

**Series: SPLITTING HISTORY - December 24, 2008**

**THE PERFECT GIFT!  
Luke 2**

1. How many of you think that this year you've gotten the *perfect* gifts for those you love? How many of you aren't sure—but they'd *better* like it anyway!!  
-Man, there's a *lot* of hype about that, isn't there? In my opinion, the marketing on getting the perfect gift has reached an all-time high—or and all-time low, depending on how you view it. By the way, guess what the ad we just watched is for? ***Jewelry!***
  - a. A gift is supposed to be an expression of love. When you love someone—you ask yourself, "What could I give that would let them know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I really *know* them?" That takes some *thought*, doesn't it? And sometimes sacrifice.
  - b. Sometimes gifts are symbolic. One year we gave my Mom a violin. She burst into tears when she opened it because it represented a dream she's always had to play the violin. One year my brother gave me profound symbolic gift—a key to his motorcycle. It didn't mean a *thing!* He never even let me *close* to his motorcycle!
2. Tonight—in fact, this whole season of Christmas, represents a gift. A gift from God to us—given because He really loves us—and *knows* what we need.

-We think about what to get someone for weeks—or maybe a few months. We *think* we know what they need and want—but it's mostly guess work. Especially for guys.  
-But God's different. He's watched us for *thousands* of years. He sees the entire arc of history—the coming and going of entire civilizations. We see history one thin microscopic slice at a time—like an MRI. In that thin slice of our own history we *think* we know exactly what we need and want. But God *knows!*

-So, what would this God who *knows* what we need give that first Christmas as the perfect Gift? It was his *Son*. Let me read the account.  
**In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:1-7 NLT)**

-Now. How many of you would've looked at the scene that night in the stable and thought to yourself, "Why, of *course!*"

This all makes **perfect** sense!" Who would ever think that God's gift to the world would be laying in a feeding trough covered with animal slobber and half digested hay? In the middle of a smelly barn?

-When you do a little more digging, you find that Jesus' name means **Savior**. The angel said to Joseph;

**Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:20-21 NLT)**

Today, most people don't think in terms of a **Savior**—so let me illustrate it:

- a. Last Monday, I went to deliver a gift to some close friends who live out a ways. Well, when I got to their driveway, it wasn't plowed. I thought, "I can do this!" When I got back to their house, they weren't home. When I tried to get **out** of their driveway—I was **stuck!** I tried every trick I knew—and couldn't move. I thought, "I'll call CAA." I forgot my cellphone. My only other option was to walk a half-mile down the road to a neighbors. As I was walking, a guy with a pick-up and a plow came driving down the road! And he, for that moment, was my **savior**, small 's'—and used his truck to get me out of my mess! So, I gave **him** the gift! Sometimes in life, we get stuck—and we need a **savior!**
  - b. Another story. When I was 13, I was with my Dad and brother in the woods about this time of year—and we got lost. What made it worse was that we were in a swamp—and soaked up past our knees. Well, my Dad had a compass—and we walked and walked—and finally came to a dead-end at this river. By then it was dark. My Dad took one step in to see if we could cross and went up to his chest in the water. We knew we were going to have to spend the night. We tried to start a fire—but couldn't because it was so wet. It went down to -10 that night. I wanted **so** badly to go to sleep—but Dad won't let me. He made us walk. We put our coats around each other, prayed, told stories, dreamed of home and hot spaghetti dinners. And after many hours, at least 72, morning **finally** arrived. My Dad **saved** our lives that night. He was our savior.
3. Down through history—and particularly in our own culture—I sense that there aren't too many people impressed with God's gift-- this tiny baby wrapped up and lovingly placed in the only makeshift spot available—a manger. Why? Well, the Bible describes it as a **sin** problem—not little misdemeanors and transgressions. Sin is **the** problem that has screwed up our lives and screwed up the planet.

-And it's not just a problem **out there** some where in some philosophical realm. It's an interior problem—a life or death thing. Jesus said it like this:

**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 NLT)**

Let's see if we've gotten it right. There is a God who created everything. He can give anything He wants—because His resources are unlimited. And as an expression of

the depths of his love—He gives us what, from His perspective, we need most. His Only Son. A Savior.

- a. Through Jesus, God stepped right onto this planet to engage in life; to make it clear who God is; and to re-establish the relationship with this God that had been broken by our sin.

-See, God doesn't just do cosmetic surgery and surface-rearrangement. He goes after the root cause.

And in all the sadness and messiness in our relational worlds—in every betrayal, theft, regret, addiction—the bottom line problem is not “life”—it's sin.

-And **that's** why God's conclusion in watching human history for thousands and thousands of years, looking at human hearts, seeing what goes on in homes, in the back alleys, in corporate planning sessions—and on battlefields concluded, “They need a **Savior!** I **love** them—so I'll send my Son

-God's gift of His Son permanently obligated Him to those who would receive His Son as His gift—their Savior. It wouldn't be just a one time thing where He would nuke their sins, then leave the scene and let us do our own thing, keep his rules, and get ourselves through life. Through Jesus God gave **Himself** to us! For this life—and forever. He would bring peace—by pouring peace into our hearts. He would bring satisfaction—not by giving us everything we want, but by giving us the gift of contentment. He would satisfy our longing for friends by being our Friend—and by making us into loving people.

- b. But the cost was extreme. It didn't just involved God sending his Son to be born and laid in a filthy manger; His Son would die the most painful death imaginable a little over 30 years later. On a cross.

-Anyone here ever given a gift you regret giving? We got one of our sons a drumset. But we didn't learn—we gave another son an electric guitar and an amp big enough to make you bleed from the ears.

