

Unworthy to Unwrap!

John 1:19-28

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

John gives a very picturesque comparison between himself and Jesus, Who is the One coming after him. In doing so, he shows how utterly different from mere human expectations is God's mode of operating. This is an appropriate message for our age!

Man's expectations of God have always been diametrically opposite to God's way of acting. Is it any wonder that depression runs rampant during this festive season? Is it that we expect too much from Christmas? Or too little? I would suggest to you today, that the hopes and expectations most people attach to the secular celebration of Christmas expect way too little of CHRISTmas.

I received a Christmas card from someone which, I believe, will make that point. In it, was handwritten these words "The world seems to be falling apart, but perhaps that will wait till after Christmas."

Yes, the world is falling apart. It has been falling apart ever since the fall of Adam and Eve. But it is because of Christmas, the birth of God's Christ, that there is hope in the world - hope for a life without sin and death.

Many people wrap their expectations in the gifts under the tree. How many people will have their expectations dashed after all the wrapping paper is thrown away and they do not have in their hands the great expectation they were hoping to receive as a gift.

Yet God the Son gave up His heavenly wealth to be born of a Virgin as God's Christmas gift to mankind. He came to forgive our selfish attachment to the things of this world, and give us the confidence of an eternal place in His kingdom.

How many broken relationships between certain family members will be exposed this Christmas? How many are hoping that the Christmas celebrations go smoothly this year that just this once, Uncle Helmut and Uncle Herman could get along.

Christ was born to bring peace from God to mankind, that forgiveness He purchased and gives to us is also the balm of healing by which we are able to forgive others. Christmas does point to Christ, the only healing for broken relationships.

We are often caught up in worldly expectations, even at Christmas. Many had expectations about John the Baptizer that were bound up in worldly thinking. Our text points out that some must have expected him to be God's long expected One. Others hoped he was Elijah returned. They were thinking that either of these would herald another great period of history for the nation of Israel. They expected that with the coming of the Holy One of Israel, God's Christ, Israel would become a great nation again.

That is why Jewish leaders came to John wanting him to be something he wasn't. When John claimed he wasn't what they expected, then they wanted to know why he was doing what he was doing. If you are not, then why do you do what you do? What is your authority John, for doing what you do?

John declares that he doesn't come for himself, but to prepare the way for God's Christ. He claims that he is even unworthy to *UNTIE* Jesus sandals. 21st Century Christians may not understand this reference. When a guest came into the home of another, as they had been walking dusty roads, it was customary to have someone remove the sandals and wash the feet of the guest. That task fell to the lowliest servant of the home. John is saying that he is not even worthy of doing this task for Jesus' feet.

John points instead to Jesus, the One who is coming after him. John is preparing the way for Jesus' work, and so John states his own unworthiness to handle even the lowliest task in regards to God's own Son. John points to Christ... John unwraps the One who is greater than He is.

That is the purpose of every Christian pastor. To unwrap the gift of Christmas! What do we want from God for Christmas? What is the gift that is given at Christmas? John points us away from the world. He proclaims to us the joy of Christmas. It is the task of every Christian pastor to point out the gift that will be wrapped that day – wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger – the gift of salvation. God's gift of Christmas is unwrapped when Christ is stripped and nailed to the cross. In His suffering death He purchased our forgiveness and salvation, bringing peace to broken relationships. The gift of Christmas was opened with the stone rolled away on Easter morning, our own resurrection and eternal life proclaimed to all.

As Christmas is this week, many wonder why we have a Gospel reading that seems to focus on John the Baptist. It is because we need to remember that even the birth of this child isn't about *the child* Jesus. It is about the work of God that will be accomplished in the God-man that is hidden in child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. John has told us in this text that it isn't about him, but about the one coming after him. On the very next day after the events in our text, John points to Jesus and says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Dearly beloved of God, John points to Christ. It is the job of pastors not only to point to Christ, but to unwrap Christ.

Baptism unwraps Christ! Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, we are new in Him, newly refreshed and forgiven to love even the unlovable. We are given a new life that is eternal, on the last day, just as Christ has died, and risen again, so too will we rise. This life, this world, is fading away. What is real, what is eternal, what lasts forever is the life we have with Christ even when everything else is passing away.

Christmas unwraps Christ, "Peace on earth goodwill toward men – God's wrath against our sinful preoccupation with this world, and the desiring of glory here, is appeased in the Babe born to redeem us from this world, to redeem us from sin and death.

Faith unwraps Christ! Faith clings not to our works, but to Christ's work for us. God enfleshed in the womb of Mary lived a life free from preoccupation with the things of this world. Faith clings to that life sacrificed upon the cross, as it is unwrapped and delivered to us, given as a gift of God's gracious mercy to us.

Christ is the Word. He is the Word that unwraps His work to purchase and deliver forgiveness of sins. The absolution unwraps Christ. The preached Word unwraps Christ and Christ's work to you. You are forgiven and built up in the true faith unto life everlasting.

On the altar before us, is a meal Christ prepared, and in our eating and drinking we unwrap Christ, food which gives us new hope and life in this topsy, turvy, world. It unwraps Christ's life, death, and resurrection. And, it delivers that Christ to us to life everlasting.

Christ is the greatest gift we unwrap at Christmas – and every time we gather together it is a little Christmas. Every Sunday God gives us His gifts in Christ Jesus, and we unwrap His gifts to us when we hear, eat, and drink. Christ is the healing needed for our every broken relationship. He is our eternal hope of a kingdom of great joy which shall never end.

Dear friends, in Christ unwrapped for us, we have all that we need for this life and for eternity. Amen.