

Christmas
“God's Gifts
Meditations on God's Gifts”
Romans 8:31-29

If you're a guest we stand for the reading of God's Word which is Romans 8:31-39 this morning. Before we do, I want to make one thing clear. Jesus was a real baby. There's a real incarnation, which means he actually did cry. He didn't cry sinfully. That's what the hymn means. He didn't have a fit of anger right? Romans 8:31-39, this season, we're looking at God's Christmas gifts to us in the person of Christ. The theme is taken from Romans 8:32-33. And that is--

“... if God is for us, who can be against us? If God did not spare to give us his own son, his only son, how will he not, along with him, freely give us all things?”

So we're looking at the gift of God's Son and all the gifts that follow from the book of Romans. Listen to God's Word as I read it to you.

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who is interceding for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, persecution or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither life or death, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

You may be seated. Pray for a moment with me. Please, Lord, give us we pray your Spirit so that we can hear, understand, believe, receive, love you, trust you, follow you. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

When I was a child, I lived in New York City till the age of seven, which is a very flat place of the world. And then I moved to western Pennsylvania, second grade. And that's a gentle rolling hill place in the world. In New York City, I found a magazine that had pictures of a man standing on top of a mountain, looking at the sky. I thought it was sunset. I didn't know the way it's done. It had to be sunrise. Looking at the sky, sun in his face with a satisfied look. Looking down upon the clouds. I thought, this is the most amazing thing that could possibly happen. You could. You could hike to a mountain so high you would look down upon the clouds. And I thought it was as likely that I would participate in such a thing, is that I would run to the moon. Seemed impossible, but it gave birth to a dream. When I found out you could actually go to these places.

And you can walk up a mountain above the clouds and look down upon it. And that dream was fulfilled 32 years later when I took my oldest daughter, then 11, on our first big peak in Colorado. It was a gorgeous day when we started, and then we got above the tree line and, and the weather began to change a little bit and we didn't get to look down on fluffy white clouds.

There were big clouds coming in hard, and they were hitting the mountain, but they were hitting mountain below us. They were black clouds and they hit the mountain side hard. And then they disintegrated for a moment and regathered and formed in gigantic black arcs above our head. This was even wilder than I could have imagined. I never saw black clouds arching over my head again.

In fact, I pretty quickly learned because we went to Colorado 23 years in a row to climb those mountains, that the best part of climbing the mountains is actually getting to the top and tapping that brass marker that's there, and then writing your name down with hundreds of other names of people who climbed the mountain that month and then basking in what warmth there is.

It might be 46 degrees, but, you know, the body heat makes you warm. You got your clothes on, you lay on your back, you sit in the sun, you eat food. That would be terrible at sea level, but you're hungry enough. It just tastes perfect. And, And you're off the mountain by 11:00. If you've got any sense.

What's the best times now, if you read the literature the Christians write about Romans 8. A number of pastors for centuries have said that Romans 8:31-39 is like climbing to the top of a mountain and looking down at all we can see, because that really is the beauty of climbing a mountain. You get to survey miles and miles and miles below you, including clouds, but farms and people and roads and much more. And that's what Paul does in Romans 8. You see, he's climbed a mountain. The mountain began in the lowest of places. The mountain began. But human sin that all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And we have no excuse and we're liable to God's condemnation. But Christ came into the world, and he offered his life as a propitiation for sins, to redeem us and to justify us.

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And we have peace with God through the work of Jesus Christ. That's Romans one, two, three, four, and five. But now we reunited to Christ, and even though we falter and fall into sin, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and were adopted into his family.

And this is the end of the hike. And Paul says, okay, now we've come to the top of the mountain. Now that we've heard everything about human sin and about God's act of redemption, what shall we say to these things? What do we see when we look down upon the earth, now that we have been predestined and called and justified and glorified, what do we have to say?

And Paul doesn't, on this particular occasion say, I've got a series of commands for you that comes later. He doesn't say, I've got some more theological literature for you. That comes later. Also, he says, I have some questions for you. In fact, I have four questions.

Question number one if God is your ally and he now is. Who are your adversaries? I mean, if God's on your side, what do you need to worry about? If God is for us on our side, who is against us? That's question number one.

Question number two, let's think about God's provision for us. If God did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all on the cross, won't he freely give us all things? If you worry about provisions, and many people do, fret not. God gave us His Son.

And then there's a question 3 about judicial standing. Who will bring a charge against God's elect? Well, the truth of the matter is many people bring charges against God's people. But who are they? If God the judge has exonerated us?

Question 4, and finally, security, are these blessings that we have temporary?

