

Encounter Youth- Sunday, 7 April- Saturday, 13 April 2019: "The Greatest Gift"

Day 1: "The Greatest Gift"

Hello Everybody, it is so good to be back at youth and see all of you again. We have started our new series, The Giving Series, and I am really excited to be kicking off the first week of devotions. I want to try and explore some instances where God's gifts to us are evident, as sometimes we don't always recognise them! But here goes... Today's topic was The Greatest Gift.

Out of all the things that God has blessed us with, our lives, the very next breath that you'll take, every heartbeat, one stands out above the rest, and that is the life He chose to live to give You, the life He wanted you to have. The greatest gift ever to be given or received by someone is the gift of salvation.

Now don't shut off when you see that thinking its going to be another discussion about what Jesus did for you that you've heard a thousand times, I really want you to think about this and what it means for you. I don't know your life, I don't know how its changed since you met Jesus, but I know for a fact that Jesus's work on the cross transforms everyone's lives it touches.

Thousands of men were crucified on Roman crosses, yet two thousand years later, Jesus's is the one we're all still talking about, the one that's still alive in our lives today even though He died 2000 years ago. Today we watched Lecrae's testimony in church and if you have time, check it out, it's really powerful! But he said something that stood out for me. He said that what really shook him was that Jesus lived the life he couldn't live, and died the death he should have died. That's incredible! Jesus lived a life of perfection, because he knew we couldn't. He also died the death of all our sins, because He never wanted us to have to do that. His life from beginning to end was all about training, and preaching and dying to bring you into the Kingdom with Him, and after all of that He still looked at you and gave you a choice. Choose Jesus or you, Jesus or the world, all God has to offer you for the rest of eternity or all the world can offer you until you die to meet an eternity of hell, literally...

The choice is yours, but Jesus is and has been extending this gift out to you all of your life, and if you haven't already or feel you have been in a bad place with God I would encourage you to pray this prayer.

Lord Jesus, I want to change. I want to follow you and live with You as my Saviour in exchange for a life forever in heaven with You. I know my life is a mess and I pray that You would wash me of my sins and forgive me and help me to live in a new way, Your way. I don't know everything and I'm not perfect, but I ask You to help me to try and to learn to be Your friend. I love You Lord and invite You into my heart right now.

If you prayed this prayer please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or for support and guidance as we walk this path with Jesus together. It is the ebst decision you will ever make in your life!

Day 2:

Hey Guys, I must apologize for getting this to you inexcusably late! I had such good plans of getting everything organized early, and then I got sick and my brain hasn't been working quite as well... I couldn't just leave it, so here it is. So sorry again! But I hope you enjoy!

The Greatest Gift

Song to Start the Day With:

Verse: _"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"_ 2 Corinthians 9:15

Do you ever look at someone and have no words to tell them or express how much you love or appreciate them as you look at them all the moments of laughter and fun you've had, all the times they have shown love and care and sacrifice towards you, all the memories and stories you have together, come rushing back at you and to sum it up into one sentence or action is simply impossible, and so you stand there in awe and love for that person and all they have been to you. Maybe it's just me, but I know I've experienced that a lot, where that person takes my words away and I have nothing to say, only admiration for who they are. Well that is exactly what 2 Corinthians 9:15 speaks about. Do you know that the word inexpressible actually means a feeling too strong to be described or conveyed in words. Hehe I think that's pretty cool.

Often I think that the salvation message and the message of the cross and all it signifies, all God gave to us has kind of lost its impact, lost its magic... We have heard the story in church a thousand times, and each time we listen a little less and zone out a little more... The truth is, you wouldn't even be here if it weren't for that cross, you wouldn't have a hope or a future, you wouldn't have any of the promises the Bible has to offer you if it weren't for that cross. And so that cross is not just a once off message that touches our hearts and whoo hoo we're saved, that cross is our ticket to heaven, it's our pass here on earth from the life Satan has for us to the life God has always wanted for us. That cross is the reason for everything, and so that cross is the reason why I will praise God no matter what, because no matter what, that cross is good. No matter what that cross declares me free, and no matter what that cross tells me that despite everything going on around me, I have a future and a life of abundance.

Every scripture you hear or read, think about it in the light of the impact of the cross, every worship song you sing, think about it and sing it in the light of the impact of the cross. That gift is eternal, it impacts every aspect of our lives, and that gift is inexpressible, awing us into a state of wordlessness.

Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for taking your gift for granted and for thinking about it in a way that doesn't honour You or bring You the respect that You deserve. Please Lord, make Your death more real to me. Teach me what it means to be truly saved and live like someone who is. I love You Lord and trust You, Amen

Day 3:

We've been talking about the greatest gift for a little while now, but as I was reading scriptures about God's gift of salvation I realized that we haven't discussed what the definition of a gift actually is. I looked it up and here's what it means:

_"a thing given willingly to someone without payment; a present." _

That's pretty cool if you ask me, but let's relate it back to our topic. If the salvation that Jesus died to give us is the greatest gift we will ever receive, then that also means that the greatest thing we will ever receive is free. So many people think that we have to jump through hoops or be a certain type of person with a certain type of past to receive salvation and a life with Jesus. Honestly, that is only an excuse to say no because a gift is something given willingly, something given without payment expected, it's a present or gift. Imagine receiving a Christmas or birthday present and giving your parents or friend cash before you took it to pay for your gift. You would never do that and they, hopefully, would never accept that, because a present is done out of a heart of love and a desire to bless someone else. No matter the cost, that cost has already been measured and the gift is extended to you freely, willingly, for you to take. Will you? The Bible says in Romans 6:23:

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

The price we should be paying is death, but that's already been paid, and freely the gift of Jesus's death and our salvation is offered to us. Take it, make it yours! The King of all Kings died to give it to you...

Dear Lord Jesus, I want to accept this gift freely, I want you in my life, to leave my sin behind and to stop making excuses for not surrendering to You, stop thinking I have to jump through hoops or be somebody. I thank You that it's the nobodies that You spent time with, the nobodies You died to save, and I pray that You would save me now, come into my life, and give me the courage to accept the free gift You're holding out to me. I open my heart to You and invite You in. forgive me now, Amen

Day 4:

Hey Guys, I do apologize. I really am sucking at this job! Getting so sick has really thrown me! That's no excuse though, so I'm sorry!... Here is today's devotion and I will be trying to be more faithful! Leaders sometimes mess up too...

Yesterday we spoke about how God's gift is free, a present from God, something we don't have to perform for. But along with the promise comes a sacrifice on our behalf. Salvation is never a stagnant form of blessing that we simply receive, eternal life just handed on a platter, we have to choose salvation and the life here on earth that it comes with at a cost.

I remember when I was 13, I joined a youth group up the road from us. I was a small fish in the sea, being only in grade 8, but I fitted in quite well also being a 'new fish' in the sea. The usual story, all the girls hated me, all the boys were happy to accept me, on their terms. I had recently rediscovered God and how awesome He was and so this whole environment

didn't sit right with me. I was broken down every week by girls who were jealous of me and then asked to do things or become the girlfriend of people I would not be comfortable with, but through it all I knew that I couldn't give in. It was really hard to say no to people because I longed to have friends, longed to be accepted, and although I was in the beginning, pretty soon I became just the boring 'serious' Christian. We moved house eventually and I stopped going. That time was really tough and I was really broken down by the people there. It was the cost of salvation, the persecution for doing what was right (and unpopular), but I would never have done it any other way.

I could've gained their acceptance quite easily if I wanted to, but at the same time I would've lost my friendship with God. I could've been cool and part of the in circle, but I might never have made it out and I know I wouldn't be here today writing to encourage all of you. Yes, the gospel came at a cost. Yes, at the time I hated the rejection and pain. But now, my life is reaping the blessings of my yesterday's sacrifices. I counted the cost and it was well worth it to know the God who will never leave me. I don't know a single person I knew back there, but God's still here.

I know it sounds cliché, but the Gospel comes at a cost, one less devastating than the cost of the world which we will cover tomorrow!

Pick up your cross verse

Day 5:

"Take the road less traveled" photo in downloads

The Cost of the World

Hey Guys, so yesterday I mentioned that we were going to cover what the cost of the world is and why it is so much greater than the cost of the Gospel in my eyes. So here goes...

The Gospel makes many demands of us as Christians. Many sacrifices need to be made in order to obey God, and perhaps many losses need to be suffered in order to follow Christ. The Bible calls us to count that cost when it tells us in Matthew 16:24:

_" Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." _

When we come after Christ we are commanded to pick up our cross, pick up our suffering, and follow Christ, counting the cost, understanding the cost and still following Jesus. But very seldom do we count the cost of the world. This passage goes on to say in Matthew 16:25-26:

_" For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" _

I find this quite interesting. Jesus says that when we lose what we hold dear on this earth, we lose the satisfaction of our souls and desires, we actually find it in Him, being properly fulfilled. But then He goes on to say that we can gain the whole world if we want, gain all the popularity, all the money, all the acceptance, all the earthly happiness he can, but in return he will lose his soul; and Jesus asks them, what will a man give for his soul, for the ability to keep his heart and mind and emotions. Will he give it away? Will he value it enough to save it from the destruction its drawn to through its own sinful nature?

I posted a picture earlier about taking the road less travelled and believe it or not, that is very much like a Bible verse in Matthew 7:13-14. It says, “_ “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”_ It is so easy to go with the crowd, so easy to go on the path that leads to acceptance, but how much is your soul worth? Is it worth losing it forever, or is it worth sacrificing a portion of eternal life here on earth to serving Jesus so that you may have eternal life.

