

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



**THRU**the**BIBLE**

*Under*  
**THE**  
*Tree*

**EIGHT GIFTS JESUS GIVES  
YOU AT THE CROSS**

**DR. J. VERNON MCGEE**

# UNDER THE TREE

## EIGHT GIFTS JESUS GIVES YOU AT THE CROSS

*Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.* –1 Peter 2:24

Will you have a Christmas tree at your house this year? A towering fir or pine, festooned with lights and tinsel and towering over a mound of brightly wrapped gifts? How did this tradition make its way into the Christian celebration of Jesus' birth?

No one has a clear answer. Some connect it with ancient Rome's practice of placing an evergreen bough over the door during the pagan festival of Saturnalia. Some tie it to tree-worshipping Druids. Still other theories relate it to a legend about Jesus being born in a forest, covered in ice and snow, that then burst into bloom.

So, bottom line, we don't know the historical basis for the Christmas tree. But in spite of all this, here's something to take to heart at this season: **God has His own Christmas tree.**

God's Christmas tree is not as photogenic as the department store tree—bedecked in colorful ornaments, tinsel, and twinkle lights—but it is far more beautiful. Have you guessed it?

God's Christmas tree is *the cross of Christ*. In fact, the proper name for the cross is "tree." In one of the first great sermons ever given we read, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree" (Acts 5:30). Peter wrote in his first epistle: "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the *tree*, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

Let's take a closer look at God's Christmas tree.

# WHAT'S UNDERNEATH GOD'S CHRISTMAS TREE?

Like a traditional tree tucked in the corner of a family's living room, underneath God's Christmas tree are gifts for His children. Though they're not wrapped with paper and ribbon, they are of infinite beauty. They come straight from heaven and were purchased with the precious blood of Christ.

Because these gifts are spiritual, you might think they aren't practical for today. But, my friend, in each one something vital and relevant for you in your current circumstance waits for you.

If you are God's child, then you have the gift of salvation. We often think of salvation as being something in the future, that it's a package labeled "Do not open until eternity." We think of salvation in terms of golden streets, crowns, white robes, and harps in our hands. But the salvation God gives is for *right now*, and it comes with gifts for you. They're right there with your name on them underneath His Christmas tree, and you can open them now. You don't have to wait till Christmas!

# HOW DO I KNOW THESE GIFTS ARE FOR ME?

God's gifts come only by faith—that is the only way you can receive a gift, isn't it? When someone hands you a present, it's by faith you accept it.

Likewise, the only way God justifies anyone today is by faith. And when He justifies, He does more than simply forgive you, He takes you who are guilty and makes you right before Himself. Nothing in us causes Him to do it; the explanation lies in God alone. Having a great faith is not important; even a little faith will save, because God justifies perfectly.

His justification is also permanent—it goes from the moment it's received all the way into eternity. He justifies sinners who do nothing more nor less than simply trust in Jesus Christ. In other words, all who come to His Christmas tree—the cross of Christ—in faith.

If you have done that, then you are His child and God places these cross gifts for you. You may have opened the packages already, and it is wonderful if you have. If you have not, don't wait any longer to accept them. After all, your name is written on them. Let's take a look at some of them.

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GIFT #1:  
PEACE

***Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** –Romans 5:1

Peace is integral to the Christmas message—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men” (Luke 2:14). But peace is an elusive and ethereal thing that seems impossible to obtain in today’s world. A more accurate translation of this Christmas message is: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace to men of good will.*” The peace is to a certain class of people—peace with God for those who want that peace.

The root of the trouble in this world is not racial, economic, political, or whatever the media is blaming currently. The root of the trouble is that the human family is at enmity with God. That is, they are God’s enemy. “...There is none who seeks after God. ... And the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:11, 17, 18).



Colossians 1:21 tells it a different way, that has taken on new meaning for me:

***And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.***

At heart, man is God's enemy. However, *God* is not an enemy of *man*—He is an enemy of *sin*. Notice peace comes through Jesus Christ. By His death on the cross He made peace between a holy God and a lost sinner. God's peace comes from knowing your sins have been forgiven.

We long for peace above all else yet it is right there at the foot of the cross, available for any sinner who will receive it. Why don't you pick it up?

GIFT #2:  
ACCESS TO GOD

***Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand ....*** –Romans 5:2

Dr. Griffith Thomas, a great Bible teacher of years ago, said, “Christianity is the religion of access.” Religions of the world shut man out from God. They are nothing but a maze of ritual and liturgy that never guarantee anyone’s entrance into God’s presence. In fact, religion stops us and blocks the way until we *do something or pay something*.

