

# Gifts, Bribes and Guilt-Offerings

by Anton Bosch

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*Anton Bosch's sermon emphasizes the importance of giving oneself rather than material gifts during Christmas, challenging the commercialization and misunderstandings surrounding the holiday.*

**Duration:** 25:52

**Scripture:** Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 2:1-12, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 8:2, 2 Corinthians 8:5, Ephesians 2:8-9

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of giving and emphasizes the importance of giving oneself to the Lord. He praises the Macedonians for their abundant giving, stating that they gave beyond their ability because they first gave themselves to the Lord. The speaker cautions against the idea that giving money is enough, highlighting that God desires our wholehearted devotion and obedience. He also encourages a shift in focus during the holiday season, urging listeners to prioritize peace and being at peace with God and others, rather than getting caught up in the busyness and consumerism of the season.

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## Transcript

Turn with me please to the book of Matthew chapter 2, and I'm going to read again part of what we read in the reading this morning, Matthew chapter 2 and verses 1 through 12. Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 through 12. Matthew chapter 2 verse 1, Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who was born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him.

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and the scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. And so they said to him in Bethlehem of Judea, For thus is written by the prophet, But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them that what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search carefully for the young child, and when you have found him, bring back word to me that I may come and worship him also. When they heard the king, they departed.

And behold, the star which they had seen in the east went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him.

And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to him, gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. We have here the account of the wise men, and remember they were not three kings, but the wise men, and they were not three, giving their gifts to Jesus.

There are obviously, as we've said before, I think there are many misunderstandings about this little part of the story. First of all, they were not three. Secondly, they were not kings.

And thirdly, they did not bring the gifts to Jesus in the manger. The scripture here is very specific, that they brought it to Him in the house. And so this was some time after the gifts, after Jesus had been born.

We're not sure how long after, it could be several weeks, several months, or maybe even a few years. And so Jesus had already been moved from the manger, from the store, to a house. And so there's just a lot of misunderstanding about that.

But what I want to focus on this morning is just the fact that they brought gifts to Jesus. And we have a custom around this time of the year to give gifts around Christmas time, Christmas gifts. I don't know where I have to stand to... Is that better? It seems that, sorry, when we move that side, there's a problem with the PA system, so I'll stand here.

And so the tradition of giving gifts goes back a long time, but it doesn't actually go back long enough. Christmas is not traditionally a Christian celebration. Christmas is based on the Roman or pagan festival of Saturnalia, which celebrates essentially the equinox.

And you may have seen on the news, some people went up to the observatory at Griffith Park and saw the setting of the sun at the equinox. And so it is connected with that. And so in about 350 after Jesus, the church incorporated, and when I mean the church, the Roman church incorporated this worship of the sun, really, into the church.

And they made it Christmas, and it became a Christian festival. And initially there were no giving of gifts in the church. Part of the pagan festival of Saturnalia was the giving of gifts.

And then when it was Christianized, and remember that the church took many pagan things and made them Christian. And when they Christianized Saturnalia, the church initially frowned on the giving of gifts. And so the giving of gifts was a pagan thing.

It was not in the church initially. And then later on the church relented, and this is very common, very typical, of when worldly ideas are brought into the church, the world and its systems prevail upon the church, and in time the church then relents and accepts these pagan ideas. And so the idea of giving gifts was brought into the church, and it was sanctified by this particular passage, by the fact that gifts were brought to the baby Jesus, and also by the fact or by the idea that we're celebrating God's gift to us, that God gave for us and gave to us His Son, the Lord Jesus.

Now when we find ourselves today, and I'm not saying that we should not celebrate Christmas or that we should not celebrate the giving of gifts, but I want for us today to have another look at this thing of giving gifts. And I wrote in the bulletin, and as you know I don't always preach the same thing as we write in the bulletin, but I did write an article on this subject today. But we know that one of the problems today is that we have this massive commercialization of Christmas.

