

Christ, Gods Best Gift to Man.

by Edward Payson

The sermon highlights Jesus Christ as God's greatest and unspeakable gift to humanity, calling for heartfelt gratitude and praise.

Scripture: John 3:16, Romans 5:8, 2 Corinthians 9:15, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Gratitude", "The Gift of Christ"

Description

Edward Payson emphasizes the profound significance of Jesus Christ as God's greatest gift to humanity, urging believers to reflect on their gratitude towards this unspeakable gift. He contrasts the indifference of modern Christians with the fervent appreciation of early believers, highlighting that even in dire circumstances, one should find reasons to thank God for Christ. Payson argues that Christ's worth is immeasurable and that His gift is freely given, without any obligation on God's part, making it a true expression of divine love. He calls for a heartfelt response of gratitude, reminding the congregation that acknowledging this gift is essential for spiritual fulfillment and joy. Ultimately, he encourages all to embrace and celebrate the gift of Christ, leading to a life of continuous thanksgiving.

Transcript

"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift"

2 Corinthians 9:15

there is nothing which would more powerfully tend to convince us how little we resemble the primitive Christians, than a comparison of our views and feelings respecting the gospel of Christ, with those which they express in their writings. While we naturally discover in it nothing wonderful or excellent, listen to it with indifference, treat it with neglect, and perhaps consider it as little better than foolishness; they can scarcely mention or allude to it without feeling the strongest emotions, and breaking forth into the most rapturous expressions of gratitude, admiration, wonder and love.

They style it the glorious gospel of the blessed God, speak of it as the most wonderful of all his wondrous works, and represent it as containing things unutterable and unsearchable, things into which even angels desire to look. An example of the glowing and energetic language which they were accustomed to employ in speaking of the subject, we have in our text; in which the apostle, reflecting on the goodness of God in giving his Son to die for us, exclaims in the fullness of his heart, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!

My friends, in obedience to long established custom, and to the voice of our civil rulers, we have this day assembled to give thanks to God. Perhaps some are ready to say, For what shall we thank him? Our fathers, who established this custom, had reason to praise him, for they were favored with peace and prosperity. We too had formerly reason to praise him, for we once enjoyed the same blessings. But those days are past. Peace and prosperity are gone. We are involved in a war, of which we cannot foresee the termination.

Our country is torn in pieces by political dissensions, and contending parties seem almost prepared to imbrue their hands in each other's blood. Our private sufferings and embarrassments are also great. Our commerce is destroyed, our business interrupted, our property, acquired in better days, taken from us; our families look to us for bread, which we shall soon be unable to give them; the prospect before us is dark and cheerless, and we fear that these days are but the beginning of sorrows.

For what, then, should we thank God, or how attune our voices to joy and praise? I answer, were our situation more deplorable than it really is, were we stripped of every earthly blessing, we should still have cause for joy and thankfulness; still have reason to praise God. We ought to rejoice that the Lord reigns, and we ought to praise him that we are not treated as we deserve, that we are not in the mansions of despair, that we are yet prisoners of hope. Above all, we ought to praise him for the unspeakable gift of his Son, and we shall do it if we possess the smallest portion of the apostle's temper.

His situation was, in a temporal view, incomparably worse than that of any person in this assembly. Speaking of himself and his fellow disciples, he says, Even to the present hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and buffeted, and reviled and persecuted. We are made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things, unto this day. Yet in this distressed, oppressed condition, destitute of all the good things of life, and liable every day to lose life itself, he could still cry, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

Nay, more; while he lay in the gloomy dungeon of Philippi, his body torn with scourges, and his feet fast in the stocks, we find him still thanking God for the gospel of his Son, and causing his prison, even at midnight, to resound with his songs of joy and praise. And can we then, with justice, pretend that we have no reason to be thankful? Ought not we, as well as the apostle, to bless God for the gospel of Christ? Is it not to us, as it was to him, the gospel of salvation?