Are they going to last? And the answer is the question is who shall separate us? What can separate from the love of Christ? And the answer is nothing. No one. We can't even separate ourselves from the love of Christ by faltering. Now this is what God offers for us because he's for us. Now, let me just say one thing.

If you look very carefully at verses 31 and 32, you'll notice that it says God is for us. Two times it says, If God is for us, who can be against us? That means that God's on our side. God is. God favors us. God is well-disposed. He's our father. He's our friend. The second time it comes up in verse 32, it's different.

The same words but a different sense. And the original language are different words. He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us. That does not mean he's on our side. It means he gave his son as a propitiation sacrifice for our sins. He's for us, well disposed to us because he gave His Son for us.

And once he's given his son for us, he will freely give us all things. God is for us who can be against us? Well, the answer is actually named in verse 35, because in verse 35 it mentions the sword. And when you hear the word the sword. In those days, living in Rome, Paul is writing to people living in Rome.

Roman armies were protected by shields, but they advanced not only with shields, but with swords and javelins and swords killed people. And when it says the sword, it means there are forces against us. And they're not abstract, it's real. There are tyrants, Roman tyrants and tyrants. To this day. I hope that as we gather on Christmas week together and we're thankful for a place, a country where we can worship freely without distraction or oppression, that we remember Christians in other parts of the world.

Because there are parts of the world, many parts of the world where the sword is against. There are people who are against God's people. Places like Nigeria and Sudan, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Libya and China. Last statistics I could find 2020 3088 churches were closed in China. They don't kill Christians. They throw them in jail. They throw the pastors in jail, and then they close the churches.

There are many who are against us. And not only are there people, against people, against believers in other places, but there are many against you right now. You have maybe rivals at work who wish they could have your job. I think you're doing a poor, poor job. But your occupation? Maybe you have neighbors. You have neighbors who have loud parties.

I've noticed that Birmingham is kind of a quiet place, at least my neighborhood. But, you know, you might have a neighbor who has loud parties and you call them up and you say, hey, could you turn it down a little bit? And they say, well, my house, my rules. I think I'll turn it up a little bit. Now that you say so, you may have neighbors against us.

We may have. We do have the remnants of our sinful nature and death and Satan opposed to us. We have our own illnesses and blind spots and sins. There's a lot ready to get arrayed against us. But if God is for us, who are they? How weighty are these forces? Now? The most dangerous thing is to have God against you.

And in fact, the Bible says on at least three occasions I am against you. God says, I am against you. To the Assyrians, a rapacious, murderous, nation conquering nation. God says, I'm against you. To the Babylonians, also murderous, seizing, destroying nation. And in one place God says to Israel at the apex of the rebellion, I'm against you. Unless you repent.

But here, through Christ, God says, I am for you. And if God is for us, who is against us now? We don't always feel that. And that's why if you read the Psalms, and I know many of you are going to read through the Bible in the next year, if you read the Psalms, one of the things you're going to see is a great number of Psalms.

Who who's, whose author cries out said, Lord, where are you? Why don't you hear my prayer? Why are you far away from me? How long will you forget me? It seems at times that God is far away because we don't receive what we desire. But if you read those Psalms again, many of you will. If you read those Psalms, what you notice is that by the end of them they are thankful.

Again, they say things like, I have trusted in your steadfast love, or I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me. And so we say, If God is for us on our side, who's against us? Question number two If God gave His Son for us, will he not also graciously give us all things? Again, there are two kinds of for us.

There's for us meaning gods on our side. And God gave His son for us. And the word that's used there for, for means on behalf of us, that is to say, Jesus died for us in our place on the cross. Now, it doesn't just say that God gave His son for us, gave His Son up for us all.

It doesn't say God gave His son. It says God gave him up for us all. And that's because the Greek word and I'm just going to say it if anybody here knows Greek, the word is *Paradise* to me. If you study Greek, it's not the ordinary and in the ordinary words *forgive*. And so it gets translated give him up.

And that word give him up has a double entendre to it. It can mean give as a gift. But in the Gospels, and I'm sure Paul's referring to it in the Gospels, give him up means betray him. Like Judas who gave Jesus up to the Roman soldiers like Pilate who gave Jesus up to death because he knew Jesus was innocent, but he cared far more about his career than he did about protecting innocent men like the leaders of Israel, the religious leaders who were so envious of him they wanted to kill him.

And so he they gave him up to be crucified. But Paul changes this. He says, look, so far as they were concerned, they were giving him up for their career, for their envy, for their standing. Whatever the case might be. They were giving him up. But God was working through all that. And one theologian, Octavius Winslow by name, puts it this way in the final analysis, the giving up was not Judas for money.

