



“The Everlasting Gift”

Romans 6:23

December 15th, 2019

We are going to be in Romans Chapter 6 this morning.

Before we dive in, I want to let you know that as I was thinking about this series on the gifts of Christmas, I was taken back to December 25, 1990. I was sixteen-years-old, enjoying another great Christmas morning with mom and dad and my brother, Lance. It was that time in the morning where we were just finished with opening all the presents and gifts. When I thought that it was all finished, Dad gave me one more small package, one that I had not seen or noticed under the tree. I think mom and dad set that package aside then gave it to me at just the right time. I took the gift which was a very light weight package, and I was wondering if there was anything in it at all. I took off the ribbon and I unwrapped the gift. I sorted through the tissue paper to see if there was, in fact, anything in the box! Then I found a key chain. I remember it very clearly. It was like a California license plate key chain. On the other end of that key chain was a single chain that said Toyota on it. I looked at the key and then at my parents. Dad even took a picture of me at just the right moment.

I was thinking to myself, *No! No way! Seriously, are you serious?* I think my parents got fed up with me looking at them in wonder, so they told me to go and look in the garage. How they kept it hidden, I don't know. When the car arrived in the garage, I don't know either.

However, there was a nice, sparkling and shining 1980 Toyota Celica with a white bow across the front windshield. I was amazed and was thinking, *Freedom!* That was just an amazing gift. As far as Christmas surprises go, that gift it outdid them all. I did not see that coming. It was a very great and memorable gift, one that I was thankful for then and am thankful for still.

Fast forward, go to December 11, 2019, last Wednesday night. I'm not kidding, I was thinking about that story and gift in relation to a potential introduction to this series of messages on the gifts of Christmas. On the shelf that night I saw the day's mail. Included in the mail was a Christmas card. I recognized the handwriting on the card immediately as dad's writing. I opened the card, looked at the picture on the front, then read what the card had to say. It was picture of a shepherd watching over his sheep by night. He was situated on a hill overlooking the little town of Bethlehem. There was a stable scene with the manger and the Christmas star shining down upon the manger and the One in the manger.

The words written across that card read:

“God's gift is still the greatest gift ever given.”

Amen! At the very moment I was reflecting back on a wonderful gift given by loving parents to their son, I received that card from my dad. I could almost hear his voice: *Remember son, God's gift is the greatest gift ever given.*

This morning we begin a series of sermons titled *The Gifts of Christmas*. Remember that Christmas is all about the incarnation of the Son of God. We are talking about the point in history where the God of the universe, the God who created everything, entered into His creation and where God took upon Himself human nature.

God added a human nature to Himself, so that now in Christ, He is both God and man in one person. There He had arrived through the birth canal of a virgin daughter of Israel named Mary. He came bearing the greatest gifts ever given to the human race.

Over the next few weeks we are going to be considering these gifts. Next week we are going to be talking about *The Inexpressible Gift* as communicated to us in II Corinthians Chapter 9 and Verse 15—or the indescribable gift as some translations have it. Next week we are going to dig deep into this and see if we can understand what Paul had in mind by calling it that.

After that, Pastor Chris is going open God's Word with us, talking about *The Indwelling Gift*, another gift that God has given that comes to reside within His people. This week, though, we will start this series by considering *The Everlasting Gift*.

This everlasting gift is revealed to us all throughout the pages of the New Testament, including Paul's letter to the Romans, a book that is filled with rich Bible doctrine. Romans is a thorough, detailed, wonderful explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It explains to us all what God has done by His grace to save us from the penalty that our sin deserves. It is an extensive explanation of the Good News about Jesus. However, there are punctuated moments throughout the book of Romans where the Good News and the gift of God is stated for us in concise and memorable form.

This morning we are going to see one of those statements. It is in Chapter 6 in the middle of Paul's discussion of the believer's sanctification. In other words, that each Christian needs to reckon him or herself dead to sin, and alive to God in the pursuit of purity and holiness before the Lord.

In the midst of this discussion, Paul dropped one of the greatest sentences ever written. In the words of C.H. Spurgeon, who is often called the Prince of Preachers:

“It's a Christian proverb, a golden sentence, a divine statement of truth worthy to be written across the sky.”

There in that discussion of the believer's growth in holiness, there is the reminder that our salvation is, in the end, a gift of God's grace.

