Thanks to God for His Indescribable Gift

First in the series “Christian Thanksgiving”

# Scripture: John 1:14-18; 3:13-18

# Key Thought: God has given us His Son and so much more; it’s up to us to receive God’s Gift.

# Intro:

The title I have chosen of this series, “Christian Thanksgiving” might seem a bit unusual. What I am thinking is that while anyone can feel vaguely thankful, there are some uniquely Christian reasons for thanksgiving and ways to give thanks which I hope to highlight during this sermon series.

Today we focus on a uniquely Christian reason for giving thanks, giving thanks for God’s Indescribable Gift to us. God sent His own Son to die on the cross for us. Thanks be to God.

# God gave us His Son.

## “Eucharist” comes from the Greek words “give thanks.”

As we celebrate communion together, the connection with Christian Thanksgiving is particularly strong. One title for the sacrament we will share today in many churches of Christendom is the Eucharist. This word “Eucharist” comes from the Greek word translated “gave thanks” that is used in the Scripture account of Jesus’ institution of the sacrament as recorded in Luke.

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you.
Luke 22:17 NIV

As the Jews celebrated the Passover, they were giving thanks for God’s acts of deliverance of Israel in the Exodus. When we take the cup that Jesus blessed we are giving thanks for the redemption which Jesus has accomplished for us through his death on the cross. So, every Communion Table, every Lord’s Supper, every Eucharist, is by its very nature, a Christian Thanksgiving for the work of Jesus on our behalf. That is where our Thanksgiving begins.

## We deepen our Thanksgiving by connecting with God’s gift of his Son.

As we entered the months of November and December, we enter the season of the year where we think about giving. In November, the big holiday is Thanksgiving; and the word giving is part of the name of the holiday itself. Generosity and Thanksgiving go together. Then comes December, and giving gifts is one of our main agendas in the month of December.

Did you ever stop to wonder where all this talk about giving began? After all, from the time we are children, we are more inclined to think about things we have as “mine” then we are to give them away.

The title of today’s message reminds us that God began the business of giving by giving us his Son. Before time began, the plan was already in place in the mind of the Trinity that Jesus would come to earth, that he would suffer at the hands of humanity, and that he would win a mighty victory over our great enemy which is death. Over and over, the writers of Scripture proclaim the Good News of God’s gift of His Son. The Apostle John is especially eloquent.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 NIV

 “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” 1 John 4:10 NIV

So, we can greatly deepen our Thanksgiving celebration and make it uniquely Christian by connecting our personal thanksgiving with our gratitude for God’s greatest gift to us, His Son.

## Jesus is the Indescribable Gift

The title line of our message this morning was penned by the apostle Paul who wrote,

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” 2 Corinthians 9:15 NIV

The Greek word translated as “indescribable” refers to something that is not able to be fully expounded, fully explained, or fully disclosed through speech. What a great choice of words for the gift that God has given to us in Jesus. Just as the verse says, we will find again this morning that it is impossible to describe completely or fully unfold all the blessings that come to us through Jesus. But it is good for us to make a beginning so that our hearts may be filled with gratitude at what God has done and continues to do for us.

# Grace and Truth came with Jesus.

One of my favorite statements that causes me to give thanks for Jesus, our Indescribable Gift is from the opening chapter of John’s gospel.

From his [the Word’s] fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. John 1:16-18 NRSV

Notice especially the two gifts that come to us through our Lord Jesus Christ – grace and truth.

## Grace

Grace refers to God’s favor given to us in Christ. The word “grace” covers a lot of territory. We use the word grace when we think about God’s mercy and forgiveness for our sins. We sing about “Amazing grace …that saved a wretch like me.” Paul wrote about this grace in Romans.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 6:23 NIV

In another place, when Paul was facing physical hardship, he wrote of God’s grace being sufficient for his needs (2 Cor. 12:9). In that verse, he used the word grace to refer to the strength and encouragement that God gives. Paul also used the word “grace” to refer to the different charismatic gifts that the Corinthian church had received from God (1 Cor. 1:4, 5). In addition, he thought of his own ministry as a grace given to him by God (Eph. 3:7, 8).

So, John puts it well when he says we have received grace upon grace, one gift after another through the merciful favor and beneficence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Truth

The second gift that John describes as coming to us through our Lord Jesus Christ is the gift of truth. Specifically, John is speaking about the truth about God. Jesus came to reveal God to us in a way that built upon the Old Testament prophetic revelation but transcended it at crucial points. The sacrificial system was transcended, once for all, by the sacrifice that Jesus made of himself. But there was more. We, as a race, needed to learn about God as our Father. We need to learn more deeply about God as a God of love, especially love for the downtrodden and those of other ethnic groups. We needed for Jesus to affirm again that God hates the hypocrisy of formalistic religion which goes through the motions but doesn’t have a heart. We needed to see God close-up and personal as Jesus revealed Him. This was a new kind of truth about God. As Jesus himself said to Thomas,

“Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father” John 14:9 NIV

The writer of Hebrews, as if reflecting on Jesus as God’s indescribable gift to us, wrote,

 “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” Heb. 1:3 NIV

You would think this idea of truth would be straightforward. But in our day, it is not. As Chuck Colson so pointedly wrote:

The fastest way to provoke scorn from most university professors is to use the words reality and truth. Why does this word truth breed such animosity? Because rebellious human nature resists truth’s claims. If something is really true, it must be true not just for the person saying it but for the person hearing it. The fact is, we don’t want to obey a higher authority from any quarter – especially what purports to be from God – for fear it will impinge upon our personal autonomy. We cling to the idea that we create our own truth. (The Faith by Charles Colson and Harold Fickett p. 59)

But Jesus came to teach us a truth about God that would draw both Jew and Gentile, both male and female together into one. It was a truth that was to be preached among all the nations so that all could believe.