Let us then banish from our minds every ungrateful feeling, every murmuring thought, and unitedly cry with the apostle, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. That you may be induced to do this, I shall attempt to show, That Jesus Christ is the Gift of God to men: a Gift which may be justly called unspeakable: a Gift for which we should thank him with the most lively gratitude. I. Jesus Christ is the Gift of God to men. It can scarcely be necessary to remind you that a gift, or present, is something valuable freely offered to persons who have no claim to it, without receiving anything in return, and without any expectation that it will be restored.

It must be something valuable; for a thing of no value cannot properly be considered as a gift. It must be offered freely, or voluntarily; for if we are obliged to offer it, it is merely the discharge of all obligation. It must be offered to persons who have no claim to it; for to those who can justly deserve it, it is not a gift, but only their due. If they claim it as a recompense for some injury which we have done them, it is restitution. If they claim it in return for services which they have performed, or favors which they have bestowed, it is a debt.

It must be offered without expecting anything in return; for if we expect something equally valuable in return, it is an exchange; if we expect some lawful service to be performed, it is wages; if we expect anything unlawful, it is a bribe. Finally, it must be offered without any expectation that it will be restored to us; for otherwise it is a loan, and not a gift. Now a moment's reflection will convince us that, in all these respects, Jesus Christ is, strictly speaking, a gift of God to man.

Christ is something valuable; for, as we shall soon attempt to show, his worth is unspeakable. He is offered to us freely, or voluntarily; for God was under no kind of obligation to make us such an offer. He is offered to persons who have no claim to such a favor, for we can justly claim nothing at the hand of God but destruction. We cannot claim the offer of Christ as a recompense for injuries received from God, for he has never injured us, but has done us good and not evil all the days of our lives.

Neither can we claim it in return for services performed, or favors bestowed--for we have never done any thing for God, or bestowed the smallest favor upon him. On the contrary, we have done him all the injury in our power. Nor does God offer his Son with the expectation of receiving any thing in return, for we and all that we possess are already his; and if we were not, we could give him nothing; for even if we are righteous, what do we give him, or what receiveth he at our hands?

When we have done all in our power, we are but unprofitable servants, and have done no more than it was our duty to do. Nor, finally, does God offer us his Son with any intention of resuming the gift; for, says the apostle, the gifts of God are without repentance, that is, irrevocable; he offers us his Son to be ours forever. Jesus Christ is, therefore, in the most strict and proper sense of the term, the gift, the free, unmerited gift of God to men. I am not ignorant, however, that some deny this.

I am aware that it is thought and urged by some, that God was under obligations to provide a Saviour for mankind, and that it would have been cruel and unjust for him to create beings who he knew would fall, had he not previously intended to give his Son for their redemption, or to open a way for their restoration, by some other means. These persons then pretend, that the law of God, which requires perfect obedience, on pain of death, is much too strict and severe, for such weak, fallen creatures, as we are; that it is unreasonable and unjust to require perfection of us, or to punish us for falling short of it; and that God, finding he had enacted a law too severe, was obliged to send his Son to bear its curse, deliver us from its authority, and introduce a milder law, which should allow us to sin a little, provided we would not sin much.

It is true, indeed, that few are to be found, who dare openly and directly avow such sentiments; but, they are the sentiments of every unrenewed heart; all men naturally consider the gospel as a kind of remedy for the too great severity of the law; and Hence it is, in their view, little better than foolishness. And if this view of the gospel were correct, it would indeed be foolishness in the extreme; and God would no longer deserve our admiration, reverence, gratitude, or love.

It would then appear that God was the offending, and we the injured party; that Christ died, not to make satisfaction for our transgression against God, but for God's too great severity to us; that he is offered to us not as a free, unmerited gift, but as a recompense for the injuries we have received from our Maker, in his suffering us to fall, and threatening to punish us for our sins. Farewell, then, all the glory and grace of the gospel. Farewell, all ascriptions of praise to God, for his goodness, mercy and love.

The wondrous plan of redeeming love, the unspeakable gift of God's eternal Son, dwindles down to the mere payment of a debt, a satisfaction for injury. But is this indeed the glorious gospel of the blessed God? Is this that mystery, into which angels desire to look; is this the wonderful scheme which filled the

breasts of the apostles with admiration, love and gratitude; and in which they professed to discover such heights and depths, such unutterable and unsearchable things?

