



Worship Planning for Christmas Eve

Sermon Thoughts on Romans 8:32 “The Greatest Gift”

The Christmas Eve Sermon

The following thoughts are provided for those who choose to preach a sermon on Christmas Eve or those who choose to preach on Romans 8:32 on Christmas Day. If preaching on Christmas Eve, the preacher will want to keep in mind that the service already contains seven readings and more hymns than a typical service. Therefore, he may want to preach a shorter sermon than he otherwise would.

Context

We see “Romans 8” and our thoughts almost automatically go to verse 28 (all things work for the good) or verse 39 (more than conquerors). It is a section of God’s Word that is dedicated to how to live in the face of suffering. But between those two oft-quoted verses is the reason why we can face suffering and sin, the cause of suffering. The reason we can go forward is the Gift: “He gave him up for us all.” Because of the Gift that was given, we can also be assured of other gifts that will be given: “How will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

Main Point

Perhaps more than any other in recent history, 2020 has been a year of suffering. The COVID pandemic (and everything that came with it), racial tensions, political tensions, natural disasters, and who knows what else will be recapped as people reflect on the year that failed to live up to expectations. While listeners may be sick and tired of hearing about such things by the time Christmas comes along, no doubt, it will still be on their minds and talked about as families gather. And likely, people will express disappointment; not just disappointment with life situations, but maybe even disappointment with God. “Where have you have been this year, God?” But on Christmas, as we open God’s gift to us, we won’t be disappointed. As we peek at God’s gift in the manger, let’s help people see Christmas not just as a temporary escape from

suffering and disappointment, but as a solution for how to face suffering as this gift of Jesus is a testimony of God's love and an assurance of God's promises.

Sermon Flow

Introduction

The preacher sets up the concept of being disappointed, leading up to our disappointment with the gift of Jesus and/or the gifts that Jesus brings. Some thoughts may include:

2020. There were so many expectations for this year. It was an Olympic year. An election year. A year for some to graduate and others to get married. Then came COVID. So many things were canceled. And even when they weren't canceled, so many things were not what we wanted or expected. A year of expectation turned into a year of disappointment. With only six days left on the year, we may very well look back and think, "That's it?"

Disappointment isn't always on a global scale. How many children are going to be disappointed tonight in their living rooms? For weeks, they've been looking at those shiny-wrapped gifts with eyes of excitement, but the gift on the inside may fail to live up to their expectations. Depending on their age, they may be too ashamed to say it out loud, but internally they'll wonder, "That's it? That's all I'm getting?"

There was so much hype leading up to the first Christmas (reference the introductions to the lessons). With thousands of years of prophetic marketing, God's people couldn't wait to open the gift that God had wrapped up for them. They were promised a Head Crusher in Genesis 3, a Restorer in Isaiah 11, and Ends of the Earth Greatness in Micah 5. Jesus was the most-hyped person in the history of the world. But had someone peeked into the stable that night and seen a tiny baby with two poor parents, they might very well have thought to themselves, "That's it? That's the Gift?"

Sadly we, too, may sometimes find ourselves disappointed with God's Christmas gift. He doesn't do what we want or give us what we think we deserve. We want to get accepted to that college, marry that person, get that job, etc. And our expectations aren't met. We look around at the suffering of the world this year and we wonder, "That's it? You can't do anything more about this?"

Transition

Introduce Romans 8:32. It is not a common Christmas text. But playing off the words of "giving," we pray it will help people to see how the gift of Jesus is the perfect gift to deal with suffering and disappointment. Some thoughts:

Why do we become so disappointed? Could it be we don't fully grasp or we temporarily forget who Jesus is and what he does for us? On this Christmas let's look again at the manger through the lens of Romans 8:32 and see just who this "it" is when we murmur, "That's it?"

Body of the Sermon

Convey that the gift of Jesus is so much more than a baby in a manger. The baby is even more than just Jesus (not that “just Jesus” would be a bad thing). The baby (aka, the Gift) also tells us something about the “Giver” (the Father), as the baby is a testimony of God’s love and an assurance of his continued promises.

Thoughts regarding the Gift being a testimony of God’s love:

*When you look at the gifts under your tree, do you simply see the gift or do you see the love behind the gift? Often it’s what is behind the gift that makes it a “great gift.” Homemade gifts demonstrate love as someone was willing to sacrifice not just money, but also time to show you their love. Or sometimes people spend a lot of money on gifts because when it comes to bringing others joy, they don’t count the cost. Look what God gave you in the manger. He wasn’t just giving you a baby. He was giving you his Son. More than that, he was giving **up** his Son for you. “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.”*

The preacher will spend effort showing that there was a relationship between the Father and the Son. The closer you show the Father and the Son to be, the more meaningful the Gift becomes as we realize the Father was willing to give his one and only Son for us. An example:

That baby in the manger was God’s Son from all eternity. Think of all the experiences they shared. They worked side-by-side creating the world. They went through the flood together. They went through the days of Abraham, promising that he’d be a great nation. They served together as they rescued God’s people from slavery in Egypt. Together they received honor and glory from the psalms of David and the worshipers in Solomon’s temple. With all these shared experiences, imagine how close the Father and the Son were. And yet, the Father was willing to give up his Son for sinners like you and me.

A possible illustration to bring this point home:

*It used to be a Seminary tradition that the professors would share their “Most Memorable Christmas” stories with the students. Professor Siegbert Becker relayed how his most memorable Christmas was the first Christmas he was going to have with his newborn son. The new parents were so excited to celebrate their baby’s first Christmas and with that anticipation he went to the crib on Christmas morning to pick up his son . . . only to find that his son had died, on Christmas of all days. As Professor Becker shared the story with his students, he then added, “It was then that I knew how much God loved me, that he was **willing** to give up his Son for me.”*

Transition

Ok, that was 2000 years ago. But what about today? What does that baby in the manger say about what God thinks about me as I face disappointments and suffering today?

Thoughts regarding the Gift being an assurance of God's promises:

If the preacher uses the suggested lessons, he may refer to the Old Testament prophecies to demonstrate how nothing deterred him from keeping his promises. And if God followed through on that promise, you can be assured he will keep all his promises. Possible thoughts:

Earlier we talked about how God promised to send a Savior as soon as the first sin occurred in the Garden of Eden. For thousands of years God watched a world constantly disobey him and turn their backs on him. God could have said, "Forget it. I'm not going to send my Son to them. I love my Son way too much to have him live with them only to be ridiculed, mocked, beaten and killed." God had every right to say that. But 2000 years ago, God kept his promise as he wrapped up his Son and gave him as a gift to the world.

If God followed through on that promise, doesn't that give you confidence that God will keep all his other promises as well? Because of Christmas, you can be sure that God will send his angels to guard you (Psalm 91). Because of Christmas, you can be sure God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1). Because of Christmas, you can be sure God will work out all things and that nothing can separate you from his love (Romans 8). Be assured, because God gave you the gift of his Son, "how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

Today we realize that isn't just lip service. God's Word is true to his promises, and the manger proves it.

Conclusion

Give people time to soak in the value of this gift that we have in Jesus. Thoughts may sound like this:

Look at the manger. Look at God's gift—to you. Humanly speaking, the Gift looks small. The Gift looks fragile. The Gift looks dirty and maybe even disappointing. But after what we heard today, I pray you don't look at that Gift and say, "That's it?" Rather, look at this Gift and say, "That's it! That's what I need! That's God showing his love to me! That's God's keeping his promises for me! That's quite a Gift. That's the Greatest Gift!"