Judas gave him up to not Pilate out of fear for his career. Not the Jews for envy, but the father for love. As Paul says, in another place Jesus was delivered up for our sins, our transgressions, and raised for our justification. If God has given them up, if God has given His son for us, gave him over to death the death we deserved when he gave us all things, the answer is yes.

He will. Now, I know it doesn't always seem like that. To be honest with you, the first time I study this passage really hard, about 18 years ago I had laryngitis and it wasn't two days. I've gotten two days laryngitis plenty of times. No big deal. It was two weeks. A two weeks of laryngitis can be a frightening thing when you speak for a living, right?

I'm thinking I'm going to be unemployed because I live by my voice. And I was concerned. I'm reading. God's going to give us all things. I'm thinking, how about keeping my voice back? That would be nice. I would appreciate that. And the truth of the matter is, God did give me my voice back. It's given us many other things.

He gives us all that we need. Now, that's not the prosperity gospel. This is not saying God will give you every last thing you want if you just trust him enough. Now God gives us what we need. What we need is not always what we want.

A loving mother does not always give a child who wants candy. Candy. They may say, I know you want candy, but I'm going to give you a plum instead. Or a blueberry or a strawberry. And a mother may give nuts instead of chips, and a mother may give a bedtime story when the child wants to play video games and the child may say, mommy, mommy, I need help.

I can't zip my zipper or button my buttons. And mommy may say, you know, you need to learn how to button a button yourself. By now you're 17. It's really time. And this is for your good.

Question number three who shall bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies, who will condemn? Once again, the answer is not extraordinarily simple. There's a complexity to it, because the truth of the matter is, we are accused and we are condemned. But God's the one who exonerates, justifies, declares us innocent. Who will bring a charge.

It's a legal question who will bring a legal accusation? And the truth of the matter is, we live in a critical age and we will face accusations. In fact, a lot of people bring accusations against Christians for being hypocrites and holier than thou. And whenever somebody says to me, you know, you Christians are holier than thou, my first answer is, I don't usually say it.

I certainly hope so, because you have no interest in righteousness whatsoever. And so I'm not better than you. I'm really I'm really doing poorly. I don't say it. I think it.

But I try not to let it show that I'm thinking that because people don't like our holier than thou attitude. And that's understandable. It's fair enough.

But there are other accusations. You know, Christians are accused of being gun toting, cigar smoking and tying environmental humanity haters. All kinds of things are stated. Again, I want you to think about Christians throughout the world. I want you to celebrate our life together here, but I want you to pray. We have we have a team of 30 people in this church who prays for Christians in lands where it's hard to be a Christian, and you know that Christians are accused in other lands.

And there's a reason tyrants know the truth. A true Christian knows they have one Lord and one God. And if the tyrant says, do this and it's contrary to God's will, a Christian will not do this, and tyrants know it. They've known it for centuries. So they go after Christians because they know that they're not safe. They're always possible rebels.

And so they attack Christianity and even when they come at us with the sword, with violence, God is for us.

He will not allow a final charge against God's people to stand. The tyrant says, you're rebellious. And we say, no, we're serving another king. And God says, yes, they are. Now, some of the accusations that come against us are actually valid. That is to say, sometimes we do have a smug, holier than thou attitude, for example, and people secular people sometimes say Christians are very selective in the sins they single out and they single out sins like sexual sins.

And, you know, you're so hung up on sex and you ignore things like gossip. And the truth of matter is we do ignore some sins like gossiping and there's some validity to it. And we should always listen when somebody may have a valid criticism. But the criticisms, its strongest, is actually from the evil one who says you have no right to stand before God.

And there's significant truth to that. There's also an answer to it. If you're, again, reading through the Bible this year, you might come, you will come to Zechariah. And when you come to Zechariah chapter three, there's a scene. It's a little bit like job chapter one and two, where

Satan somehow gains entry into God's presence. And there's a man named Joshua who's a high priest.

Now, as you probably know. And if you don't come some more and you'll learn more about it. The high priests of Israel had very distinctive and beautiful clothing, white with gold threads and and blue threads, and everything had to be just so very carefully specified so that they could represent purity as they offered sacrifices before God. They need to come with pure hands.

But of course they didn't always. And this particular priest is named Joshua. And instead of standing before God with beautiful, perfect clothing, he stands covered in filth, covered in human excrement. And Satan says, this man has no right to stand before you, has no right to offer sacrifices. He represents all the sinful people that would approach God. And the Lord says, essentially not quite so many words.

