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Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – December 17, 2020

The Lord be with you.

I've just been reading here the news about the vaccine for Coronavirus. And it's really amazing, and they say that there are more vaccines on the way. It's really something how a vaccine works. They say that they inject you with just enough of the disease to make you immune to the disease. And as I say that, well, it's getting me to thinking, do you think maybe some people are vaccinated against the gospel? Did they have just enough of the gospel to be immune to the real thing? That they have sung Amazing Grace so many times that God's grace no longer amazes? Or do you think that maybe we might even be vaccinated against Christmas? I mean, you're after year, we celebrate Christmas such that we have perhaps built up immunity to the wonder of Christmas, a resistance to all that Christmas really means I mean, most people know about wise men, about shepherds, angels. They know about a star, they know there was no room in the inn, they might have even seen the Charlie Brown Christmas, and they are immune to the startling good news that his Christmas... I've often time said that the hardest sermon of the year for me to preach, I hear this from other preachers too, the hardest sermon of the year for me to preach is the Christmas sermon. I mean, we all know the story. It's almost like our familiarity makes us immune to the real joy that is Christmas. So today, I wanna look at a scripture text, it takes us to the very heart of Christmas, but Christmas is all about. I'm in 2 Corinthians Chapter 9, Verse 15, as the Apostle Paul, he can't hold himself in, he can contain himself, he just burst forth with joy as he writes, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift."

It's popular this time of year to say that Christmas is a time for giving. But you know, I'm not not sure that all the people who are there at that first Christmas that they would have thought of it as a time for giving. I think that rather, they would have said that Christmas is a time for receiving... You listen to the message of the angels. What the shepherds told people, you listen to the wise men or Mary or Joseph, everyone who was there would have said that Christmas was about receiving... It was about receiving God's love all wrapped up in swaddling clothes. That the gift that they were receiving, the Apostle Paul calls Gods indescribable gift. The Christmas story sets the gospel of Jesus Christ apart from all the religions of the world. As you look at the world's religions, you just line them up one after another, they're all about us doing for God rather than what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. They're about you and me trying to reach up to God rather than God coming down to us. Becoming one of us, taking on our humanity, taking our sin as his own that he might gift us with his very life. And here in 2 Corinthians 9, Paul is wrestling with what most preachers wrestle with at Christmas, Paul is trying to find just the right words to describe what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. And so what Paul does, Paul actually invented a Greek word. You get to do that if you are an apostle. Paul invents a Greek word. And we can say that he invents it, because the



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word that is translated as indescribable, as an indescribable gift, it is the first time this Greek word shows up anywhere in the Greek language. But if you break down this word that Paul has invented,

I mean, you look at its parts, Paul's invented word has the idea of something that is too wonderful for words, it is inexpressible, it is unspeakable. There are not words for it in Greek and Hebrew, in English, in any language of what God has done for you and be in Christ Jesus. Well there just aren't words to describe it, that the Christmas story can never, never be fully told. So if you think, you know Christmas, if I think I know Christmas, it is beyond our words to express or to know.

There was a young man, a fisherman, named John, son of Zebedee. He was one of the first to receive God's indescribable gift, Jesus Christ. And in John's Gospel, chapter 1 verse 12, John writes, "all who received Jesus, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God." I wanna put emphasis on that word "all", all who received Jesus. He gave the power to become children of God. They received. Now, there was another man named Irenaeus, he is the first Christian theologian. And church history tells us that Irenaeus had actually a direct tie to the Apostle John. And Irenaeus wrote, he said, "Our beloved, Jesus Christ became what we are. That He might bring us to be what he is in himself, sons and daughters of God." In the God's indescribable gift of Christmas is that the son of God became the son of man to make us sons and daughters of God. That is God's indescribable gift that came down at Christmas, came down, not for His sake, but he came down for our sake. He gave Himself. He poured out His very life so that we might forever receive His life. And that's the truth of Christmas.

And I hope and I pray that you and I never are vaccinated against the joy and wonder that is Christmas. One Christmas morning, watching children open their Christmas presents, I had new insight into what Jesus meant when he said, we have to change and become like little children. I watched little children opening those gifts and not one of them said, oh, you shouldn't have gotten me so many presents, you shouldn't have spent so much money, they didn't break open their piggy banks and try to pay back, they received. And so it's in the heart of children to take, to receive. And so the heavenly Father wants you to receive as our Heavenly Father delights in giving. Make this Christmas your time for receiving God's indescribable gift of life wrapped up in Jesus Christ.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler. Thanks for listening, until next time.



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