

Series: DO OPEN BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Text: Luke 2:8-20; Philippians 4:4; Psalm 16:11

Title: "God's Gifts to You"

Introduction: Merry Christmas BMZ! We have been going through a series through December called, "DO OPEN BEFORE CHRISTMAS" ... Did any of you ever get gifts in the mail or whatever that had a tag on it that said, "DO NOT OPEN BEFORE CHRISTMAS"? Such a drag!

So, we have been talking about GIFTS we want to GIVE BEFORE CHRISTMAS ... Tonight we are going to change things up a bit. Tonight, on Christmas Eve, = A Gift we need to RECEIVE at Christmas. Tonight, the GIFT is for US! What GIFTS do WE need to OPEN for OURSELVES?

IF you haven't already, GRAB your MESSAGE NOTES ... *Take out your MESSAGE NOTES and CONNECTION card. You will see there are blanks to fill in ... Please take the time to do so. Grab a PEN and write down whatever else you think is important to you and your faith journey. After worship, drop off your CONNECTION CARD and take your MESSAGE NOTES home. Please Re-read the Scripture and the notes to keep growing and learning. For those of you on-line, you can go to our website, www.bmzchurch.org ... find the NOTES and follow along ... LET'S PRAY (turn off marked lights during prayer)!*

I love the story of the Angels and the Shepherds! Poor guys out in a field and they see something they have never seen before ... BRIGHT lights, LOUD music ... and the ANGEL says, "Do NOT be AFRAID!"

I'm not sure, but there are probably at least a FEW of YOU here who are AFRAID of God... maybe INTIMIDATED by God ... at the very least, some of you don't know WHAT to THINK about God. It's just so "OUT THERE"... DIFFICULT to GRASP.

Ever think of WHY Jesus was born as a baby and WHY he was born to COMMON parents and NOT ROYALTY? Jesus is the Son of GOD ... God could have just showed up! "Ta-Da! I'm Here!" Instead, God CHOSE to SEND His SON in the FORM of a BIRTHED baby to a PEASANT couple from Nazareth while they were in BETHLEHEM. He was born in a cave and laid in a feed trough! WHY?

So we can relate to Jesus ... He was born like we were born. Jesus was raised in human/tough circumstances. He was raised in a normal, CARPENTER'S WORLD! WHY? So, we can better understand WHO God is and so we can know God understands what we HUMANS go through. Jesus saw and experienced the pain and grieving and the difficulties and the joys and happiness and hard times and sorrow that we experience as humans. He gets it! We can talk to Him and go to Him in our times of difficulty and know that HE GETS IT! Jesus was vulnerable to this world too...

More IMPORTANT ... So God could SAVE US through a PERFECT LIFE and a PERFECT SACRIFICE. He had to be LIKE US so He could DIE in our PLACE!

So, here's the DEAL: The ULTIMATE GIFT this Christmas is God giving us JESUS! Jesus is God's Christmas gift to us as human beings ... God in HUMAN FORM to RELATE TO US and to LIVE and DIE for US ... AND, it's a package deal! Many gifts come with Jesus.

Don't you love getting those gifts that are like 3-in-1? You open a box and there are multiple gifts inside! Isn't that awesome!?! It's a package deal ... more than what you expected!

That's the way Jesus is. If we are willing to open the gift that God gives us and accept Jesus into our lives, this Christmas, we will find that there are MULTIPLE GIFTS there!

I hope as we talk about the gift of Jesus that we remember what Christmas is about... Luke 2:8-14 = ⁸ *That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.* ⁹ *Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified,* ¹⁰ *but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.* ¹¹ *The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!* ¹² *And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."* ¹³ *Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,* ¹⁴ *"Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."* ¹

Christmas is all about GIFTS! I don't know about you, but when I was a kid (and still today) I hate to see gifts left unopened... After we had all opened gifts when I was a kid, I would kind of check back under the tree to see if there was anything left (gifts for other people, etc.) ... I wanted to OPEN them ALL!

