

***Titus 2:11-14. <sup>11</sup> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, <sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.***

***This is Christmas giving at its best:  
See how God's grace keeps on giving.  
Let us give our lives to our Savior.***

In the entry way at our church in Danube there stands a Christmas tree that nicely captures both the reason for the season and the giving spirit of Christmas time. This tree in the entryway is beautifully decorated with ribbons, lights, and ornaments, and under that tree are boxes wrapped up as gifts. One of these brightly decorated boxes often sits right in the front of the tree and written on it are the words *Baby Jesus*. What a marvelous gift God gives to us! God gives to us his Son! He gives us this wonderful gift, he gives us Jesus, born as one of us. God becomes man and takes a servant's form, a baby wrapped up in strips of cloths laid in a manger as the ultimate gift of God's love. Amazing! But that's not the only gift. Under that one gift, is a whole pile of gifts that our God gives to us in Christ; and so under that tree in the entryway are other glittery boxes which are labeled with words such as grace, peace, joy, hope, and heaven. God is generous with us, it all starts with the gift of Christ, but gift after gift is given to us by our gracious and generous God. How can we not want to give something back in return?! As we marvel at the generosity of our God, as he gives us his own Son, he also piles on grace, and peace, and hope, and so we are compelled to be generous as well.

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As the apostle Paul writes to Titus he is encouraging this young pastor to teach God's people about the grace of God and how it touches and effects our

lives in very practical and everyday ways. In the midst of a list of topics for Titus to teach to all the different groups of people that he would serve, Paul reminds him of a central truth on which all his practical teaching hangs: ***For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.*** God is generous with his grace, he sends salvation for all. And, of course, when did this grace of God that brings salvation appear to all men? It is when Christ Jesus came to this earth. At Jesus' birth, God's love came down in human form. God's undeserved love, his grace, was put on full display in the gift of Jesus as all the fullness of the Deity dwelt among us for a time. God sent his own son, God took on flesh, to rescue sinful mankind. And so along with the promised Savior, comes the gifts of forgiveness and peace with God. Through his perfect life, his innocent death, and glorious resurrection you and I have been set free from sin, we have victory over sin and death, we have the sure hope of heaven and the wonderful promise of eternal life. We have all these gifts and not only have we been set free from sin, death, and hell, we have been set free to serve our God. In Christ Jesus, we have been given the wonderful gift of purpose. ***Jesus Christ,<sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.***

God's grace teaches us why we are Christians and what we therefore should do about it. We have been set free to serve our God. We have been set free and purified by our God to be a people that are his very own. We are filled with his love and compelled to live for him, and to give him honor. Everything the Christians is and everything the Christian does is because of God's grace which is given so generously to us. God's generosity in sending us Christ teaches us to give ourselves to God. And this change in our lives is a blessing from God as well. As we learn of his grace, as we study his word, as we receive his grace in the Sacraments, we also learn from his generosity, and we give ourselves, our acts of obedience and service and love to him who loved us first.

Have you ever seen a Christmas tree with just one gift under it? I don't think I ever have, unless it is the last present left to be unwrapped. As a child, I enjoyed being part of a big family and now I have been blessed with the joy of having a big family of my own. The Christmas tree usually doesn't just have one present under it, but it has several piles. Thankful for each other, we give. Mom and dad are generous in their giving to the children. They go out and get things that are needed, things that the children want and they are often quite generous. The gifts are wrapped up neatly and put under the tree. The children are excited and often very grateful. In order to show their thanks they may even respond with gifts made at school. I had a little brown paper bag

with festive scribbles waiting for me under the tree this year. Or the children are generous in that they were able to find enough money to buy a little something buy for mom and dad or for each other. In a similar, but much greater way, God is gracious with us and we respond with thanks. He gives us the Savior we needed and the peace and hope that we crave. He is generous in pouring out gifts which pile up, gifts such as forgiveness and grace, love and joy; and we respond to his heavenly gifts with gifts that we can give.

Our pile of gifts may not seem as impressive, as eternal, or perfectly wrapped as God's. They might seem like little brown bags with festive scribbles when compared of the luxurious gifts of eternity and salvation that God gives to us, but nevertheless the gifts that we bring out of thanks to God are nonetheless precious to our Father. Paul speaks of how the grace of God, the generosity and kindness of our LORD, teaches us to respond in God-pleasing ways. He says, <sup>12</sup> ***It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.*** When we live self-controlled lives, when we resist temptation, when we live lives of service and love to our neighbor, these are gifts of thanks, gifts of obedience and love, that we give to the Lord.

God sent his Son to live and die in our place. In Christ, he gives us forgiveness; he gives us peace with God, and so that grace teaches us what is good and right. Knowing what Christ Jesus has done for us, we will listen to his word and we will grow in his truth, we will resist the passions of this world and live godly lives out of thanks to God. God in his goodness has generously planted faith in our hearts and he loves it when we produce fruits of faith such as those described as fruits of the Spirit. Paul alludes to such fruits of faith here in Titus and makes an actual list in his letter to the Galatians, <sup>22</sup> ***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*** <sup>23</sup> ***gentleness and self-control.*** These are things that God brings forth from his people. These are actions and attitudes that reflect the good gifts that Christ Jesus gives to us. Out of thanks to God and his grace we resist that which is evil and we strive to live God pleasing lives. God generously provides eternal gifts, these saving gifts such as a Savior born as our brother, and forgiveness, salvation, and peace that comes from him. He pours out these gifts to us generously so that we are not only willing to do what is good, but filled by his goodness and we are set free and made eager to serve our God, eager to do that which is Christ-like, that which is pleasing to God.

Christ Jesus came into this world to set us free for this very purpose. He came to save us, to redeem us. He came into this world as a child, born in such lowly state so that he could live for us and then die in our place. ***He gave***

***himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*** He came into this world to do this for us, to live as our Savior, to die on the cross and rise again to redeem us from sin, and to set us apart for him both now and for eternity.

And so filled with the good news of Christmas, with the good news of salvation, we will serve our God until he comes again. For the grace of God that appeared so clearly in the person of Christ teaches us, guides and moves us to do that which is good, with the blessed understanding that Christ will come again. With the same kind of certain and joyous expectation we have when we annually wait for Christmas we joyously await in sure and certain hope of the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ our Savior. For he will come to hand deliver the ultimate gift of eternal life to us who believe.

The gifts pile up as God generously gives to us his children, and it all starts with a child wrapped up and placed in a manger. God takes on flesh to be our Redeemer, to set us free, to pay the full debt of our sins. He comes to bring us the gifts of forgiveness and peace, hope and joy, and eternal life. As we learn of his great love and his generous gifts that he piles up before us let us respond by laying our gifts at his feet. Gifts of service, of worship, and praise. May such gifts, both God's good gifts of salvation and forgiveness, and gifts of obedience and love and thanks to God, continue to pile up in your life until our Savior comes again. Amen.