

We Are Rich!

It's Christmas morning. All the gifts are under the tree. Little Sam runs down the stairs from his bedroom to see what gifts are his. There are four gifts with his name on them. Sam opens the first one. It's a football. He opens the second one. It's a baseball glove. The third one, a truck. The fourth one, a set of Legos. Sam looks at all his gifts and shouts, "I'm rich!"

That story describes how I feel when I read Titus 3:4-7. Reading Titus 3:4-7 is like opening gifts on Christmas, and after opening each one, realizing how rich you are. Let's open these gifts today, see what we have been given, and how rich we are.

Gift #1 - Salvation

***"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."
(Titus 3:4-5)***

We can't help but think of Christmas when we read the words ***"when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared."*** We can't help but think of the babe born in Bethlehem, of God in the flesh, of Emmanuel. Why did this holy Child appear? To save us. To save us from what? To save us from what we could not save ourselves – from our sin. Note ***"not even our righteous acts are good enough to save us."*** Anything we might point to in our life with the hopes that those things would count for something with God doesn't cut it. Not even claiming "I am a good person" cuts it.

Within our heart, we can't ignore what Isaiah says: ***"All have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."*** (Isaiah 64:6). And we can't ignore what Paul says either, ***"There is no one righteous, not even one"*** (Romans 3:10). These passages describe who we are by ourselves. We know it. We also know that if God would wait to save us until he saw something righteous in us, we'd never be saved. But he didn't wait for us. He took his own initiative and saved us. He saw our sad, pitiful state and did something about it. He had mercy on us, came to us in the flesh, and did what he had to in order to save us. He lived for us. He died for us. He rose for us. Never were two simple words ("for us") a more precious, personal gift.

Gift #2 - Baptism

***"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior."
(Titus 3:5-6)***

A man came up to a beggar and asked, "What can I give you? Can I give you some food?" The beggar said, "Thank you. But no, sir. What I really need is a bath and a new set of clothes." That's what our baptism means to us as it's described in these words of Titus.

Because of our sinfulness, we are like filthy beggars who need a bath and a new set of clothes. Our baptism provides that. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, baptism cleanses us from sin, changes our condition before God, and gives a fresh, new start. We have been made alive with Christ and given new meaning to our lives. And every day we turn to our baptism, it promises that we start clean. Our baptism is a gift that keeps on giving.

Gift #3 – Justification

***“...So that having been justified by his grace...”
(Titus 3:7)***

This gift is so powerful because it is a declaration that comes from God’s high and holy court. Let me illustrate:

“Ron got tangled up in a crime to help pay for college. After committing more than 20 robberies, Ron had finally gotten caught. The judge let him off easy. After sentencing Ron to about a month in jail and three years probation, the judge told Ron, ‘Never in the history of state law has anyone received such a light sentence.’ Ron didn’t get the sentence he deserved. But he still got sentenced.” And therein lays the difference between man’s mercy and God’s mercy.

There is nothing in us that deserves a lighter sentence than eternity in hell. But instead of making the sentence lighter, God removed the sentence altogether. God himself has declared us “not guilty.” That judgment cannot be reversed. It cannot because Jesus carried out the sentence for sinners on our behalf. The punishment we should have endured, he endured. The hell we should have suffered, he suffered. The execution we should have received, he received on the cross. Because Jesus did all this for us, God has legally acquitted us. We are free.

Gift #4 – An Inheritance

***“...we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”
(Titus 3:7)***

These words in the Greek are a judicial declaration as well? Not only have you been justified but you have been made a legal heir of God. You see, only a person’s child is a person’s heir. So for these words to be true in Titus, you had to be adopted. And that’s exactly what God did for you. He adopted you. That’s why you are an heir.

The legal power of your adoption is amazing. Again, let me illustrate: “Joe and Melanie went to the county courthouse for a legal hearing called “the termination of parental rights of an adopted child.” The hearing lasted about an hour, and at the end of it, Elliana’s birth parents lost all legal rights to her. Do you know why? The judge declared it. He also declared Joe and Melanie the adoptive parents. In that moment Elliana became a legal and full member of Joe and Melanie’s family. She also became an heir of everything that belonged to Jonathan and Melanie.” In very much the same way, dear friends, you are a legal and full member of God’s family and an heir of God’s kingdom. Why? Because God himself declared it! And really, your baptism promises it.

When Sam shouted, "I'm rich," he didn't know better. He only knew what he had been given to him and that in his mind he was the most blessed child in the whole world. I pray we have a similar attitude toward these gifts we have opened in Titus today. Nothing compares to these gifts that we have been given. We are truly rich! Merry Christmas. Amen.