NO GIFT LEFT BEHIND... That's going to be our MOTTO for tonight! **TOO OFTEN WE LEAVE GIFTS from GOD UNOPENED! NOT TONIGHT!**

So, the 1st Gift that COMES as a PACKAGE DEAL with ACCEPTING the GIFT of JESUS into our lives ... **GOD'S CHRISTMAS GIFTS WE SHOULD ACCEPT:**

#1 = Accept God's Gift of HAPPINESS

GOOD NEWS Tonight! God wants you happy ... just like you want you happy ... Blaze Pasqual quote: *"All men and women seek happiness. This is without exception. The will never takes the least step but to seek happiness. This is the motive of every action of every man and every woman, even of those who hang themselves. Everybody wants to be happy."*

We ALL want to be HAPPY ... correct me if I'm wrong. BUT, here's the TRICKY part. What we THINK will make us HAPPY, only makes us HAPPY for a LITTLE WHILE. Do you know WHY? BECAUSE we BASE our HAPPINESS on our CIRCUMSTANCES, or PEOPLE and when CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE (and they ALWAYS DO!) or PEOPLE let us DOWN (and they ALWAYS DO!), we are LEFT MISERABLE. And, that is NOT the KIND of JOY and HAPPINESS GOD wants to GIVE US!

Let me throw out something that might SHOCK you ... Did you all know God is a HAPPY GOD? And, as FOLLOWERS of JESUS, God WANTS us to be HAPPY! This is SHOCKING because MANY people PICTURE God "UP THERE" with a baseball BAT kinda WAITING for us to have some FUN so HE can BEAT you DOWN! BUT that is NOT GOD! Listen ... **Philippians 4:4 = ⁴ Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!** ² WAIT! Where does it say we FIND JOY? Right! In the LORD!

Jesus said he came so our JOY would be FULL ... we would be FULL OF JOY! God is a God that is FULL OF JOY and wants us to be LIKE HIM! THE ONLY PLACE we find pure happiness and joy that does NOT Fade Away is in Jesus Christ!

You all know THE PROBLEM with PLEASURE, right? The PROBLEM with PLEASURE: Anything WE DO to bring us pleasure ... ENDS! Anything we've experienced that has brought us great pleasure ENDS at some point ... it's OVER!

BUT, NOT TRUE about the joy and happiness the ANGELS announced that night ... *"I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people."* That great joy is made for ALL PEOPLE and it lasts FOREVER! Jesus is the ONLY WAY for us to be in RELATIONSHIP with ALMIGHTY God and ONLY in GOD can we FIND TRUE, LASTING JOY and HAPPINESS!

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Lk 2:8-14). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

² Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Php 4:4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Listen ... Psalm 16:11 = ¹¹ *You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.* ³ BTW, that said, "FOREVER!"

Listen carefully ... There is GREAT DANGER in telling you true HAPPINESS is out there, and God WANTS YOU to experience that FOREVER! The DANGER is: Most of us will make HAPPINESS our DESTINATION and try to take the easiest ROAD to GET THERE. We HUMANS always want the EASY ROAD. BUT Happiness is NOT A DESTINATION! HAPPINESS is what happens along the JOURNEY when GOD IS OUR DESTINATION!

Did you get that? When we accept Jesus into our lives and make GOD our destination, Happiness is what happens along the way ... THAT IS THE WAY TO HAPPINESS! The ROAD to GOD is RARELY EASY, but there is HAPPINESS on that ROAD ...even in STRUGGLES.

PEOPLE come to CHURCH for ONE of TWO Reasons: To **FEEL BETTER** or to **GET BETTER**. To **FEEL BETTER** (I'm okay and you're okay) is EASY. Let me take care of that ... "GOD LOVES YOU just as you ARE!" To **GET BETTER** is CHRISTIANITY / to FOLLOW Jesus! Everything in the BIBLE / Biblical PRINCIPLES is about MAKING us ONE with GOD ... Righteousness ... ONENESS with GOD is what JESUS PRAYED FOR ... "That you and I would be ONE as MY FATHER and I are ONE." Everything in the BIBLE that GOD LEADS us or TELLS US to DO or DON'T DO is for the PURPOSE of ONENESS with GOD. From that ONENESS in RELATIONSHIP with GOD comes HAPPINESS!

On this earth, the more we FOLLOW THE ROAD TOWARD GOD, the BETTER we get at wanting to do what GOD wants instead of what we want ... and we find HAPPINESS there!

Jesus says it is "More blessed to give than to receive" - Jesus. "BUT I WANT TO RECEIVE!" We find the MORE we DO things GOD'S WAY (*What You do for the Least of These my Brothers and Sisters*), the MORE we experience HAPPINESS in our lives ...

We THINK we can FIND HAPPINESS on our OWN. It just does NOT WORK very well. If you want to experience PURE HAPPINESS, START PURSUING GOD!

C. S. Lewis, the author of Chronicles of Narnia wrote = He said, "We are half-hearted creatures. Fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go off making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased."

