

OPEN THE GIFT

*Discovering the Treasures God Gave Us
When He Gave Us Jesus*

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www.aroundthecornerministries.org

Around The Corner Ministries exists to take the gospel to every neighborhood in America. Our mission is to equip followers of Jesus to engage their neighborhoods and communities with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is of Him.
If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in His anointing.
If we seek strength, it lies in His dominion;
if purity, in His conception;
if gentleness, it appears in His birth.
For by His birth He was made like us in all respects, that He might learn to feel
our pain.
If we seek redemption, it lies in His passion;
if acquittal, in His condemnation;
if remission of the curse, in His cross;
if satisfaction, in His sacrifice;
if purification, in His blood;
if reconciliation, in His descent into hell;
if mortification of the flesh, in His tomb;
if newness of life, in His resurrection;
if immortality, in the same;
if inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom, in His entrance into heaven;
if protection, if security, if abundant supply of all blessings, in His Kingdom;
if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given to Him to judge.
In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in Him,
let us drink our fill from this fountain,
and from no other.

—John Calvin

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A WORD TO THE READER

*For God so loved the world,
that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him shall not perish,
but have eternal life.*

John 3:16

Christmas is the time when we celebrate the arrival of the tiny baby that came from heaven, His birth announced by an angelic choir and marked with a bright star that led wise men to worship. Born to simple people and raised in a small village where surely everyone knew Him to be a kind, wise, and mature-beyond-His-age young man, He lived just thirty-three short years. To the surprise of many, He became a rebel in the religious culture of His day and was executed by those who claimed to speak for God.

We know the real story. Jesus was the only begotten Son of God, sent to purchase our salvation and rescue us from the sin that separated us from our Creator. He came to give us the gift of eternal, abundant life today, and the promise of a glorified life in His presence when we say goodbye to this world.

I believe those who have placed their faith in Jesus have the potential to experience soul-satisfying joy and contentment in every circumstance. In Him, we have received an unending treasure that meets every need, overcomes every sin, soothes every hurt, and gives every trial a purpose that outweighs the burden of its pain. Even so, as true Christ-followers, we can find ourselves in seasons of discouragement or depression. Our flesh is susceptible to being captured by addictive behaviors; we may be lonely or struggle with antisocial tendencies. We may at times feel powerless and ill-equipped to serve in our local church, make an impact for God's kingdom, or simply to get through our day-to-day obligations with some semblance of emotional and spiritual well-being.

While those in Christ may encounter places of disappointments and struggle just as the rest of the world, we are not destined to live there. We have a solution. Jesus came to give us the source of all the joy and contentment we can never find without Him. He came to give us *Himself*.

Here are the questions we must answer.

Have we failed to open the gifts that Jesus brings?
Have we underestimated what He came to do?

Perhaps you're still weighing in on whether or not this Jesus is who He says He is. You don't quite see what your Christian friends are talking about; it all seems

a bit foolish and unnecessary to you. And, you feel you're doing pretty well at the helm of your own life. If that's your story, then I challenge you to unlock the door to your heart as you read this book. Be honest. Be real. Ask God to show you if these words are true. My prayer is for your eyes to be opened and your heart to understand that Jesus is far better and greater and more relevant to you than you ever dreamed.

God didn't create us to flounder around in life, figuring it out as we go and attempting to either make the best of our failures or pretending they never happened. His desire is for each of us to see the truth about ourselves and recognize the empty places that will never be filled outside of Jesus. He longs to give purpose and meaning to our days and fill up our souls with real joy and peace, and a thousand other little blessings we can only imagine.

And so, He gave us Jesus.

I invite you to open the gift. We begin our journey with salvation and all it provides and will end in the throne room of heaven. I'm praying that, along the way, God will reveal to us just how much He gave us when He gave us Jesus.

Thanks for taking this journey with me,

Sheila Alewine
October 1, 2020

SALVATION GIFTS

Day 1 – Day 7

*And there is salvation in no one else;
for there is no other name under heaven
that has been given among men
by which we must be saved.*

Acts 4:12



Jesus came to give us salvation.
He has reconciled us to the Father and declared us to be righteous,
justified in the Father's eyes only because we stand in Him.
In grace and mercy, He granted us repentance and gave us faith to believe.
Salvation is the gift of a brand-new life unlike anything we've ever known.

DAY 1: THE GIFT OF RECONCILIATION

The glorious good news of the gospel is that the sin-devastated relationship between lost sinners and the holy God can be restored.

But through God's plan of reconciliation all the hostility, animosity, and alienation separating the Holy One and sinners vanishes, and those who were once His enemies become His friends.