No, my friends, this is not the gospel; these are not the good tidings of great joy which angels delighted to bring from heaven. God's offer of his Son to guilty men is not the payment of a debt, or a recompense for injuries done them. No, it is a gift, a free, unmerited gift, an unspeakable gift, the worth of which we can neither describe nor conceive. God was under no obligation to provide a Saviour for our ruined race. He provided none for the fallen angels, nor was he any more obliged to provide one for us.

With the most perfect justice, and without the smallest impeachment of his goodness, he might have left us all to perish; and peopled the earth and filled heaven, with a new and holy race of beings. Agreeably, the Scriptures every where represent the plan of salvation as entirely of grace, free, sovereign, wondrous grace, from its commencement to its termination. They tell us, that Jesus Christ is the gift of God; that he freely delivered him up for us all; that when we were his enemies Christ died for us; and that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish.

Here is nothing said of the payment of a debt, or of recompense for injury. Nor do the blessed spirits of the just made perfect in heaven, view their salvation as flowing from anything but the most astonishing love and grace. Not unto us, they cry, not unto us, but to thy name give glory. Blessing and glory and honor and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever. If, therefore, the apostles on earth or saints in heaven, or the Holy Spirit himself, knew anything of the plan of salvation, Jesus Christ is in every respect the free gift of God to man.

And why was such a gift necessary? Because we are children of ignorance, and needed a Divine teacher; because we are children of disobedience, and need a Divine sanctifier; because we are children of wrath, and need a Divine redeemer, to make an atonement for our sins. We have insisted the longer on this part of our subject, because until we are fully convinced that Christ is such a gift, we cannot prize the gospel as we ought, nor truly thank God for this or any other blessing.

II. I proceed to show, that this gift may be justly styled unspeakable. With this view we observe, 1. That the love which led God to bestow such a gift upon us, must have been unspeakably great. This our Saviour, when speaking of it, plainly intimates. Though he spoke as never man spake, yet even he could not describe it except by its effects. God, says he, so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

He does not say, God loved the world fervently, greatly, immeasurably; for none of these expressions were sufficient to show the extent of his love. Nor does he say, God so loved the world that he preserves, supports, and fills it with his blessings; for these proofs of his goodness, though great, are comparatively nothing. But he says, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son; thus intimating that his love could not be described, and leaving us to judge of its greatness by its effects.

And, judging by this rule, how great must his love have been! Say, ye who are parents, how must you love a person, before you could freely consent, for his sake, to give up an only son; to a cruel and ignominious death? But as high as the heavens are above the earth, as far as God excels his creatures, so far does his love for his Son surpass that which the most affectionate parent feels for his offspring. We are told that God is love, and we find that he can even love his enemies, so as to load them with favors; for he causes his sun to shine, and his showers to descend on the evil and unthankful.

If then he can thus love his enemies, how infinitely must he love his innocent, holy, only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of his Father, and always does those things that please him! And how must he love the world, since, for its redemption, he gave up this beloved Son to such agonies as Christ endured. But in vain do we attempt to give you any idea of this love. We sink under the weight of our subject. We cannot describe what is indescribable. We can only say, with the apostle, What manner of love is this?

Well may it be called an unspeakable love! 2. The gift of Jesus Christ may be justly called unspeakable, because his worth and excellence are unspeakably great. He is the pearl of great, of inestimable price. He is not only precious, but preciousness itself. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom, and knowledge, and grace; so that as the apostle informs us, his riches are unsearchable! Nay more, in him dwells all fullness, even all the fullness of the Godhead. In giving us Christ, therefore, God has given us himself and all that he possesses; and hence, those who receive this gift, are said to be filled with the fullness of God.

Had God given us a thousand angels to guard and attend us, or ten thousand worlds for our portion, it would have been comparatively nothing. It would have been nothing for him to give, for he could have created them with a single word. It would have been nothing for us to receive; for what are worlds, or angels, in comparison with the Creator of all worlds, and the Lord of angels. Nor is this all. In giving us Christ, God gave us all the other blessings which we enjoy. We are told, that every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.