As we begin this Christmas series this morning, I would like to share with you this one verse, this one single verse, laying out before us the everlasting gift. Romans 6:23:

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

Let me just sound forth those words once more and allow them to settle into your heart—the truth of them; the glory of them; the reality of them.

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

Brothers and sisters, there you have the everlasting gift, and that is eternal life in Christ, not just ongoing existence of some of kind, but everlasting life in the Lord; a life that will never ever, ever end.

I can't help but think that last year at this time I got a brand-new cell phone. I loved that phone. It was a Samsung Galaxy Note 8 Smartphone. It had a little S-pin that you could write on the screen with, and you could also highlight things.

It was such a cool phone and was the best little gadget I have ever had. I loved that phone. Yesterday, I dropped it. I had the protective covering on it, so the screen did not shatter and most of the features of the phone work just fine, except it will not read the sim card anymore.

The sim card is the data card that connects you to your provider, so I have a phone that has a wonderful camera and other great things, but it won't allow me to make any phone calls anymore. It won't allow me to send text messages. When I am out and about, there is no more internet, so I can't email when I am out and about.

I was thinking that phone was such of a cool gift, but it does not work the way it needs to work anymore. In contrast to the good things of this world that can break, that can rust, that can get destroyed. However, God grants to His people who trust in Jesus a life that is never ever going to end.

In fact, as you read the pages of Scripture, I think that the indication is that it is going to become more and more glorious and wonderful as the ages stretch forth into eternity future. It is the gift of life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As we look at this verse, we have to notice first of all that this gift is presented to us as the other side of a contrast. Do you see it in the verse that we just read?

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

This morning as we begin our consideration of this gift that is in front of us today, it is our duty to first consider the first part of that contrast: The wages of sin is death. Just read that. Take it in, and let us be sobered by what is written there from the heart of God to us.

The wages of sin is death. The word *wages* means payoff or the *payout*. It carries the nuance of getting what you have earned. You have worked for it, and it is the measured wage that is deserved.

So often in our labor, the wages of work is income—money. In the moral sphere of this universe that God has created, the wages, the outcome, the payout of sin is death. Sin is any deviation from the moral purity and holiness of God as revealed in the moral law of God. It is any step outside. It is any transgression of the good that has been revealed by God. This is what sin is.

We read in the pages of Scripture that there are two arenas by which we can deviate from the goodness that God designed us to live in. There is an internal arena and an external arena. The internal is that of the mind and the heart and some of the emotions that we will entertain within ourselves. It is possible for somebody to stew and to simmer with impure thoughts that are within.

Then there is also an external arena where the thoughts and the internal aspect of it becomes outward in the things that we do, and the things that we say that are harmful; the ways that we behave. There are so many different ways in which we can transgress from the good in to the evil. Sin is a reality.

Not only are there these two arenas of sin, but there are two ways of sin. There are sins of omission and there are sins of commission, as theologians have recognized. The sin of omission is when we fail to do the good that we ought to and can do, and that we really should do. This is the sin of omission.

A sin of commission is carrying out some form of evil that we ought not to do. So, on the one hand, there is the sense in which we ought to be going out and doing some kind of love, service, and kindness that in our selfishness, we slam on the brakes on and don't do it. There are sins of omission.

Then on the other hand, there can be some forms of speech or behavior or impurity where we are heading in that direction, and we are supposed to be applying the brakes, but instead, we apply the accelerator and we go forth into the deeds of sin. Sin is internal and it is external. It is a matter of things that we really should do and we don't and the things that we ought not to do and we go ahead and do those things anyway.

Every single one of us has sinned in a whole diversity of ways. That is true of you. That is true of me. We are fallen sinners. And this text says that the wages of sin is death. Understand that the essence of death is separation. There is physical death and there is spiritual death. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God.

God is pristine. God is holy. He is upright in every way and His eyes are too pure to look upon sin and evil without judging it. And the wages of sin in eternity is separation from God. Where instead of basking in His love, we will be under His judgment in hell. This is the teaching of Scripture. The wages of sin is death.

Every member of the human race has accumulated a massive payment that is due them for their sin. With our various areas of employment, we have days off. Some days we work, other days we don't, but every single one of us sins every single day, and that sin is offensive in the sight of God.

We are all sinners, every last one of us and we are building up the wages of sin and the wages of sin is death—separation from God for eternity. That, brothers and sisters, is just a very, very brief consideration of the first part of that contrast. We need to take it in and we need to absorb it. The wages of sin is death.