At Jesus’ trial, during his testimony before Pilate, Jesus spoke about this.

“For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 18:37).

After Jesus said this, Pilate speaks for all our unbelieving and excuse-making race when he says, “What is truth?” (John 18:38).

How much better if we listen to Jesus and learn the truth about God. Then we can honestly give thanks this month for God’s Indescribable Gift, His Own Son, who came to us full of grace and truth.

# Through Jesus, God has given us all things

## One Gift, abundant gifts

But there is so much more. Maybe I can illustrate this truth this way.

My mom loved giving gifts at Christmas. She was not one to spend much money the rest of the year. But Christmas was a different story. Each Christmas, her children and grandchildren would receive multiple gifts from her and Dad. But we knew who did the shopping. She started in late summer. And she was a wonderful gift selector. During the time frame when our children were small, each of her four children and their spouses would receive a large box from my mother and father, filled with gifts of various and often unrelated kinds. Some would be wrapped, some would be in sacks, a few might just be buried in the box. We were always delighted with Mom and Dad’s generosity. There were so many thoughtful and useful gifts in that one box.

In a similar way, the Bible reminds us that when we receive Jesus as our Savior, when we give hospitality to His Holy Spirit in our lives, there are so many gifts that come with that spiritual experience. Paul describes the setting of God’s generosity to us this way;

When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So, you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. Gal 4:4-7 NIV

## Abounding outflow of the Spirit’s presence

As a child of God, we have received a super-sized spiritual gift box. Paul wrote:

 “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” Rom 8:32 NIV

What’s in that gift box from God? Well we can begin by thinking of the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. (Gal 5:22). But there is so much more. We should, like Paul, also include the specific gifts given to us for service to the body of Christ; things like leadership, giving, helping others, wisdom, healing, etc. Then there are the gifts of specific ministries like pastor, teacher, usher, greeter, Sunday School teacher, trustee, etc. But the list should be even bigger. Really, according to God’s promise, it should include whatever we need.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8 NIV

Pastor Henry Blackaby put it this way,

In Christ and in the cross, God has already abundantly provided us with everything we need to deal with everything that confronts us. (Experiencing the Cross by Henry Blackaby p. 16)

Wow! That is really a box full of gifts from God! May our thankfulness increase as we meditate on all the God has given us in Jesus!

# It’s up to us to receive God’s Gift.

## We resist following Jesus

But we can’t have a truly Christian Thanksgiving unless we open our hearts to God’s indescribable gift ourselves. Sometimes we resist that decision to become an intentional Christ follower. We like to just share the culture of Christianity without actually making a decision to follow Jesus personally. Following Christ can be costly to our selfish wishes and plans. Following Jesus involves surrender of our right to please ourselves; to always call the shots. Following Jesus means that he is the leader now, not us. That initial decision to leave our perceived independence behind is hard on us.

Becoming a Christian had not occurred to the jailer at Philippi when he locked his most recent prisoners in the deepest part of his prison. They had been flogged so their backs were bleeding but that was not unusual for prisoners he received. But he received strict orders about these two, called Paul and Silas, so he put their feet in the stocks as well. He went home and went to bed. About midnight, he was jarred awake by an earthquake. He rushed out to check on the prison and saw the doors wide open. Thinking that the prisoners had escaped, he was about to kill himself, when Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself, we are all here.” Suddenly the jailer was very interested in what Paul and Silas had to say and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied with a simple instruction, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). The transformation of the jailer and his family began that night.

## Following Jesus opens new horizons

Friends, opening your heart to Jesus is the beginning of new horizons for you too. I responded at an early age and opened my heart to Jesus. My life has been filled with blessings because of Jesus. It doesn’t mean that nothing ever goes wrong. It doesn’t mean that there are never hardships. But it does mean that when we open our hearts to the great “Indescribable Gift” whom God has sent to be our Savior and make him Lord in our own hearts, then the gifts of God’s grace begin to show up in our lives day by day.

Don’t let anybody ever tell you that the life of holiness is drab, boring, and lifeless. It is not. How could it be? It’s full of the complete, abundant, overflowing life of God. It is full of joy. It is full of victory. It is full of promise and hope.
(Experiencing the Cross by Henry Blackaby p. 70)

 Actor Sean Connery played the part of James Bond in many famous movies. When he was sixty-two, he was still acting despite the fame and money he had made. An interviewer asked him why he was still acting. He replied, “Because I get the opportunity to be somebody better and more interesting than I am.”

Friends, that is what the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ does for us for real. It enables us to be someone better than we are! But it is not just an act and it is not intermittently only when we are before the camera, it is every day of our lives because the Holy Spirit is at work transforming us into the image of Jesus!

Commitment to Christ is not the end. There is much to follow as we seek to grow into maturity in Christ. But it is an indispensable beginning, to which you testify when you say at your confirmation, “I turned to Christ, I repent of my sins, I renounce evil.” (Christian Basics by John Stott p. 29)

I invite you to open your heart to Jesus, the Indescribable Gift from God, who came so that we might have life and have it to the full (John 10:10)!