—John MacArthur¹

Romans 5:8-11 – But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

God sent Jesus right into His enemy's camp. We don't normally think of the Christmas story as a war story, but at its heart, it was a rescue mission. God sent His best and bravest soldier into enemy territory as a newborn, red, wrinkled infant. It would take the power of God to destroy the enemy; a surprise attack was necessary. No one expected deliverance and freedom to come in the form of a tiny baby.

To understand the magnitude of God's gift, we have to first know we are His enemies. There's a dividing wall between a holy God and sinful men. Paul called it "the enmity" when he spoke about the law of God that calls us to account for our sinful deeds. We are born into it, broken people, a fallen nature inherited from our ancestor, Adam. We begin our own lives as squalling, needy children, born into the camp of lost souls, bound in the dominion of darkness.

Colossians 1:13-14 – For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

We need to be reconciled to our Creator, to be brought back into favor with Him. We are at odds with Him not only because of our inherited sin nature, but as a result of our own willful, sinful deeds. This is not a case of both parties being wrong and coming to a compromise so that the relationship can be restored. All the fault is on us, and without God acting on our behalf, we can never be reconciled to Him.

The word *reconciliation* does mean to “return to favor” but also has the deeper meaning of an exchange. When you reconcile your checkbook, you balance both the debits and credits. They must equal out for your bank account to reconcile.

Jesus came to reconcile our accounts with God. We owed a debt we could not pay, a sin debt, that could only be accounted for by our death. And even then, our physical death could never make us holy and righteous; we would still have a spiritual deficit. We could not bribe our way out of the enemy’s camp.

God reconciles us *in Christ*. He makes an exchange. When Christ died, He took our sin to His account and in exchange, gave us His righteousness. We are brought back into favor with God.

We are reconciled.

The first step to know Christ is to know ourselves. We must recognize that we are enemies of God until we receive the gift of reconciliation.

What is the first thing a person does when he has been rescued from an enemy? *He looks behind him to see who else needs rescuing!* When a prisoner of war hears the sound of troops coming to set him free, he runs toward his rescuers to gain his own freedom. When he realizes the enemy has no more authority to harm or hold him, he will immediately bring all the influence and power of those who rescued him to set his fellow prisoners free.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 – *Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

Have you received the gift of reconciliation in Jesus? If so, rejoice! You are a favored child of God. Now, look behind you and see who else needs rescuing!

Pray Today

Dear Jesus, Thank You for reconciling me to the Father. You came into our world knowing it would hate You, persecute You, and ultimately kill You. You gave up Your life so that I could be brought back into favor with God, having all my sinful accounts cancelled out in exchange for Your righteousness. You reconciled me while I was still your enemy, and now I am called to tell others about this great gift available to them. Thank You for the gift of reconciliation. Amen.

DAY 2: THE GIFT OF JUSTIFICATION

This is the rock where we stand when the dark clouds gather and the floods
lick at our feet: justification is by grace alone (not mixed with our merit),
through faith alone (not mixed with our works)
on the basis of Christ alone (not mingling his righteousness with ours),
to the glory of God alone (not ours).

–John Piper²

Romans 3:21-26 – But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

A common argument against the Bible's teaching that Jesus is the only way to salvation is that it is unfair. Why should we believe in a God that says His way is the only way? Is this a God who is loving? How fair is it that only those "Christians" who believe a certain way are the ones who get into heaven?

The argument is flawed, because it makes the assumption that Christ-followers are allowed into heaven because they believe. This is not true. Believing, no matter how deep or passionate our faith is, does not accomplish what is required for entrance into God's eternal kingdom. If it did, it would be a religion based on works, just like every other false religion.

We cannot *believe* our way into heaven; we must be *made righteous*. We must be *justified* before God, something we cannot achieve by our own efforts.

Justification is a big word that simply means to be made right. When God justifies us, He declares that we are righteous, or right with Him, and thus welcomed into heaven. Heaven is a place where sin cannot abide. God is holy. He illustrated His holiness in the strict laws of sacrifice and atonement by which His people, the Israelites, were to abide. Failure to follow God's sacrificial statutes resulted in instant death in many cases.

As sinful human beings, born with a fallen nature inherited from Adam, the only way we can be made righteous in God's eyes is if He looks at us in Christ's

righteousness. Christ's death on the cross accomplished our justification, and it is given as a gift, never earned by our belief or by our good works.

God took our sin and placed it on His Son, Jesus. Jesus paid the penalty for us.

