whispered accusation that Calvary was not enough. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith... it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Some of us need to stop negotiating with God this very day and simply surrender to being loved.

A gift offered is not a gift possessed

In 1830 a man named George Wilson was sentenced to hang for robbing the mail. President Andrew Jackson pardoned him, and Wilson did the unthinkable: he refused the pardon. The courts ruled that a pardon refused is no pardon at all, and he went to the gallows with his freedom lying

on the table. Astonishing? Yet men and women do the same with the pardon of God every single week.

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). Receiving Jesus is not passive. It is opening your hands, opening your heart, and saying yes, Lord. And be warned: familiarity is not faith. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21). You can sit under sound preaching for forty years, own three Bibles and still die with the gift unopened. "How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3). It is possible to perish politely, respectably, in the third pew from the front.

There is a word here for the church too. The risen Christ diagnosed a congregation that said, "I am rich... and do not need a thing," while he stood outside their own front door: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock" (Revelation 3:17, 20). It is possible to run the meetings, sing the songs and lock the Giver out of the building. Is he inside your life, or merely on the premises?

The gift keeps on giving

Jesus is not merely a ticket for later; he is life for today. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). When we receive the Son, the Father keeps on giving: the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), the peace of Christ that guards heart and mind (Philippians 4:7), and a purpose prepared in advance for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10). Paul counted everything he had ever achieved as loss, rubbish even, "compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). Can you honestly say the same, or is Christ one treasure among many on your shelf?

And God is not looking for admirers of the gift but carriers of it. "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors" (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador who keeps the King's message to himself has betrayed his commission. "Freely you have received; freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

Claim the inheritance

So I ask you plainly. If you have never received Christ, why not today? "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2), and tomorrow is promised to no one. If you are a believer living like a pauper with a fortune in the vault, come back to the Giver for fresh filling, fresh peace, fresh purpose. And before this week is out, name one person, in your street, your family, your workplace, and hand them the gift.

The paperwork is signed. The price is paid. Your name is on it. Claim your inheritance.

Questions

1. How can someone admire Jesus without ever truly receiving him? (**John 1:12**)
2. Where are you still trying to earn what Christ has already paid for? (**Ephesians 2:8-9**)
3. If God gave us his Son, what does that say about his generosity in everything else? (**Romans 8:32**)
4. What is the difference between religious familiarity and genuine faith? (**Matthew 7:21**)
5. Who could you hand the gift to this week? (**Matthew 10:8**)