It is really a money making time, a time when the world hoped to make their profits. And we know that from Thanksgiving, the day after, the Friday after Thanksgiving, Black Friday to Christmas Day is the time when the businesses really make their money. And so there's a tremendous amount of pressure from the world and from its systems upon Christians to be running around buying gifts.

And there's a lot of pressure from children on parents to give gifts and pressure on us, on one another to make sure that we give gifts. And so it becomes a hectic time. And you know, I just thought about that and I thought about the fact that the angels, one of the things that the angels said was, peace on earth, peace on earth.

And you know, Christmas is of all the times of the year, the least peaceful time. If we are celebrating the birth of Jesus, then it should be a time of peace. Now, there's no command in the scripture, remember, for us to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

But if we want to do so, I don't have a big problem with that. But I do have a problem with the way in which we do it. And so if we're going to celebrate Christmas, it needs to be a time of peace.

It needs to be not a time of being frantic and trying to rush from one place to the other, trying to beat the traffic, trying to beat the sales, trying to do this and... And folks just getting themselves in a terrible state about buying the gifts and making all the food and making all the preparations and doing all the stuff that they have to do. It should be a time of peace. It should be a time when we're at peace within ourselves.

It should be a time when we're at peace with one another. It should be a time when we're at peace with God. But instead what we find is that the spirit of the world comes upon Christians and they get up at 2 o'clock in the morning to make the sales.

And they stay in the stores until 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock. In fact, I heard Mervyn's, I think, stayed open until 2 o'clock the other night. And Christians are rushing to and fro, trying just to do all this stuff.

And we've lost the sense of what it is all about. Now, when we speak about the gifts, and in the article you'll see I use the heading gifts, bribes or guilt offerings. Are they really gifts? Or are they bribes and guilt offerings? You see, one of the reasons people give gifts is in order to bribe someone else.

In fact, one of the oldest references to gifts in the book of Proverbs, it says that a man's gift will make a room for him and bring him even before kings. Speaking about a bribe. One of the oldest uses of a gift, and there are legitimate uses of a gift, but one of the oldest uses of a gift is a bribe.

And there are many places in the third world that you can't go anywhere or do anything unless you pay the appropriate bribe, unless you give the appropriate gift. And when we speak about a bribe, it is in order to buy something from someone. That's the purpose of a bribe.

When we give a gift, but there is a hook in that gift. We want something in return. And you know, many times when we give gifts to one another, it is a bribe.

It is a bribe because we want the love and the affection of that individual. Now let me ask you, is that kind of love worth having? If you have to buy it with a gift, is that love worth having? But more often, the gift is a guilt offering. And parents do this very well.

Because they have not given themselves to their children. Because they have not given their children time. Because they have not given their children discipline.

Because they have not provided for their children a good loving home. They feel the need to make up by giving gifts. Now again, let me emphasize, I'm not against giving gifts.

But what we need to do is we need to be giving the right things to begin with. And if we're not giving love, if we're not giving ourselves, if we're not giving our time, if we're not giving all the other things that are important, then your gift is really just a guilt offering. It's really hypocritical.

Because with a gift we're saying, I love you. I love you \$29.99, but I don't love you with my whole life. Because I'll buy you the gift, but I won't give you my time.

I'll buy you the present, but I won't give you myself. And you know, we do the same thing with God. And while it's good and right that we bring God our offerings, remember even in the Old Testament King Saul discovered that God says that He wants obedience rather than sacrifice.

And many times the gifts that we bring to God are simply a guilt offering because we have not been obedient to Him. Because we have not given Him what He really needs and really requires of us. And so we put some money on the plate.

When I was growing up missionaries used to come by every so often to the church. And they would tell the stories and show the pictures of their work out in the mission field. And one of the favorite things they used to say is, You can't all go, but you can give me the money to go.

Now there's some truth in that, but there's a lot of error in that. Because God is not asking you for your money first of all. He's asking you for yourself firstly.