Now, let me draw your attention to what I think is one of the most wonderful words in Scripture. I think that the word *but* is one of the best words in the Bible. Here in Romans Chapter 6 and Verse 23, I might even say that we have before us one of the best *but*s of them all!

This word *but*, it is a word of contrast. Yes, take in what was before, but really get a load of what's coming next. The wages of sin is death *BUT*... Hallelujah for that word! But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. God has given this gift and that gift is only found in Christ the One who came into the world and whose birth we are celebrating all month long, all life long, all eternity long.

As we consider the other side of this contrast, I want us to perceive here in this text how there are three aspects of the contrast. On the one hand you have the sin. On the other hand you have the grace. The three aspects of contrast help us to understand what God has done for us in Christ.

First, let's understand this:

1. In contrast to the wages of sin is the free gift of God.

The wage is something that is earned. The gift is something that is given by grace. In fact, *free gift* is the word for grace. It is in noun form in the underlying Greek. Can you imagine how the meaning of this verse would be altered if it said:

The wages of sin is death, but the wages of your righteousness is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord

The payout of sin is death, but the payout of your pursuit of purity before the Lord is eternal life in Christ. That would make that eternal life something that we work for and earn, and there is no earning it.

Instead, this verse says:

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God's grace is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is something that He gives in love for the one who humbles their heart and says, *I am a sinner. I need forgiveness and I need Your grace to provide for me something that I could not provide for myself.*

When we think about the whole idea of a gift, a gift is something that is free and not free at the same time. A gift is free to the one who receives it, right? It is free. Somebody comes and gives me a gift and I pull out my wallet say let me pay you for that, then it is no longer a gift.

A gift is free to the one who receives it, but it costs the one who gives it. Here when we think about the gift of everlasting life in Christ, we come to the heart of Christmas when we think about what the cost was for the Lord our God.

Once again, I touched upon this in the introduction of this morning's message, but the meaning of Christmas is that God entered into the world to pay the price for our sin. What we find in the pages of Scripture is that there is one God and one God alone, yet within that God there is three. He is the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

The Second Person of the Trinity, the Son, entered into the world that He created. He took on human flesh and He paid the price that our sin deserves. Here in the text of Romans Chapter 6, it is all about redemption; paying a ransom to free us from slavery. That is what is laid before us here in text.

In Christ, you have the pure and the unblemished blood of the Lamb flowing through His veins. When He was on the cross, that blood was spilled, and it is revealed to us in Scripture as a purchase price.

It frees us from the penalty that we deserve. It frees us from the dominion of sin. When applied it brings us into the grace of God when we trust in what Jesus has done for us. This salvation is given to us as a gift. Jesus, the Son of God, is the One who paid the price. So in our hearts every Christmas we say, *Thank You, Jesus, for what you have done for us.*

In contrast to the wages of sin is the free gift of God, something that we receive by faith. The second point of contrast:

2. In contrast to the dominion of sin is the Lordship of Christ.

Romans 6:23 says:

²³...but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He is our Master, our Authority. We enter into the sphere of the Lordship of Christ as those who have received His gift.

I have watched quite a few Christmas movies through the years. Have any of you ever watched any Christmas movies? What I have noticed is so many of these Christmas movies, they have a villain or evil people—somebody who is out to get the person that we are pulling for.

One of my favorite Christmas movies ever is *A Christmas Story*, with Little Ralphie and his Red Rider BB Gun. He has to get that gun for Christmas. That what is hoping for. On first glance, we might think that the enemy in that story is Scott Farkus. He had yellow eyes and was the town bully. But thinking about it a little bit more, I thought what if the mom is actually the villain, with her accomplice the teacher. She appears in Ralphie's nightmares, *You'll shoot your eye out, you'll shoot your eye out, you'll shoot your eye out!*

The movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, it has a villain known as Old Man Potter. In the cartoon, Frosty the Snowman, the villain is Professor Hinkle. He wants his hat back. *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*, *The Abominable Snowman*, the movies go on and on.

The real Christmas story, the story of Christ and His salvation, it has an enemy too. On first glance, we might say, Yes, of course, the enemy is Satan; the devil. In fact, he is an enemy and he exists. There is an unseen demonic realm. We see its evil all throughout this world. But the greatest enemy that you have is much closer to home, understand that. Because there is the sense in which you are your own worst enemy. It is the sin and rebellion that lives within your heart. It is your own sin that alienates you from God.