Even in the Old Testament, man did not have access to God. The tabernacle shut him out. No ordinary man could go into the holy of holies, only Israel’s high priest could enter, and then only once a year and with blood according to God’s specific instructions. A careful study of the tabernacle reveals that the wonderful person of Jesus Christ actually shut man out from God until He went to the cross and died for the sins of the world.


One of the most glorious benefits of living in this age of grace is that we have direct and immediate access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

***Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ... Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*** –Hebrews 4:14, 16

***Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*** –Hebrews 10:19-22

This is a miracle, my friend! Access to God Himself.

Today, at the foot of the cross, God gives you a gift certificate that allows you to go directly and immediately into God's presence. There you can find all the grace and help you need. It would be a terrible thing to receive a gift card like that and not use it. How tragic it is that Christians who have been given access to God fail to use it! Don't be one of them.



GOD'S PEACE  
COMES FROM  
KNOWING  
YOUR SINS  
HAVE BEEN  
FORGIVEN.

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GIFT #3:

## HOPE

***Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.***

—Romans 5:2

The next gift is not an ordinary hope, but “hope of the glory of God.” Paul said to a young preacher by the name of Titus, “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). When the Lord comes again and takes His church out of this world—that is our glorious hope. If you belong to Him, you have a future. You have something to look forward to.

The glory of God is a fearful thing yet to be revealed on this earth. We’re told that Christ is coming again, not as a babe in Bethlehem, but in power and great glory. As our civilization rushes headlong into degrading sins, thoughtful people ask how long God will let mankind go on like this. Over this earth hangs an ominous expectation: The coming of Christ in glory. His coming will be a time of great judgment on this earth.

Since you and I have come short of the glory of God, how can we—imperfect and weak as we are—look forward with joy to that day? My friend, after we are justified in God’s sight by simply trusting Jesus Christ, we need not dread the coming of that glory. Why? Because He will take us up beforehand:

***For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ... For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another ....*** –1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; 5:9-11

We are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). When He comes, He will make right all that is wrong in the world today.

The child of God has a blessed hope. We know all things are going to “work together for good” (Romans 8:28). We know that *nothing* “shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). How wonderful is that blessed hope of the church!

GIFT #4:  
TRIUMPH IN TROUBLE

***And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.*** –Romans 5:3, 4

Another gift under God's Christmas tree is victory. To translate this verse another way, the believer can rejoice in trouble.

This is one of the paradoxes of the Christian faith. The apostle Paul wrote to new Christians in Thessalonica:

***And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.***  
–1 Thessalonians 1:6

The world dares not join those two words—affliction and joy. But, child of God, you can boast of the discipline of God. Why? Because you know if He has permitted trouble to come, it is for your good and His glory. God is attempting to develop character in us. He does not save us by our character, but He does save us in order to *produce* character—and many times He accomplishes that through the refining fires of trouble.

The Greek word used for “character” is the root from which we get our English word “assay,” which means to evaluate. Years ago in mining towns, the assayer was someone who could take a piece of ore, examine it by means of a rigorous test, and determine its genuineness. That is exactly what Job meant when he said, “But he knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Troubles should not weaken the faith of the believer but, rather, strengthen it. Actually, troubles should produce boldness. Triumph in trouble results in patience and character. And the final result is hope, which means a super-abounding optimism toward life.

When we see this package under the tree, we pick it up carefully, maybe hesitantly. But, my friend, this trouble could be a gift from God. You can rejoice in trouble.



GIFT #5:

LOVE

***Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts .... –Romans 5:5***

The general meaning of “poured out” is that the love of God gushes forth from your heart as oil from a gusher. The love referred to here has nothing whatsoever to do with human emotion; the love of God is a fruit of the Spirit. It means to love as God loved when it was said of Him:

***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. –John 3:16***

The “Christmas spirit” is common in this season, with many making donations to various charities. But real Christian love only comes when we *seek the face of God*. Only when we see God can we show His love to the world.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a camera lens. The lens is the central focus, and through its circular opening, a cityscape is visible under a dramatic, sunset-colored sky. The background is blurred, showing the hand and parts of the camera body. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

When He comes,  
*He will make right*  
all that is wrong  
in the world today.

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GIFT #6:  
THE HOLY SPIRIT

The sixth gift of His grace just might be the greatest:

***... The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. –Romans 5:5***

When you become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, He instantly writes your name on this gift: The Holy Spirit. You do not have to seek this gift, and you do not have to wait for Him; it is instantaneous.

When He was preparing to leave this earth, Jesus said:

***And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. –John 14:16-18***

Jesus has come to us through the Holy Spirit, who is given to every believer. Notice that “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit alone can actualize the love of God for us in Christ. The indwelling work of the Holy Spirit in the believer is His peculiar work in this age of grace.

GIFT #7:  
DELIVERANCE FROM WRATH

The last two of these rich gifts are hidden away in Romans 5:9-11. Let's look at them rather closely.