Christianity has legs, it has arms, it has eyes, a heart, and a mouth. Christianity is more than a once off prayer, it’s a lifelong commitment through all of your life.

Dear Lord, I want to count the cost that the world has on my life, count the cost that I must pay for the rest of eternity if I pick that life over the one you offer me. Oh Lord, may I count that cost every time I’m tempted away from You, tempted away from the road less traveled, and may I see the benefit of choosing You throughout the path of my life. Lead me to the narrow road, the road less traveled, and may I never cast my eyes from You. I love You Lord, Amen

Day 6:

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

1 Corinthians 15:22

I am studying theology at the moment and I read something very interesting a few weeks ago. I read that when Jesus came to earth He was like a fulfillment of what Adam, the first man on the planet, was supposed to do. Adam was born as a perfect man, but when he and Eve gave in to temptation and sinned in the Garden of Eden, their first home, they invited sin into all the world.

Hey Guys, Katlego shared a powerful message tonight all about how when we give, it gives back to us. That we are blessed so that we can bless those around us and bless them cheerfully. You missed a good night if you weren’t with us! We also handed out the giant Lindt bunny to the winner of the draw for people who filled in our survey and Peter was our lucky winner. There were so few of you that filled in the survey though that we decided to give you another chance to do the survey we sent out during the week and be entered to win another chocolate bunny, so fill them in!

But anyway, believe it or not I am only now finished and home after the busy night, so here is the devotion, I hope you enjoy!

Verse for the Day:

"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

1 Corinthians 15:22

I am studying theology at the moment and I read something very interesting a few weeks ago. I read that when Jesus came to earth He was like a fulfillment of what Adam, the first man on the planet, was supposed to do. Adam was born as a perfect man, but when he and Eve gave in to temptation and sinned in the Garden of Eden, their first home, they invited sin into all the world. From then on their offspring were born with sinful natures into a sinful world and behaved as their parents, sinfully, and eventually you get down to you and me, living in the world we do, experiencing the consequences of sin like we do. Sickness, death, hunger, poverty, none of it was God's plan, and so He made a new one. A plan to redo history, not wipe it out and start again, but make it better through His son. Jesus came, thousands of years later, to fulfill what man couldn't in the beginning and live a perfect existence, so making a way for us to take part in His perfect life and be saved, taking our identity from beggar to royalty, taking our destiny from hell to paradise (literally!). That is what the verse above is talking about, that in the destiny that Adam gave us, all we had awaiting us was death, but in Christ we could be made alive.

I don't know about you, but I am still experiencing the consequences of sin. In fact right now I have a terrible cold and feel like I'm dying half the time. The difference is that I know I have something beyond all of this, something beyond the pain and brokenness, something beyond sickness and death, paradise beyond the living hell I might find myself in. Jesus says in John 16:33, _"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."_ He promises us trouble, He promises that we will face things that are hectic tough, but He also promises that no matter you face, it is already overcome, by the blood that He shed on the cross, and no matter what we face, there is a light at the end of a tunnel and something more beyond it. He takes us from glory to glory and works all things for our good if we love Him (Romans 8:28) and that is why His gift is so good, because it never ends or is done, it keeps on giving. His eternal gift of life and life in abundance! (John 10:10)

Dear Lord Jesus, I love You and I want to know You more... Show me Yourself in my struggles and in the storms that I might experience Your victory over the things that I face. Journey with me and reveal the depths of Your gift to me and what it means! I love You and I am Yours. Amen

Declaration for the week: ...

Sleep well guys and see you on Sunday!

Day 7:

Hey Guys, it's Saturday and it's been a long week, but I have one more thing I want to say on the topic of the Greatest Giver and the Greatest Gift before we move on to our next topic. Throughout this all I've wanted to make it personal for you, not tell you what you already know, but open the topic up in a way that gets you to think, and I hope that I've done this. Right now though, I want you to think about what exactly God's gift means to you and how it has impacted your life. We don't have small groups, but by yourself quickly, take a moment, maybe even ask God to show you:

What does God's gift of His death and resurrection and salvation mean to you?

Last Friday I shared a story about my grandfather. I told you about how he bought me perfume and presented it to me when I was only about ten and how that has impacted my life ever since. I never put on perfume without thinking of him, I never go out to a special event without knowing who I am because my grandfather told me and clearly shows me that night when we were out to dinner and he blessed me like he did.

How much more impact should the life that Jesus died to give us have? How much more should we walk out the house knowing who we are, knowing that we are loved and chosen and free?

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." 2 Corinthians 5:17

Thank you for listening and reading to all of these and I hope you've enjoyed them! Have a good rest of your weekend and see you tomorrow! (Worship is upstairs by the way)