We need to confess that before the Lord, saying, *Lord, I have transgressed in so many ways. Thank You for Your forgiveness. Thank You for the price that was paid. I come to Christ and His cross.*

But understand, sin is an ongoing enemy, even in the life of the Christian. When you do a careful reading of Romans Chapter 6, you will see that indwelling sin within the heart and the flesh of each follower of Christ, it is personified. On the one hand, we are forgiven of sin, but there is the residue of it so that it would be so easy for any of us to go off in to sinful behavior; those of us in Christ too.

And here in Romans Chapter 6, it is like that sinful nature is personified and is given volition and given desire and it desires to rule over each one of us. Sin desires to be your dictator. Sin desires to keep you in its grip. It will lead you off into all kinds of destructive behavior.

Even for a Christian, for a person who has humbled themselves before the Lord confessing they are sinners in need of forgiveness, there is the sense in the ongoing practice of sin where sin can result in a form of death in this life.

Yes, we are joined to God by faith in Christ, but sin can cause death throughout this life if we yield to it. The essence of sin is separation. The practice of sin can separate joy from your heart. The practice of sin can separate power from your service. The practice of sin can separate intimacy from your relationships. Sin is destructive, make no misstate about it.

Praise God, that in Christ there is power to overcome and crucify the sinful nature; that personified dictator sin within can be overcome by the power and the grace of the Holy Spirit. Throughout this language of Scripture, we have this language of redemption that in Christ, we will be filled with the Spirit. We will have increasing growth in power and victory over sin.

That is good news. Throughout the sixth chapter of Romans, what you will find is that Paul used some very, very harsh language to get the point across to us. Eight times in Verses 15 through 23 the language of slavery is used.

If Verse 19 Paul make it very clear that he was speaking in human terms. He was using illustrations and pictures because they help us to understand. Paul used shocking language to get the picture clear in our minds.

We are going to be slaves one way or the other, either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. We have to understand that entrance into the grace of God also means entrance into the glorious Lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ, who wants to make it so that we are slaves to righteousness so that sin will not have dominion over us, introducing death to the various aspects of our lives in this world.

But it must be in our hearts to say yes to the Lord, asking him to set us free and to be our Master. Because it is going to be one way or the other. Nobody is going to grow in holiness in a lackadaisical kind of way. We need to say, *Lord, reckon me dead to sin and a slave to righteousness.*

Imagine a form of slavery that did not result in the degradation of life and a sad death. But imagine a form of slavery that elevated the person; a form of service that caused the person to stand out with love and dignity and grace and truth and goodness.

We must be those who, when tempted by sin, have a yielding heart produced by the Spirit, saying, *Lord, I am dead to sin and I am a slave to righteousness.* We come under the Lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we are alive in Him, our Living Head, with all the qualities of His grace and peace and truth and love and joy, our lives are going to become fruitful. Instead of seeing death, we are going to see life.

So in contrast to the dominion of sin, there is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. There is a lot of talk about autonomy in this world. I just want for all of us to understand that with followers of Christ, there is no self-rule here. *I'm the lord of my life. I'm the captain of my ship.* No, you are not!

Jesus is the Captain of your ship! Jesus is the Lord of your life, and there is no better way for you because He is the One who designed your life. He is the One who know how to make it thrive with fruit. We are not going to drift into holiness, but we must say, *Lord, Your are my King. You are my Master. Where You lead, that is where I go.*

In contrast to the dominion of sin is the Lordship of Christ. Finally, there is one more point of contrast.

3. In contrast to the separation of sin is the union of life.

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

In Christ! If death is all about separation, then life is about union. And the gift of God is being joined to Christ in such a way that we share in His life, in his love, in his character, in His resurrection, in his power and in his eternal existence. We will be a part of His reign, joined to Him, forever and ever throughout all eternity future.

The day is coming upon the return of Christ when the New Heavens will be joined to the New Earth. Our purified souls will be joined to our resurrection bodies. The redeemed family of God will be joined together for everlasting fellowship. We, as the bride of Christ, will be joined to our Messiah to know Him and to carry out His wonderful purposes for evermore.

There is a sense in which this already begins in this life. The goal and the desire of the church is that we grow closer together in fellowship in the sharing of life in union with Christ Jesus so that the closer we get to Christ, the closer we get to one another as we move toward Him. There is the sense in which we ought to be moving closer toward one another in love. There is union in life.