We are also taught, that all these gifts come in and through Christ; so that he may be justly called, not only a gift, but the gift of God, that is, the gift which includes all others. If the earth is full of the riches of God's goodness, if its inhabitants are preserved, fed, and clothed; if God gives them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with peace and gladness, if they derive any pleasure from children, friends and social intercourse, if they are permitted to hope for still greater blessings beyond the grave, --in a word, if any happiness is or has been enjoyed on earth, more than in hell, it was all given by God, when he gave us Christ to be the Saviour of the world.

In this sense it is, that Christ is said to be the Saviour of all men, including those who do not believe. He pleads for them as the dresser of the vineyard did for the barren fig tree, that it might not be immediately cut down as a cumberer of the ground. Thus he saves them from instantly suffering the agonies of death and the pains of hell. He saves them from many of the present effects and consequences of sin; he gives them to enjoy the day and means of grace, keeps back the curse which is every moment ready to blast them, and loads them with innumerable temporal and spiritual favors.

Since then Christ is inestimably precious in himself, and since in him are included all the other gifts which God has ever bestowed on our race, he may be justly called an unspeakable gift. 3. Unspeakable as is the intrinsic value of Christ, he is, if possible, still more unspeakably valuable to us. You need not be told, that the value of a gift to the person who receives it, depends much on his circumstances. A sum of money may be a valuable present to any one; but to a man on the point of being dragged to prison for debt, it is much more so.

Medicine, or food may be valuable in itself; but when given to a man ready to perish with sickness or hunger, its value is very greatly increased. So Christ is unspeakably precious in himself, and had God given him to the angels as their portion, it would have justly been called an unspeakable gift. But how unspeakably more valuable is such a gift to us, who were on the point of perishing forever. Would you know the worth of the gift to creatures in our situation? Go and contemplate the fallen angels in the

mansions of despair.

See them enveloped in the blackness of darkness, bound in eternal chains, reserved unto the judgment of the great day, and expecting nothing but an eternity of unutterable, and constantly increasing wretchedness, beyond it. Would the gift of an almighty Saviour, to redeem them from this situation, be to them unspeakably precious? If so, Christ is an unspeakably precious gift to us; for what they are suffering was our just doom, a doom which would have been inevitable, were it not for the gift of Christ.

A wretched and hopeless life, a still more wretched and despairing death, and an inconceivably more wretched eternity, were all that we could expect; for, being children of disobedience, we were children of wrath; the fire prepared for the devil and his angels burnt to devour us; the broken law of God had pronounced the sentence of our everlasting condemnation, and nothing but the gift of such a Saviour as Christ, could have prevented our suffering it; for the word of truth declares, that he who believeth not the Son of God is condemned already; that he shall never see life, and that the wrath of God abideth on him.

But from this curse Christ has redeemed those who receive God's offered gift, by being made a curse for them, and they are delivered from wrath through him. Well then may the gift of such a Saviour to creatures in our situation, be called an unspeakable gift. Lastly, the gift of Christ may be justly called an unspeakable gift, on account of the spiritual blessings which are enjoyed by those who receive him. We have already observed, that even those who reject him are favored for his sake, with many temporal mercies; but these are nothing compared with spiritual and eternal blessings which he imparts to those who thankfully accept the unspeakable gift of God.

He gives them the pardon of all their sins, and accepts them as if they had never sinned. He brings them out of darkness and ignorance into his marvelous light, and imparts to them that knowledge of God and himself which is eternal life. He instamps the holy image of God on their souls, and makes them partakers of a divine nature. He delivers them from sin and guilt, from fear and anxiety, and thus prepares them to enjoy peace of conscience, and favor with God. He withholds from them no good thing, and causes all things, without exception, to work together for their good.

