

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. You may be seated. I always find it interesting when we read the gospel lesson and it doesn't really sound a whole lot like gospel. Here we have the message of John the Baptist and the way they describe his message is quite interesting. He says, "Who warned you, you brood of vipers to flee the coming wrath of God?" Blessed be the name of the Lord. That's the gospel of... Wait, what? You brood of vipers? How is that gospel? How in the world can we interpret that as gospel? Yet it is. Good news, when we think of gospel, we tend to think of forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting, and all the good stuff, and that is true. But good news, the good news that comes from God is much larger than just God loves you.

God loves you is all fine and good, but you really don't understand the depth of that love unless you understand where you stand before God. It's very important that we understand our relationship with God without the gospel, without the good news of Jesus Christ. Because if we don't understand that we are sinners, that we need to hear that same message of John. "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." We need to hear and understand that message first. The law of God plays fully upon us because if we do not understand the depth of the judgment that we face, the guilt that we deserve, we will tend to think, like the Israelites of the day, "Well, we're children of Abraham." We always have been God's special people. It doesn't really matter how we act, or what we do, or whether we really worship God or not.

We are children. We have an inheritance. We deserve God's love. No, we don't. Neither did they. Nobody, nobody deserves the grace of God. After all, it is a gift. You don't deserve a gift. You get a gift because the giver wants to give you one. Whether you deserve it or not is immaterial. God desires to give us gifts, and that is the only reason we have the gifts. It's because of His desire to love us, but more importantly, His desire to forgive us. He could love us and say, "Well, you know all those bad things that you do. Yeah, I don't really care about them. I still love you." I mean, that would be nice, but that wouldn't really be a holy and righteous attitude, and it wouldn't really take into account the severity of sin. Sin is damning, literally.

To say that we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, that is indeed good news when it is paired with, "By the grace of God in Jesus Christ has given you salvation." See, the depth of our sin is surpassed by the grace, and mercy, and love of His salvation which he gives to us freely. So because of that, because we understand that we've not deserved it, and yet we have it if we believe that the gift is for us. How do we know that the gift is for us? Are you breathing? Are you a human being? Then the gift is for you. It is universal. It is for all people of all language, of all tribe, of all nation, of all color. It does not matter. It is a gift given

to all of us freely, and how do we get that gift? We get it through His Word, and today, we got to see the Word connected with the water which brings about new life, which seals, which sealed Cade and which seals every single one of us in His promises.

We've been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. As John says, "I baptize with water, but he's getting baptized with fire and the spirit." See, when we receive the baptism of Christ, we receive everything. Everything that God promises is ours in our baptism. He declares baptism to be an adoption. It's like the adoption papers being sealed and signed. There's no doubt it is an historic event. It happened. If you don't remember your baptism, your sponsors, or your parents, or somebody else remembers it, and they can tell you, and it connects you with the rest of the community. They were there and they saw it. We were here and we saw it, and it is valid and true. God has adopted each and every one of us as his children, and in that adoption, we have received all of the benefits, all of the privileges, all of the rights of children of God.

Now, we don't yet see them in their fullness, but they are still ours. We have eternal life right now. We're not waiting for it to happen someday in the future when we die or when Christ comes again. It is ours now. We are eternally saved now. We have the grace of God now. We are fully forgiven of all of our sins now. God's not waiting for us to figure out, "Oh man, I sinned today, and I forgot, and I don't know. Am I forgiven?" Yes, you are. You live in a state of the grace of God. We confess our sins to remind us of how much he has done for us. It's not like he doesn't know that you sinned. It's not like you're listing your sins and God's going, "Oh, I'm surprised. I didn't know you did that."

God's not surprised. He knows. In fact, he knew before you did it that you were going to do it. It's not a surprise to him that you sinned, and he is not waiting for you to articulate that sin before he said, "Well, you missed that one, so you're out of luck." That's not how His grace and His mercy works. It is universal, and it is complete. When were your sins forgiven? On the cross. When Christ was nailed to the cross, and at the end, he said, "It is finished." What was finished? Your salvation, your forgiveness, your life everlasting. The promise was finished and accomplished for you on the cross and then applied to you directly and immediately in your baptisms. You have the benefit for all of your life. We confess our sins so that we might be reminded and receive the great gift of Him telling us over and over and over again that He loves us and He forgives us.

I mean, how great is it to know and to hear from the Word of God and from His called minister that your sins are forgiven? No matter how bad you get, no matter how far you stray, if you go back to the cross and go back to the promise that God gave you in baptism, you can feel and understand the grace. It's always been there,

DECEMBER 8, 2024 SERMON

but you get to receive it and hear it once again, and what a glorious, glorious sound that is. Now, because we have been forgiven, now, we are excited when God challenges us, and disciplines us, and trains us, because now, we learn what it means to be His child. We get to grow in our appreciation of the gifts He has given. We get to grow in the opportunities to share His blessings with others. We're not just wandering around waiting for the end. "Okay, God, whenever you come, it's good." No, he's given us a task and not an onerous task, but a joyous one, to share His love with the world, with everybody that we come in contact with, to share the joy, the joy of our salvation.

I mean, the church looks wonderful. It looks beautiful. All the lights, and the candles, and the colors, and everything anticipates the joy. But what is it a joy in? Not just that we get to celebrate, you know, getting gifts this year again, or that we get to sing some of our favorite songs once more. All of that is great, but it's not the point. The point is this is preparing us as John prepared us for the coming of Christ's message. It's not just that Jesus was born in a manger, but that He was born, that He lived, and then He died, and then three days later, rose from the dead. Because He rose and He promises that His children will rise with Him, we know that that is true for us as well.

So what gift are you looking for? The gift of Good Friday, the gift of Easter Sunday where your sins are buried and your new life arises. You're buried in your baptism with the death of Christ, and you are raised a new life in the Easter Sunday, in your connection with Christ, in your adoption as His child, and now, as His adopted child, may His grace, and mercy, and peace be and abide with you always now and forever more unto life everlasting. Amen.