

THE BIG IDEA: Receiving is believing.

The Take-Off

It just wouldn't be Christmas without bad gifts, would it?

All of us have - at one time or another - opened a gift and said thanks through a forced smile.

Here are just a few of some of the worst gifts in gift-giving history!

[BAD GIFTS slideshow]

This morning, we're going to take a look at some pretty bad gifts that a lot of us have opened, and one good gift that some of us have yet to open.

But first, a quick recap of where we are in our December series:

Our BIG THINGS come in SMALL PACKAGES series started by peeking at the end and seeing that God's kingdom wins, and wins BIG!

That's important, right, because I want to be on the winning team, and so do you! No one, if they knew which team wins and which team loses beforehand, would choose to be on the losing team, right? That'd be crazy!

And so we win, and we win BIG because our God wins BIG. And that sets us up to dream, but not just small dreams that insult a big God, but big dreams because our Father dreams even bigger for us. And, we can't fail!

And that gives us the freedom to stop holding onto all the things we have in an attempt to somehow try to fund our dreams. Instead, we can give BIG to help others who need God's help through us.

Ending BIG leads to Dreaming BIG which leads to Giving BIG, and boy, did you!

Last week - in our first ever BIG GIVE - you gave \$1,938 that we are now in the process of giving away.

And why can we be so generous? It's because we can honestly say "I have enough" and "I have a Father" who takes care of me and my needs.

Now, listen, some of us really WANT to say that. We want to stop craving more than we need, but we can't, and that's where this morning comes in.

This morning - on the Sunday before we celebrate arguably the BIGGEST EVENT THIS WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN - we want to help each of you learn how to "receive BIG."

To help with that, let's read a passage together and then work our way through some pretty bad gifts before we end with a good one.

Listen to the words of John in John 1:9-13. We'll be mostly concerned with the last 2 verses, but this will give us the full impact.

Did you see the 4 gifts? No?

Well, that's why I'm here, right? It's my job this morning to show you the three that all of us have opened at some time or another and the one that we need more than anything else.

And since we've got all our kids up here with us this morning, I'll need to get a volunteer from time to time to help me open the gifts, so let's roll!

I need someone to help me open up gift numero uno!

1. BAD GIFT #1: A pair of JEANS (because we can't inherit Jesus)

- a. Most of us are hoping to inherit from our parents.
- b. We'd like to inherit money, houses, stuff.
- c. Many of us are even hoping to inherit salvation from our parents.
- d. But your parents can't pass salvation down to you.
- e. In fact, there's only one thing that we've been guaranteed to inherit from our parents, and we get it when we're born, not when they die: our sin nature.
- f. We don't like to think of it this way, but babies - as cute as they are - are just bundles of sin.
- g. Here are a few Scriptures that back up that statement:
 - i. Psalm 51:5 - "I was brought forth in iniquity, in sin my mother conceived me."
 - ii. Romans 5:12 - "as sin came into the world through one man...so death spread to all men because all sinned"
 - iii. Romans 5:19 - "by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners"
- h. Practically, our sin nature is why we have to teach babies the right things and not the bad things.
 - i. We teach them to share, not to be selfish, right?

- j. That's because of the sin that we inherited from our parents, and they did from theirs, and they from theirs all the way back to Adam.
- k. You and I can't inherit Jesus from our parents, only sin.
- l. It's in our jeans, and that's why it's a bad gift.

2. BAD GIFT #2: A dirty RAG (because we can't earn Jesus)

- a. So let's take a look at another bad gift, and this one is probably the most common of the them all.
- b. Of course, none of us would ever think a dirty rag is a good gift, but we live like it is.
- c. Isaiah 64:6 is a verse that we really need to get a hold of
- d. All of us have plenty of things that we like to keep hidden, right?
- e. The closet no one opens, the uncle no one meets...
- f. We understand that there are certain things - bad things - in our lives and hearts that are like this rag: filthy, dirty, more ready for the trash can than the countertop.
- g. But Isaiah wasn't writing about any of that.
- h. He was writing about your BEST.
- i. The things that you and I have done that we're the most proud of, not the most ashamed of
- j. And he says that all of that - that the best we have to offer God - is like a filthy rag
- k. And since the kids are here and we're trying to keep it G rated, let me just say that Isaiah wasn't writing about a used up dirty mechanics rag.
- l. You can study it on your own time, but it was a much dirtier rag that only one half of the world's gender used
- m. Yeah, that's what my righteousness is like, and yours, and everyone else's.
- n. So, let's understand that if we're putting our trust in what we do to save us, we've opened a really bad gift, because our good is never going to be good enough to earn Jesus.
- o. One of the more horrifying verses in the Bible reveals this: in Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus sent a bunch of people to hell who had done a bunch of good things (probably better things than you and I have done)
- p. We can't earn Jesus, and that's why this dirty rag is a bad gift.