Romans 6:23 – For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sin requires a sacrifice; something has to die to atone for it. This is how God could declare the Old Testament saints righteous. He passed over their sins until the time when Jesus paid the debt. Their sacrifice of lambs, goats, and bulls was an act of obedience, looking forward to the future Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

God never excuses our sin. Sin always requires a payment, and this payment comes in the form a gift – the gift of justification. We are made righteous only by the atoning act of Jesus on the cross. Belief is necessary, not to justify ourselves before God, but to access and receive the gift that has already been offered on our behalf. Belief is a response to what God has already done.

Scripture warns us that all of us will stand before God and give account for our lives. What relief! What joy! What assurance we have that because of Christ, we can stand and be counted as righteous because we have received the gift of justification! Jesus came to make us righteous and give us the hope of eternal life. In gratitude, let's live as the holy people Christ has made us to be.

Titus 3:5-7 – He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Pray Today

Dear Jesus, Thank you for the gift of justification. How fearful it would be to stand before You in all Your holiness, and only then recognize the reality of our sinful state. We're so thankful that You came so that we could be made righteous. You took our sin on Yourself and graciously exchanged it for Your righteousness, making us acceptable to the Father and granting us entrance into Your kingdom, and the eternal joy and glory of heaven. Remind us daily to walk in the righteousness that You have gifted to us and help us tell those around us that they, too, can be justified by grace, through repentance and faith in You. Amen.

DAY 3: THE GIFT OF A NEW LIFE

The new birth is no mere turning over a new leaf,
but is the inception and reception of a new life.
It is no mere reformation but a complete transformation.

In short, the new birth is a miracle,
the result of the supernatural operation of God.
It is radical, revolutionary, lasting.

—A.W. Pink³

2 Corinthians 5:17 – Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

A common desire among human beings is the longing for something new. A new year, a new beginning, a fresh start. As a child, we looked forward to the excitement of a new school year; we went “school shopping” for new clothes, new shoes, new supplies. I loved (and still love) opening a new notebook, unspoiled and waiting for inspiration. As adults, we are constantly trading up (or trading in) for something different, something new, whether it’s a car, a house, or a job.

I believe this longing for “something new” is a by-product of our fallen nature. We inherently sense there’s something missing, something more. Thanks be to God for the day we realized that nothing in this world would ever satisfy that longing.

Jesus gives us the ultimate gift of a new life, a new beginning when we come to Him by faith and receive salvation. Paul describes those in Christ as “new creatures,” a phrase which immediately takes us back to Genesis when God first created man and woman. Adam and Eve were created by God, perfect, holy, and blameless, innocent, and unaware of sin until they disobeyed and broke God’s command. This brokenness, this fallen nature, would be passed down to every human being, and with it, an awareness and constant desire to be re-created anew.

In Christ, we are *made new*. The Greek word translated “new” is *kainos* and denotes not another of the same kind, but new in form and quality and nature. God literally recreates us in salvation, restoring us back to the original image of God. We have a new perspective, new desires, and a new source of power to live through the indwelling Spirit of God.

We have a new life.

As exciting and wonderful as the new life is, equally as exciting is the promise that the old life passes away. Have you ever visited the eye doctor because you realized your vision was blurry? He explains to you that you need a new prescription to see things clearly and sends you home with a new pair of glasses. How helpful would it be to continue to wear your old glasses and tuck the new pair away in a drawer to save for the future?

Perhaps you have a favorite pair of boots that you are unwilling to give up, even though the soles are worn and you find your socks wet and your feet cold every time you venture out in them. You've already purchased a new pair, but you're saving them for when you "really need them."

Sadly, this is what many of us do as new creations in Christ. We continue to live the old life when God has made us new creatures and given us a new life. He has done the work spiritually; we are *made new*. He has turned on the light for us spiritually; we have to decide whether we want to walk in that light, or stumble around in the darkness with blurry vision, unprotected from what we might walk into! The new life Jesus came to give us starts *now*.

What are you holding onto from your old life that needs to be laid aside so that you can enjoy the new life God has given you? Are there habits or sins that need to be confessed and abandoned? Is your value system and worldview based on scripture or your own knowledge and perspective from the world's culture? Is your time and talent dedicated to the new call God has on your life, or are you still working for your own glory and success?

Jesus came to give us the gift of a new life. Let me say it again. *We have a new life.* Let's not waste a moment more in the old one.

Romans 6:4 – *Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

Pray Today

Dear Jesus, Thank you for the gift of a new life. You have made us a new creation. Thank you that our old life has passed away and we have the opportunity and ability to enjoy the new life You made possible by Your death and resurrection. We recognize that You are making all things new, restoring what sin stole from Your creation. Help us to walk in newness of life and abandon all that would keep us rooted in our old ways of living without You. Amen.