

Talk given by Ida-Rose Hall, Sunday Dec. 25, 1994. PV 1 Chapel. Corner Sumac and Stadium Ave.

(Take gifts out of the sack.)

These Christmas packages are from our grandchildren in Oregon. Do (or I should say,) *did* you have a lot of similar packages under your tree this morning? If these packages have been there for several days, I am willing to surmise that they have been felt, shaken, tipped, and guessed at frequently. I doubt if our David was ever surprised on Christmas morning. Somehow, no matter where we hid the packages, he always managed to ferret out what he and everybody else was getting for Christmas.

The giving of Christmas gifts represent the gifts the wise men brought to Christ--Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Gifts offered only to those of Royal Blood.

Christmas gifts have some things in common.

1. They are constructed of perishable materials. They wear out, rust, break, are eaten or used up, or are broken.
2. The obtaining of them took time to choose, shop for, and wrap.
3. They had a price that had to be paid.
4. Gifts are usually reciprocal. We give to those we love. They give to us.
5. Sometimes the gift we receive costs so much that we cannot possibly give a gift of like value.

Since most Christmas gifts are perishable, their life-line is often short and fleeting. The gifts that so delight us today, no matter how valuable, are often not even in existence by the next Christmas.

There are gifts, of course that can have an eternal value, provided they are used and not left on our shelves or in a drawer. Gifts of the scriptures, for instance. The scriptures never grow old or stale--new insights can be discovered on every page. Journals--if kept. Books which contain the words of the Prophets or have themes or plots that uplift, enlighten, or inspire. Great music and poetry.

Gifts which expand our knowledge and help us to understand God's Universe and our beautiful world. Gifts which help us to develop our

talents, such as art supplies, Musical Instruments, sheet music, or craft supplies. These are the gifts that have most impact on our lives.

A good book can be re-read often, with renewed enjoyment. Our journals help us to understand our selves as we re-read them, and may in later years help a loved Grandchild to realize that Grandmother or Grandfather had some of the same problems they have.

And of course, some gifts are just for fun. They make us laugh, or give our homes a touch of beauty. Maybe that new dress in the box for "Betty" will be the one she will remember all her life as "her very favorite dress"

Contrast these material gifts with the spiritual gifts given to us by our Savior and our Heavenly Father. They do not wear out, rust, break, or use up. Our Heavenly Father knows each of us well and he matches his gifts to fit the child. Have we opened the package containing our individual spiritual gifts, or are they, so to speak, still under the tree?

Sometimes these gifts are discovered as we fulfill a church calling that we thought we were not suited for. Perhaps as we serve others, we find that we have gifts of compassion and understanding we did not know we had. Our Patriarchal blessings often give us clues to our spiritual gifts.

These gifts do have a price. Not for the giver, but for the receiver. For instance, consider the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of the Holy Ghost is a spirit of power. We are given this gift when we are baptised. But he can't be a power in our lives unless we listen to his promptings and live as we should. He cannot live in an unclean tabernacle. However, if we lose the spirit of the Holy Ghost, we can regain his presence if we repent and again become worthy.

Remember that Peter denied three times being associated with Jesus before the cock crowed that terrible morning when the son of the Eternal father was in the hands of his enemies. And yet when Peter and the other apostles received that second comforter, which the Lord promised to send them when he was no longer with them, they became spiritual powerhouses.

That comforter, the Holy Ghost, gave them the strength they needed to establish the church in the meridian of time and withstand the persecutions which ended in many of them sealing their testimonies with their blood.

After Christ was betrayed with a kiss outside the Garden of Gethemane, he was taken for trial before the Sanhedren--the ruling body of the Jews. No expensive lawyers came forward to plead his case, as was certainly fitting one who was "the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords."

I wonder if there were any Almas, besides perhaps Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea, at the infamous trial of our savior? And I wonder if, in the quiet of the night, his accusers trembled at what they had done and wished that they, like Pilate, could wash their hands of the blood of Christ?

Jesus Christ was chosen to be our Redeemer in the pre-existence. This role he fulfilled fully in the Garden of Gethemane and on the Cross on Cavalry. The universal gift of this sacrifice was the free gift of the resurrection for all mankind. We talked about gifts being reciprocal. Not this one. We can, however, do what he asks: It seems so simple. "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

His sacrifice opened up, also to all mankind, the ultimate gift of God--eternal life in the presence of our Heavenly Father and his son, Jesus Christ. (John 3:16 & 17)

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whomsoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."

He gave his life for us. Greater love hath no man. Christ was the only one born into this world who had power over death. Only he could voluntarily lay down his life. At any time he could have drawn back from that ultimate sacrifice.

The death of Jesus Christ ended sacrifice by the shedding of blood. He taught a gospel of love, not of retribution. He was the perfect example.

"Do as ye see me do." "If ye have seen me, ye have seen the Father."
"Love your enemies." "Do good to those who spitefully use you." "Forgive all men."

Many of our spiritual brothers and sisters lived on the earth when the fullness of the gospel was not available to them. They are waiting for us to vicariously give them the precious gifts of the temple ordinances--baptism, the endowment, eternal marriage, and sealing of the generations. For us the cost is minimal--some of our time. For them the value cannot be calculated. It is something they cannot do for themselves.

This Christmas Sabbath Christians the world around flock to their churches to celebrate, as we do this morning, that most precious of gifts of our Eternal Father in Heaven, the gift of his only begotten son.

His birth took place quietly, almost inconspicuously, on that blessed morning when Mary brought forth her first-born son and laid him in a manger. In Bethlehem, when the angels sang, did anyone besides the shepherds hear them? A new star appeared and shone over the place where the Christ child lay. How many who saw it, recognized that it was the sign of the Christ Child's birth? Would the shepherds have known if not for the heavenly messenger? Even Herod would not have known if the wise men had not come seeking in the place where "he who was born King of the Jews" was expected to have been born--in the royal palace.

On the other side of the world, in the land of Zarahemla, on the day before the savior was born, those who believed the words of the Prophet Samuel, who had predicted that Christ would be born in five years were worried. The five year time was up. (3 Nephi 1: 9-13)

Now it came to pass that there was a day set apart by the unbelievers, that all those who believed in those traditions should be put to death except the sign should come to pass, which had been given by Samuel the Prophet.

And it came to pass that when Nephi, the son of Nephi, saw this wickedness of his people, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful.

And it came to pass that he went out and bowed himself down upon the earth and cried mightily to his God in behalf of his people, yea,

those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers.

And it came to pass that he cried mightily unto the Lord all that day; and the voice of the Lord came unto him saying

Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world to show unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouths of my prophets.

(Paraphrasing) That night the sun set, but it did not get dark. All night was as the day. A day and a night and a day of light. And a new star appeared in the Heavens. And many who had not believed repented and were baptised by Nephi. All Zarahemla saw and witnessed the signs of the Saviors birth in the Western Hemisphere. Were there Heavenly choirs praising God here as well?

We need to lay aside our worldly gifts, which the Lord does not begrudge us, and some time this Christmas day reflect upon the things in our lives that are really important. (Mathew 6: 13, 19-21]

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Enjoy this wondrous season. I could not find the reference, but I remember the poet's words; "What can we give him? We can give him our hearts."

In the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.