3. BAD GIFT #3: A picture of MOM (because we can't borrow Jesus)

- a. Let's get another kid from KidCity up here to help us look inside the third box - one last bad gift
- b. It's a picture of mom - well, more specifically, my mom, but she represents mothers everywhere!
- c. And it's terrible to think of a picture of your mother as a bad gift, but let me explain what it means
- d. It means that you can't borrow Jesus
- e. There's an interesting passage of Scripture that was written by a man but sounds like it could have been written by our moms
- f. In Romans 9:3, Paul wrote that he would go to hell if it meant his people could go to heaven
- g. Sounds just like mom, doesn't it?
- h. Moms give up the last piece of steak, pie, cake so the family can have it
- i. Moms do without so that the family doesn't
- j. Moms would let their kids borrow anything, but no matter how godly your mom might be, she'll never be able to let you borrow Jesus
- k. 1 Timothy 1:5-6 records Paul's instructions to his protegee
 - i. Your mother (and grandmother) had faith
 - ii. But you'd better fan into flame your own faith
- l. If there's anybody who can pray effectively for their kids' salvation, it's got to be a mom (I'm proof!!)
- m. But mom can only pray you to Jesus, because ultimately you have to make faith in Jesus your own
- n. You can't borrow Jesus (even from your mom), and that's what make this a bad gift

4. GOOD GIFT: A cross (because we can only receive Jesus)

- a. So, one gift left and you already know from your note sheets that it's good gift, right?
- b. So let's get a kid to rip this one open so that you can confirm that you've correctly guessed the last blank
- c. The only good gift is a cross
- d. We know that we can't inherit Jesus, earn Jesus or borrow Jesus
- e. The cross reminds us that we can only receive Jesus

- f. The cross reminds us that Jesus came to reconcile us back to God, but also that he did it while we FOUGHT HIM THE WHOLE WAY (Romans 5:6-10)
- g. And so, when I receive Jesus, I show that I believe Jesus
- h. I don't just believe about Jesus, that he came - historians have written about the man Jesus
- i. I don't just believe in Jesus, that he came from God - James 2:19 says even the demons do that
- j. But when I receive Jesus, I'm saying that I believe Jesus, I believe what he said about why he came - that he stepped into flesh in order to pick up a cross and pay for my sin.
- k. It means every confidence I have is in his work on the cross, and that my best days can't save me anymore than my worst days can condemn me
- l. 1 Timothy 1:15 - Christ came into this world to save sinners, which means that everyone in this room - while undeserving of such a gift - need only receive it because we believe it
- m. Receiving is believing**
- n. Listen, we've watched this get played out in front of us the whole message
- o. Every kid who helped open a gift was also given a gift, and not one of them stopped to try to understand it, or ask if they had unwrapped a gift perfectly enough to deserve it
- p. They simply received it because they believed it was good
- q. People are fond of saying that "seeing is believing" but it isn't. A lot of people saw Jesus during the first Christmas and millions have seen him since.
- r. Even Satan sees Jesus.
- s. But Satan isn't getting saved, and for one simple reason.
- t. He would never receive the cross, and receiving - not seeing - is believing.
- u. Trying to inherit it, earn it, or borrow it leads to death
- v. But simply receiving a gift that we neither earned nor deserved leads to life, both in this life and the next

The Landing

"The world lay silent beneath a cloak of sin

Until the light of God shone in

His name is called Emmanuel

For with us God to come to dwell"

A pair of jeans, a dirty rag, even a picture of Mom.

When we receive Jesus, we acknowledge that a good God gave a good gift to save us from these bad ones.

We acknowledge that our good was never good enough, and that our only shot is admitting that we are sinners in need of a rescue that we tried to sabotage at every turn.

Christmas can be summed up in 9 words: Jesus came to confront my sin on a cross.

Anything less than that isn't Christmas.

It's just a bad gift.

Let's pray.