We SELL ourselves so SHORT in this life when it comes to HAPPINESS. God WANTS MORE for each of us! Accept God's gift of HAPPINESS... #2 =

#2 = Accept God's Gift of HOPE

Someone once said IF our GREATEST NEED had been INFORMATION, God would have sent us an EDUCATOR. If our greatest need was TECHNOLOGY, God would have sent a SCIENTIST. If our greatest need was MONEY, God would have sent an ECONOMIST. If our greatest need was earthly PLEASURE, God would have sent us an ENTERTAINER, but OUR GREATEST NEED is FORGIVENESS and God sent a SAVIOR.

Back to Luke ... Luke 2:11 = ¹¹ *The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!*⁴ The SAVIOR is BORN! Why do we CARE?

What does SAVIOR / SALVATION MEAN? 3 THINGS: 1) **FORGIVENESS** of our PAST ... anyone have a PAST? 2) **FREEDOM** from our PRESENT struggles ... anyone STRUGGLING? And, 3) **FULFILLMENT** in our Future / ETERNITY ... anyone need ETERNITY secured?

³ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ps 16:11). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁴ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Lk 2:11). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

So, what does it mean to be SAVED? How do we get SALVATION? Simply, ACCEPTING God's gift of those THREE things: FORGIVENESS, FREEDOM and FULFILLMENT through JESUS on a CROSS!

I know people who were lifeguards ... Lifeguarding in the ocean ... let them exhaust themselves first ... you can't save them while they are trying to save themselves ... FLAILING / HIT / KICKED! ONLY WHEN they GIVE UP can you BRING them in to SHORE!

Same with us ... either we think we can save ourselves (I have plans. I have my life planned out. I know what will bring me happiness... and God says, "Go for it! When you're done trying that, I will be here...") and we keep thrashing around or we don't think we need to be saved (I pray that someday soon you will realize that we are all going to live for eternity somewhere).

Some of you have GIVEN UP HOPE! You think you have done so many BAD THINGS there is NO WAY God is going to offer YOU FORGIVENESS, FREEDOM and FULFILLMENT! You have been TOO BAD ... You are SO on the NAUGHTY LIST!

Let's read TOGETHER ... **John 3:17 = ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.** ⁵ We think God is here to CONDEMN US / JUDGE US / to CATCH US doing something WRONG. Actually, JESUS was sent by God to SAVE US and offer us HOPE ... NO MATTER WHO we ARE or WHAT we've DONE!

God can bring HOPE into lives that seem HOPELESS! God offers SALVATION! The 3rd Gift God offers through Jesus Christ is...

#3 = Accept God's Gift of HARMONY

Jesus brings PEACE and HARMONY into a LIFE filled with CONFLICT. In a WORLD filled with FIGHTS, ARGUMENTS and HURT this Christmas ... Jesus wants to BRING HARMONY and PEACE into your LIFE / FAMILY / RELATIONSHIPS ... every area of life! Remember what the ANGEL said to the SHEPHERDS? **Luke 2:14 = ¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."** ⁶

Would you please CIRCLE the word "PEACE" in that verse? Then ... *"Those with Whom God is Pleased"* = Those who have a RELATIONSHIP with God. You see, THIS is what CHRISTMAS is ABOUT ... God loved the world so much He sent His Son, Jesus, so we could be in a RIGHT RELATIONSHIP / ONE with God (righteousness)! BUT, NOT just US as ONE with GOD! No! We get to SHARE IT!

God wants us to SHARE that PEACE in RELATIONSHIP with other people... God wants our relationships with our FAMILY / FRIENDS / NEIGHBORS / CO-WORKERS to be full of PEACE and HARMONY... Anyone need some of that?

We are REMINDED in the BIBLE that we have a JOB / TASK to do ... **2 Corinthians 5:18 = ¹⁸ And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.** ⁷

God puts us in a position to HELP PEOPLE RECONCILE their relationships with EACH OTHER ... we are people who help put relationships back together! Once we have Jesus in our life, broken relationships BOTHER US! Christmas is a time of RECONCILIATION! The birth of Jesus was God's plan of RECONCILIATION between God and it REMINDS US we need to RECONCILE with OTHER PEOPLE as well! Write the letter; send the email; make the phone call, but, get relationships right ... RECONCILE! Do whatever it takes to reconcile a relationship this Christmas ... Remember, it's NOT about being RIGHT; it's about being RIGHT with GOD!