Sometimes when the whole house is shaking and losing pieces of brick and pictures are bouncing on the walls...we think, **Hmmm!** But the Bible says that it **delighted** God to give His Son, the perfect Gift—to us! That's what true givers are like, you know—they give—with no regrets. No regrets!

4. Of course, the catch in all of this—the thing that has troubled every human ever since is this whole thing called **sin!** People think, “Yeah, I could use someone to save me from my bad days, from debt, from getting stuck in snow drifts, and from auto accidents—but **sin?**”

-The Israelites were expecting a Messiah to come and nuke the Romans and save them from **other** people's sins—but from **their** sins? **I don't think so!** And one old guy, named Simeon—a prophet—could see that coming. He knew that the birth of this baby, Jesus, was the most phenomenal thing to hit the planet—and, when Joseph and

Mary brought Jesus to the temple, he told them that. Then he took Mary aside and gave her some information I'm not sure she wanted to hear:

**“This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.” (Luke 2:34-35 NLT)**

- a. Jesus grew up, see—and made it clear that the biggest problem on the planet was not political or financial or medical. It was a **sin** problem. And all of us are infected—and have, in turn, infected others. It goes **way** deeper than our actions—it affects our motives.

It affects every single relationship in our lives. We humans would like to think that it's **really** not that bad; that a little self-help and behavioral modification ought to do the trick.

-The most offensive thing Jesus grew up to say is that every single person needs Him. This name, **Savior**—a Savior from **sin** ultimately led to Jesus rejection and crucifixion. God simply used this tragedy as a sacrifice to pay for sin and make it possible for **our** history to be split into two big pieces; **before** Jesus—and **after** Jesus.

- b. In our world, people **still** take **great** offense at the idea that our predicament was so severe that God had to take drastic action and show His Grace—send His Son so our sin wouldn't kill us and everything we love and care about. People typically don't mind being saved from their problems and from their neighbors and from heart disease and the heartbreak of psoriasis—but from their **sin**? Uh-uh!

-Because, see, to be saved from your sin means having the contents of your heart revealed. It means change—and we either don't want to change—or don't think we can. We **fight** personal change—even when what we're doing is **so** not working.

-The other night Lori and I watched a TV show called, **Intervention**—a documentary on how addiction wrecks the life of the addict—and all the people close to them. This one was about an alcoholic Mom—with five children ranging from about 7 to 20. Her alcohol had wrecked her marriage, her kid's lives.

To the point where she hated her own life and wanted to die. Yet, when she was offered rehab and confronted with the need to change, she was belligerent. “This is all BS! I'm not going to rehab.” And yet she was **dying**—and her life was awful!

5. That leaves two options. First, keep Jesus small. In some ways, Christmas can be the perfect season for people who don't want to change. Know why? Because in the Christmas story—Jesus is still a baby—needs protected, changed, fed, carried.

-And Jesus was a real live baby. He was cute. He cried, needed nursed, changed and protected. And if we just keep him small—as this tiny baby in a manger—we don't have to deal with what He grew up to teach and do. Jesus in a manger is **way** less intimidating than Jesus on a cross—dying for my sin. And yours.

- a. See, the truth about the **Savior** issue is that we do choose a savior of some kind, little 's.' For a lot of people—money is their **savior**, little 's'. They think it can solve their problems and give them what they need and want. But an economy like ours tells us that money can do a lot—but you may have to rescue your money!
- b. Sometimes people look to others to save them. You hear a lot of this at Christmas. **All I want for Christmas is you—Ba-a-by!** Friends are very important. Love is very important—and an incredible gift. But it can't ultimately save you. You need to make sure, if you're going to choose a **Savior**, that it/he can actually **do** that. Save you!

-Remember the guy in the pick-up truck with the plow that pulled me out? Guess what happened next?

**He** got stuck! I drove out to the road, and then I had to come back and help **him** get unstuck! Anything you choose here in this life to save you, get your out of messes, will ultimately disappoint you—guaranteed!

- c. Remember the story I told about my Dad saving our lives when we were out in the woods? Well, my Dad was an amazing man—but he was in the same predicament we were. We survived till morning—but we **still** had to get across the river. We walked down the shore a ways—and a tree had fallen across the river. **That** was how we got across!

-We humans are very bright—and creative! We can follow great people we deeply admire through the messes. But when we make it through the obstacle-course called life at twilight—there's this final river to cross called death. Jesus is the only way across.

6. I have this suspicion—want to know what it is? It's that **most** people, if we look deeply enough inside, and deeply enough at our world—**understand** our need for what Jesus came to do—as **Savior**. We look at the immense problems of our world and **know** there's not a politician clever enough to solve them—that education and money and publicity alone isn't going to dissolve centuries of hatred and selfishness and pride. -In our hearts we **know** the power of unforgiveness in our own hearts. We've **all** been ashamed of how our tempers and mouths and selfishness have torn down what we've tried to build. We know what shame feels like.

We would **love** to feel forgiven and free—and the power of God transforming us from the inside out. Power to **change!** And we long—we **long** for the peace promised by the angels that Christmas night. **Bu-u-ut...!** We think, "What if I try and it doesn't work? What if Jesus was just a normal guy and can't save **anyone?**" I don't know what the hold up is for you.

-Every year at Christmas—I think of the reason **why** Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger. **No room.** The only explanation given. No room at the inn. And I wonder why? Why was there no room—for, at the very least, a young pregnant mother in labor? Maybe it's for the same reason's Jesus has knocked on this door—my heart—and there's been room for **every thing else**—even the stupid things. But not for Him.

-And every year at Christmas—Jesus, as Savior, once again knocks on this locked, bolted doors of human hearts. He offers life and hope and peace and transformation. He is God's perfect gift. But, see, the door opens only from the inside. He would be your Savior, walk with you all your days—if you'd simply open your heart to Him.