He gives them exceeding great and precious promises, and provides for them strong consolation, to support them under the evils of life. He suffers them to fear no evil, in their last hours, and enables them to sing the song of victory over death and the grave. He receives and welcomes their departing spirits in the eternal world, raises their bodies incorruptible, glorious and immortal; acquits, acknowledges and rewards them, at the judgment day, and presents them, perfect in knowledge, in holiness and happiness, before the throne of his Father, with whom they shall live and reign forever and ever.

In one word, he makes them heirs of God, and consequently heirs of all things; exerts to the utmost all the infinite perfections of the Godhead, to perfect, perpetuate and increase their happiness. And, my friends, what could he do more? What could any being do more? What can creatures desire more? Should they employ their minds, through eternity, they would be unable to wish for, or conceive of any thing which the gift of Christ does not include. Who then can deny that it may be justly called an unspeakable gift; since it raises those who accept it from the lowest depth of wretchedness to which a creature can sink, to the highest pitch of glory and felicity which creatures can reach?

III. This is a gift for which we ought to thank God with the most lively gratitude. But, my friends, is it necessary to prove this? Is it not already evident? The principal circumstances which render a gift deserving of thankfulness, are the motives which occasion it, its intrinsic value, its being adapted to our

circumstances, and the benefits which we derive from it. But we have already shown that the love which induced God to offer us the gift of Christ, his own intrinsic value, our perishing need of such a Saviour, and the benefits which he bestows on those who accept him, are alike unspeakably great.

It therefore necessarily follows, that our gratitude to God for this gift should be unspeakable. The gratitude of just men made perfect is so. Never have they been able, never will they be able, to express all the gratitude which they feel to God, for the gift of his Son. It is an inexhaustible fountain which flows, and ever will flow, in ceaseless praises and thanksgivings, throughout eternity. If then we possess any thing of the temper of heaven, if we hope ever to join in the employments of heaven, if we, in the smallest degree, resemble the apostle, we shall unitedly join with him in exclaiming, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!

We shall partake of the food which God this day provides for our refreshment, with feelings in some measure similar to those with which the spirits of the just feast on the bread and water of life, at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven, and our whole future lives will be one continued day of thanksgiving to God. If any still feel unconvinced, that we ought to thank God for the gift of his Son, we would ask them whether God can do anything for which his creatures ought to thank him.

Can he bestow upon them any favor which shall entitle him to their gratitude? If so, he has done it already, in giving us his Son; for he can do nothing greater for any creature, he can give us nothing more precious than this. In giving us Christ, he has given us himself, and all that he possesses, so that he may now justly say to us, Unthankful, obstinate creatures! what shall I do to excite your gratitude; how shall I purchase that place in your affections, which ought to be mine, without purchase?

I had but one Son; him I have freely given for your redemption; and now I have nothing more to offer. To purchase your gratitude and love, I have made myself poor; I have given you all I possessed, and if this is not sufficient, I can only come to you as a suppliant, and beseech you, for my sake, for my Son's sake, for your own sakes, to be reconciled to your heavenly Father, and accept with thankfulness my offered grace. Such is, in effect, the language of your gracious, condescending God; yet, astonishing to tell, there are hearts so hard as to be unaffected with this language, so stubbornly ungrateful as to refuse to thank him for the unspeakable gift.

My friends, are not some of your hearts of this description? Are there not some among you who have, through life, requited God evil for good? Are there not some present, who never sincerely thanked God for the gift of his Son, and who would feel more joy and gratitude for the gift of a few thousands of pounds, than they have ever felt while hearing the good news of a Saviour? If there be any present of this description, let me entreat them to consider what they have done, what they are now doing.

How hateful, how inexcusable, must such ingratitude appear in the sight of God! How widely do you differ from him who uttered the words of our text, and from all holy beings! How impossible is it for you, with such a temper, to join in the praises of heaven, or derive any advantage from the gift of Christ. The gift is indeed offered to all, but it will benefit none but those who thankfully receive it. Be persuaded then, this day, to receive it with thankfulness, and let the goodness of God lead you to repentance.

While you feast on the bounties of Providence, remember that they were purchased by the blood of Christ. Should you do this, this will indeed be a thanksgiving day, the beginning of an eternal thanksgiving in heaven.

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