

Sermon 1 Corinthians 13:9 1st Sunday Series B

Sermon: 1st Sunday in Advent

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Theme: God's gifts

Goal: To recognize God's gifts in our lives as they serve to prepare us for Jesus' Advent.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Have you already bought the gifts you want to give to your beloved ones? It is always a time of rushing and running up and down to prepare everything for Christmas. The shopping centers are beginning decorating for Christmas and giving their promotions earlier and earlier every year.

What is the most desired gift your family would like get? It's always easy to buy gifts for children; but not so easy to buy them for adults. Each person has his or her own taste, style and feeling about clothes, perfumes and other personal stuff. But it's a special happiness to give and to receive Christmas gifts!

Paul speaks about some gifts that God gave and still gives us. To give gifts for Christmas originates from the great gift that God gave us at the first Christmas, His Son Jesus Christ; and from the gifts that the wise men brought to the baby Jesus. It's a way to show our happiness and our love to others as God loves us.

Last Sunday we talked about some physical and material blessings and gifts that God gives us, as we celebrated the end of the church calendar with Thanksgiving. At the beginning of a new church year, let's see some spiritual blessings that God shares with us, preparing us for the Christian celebration of Christmas and for the second coming of Christ.

I – What God did for us

Paul “thank God for you because of His grace **given** you in Christ Jesus”. Grace is God's favor. It is not something that we deserved, but it

is a free gift from God to us. It includes all the salvation plan, everything that God did to reconcile us with Himself. Paul wrote to the Ephesians 2:8,9: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the **gift** of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Some parents promise the Christmas gift as a reward to the children. If the child studies well and passes the year... if the child is obedient and doesn't cause big troubles... if the child does this and that... then he will receive the gift he is longing for. This is not grace. The child will make all the effort to earn what he wants: a new toy, a new cellphone, something special he desires... This is not grace! This is like a payment, like a “salary”!

When we were still disobedient, God loved us and gave us His Son by grace. We cannot “earn” God's grace. We didn't deserve God's love; but He loved and still loves us. His Son in the manger and on the cross is the biggest, the greatest gift we can ever receive! By grace! - And Paul and we too give thanks to God for His grace given us in Christ Jesus!

With God's grace comes the gift of peace: “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Peace is the big message of Christmas, as the angels sang: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.” (Luke 2:14). The Prince of Peace, as Jesus is called in the prophecies, brings peace to everyone who believes in Him through the forgiveness of our sins and the reconciliation with the Father. We are not enemies or strangers anymore, but beloved children of God. We don't need to be afraid of God, but we have peace with God. The resurrected Christ said: “Peace be with you!” (John 20:21)

II – What God does for us

Having been called to the faith in Jesus and having received the gift of God's grace, now Paul says: “For in Him you have been enriched in

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every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.”

God not only called us by His grace, but He still enriches us during our entire life time. It is not so that God calls us to life and then says: Now it is with you... I have done what I could... the rest is with you... NO! He preserves, strengthens and enriches us every day by His grace. His Word and the Holy Communion are the Means of Grace by which God comes continuously to us to feed us and to strengthen us.

Maybe it is like if you give a new cell phone to your child. It is not a one-time gift ; but you need to pay the bill every month for him. So God is “recharging” us by His Means of Grace day by day.

It is a big offense to refuse a gift. If you give a shirt to me, and I will say: no, thanks, I have lots of shirts in my wardrobe... it will be an offense and will break our good relationship. - Why do so many people despise and reject God's precious gifts, the Means of Grace? Maybe it is not intentional; but if we don't “*gladly hear and learn it*”, as Luther explains the 3rd Commandment, we are despising His Word and the Sacrament.

God's gifts are available for every one. He loves all and wants to give His gifts of Salvation, forgiveness of sin and peace to every one who believes in Jesus. It's free! It's a gift! It's to be shared! Let's enjoy God's gift!

III = What He will do for us

God has a bigger purpose for us when He gives us His free gift of Salvation by grace. Salvation is not just a matter to be in peace in this world, but to be prepared for the second coming of Jesus, when peace will never more be disturbed by human reasons. Paul writes: “Therefore you do not lack any spiritual **gift** as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus

Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The day of our Lord Jesus Christ is the last day. It is called “the day of Jesus” because He will be revealed in all His glory and splendor as our Savior, and as the Judge at the same time. For those who have rejected the free gift of God it will be a terrible day, as Jesus describes it in the Gospel of Mark 13:24-37. But for us who accept the gift of God and believe in His grace, it will be the Day of our Final Redemption! In spite of our sins and imperfections, we will be blameless on that day, because God keeps us strong to the end, forgiving us our sins daily. Through Christ He renews His free gift daily, preserving His children in His grace and love.

Conclusion: What God did, does and will do for us is assured by God's faithfulness. Paul writes: “God, who called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ, is faithful.” To the Philippians 1:3-6 he wrote: “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

God is faithful. He gave us His Son to die for us. He gives all what we need for our body and our soul. And He will preserve us blameless to the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us enjoy these gifts from God not only as we are celebrating Advent and Christmas, but on every day of our lives until He calls us to His house. Jesus came in the flesh on the first Christmas to fulfill God's Salvation plan; He comes among His people through the Word and the Sacraments to call us by grace to the true faith and to preserve us in His grace; and He will come again to rescue us from this valley of tears to His glorious mansion! This is the triple main emphases of the Advent Season. Let us celebrate it in faith and in hope! Amen.