Good point. I'm going to take his filthy clothes off him. This is chapter three, verse five. Remove the filthy garments from him. Behold, I have taken your iniquity away, and I will close you with pure vestments. Now, as Christians, we know that we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, who lived a perfect life and granted it to us, or bestowed upon us, or imputed it to us so that we can stand before God.

Now the accusations of Satan are invalid, but he's a persistent type, and he keeps trying to make his case. And it says over in the book of Revelation that God tries the same thing. He tries to accuse God's people and say they have no right to stand before God, and then in revelation chapter 12, verses 10 to 11, it says that the Lord Jesus throws the accuser down.

The accuser, because they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony, by the word of the testimony of the lamb is taken away. The sins of the world. So Satan still going to say, they have no right, you have no right to stand before God. And Jesus says in themselves, they don't, but they're not by themselves.

The lamb has shed his blood for them, and so they're covered, and they can stand. And so the accusation is silenced. We face accusations. Satan speaks, we accuse ourselves. Often the fiercest accusation comes that we label toward ourselves and, you know, family members and friends and coworkers may say things and point out our sins. And Christians accuse each other and public figures, you know, politicians and architects and anybody who stands in the public eye can be accused of malfeasance.

But Jesus stands at the right hand of God. Now, we know that ordinarily, Jesus standing at the right hand of God means that he reigns with the father. But sometimes, and this is one of those times, sometimes it means he's next to God in the role of advocate. It's judicial. Seeing. And the accusation comes and Jesus is our defense attorney says these people are innocent because they're clothed in my righteousness.

And so the accusations are silent. This is a benefit of Christ. We stand at the mouth and we say, thank you, Lord, for silencing all the critics, even the self-critique, the critique of the evil one.

The fourth question is, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? And we get quite a list of things that could separate us from Christ.

Tribulation. Distress. Persecution. Famine or nakedness? Danger. Sword sort of course, as I said, refers to the possibility of martyrdom, a brute force of being killed. And here in Romans chapter eight, Paul cites Psalm 44, which is one of those songs that cry out the words from Psalm 44 say this for your sake we're being killed all day long.

We're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered, and and the cry goes up, what do you do about this, Lord? How can you let this happen after you let these accusations stand? The truth of the matter is that sometimes we stand even despite death.

The God preserves us. He's for us. He loves us even in death. John Calvin is one of the heroes of the church, lived in the 16th century in France, and he lived in a hard period of time. He was a seminary Prof or a president didn't really have presidents as we do today, but he led a seminary, and people who were French, also Germans and English, but especially French people.

He was in that part of Switzerland. It was right close to France. He was himself French. The seminary started mostly had French students, and he knew that when they graduated, they were going to go back into France. That had a king at that time. It was extraordinarily hostile to the gospel as we understand it. In fact, when they graduated, they gave students certificates for hanging.

Get it? That's what they called them. They said that because they knew that they might die for their cause. And the truth of the matter is, they knew that if they started a little church and or only 30, 40, 50, 60 people, they'd probably be fine. But there were churches that grew to 1000 and 2005 thousand, even 10,000 people filling the cathedrals that had been given over to no gospel.

And if you succeeded, the chances of going to jail or being slain grew and grew. And they knew that not only was that happening, but in the same period of time, the plague, the Black plague, bubonic plague went through Geneva three times during Calvin's career. Like, Lord, can you please. I mean, persecution is one thing and it can you keep the disease away?

No. Sometimes. Sometimes God preserves his people, even through death. We were killed all the day long. Christianity has a variety of soundtracks. One of them is the hymns. The songs that we sing sang them now. We'll sing them tonight. There's also the sound of laughter and joy and meals being eaten together. Then there's another soundtrack, and that's the sound of doors slamming and chains being fastened.

The people. So we have Psalms say things like, oh, that I had wings of a dove. I would fly away and be at rest. I would wander far away and we could sing that song. In a crisis we can also sing cast your burdens upon the Lord, so he will carry them for you and deliver you from them.

And the Lord does send us hardships. He's still for us. He's still for us. In the hardships man in Peter Christ wrote this, I quote it to you this world is a veil valley, a veil of soul making a great sculptor shop and we are his statues. To be finished, the statues must endure many blows of the chisel.

This is not optional. Once we have lost our innocence, the way back to God must be hard. What he's saying is that God gives us even adversity to chip away at the sins and the follies that we have, we get unjust criticism. Do you think you know there's an element of truth to it? I need it, I need it maybe 90% false, but that little shred of truth I need to deal with that.