Then when this life ends, Christians do experience physical death but we don't experience spiritual death. When these bodies decline and the soul goes to be with the Lord in Paradise, we are joined together with the Lord. We see one another.

This week as we were thinking about our beloved Pastor Keith going to be with the Lord a little over than a month ago, then our brother Eric going to be with the Lord just last week, somebody said, *Boy O boy, I wonder what kind of reception brother Eric got from Pastor Keith last week.*

They were remembering how Pastor Keith gave Eric probably the biggest welcome of any of us each week. Imagine Pastor Keith just set free; imagine Eric set free, clear minded thinking Eric. Pretty soon Jerry Larsen will be strolling up to see them.

There is this union in the presence of the Messiah. There is a union of life, this intimacy, this joining together. It is going to be perfected all throughout all of eternity, and that we want to grow more and more through the years that have together here.

I was thinking about everlasting life in Christ Jesus our Lord, thinking of the whole concept of infinity; that God is infinite in nature. Infinite! A being that is infinite has the ability to keep on giving and giving and giving and giving without being depleted.

We are finite beings and there might be a tendency where there is a heart to serve and a heart to give and a heart to provide. We give and we give and we give, and we get depleted and depleted and depleted. We need to go back to the Lord to get filled back up to give, give, give, and give.

We get depleted, but God's supply never ever diminishes, so that He will keep on giving and keep giving, and the flow of His grace will never subside. It will never be diminished. It is going to keep going.

If I understand the pages of Scripture correctly, it's volume is just going to keep increasing. We give and might start running out, God gives and the volume of it gets more intense. Let me finish with one of my favorite Christmas passages. It is a prophecy of Christ and His Kingdom and our life in Him and His reign. Isaiah 9:6-7:

**⁶For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulders,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace
there shall be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.**

There are wonderful truths there. They are filled with meaning. There is something in this passage that stands out to me every single time I read it. It that word *increase*. That word *increase* blows my mind. It causes the wiring in my thinking to be blown.

Verse 7 does not simply say, *of his government and peace there will be no end*. It says that of the increase of his government, of the increase of his reign, the increase of his initiatives, the expansion of his gifts, the growing of his directives, and corresponding to all those things, his peace in the hearts of his people, it all is going to keep expanding and growing throughout all eternity.

First and foremost, we are going to be those whose hearts are filled with awe and praise as we look upon Jesus our Lord, and we are going to serve His Holy Name, doing the things that His creative heart and mind thinks for us to do in His Everlasting Kingdom forever and ever and ever and ever.

That is not going to include sitting on a stinking little cloud, strumming a harp and floating around. That sounds miserable. Heaven is not going to be boring. God is going to give us initiatives and assignment and tasks to do as His reign increases and expands, in the New Heavens and in the New Earth, for all eternity future. Mind blowing!!

I don't know how to understand that. All I know is that life in Christ is life in union with our Messiah in worship and in praise of His Holy Name, thanking Him for the shedding of His blood, for the giving of His life for us; that He might cleanse away every stain from our hearts and souls and lives; that He might cleanse us and make us pure and holy in His sight by His grace as a gift that we may dwell and reign with Him forevermore in a way that is going to be wonderful beyond description.

The gift of God—the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is everlasting life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Are you in Christ? You enter in by faith. You confess your sin. Scripture says if we say that we don't have sin, we are liars. That's just another sin. We say, *Lord, Your holy and pure. I am not. I need Your mercy and Your grace.*

We come to Christ in faith saying, *I rest in Him. My salvation is in Him. My everlasting life is in Him. It is not something that I have earned. I am humbled. I need Your grace.* We enter into Christ through faith, and by faith, we are joined to Him forevermore to be a part of a Kingdom that will never end.

If you are here and you are not a Christian, you have never humbled yourself in that way, we all have to humble ourselves. Yes, I just said that. If you have never humbled yourself in that way, it says in Scripture that *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.* Come before the Lord and tell Him you need Him. I would love to encourage you in that. I would love to let you know more about it. I want to encourage you in that faith.

If you are here and you are a Christian, I pray that your heart will be filled with joy in the Lord and that you will worship Him in the power of His Spirit as we continue into this holiday season.

Will you join me in a word of prayer as we close?