First—

***Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.*** –Romans 5:9

People often ask me to point to a verse of Scripture that shows believers will not go through the Great Tribulation. Here is one of many. What is this wrath from which we are saved? The Tribulation. Some seem to think the Great Tribulation is like a hurricane, and they'll be able to get in a storm cellar, batten down the hatches, and stay there until it blows over. My friend, that isn't accurate at all.

In a former gift I mentioned the wrath or judgment of God's glory, and it is to this that the Lord refers.

***For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?*** –Revelation 6:17

The “cup of iniquity” is being filled up, a stage is being set—as God said it would be—and then the judgments will come on the earth. The Antichrist will come to power, promising the world peace, and the world will believe him. The heart of man, yearning for peace, will go after the man who promises it—never thinking of turning to Jesus Christ, who alone can give it. They will be deceived. Antichrist will not bring peace, but war. It will be the final conflagration, ending in the battle of Armageddon.

However, Romans 5:9 assures us we are delivered—we have been saved from the wrath of God to come. If you have been troubled by some who say believers must go through the Great Tribulation, read the next verse:

***For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*** –Romans 5:10

If God was willing to give His Son to die for you when you were an enemy of His, don't you know that when you become His child He will see to it that you will not taste of the wrath to come? Christ died to save us from this. What a priceless gift—we are saved from the wrath to come!

A photograph of a person wearing a black winter jacket and a dark hat, smiling broadly with their arms raised in the air. They are standing in a snowy environment, with snow falling around them. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white and grey, suggesting a snowy landscape. The person's face is partially covered in snow, and their eyes are closed in a joyful expression. The overall mood is one of happiness and celebration in winter weather.

HE HAS WORKED OUT  
A PLAN TO SAVE US  
BECAUSE OF HIS  
*Love for us.*

ISN'T THAT ENOUGH  
TO MAKE YOU **REJOICE?**

OH, CHILD OF GOD,  
*have joy,*  
IN YOUR HEART.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

G I F T # 8 :

# JOY

***And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*** –Romans 5:11

This is one of the most wonderful statements in Scripture. Right now, wherever you are, whatever your problems are, my friend, you can rejoice—you can *joy*—in God. Just think of it!

He lives. *Rejoice.*

He is who He says He is. *Rejoice.*

He has provided a salvation for you and me. *Rejoice.*

He is willing to save sinners and bring us into His presence someday. *Oh, rejoice!*



The word translated “joy” in the King James Version might better be rendered as “boast.” We can boast in God, not because of what we are or have. As Paul said, “I am what I am by the grace of God” (see 1 Corinthians 15:10). But we can boast in Him because of what we have received—the reconciliation or mercy seat.

Jesus told of a Pharisee and a tax collector who went up to the temple to pray (see Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee boasted of his good works. The tax collector stood way off and beat upon his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” Why did he beat upon his breast? Because he did not have access to the mercy seat. He had repudiated his nation and his God when he became a tax collector. He was an outcast, and all he could do was stand on the outside and cry, “God be merciful.” Actually, the word for mercy is “mercy seat”—that place in the temple where every instructed Israelite knew there was blood sprinkled which gave him access to God. In our day, Christ is that mercy seat; He is the propitiation for our sins.

When you unwrap the package marked JOY, you find in it God’s mercy seat.

Reconciliation produces real joy, friend. He has worked out a plan to save us because of His love for us. Isn’t that enough to make you rejoice? Oh, child of God, have joy in your heart.

You’ve been given eight marvelous benefits of salvation. Rejoice!

# CONTACT

During World War I, a British detachment was cut off from the main forces in the front lines. They had gone out to explore and were caught in the crossfire from the enemy. Their communication line had remained open but finally was severed by a shell. The captain called for a volunteer who would trace the line to the point of trouble, bring it together, and tie it. He warned it would be a dangerous assignment. Several volunteered, and one was chosen. He followed the wire into no-man's-land. Finally he found one end in a shell hole, and feeling around in the mud, he discovered the other end. But he could not bring the ends together to tie them, because the enemy had him under fire. He just lay there and held the two wires together so that communication was restored. Eventually he was killed, but the communication was not disturbed. The next day after victory was declared, they found this man frozen in death—one line locked in his right hand, the other in his left hand, and through his body the message had been passing.

The British government took a picture of that man performing his duty in death, and underneath they put only one word: CONTACT!


Over 2000 years ago there came down from heaven One who restored communication through a line that had been broken by sin. He laid hold of God because He *was* God, and He laid hold of man because He *was* man. He could not make the connection by His life; it was made when He died on the cross.

Today our contact with God is through Jesus Christ. These eight glorious gifts offered to us through the cross of Christ, God's Christmas tree.

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets from TTB.org. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with a wooden table.

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