And that that sorrow I feel at some loss might be because that thing which I lost was too dear to me. I love that too much. So again, what do we have to say? We have these four questions. Since God is for us, who's against us to answer? No one of consequence. If God gave his only son for us, will he not give us all things?

Yes, indeed he will. If God justifies, who will accuse no one with any standing who can separate us from the love of Christ? No one. Nothing. We can't even separate ourselves through Christ, neither death or life. Andrews. No rulers. He says everything. Things present, things to come. Angels, powers. He names, everything that could come to separate us from Christ.

And nothing will separate us from Christ. It means that in the hardest times he'll preserve us. You've all heard of Calvin. You've heard of Augustine II, probably. Augustine, lived from 354 to 430 A.D. he lived in a city called Hippo in North Africa. Hippo means horse. He was the bishop of the city. He was the most important pastor.

The greatest number of people came to his church, and he taught them. Even as he grew older and he grew weaker. 76 years old, the Vandals, the tribe, the Gothic tribe rampaged through and destroyed and sacked Rome. And then they went to North Africa, which is now defenseless against the Roman armies that had collapsed. And they were about to come to Hippo people.

Messengers came saying, they're coming. And they said to Augustine, you need to get out of the city because you need to survive their onslaught. They're going to destroy, they're going to kill. They're going to pillage. You need to go south of us, into the desert where they won't find us. And Augustine said two things. He said, first, I'm too old and too weak.

He was 76 years old. I'm too old and weak to go trekking across the desert for a couple days and then come back, and my people need me. The people who can't leave the people don't have the ability to go trekking for four days. The poor of the city, they need me. And he gave the last days of his life to prayer, to speaking with his weakened voice as an old man, to prayer, to preaching, to meditation, to one on one consultations.

And in God's providence, he died the day before they took the city. God spared him and allowed him to minister till the end. And that's the way God often does it. He he spares us in ways that we might not initially see as sparing or caring.

In hardship I have a friend named Tony Mérida. People sometimes call him Tony Merida. It's hard to say. He doesn't even know how to pronounce his name properly. He's a pastor. He's a pastor of a large reformed church in North Carolina, and he wrote a book. And in that book he talks about the time when he was ministering in Kiev or Kiev and Ukraine.

He would go for a week and teach in Kiev Theological Seminary. And he met there a man named I'm not kidding you. I know it's Christmas and so forth. His name is Emmanuel, and he met him at the seminary and he found out Emmanuel story. Big rough looking guy, you know, like chain scars from chain fights on his head and tattoos all over the place.

And he asked him a few questions about his life and he said, you know, I spent a lot of time in prison when the communists were in charge, and not because I was a Christian, because I was a bad dude. I was a criminal. That's why I was in jail. I was a criminal, and when I was in prison, I would find Bibles.

People would give me Bibles, and I would use the Bible to tear the pages out so I could roll various substances in the pages of the Bible. That's how I use the Bible. And now he's at seminary teaching people how to read and live by the Bible. What happened? Emmanuel took a look at his life. One day he said, I'm going the wrong direction.

This is not the way. This is not the way to live.

I need another way. He found it in the pages of the Bible and the Christians that entered his life. I don't know how many times he went to church before. How many times you picked up a Bible to rip a page out, how many times you read a few lines before he wrapped some substance that he was going to smoke?

Probably some of you, like me, I went to church hundreds of times before I became a Christian. Some of you probably came to church many times. Still aren't. Maybe quite sure if you're on the right way or not. You can be sure. You can be sure. And if you trust in God, he is for you. He gave his Son on your behalf.

He's on your side. He gave his son on your behalf, and now he will allow no charge against you if you trust in him. No force can distort. Nothing can separate you from his love if you give yourself to him. I hope you've done that. And if not, I hope you spend some time this Christmas season meditating on these things, leaning toward them, because there are great blessings from the mountaintop as we consider what Christ has done.

If God is for us, and he is, who's against us? Nobody who can bring a charge against God's elect, who can? Who can say no to the judge of heaven and earth and say, no, no, you're wrong. That person is guilty. No one can do that. Is there any gift that you need in life or in death? Is there any gift you need that God will not give you?

Having already given your son? Can anything separate you from love? You can't even separate yourself. God will persevere with you even when you don't persevere with him. These are the

blessings we have through Christ, through God the Father who gave His Son for us all. Let's pray. The father, I pray that you would. Help us to meditate, to write.

It is, It is easy to spend our time worrying about gifts and parties and travels and enjoying good things, wonderful things, entertainments, laughter and merriment with our friends. It's all good. I pray that the good would not drive out the best, and that is the best. To meditate on who you are, what you've done, and to follow you in all of life.

And we prayed in Jesus name, Amen.