And so we develop a culture of saying well, you know, you can buy yourself from God. You can just give God a certain percentage and then you don't have to do anything else. You don't have to be obedient, you don't have to serve Him, you don't have to give yourself to Him.

But you know when we look at God, He gives us many gifts. He gives us salvation, forgiveness, grace, His Spirit, the church, the Bible, the ministries. He gives us so many gifts.

But you know, all of that began with one thing first of all. He gave Himself. He first gave Himself.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Jesus gave His life, His blood, His body. He gave Himself.

And now having given Himself, on top of that He gives us the additional gifts. And it all began when He gave Himself. Notice He did not give of Himself, but He gave Himself.

And our relationship with Him should be the same. When we give to God, it should not begin with the gifts, it should begin with myself. When we give to one another, it should not begin with the gifts, but it should begin with ourselves.

I wrote in the Bulletin article, what do I really want for Christmas? And folks, this is real. The greatest gift that you could give me for Christmas is if just five people who've been shortchanging God this last year. And you know what's interesting, a year ago we made a commitment, when the MeFo made a commitment, a piece of paper, that they were going to give God more this year, in terms of their time, their energy, their praise for the Church.

I wonder how many people actually did that. But you know, I know that many people are not giving themselves to God. The greatest gift that anyone could give me is if just five people out of this Church began this year to give themselves unreservedly, 100% to God.

I'm not asking you to give up your job, or to give up your family, or to give up anything. I'm asking you just to give yourself to God, and say, Lord, here am I. Remember Isaiah, here am I. Now, in the book of Corinthians, I want to go to one scripture, as I draw to a close, 2 Corinthians chapter 8. 2 Corinthians chapter 8. And I want you to see that this is in fact a very biblical concept that I'm speaking about. And in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, Paul is speaking about giving.

In verse 2, it speaks that in great trial of affliction, he's speaking about the churches in Macedonia. So he's writing to the Corinthians, and he's speaking about the church of Macedonia, which is not very far away. And verse 2 says that in great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

Now, those are a lot of fancy words. He's basically saying these people were very poor, and out of their poverty they gave abundantly. Verse 3, for I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing.

But now look at verse 5. But not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord. They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. Paul is saying, he's saying I'm really glad about these Macedonians.

He says because they have been very good stewards. They have given abundantly. But he says I'm more glad about the money that they gave.

I'm more glad about the fact that they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then they gave themselves to us. Now folks, maybe you still haven't bought that Christmas present yet. The greatest gift that you can bring to God is yourself.

The greatest gift that you can give your family is yourself. You cannot replace that with a thing that runs on batteries. You cannot replace yourself with bling bling.

There is no substitute for you. And whatever you give needs to be an expression of the fact that you have given yourself first. God gave himself.

The scripture speaks about the indescribable gift. Over and over in the New Testament it speaks about the fact that Jesus gave himself. It speaks in Ephesians chapter 6. The church that he loved and he gave himself for it.

And I really want you to think about this today. We have another two days to go to Christmas. If you can't afford to buy a gift.

Folks, if you have to go out and buy a gift on credit, don't buy that gift. There are Christians who are still paying off the gift that they bought last year. I would rather you go to your family and say, I'm sorry, we don't have the money, but you know what? I'll give you a greater gift.

I'll give you myself this next year. I will give you more of my time. I will give you my undivided attention.

I will give you my love. I will give you my devotion. I will give you the discipline and the structure and the order in the house that you need.

I'll give you myself. And folks, that is the greatest gift you can give anyone. That is the greatest gift you can give me.

That's the greatest gift you can give your family and your loved ones. The thing that runs on batteries, it's going to die. The batteries are going to run out.

But as we give ourselves, that is a gift that will endure to eternity. It will bear fruit in your loved ones and in your family and in your relationships. Not for one year or two years or three years, but until Jesus comes.

They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us. Amen. Pastor Lopez.

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