⁵ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (In 3:17). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁶ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Lk 2:14). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁷ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (2 Co 5:18). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

BUT we can NOT STOP THERE! As FOLLOWERS of JESUS it should BOTHER us EVEN MORE when PEOPLE are NOT RECONCILED to JESUS! **2 Cor 5:18b = And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him.** Remember HAPPINESS COMES when we LIVE God's WAY. ONE way we do that is to GO into ALL the WORLD!

Again this year, we here at BMZ Church have an OPPORTUNITY to carry out our TASK of GOING into ALL the WORLD and RECONCILING PEOPLE to HIM. We have a CHANCE to SUPPORT INTERHOPE to keep RESCUING KIDS, FEEDING them and HELP them through SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS. We help offer CHRIST ACROSS the WORLD ... and, they go from GARBAGE DUMPS to DANCING! Watch ... **(SHOW INTERHOPE VIDEO HERE)** Match GIFT ... 100% goes to SE ASIA!

Now, BEFORE we LEAVE ... Imagine giving ME a well thought out GIFT tonight ... something you know I need ... and I thank you like crazy for that gift. I tell you I can't open it right now, but I'll open it later ... 6 months you come into my office and see it sitting in the corner unopened ... and I just say ... *"I've really not had time. I have had so many important things to do that I couldn't take time to JUST UNWRAP IT!"* That would be weird, right?

Some of you have never unwrapped the GREATEST GIFT EVER. The gifts of HAPPINESS, HOPE and HARMONY with God and other people!

If you haven't done this ... Pray with me tonight and you can know this Christmas was special ... on Christmas Eve in 2019, I opened the greatest gift ever!

Let's Pray!

Dear God, this Christmas I want to receive Your gift of Jesus Christ into my life. I open my life to you, Jesus. I WANT those GIFTS of FORGIVENESS, FREEDOM and FULFILLMENT. As much as I know how, I ask You to come and put Your Spirit of love into my life and make me the person You want me to be. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We are called as followers of Jesus Christ to continue what Jesus did ... offer light to this world of darkness ... candles!

Next Steps: *I will memorize John 3:17*
I Will Accept God's Gifts
Read Luke 2
Give to InterHope Missions for Sustainable Solutions

Hosting (Closing)

HEY, it has been a GREAT DAY here at BMZ... Glad you've been here with us!

In a moment, we are going to

- RECEIVE the OFFERING so please take this time
- to finish COMPLETING any information
- Or NEXT STEPS on your CONNECTION CARD (**FULLY FILLED OUT!!**)
- AND when our ushers come around to RECEIVE our OFFERING
- You can drop that card in the offering basket. YEP ... BOTH in the SAME BASKET!!

IF you are a First-Time Guest with us today

- We are so glad that you joined us ... And we have a GIFT for you.

It's a book called "**UNSHAKABLE**" and it's at the BACK TABLE / By the DOORS...

- all you need to do is DROP your COMPLETED Connection Card
- in the OFFERING PLATE / BASKET WITH your OFFERING when it's passed. YEP ... BOTH in the SAME BASKET!

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As our ushers GET READY to come forward

- I just want to remind you that ... STEWARDSHIP is DISCIPLESHIP ... we RECEIVE an OFFERING EVERY Sunday BECAUSE it's BIBLICAL ... AND, it HELPS us GROW in our FAITH!
- STEWARDSHIP VERSE ... 2 Corinthians 5:18 = ¹⁸ *And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.*⁸
- FIRST of our EARNINGS go back to the ONE who Blessed us in the 1st place! That's why WE/I do Automated Giving! I get paid ... the TITHE comes OUT FIRST!
- God's plan for BUILDING His Church was through TITHING and GIVING of the FOLLOWERS ... Share the GOOD NEWS! To REFRESH OTHERS!
- As Developing Followers of Jesus Christ, WE need to KNOW what the BIBLE says about GIVING ... NOT just what we THINK it should say.
- **MONEY is a HEART ISSUE.** And, GOD wants what is BEST for your HEART! Listen, if GOD LOVES US so much that HE is willing to GIVE UP His OWN SON FOR US, WHY would GOD LEAD us ASTRAY in FINANCES?! USHERS ...
- Next Week: "**SHOWING I CARE FOR GOD'S WORLD!**"
- AFTER OFFERING: SONG (Live) / PRAYER (Live)

"Truth without Grace is Fundamentalism (Brutality). Grace without Truth is Sentimentalism (Hypocrisy)."
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