



Advent 3 – December 12, 2010
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It's About Time God Gave Up
John 3:16-17; Philippians 2: 5-8 ff.

His name was Doug. He was adopted as a baby by loving but ultimately overwhelmed parents and he was in my youth group. Doug was always in trouble. Drugs, alcohol, smoking. And then the stealing began. Doug was finally caught, arrested and convicted. I stood at his trial as his youth minister in Bakersfield, speaking of the good things I saw in Doug, my hope for his growing Christian faith, my belief that he could be better. But...honestly...after so many late night phone calls, **I reached the point where I pretty much lost hope that Doug would ever change.** He tried, he cried, he repented, he accepted Jesus all over again, he promised to do better...but he didn't. He went back and did the same things...and worse ...over and over again. He ended up in Juvie. His parents despaired. Other parents of kids in my group just shook their heads in disgust... and kept their kids away from Doug.

And I...**well, I gave up.** At least I gave up hope that Doug would ever turn his life around. I kept trying to minister to him...but every effort felt like shoveling manure against the tide. It was inevitable. And when I heard that Doug had been hit and killed by a train while standing on the tracks, I didn't know whether he had taken his life, been too drunk to see it coming or been playing the daredevil, jumping across the tracks in front of the train at the last second.

Ever known anyone like that? Someone who...no matter how many chances you gave them... never, never, never turned things around? No matter how hard you tried, how much you prayed, how optimistic or faith-filled you were, after a while you just stopped believing in them. You just...gave up. Honestly...anyone here ever felt that way about someone?

How about this: **anyone here ever felt given up on?** You blew it one too many times and your parents stopped believing in you. Or you blew it one too many times and your wife stopped believing in you. One too many broken promises to your children. One too many broken promises to your boss. And it was over. No going back. They just gave up on you!

Do you think God has ever been tempted to give up on us...in spite of his best efforts? Look at all he has done. He called Abraham to be the father of a chosen people. He called Moses to lead them out of bondage in Egypt and into a promised land. He sent judges and prophets to teach them **how** to live and to remind them that they **ought** to live that way. And they did...for a while. Then, they would forget and slip back into their old ways. Again and again and again, God would say, "You've done wrong!" and they would say, "We're sorry" and God would say, "OK, I forgive you," and they would go right back out and do the same thing again...and again...and again.

After thousands of years of faithfulness; countless displays of His power and love...and repeated, repeated betrayal by his children...who could blame God if he just threw his cosmic

hands up into the air and said, "I...GIVE...UP!?" **And, in fact, he did.** God gave up. Listen: **"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."**

When we read the stories of the Old Testament...when we see how, time and time again, God's people turned their backs on him, doubted him, mocked him and even participated in the most despicable of practices, including child sacrifice...we can well imagine how God might have given up! Given up on the whole lot of us. And God DID give up...he gave up his Son. He sent his son to this earth to do what we could not do for ourselves; save us.

In the fullness of time...when God has everything in place...God gives up...gives up his Son. **That is the story of Christmas.** But...this morning I want to ask this: what did that cost? **What did it cost God to give up his son?** And what did it cost the son to give up his Father and come to earth? The most powerful description of that experience comes in Philippians 2. When we read this, we are actually reading an ancient hymn. This was their version of "Holy, Holy, Holy" or "Come Thou Fount." It is a hymn about how the Father gave up his Son to come to earth; about how the Son gave up his place in heaven and eternity with his Father, entered time and space...to save us. READ

So...what did God the Father give up when he sent his Son to earth? He gave up his immediate relationship with him. Think about this: how long had the Son existed? When did the Father create the Son? Never! John 1 tells us that the Son...the Second Person of the Trinity...always existed; the eternal God has always existed in a community of three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I know; this "Trinity" is hard to comprehend...but that is what the Bible teaches. Just imagine what it would be like to live in perfect, intimate community with someone...forever...and have that relationship torn apart.

We read about Siamese twins who, after years of life together, are separated. It is traumatic. Not only the surgery, but the loss of that physical immediacy. Imagine...their whole existence, they have been a part of one another. That close. Suddenly, separated. Depression, loss...despair...doctors must deal with all of these things.

When the Father sent the Son to earth he gave up his immediate relationship with him, a relationship that had existed from eternity. Was that hard for God? Can our heavenly father feel loss? Pain? How many of you have sent your children off to college? Was that hard? After 18 years of life together, suddenly they are gone. Of course, in our case, we sent Rachel to Whitworth; a place we know and love and trust. It is a place of safety and she is flourishing. We believe that's exactly where God has called her to be.

But what if God called Rachel to a place that wasn't so safe? I remember one time I was tucking her in and she told me she wanted to go be a missionary in a Muslim country. I hardly knew how to respond. I have PRAYED that my children will follow God's call courageously, wherever it might lead. But, LORD, I didn't think you'd take me THAT seriously. Christians die in Muslim countries. Especially Christian missionaries. And especially, especially WOMEN Christian missionaries...no, Lord, that's not what I meant when I offered my child up to you. I meant something less risky. Something safer.

But thousands of parents have sent their children into the mission field over the centuries, never to see them again. IN fact, missionaries used to pack their belongings in a coffin because they went expecting to die on the field. If THIS was your child's future, would you be so willing to give them up? The manger of Bethlehem...Jesus' birthplace...was also his coffin. God the Father so loved the world that he GAVE his only son...to what? To suffer and die. Did

he know it was coming? Yes. Was it a surprise? No. In fact, it was the plan. But did it hurt? Was it painful to be separated from the son and send him on this dangerous mission? Did it cost the Father something?

And how about the Son? He, too, gave up an immediate relationship with the Father. Remember the prayers in Gethsemane when he tried to sort out God's will for him? There was a time in heaven when the Son simply turned to the Father and talked about their whatever they wanted to talk about. Now, he knelt in the dirt under an olive tree awaiting his arrest and feeling forgotten by his Father. And when he cried out, "Why have you forsaken me!!!!" from the cross...was that not the utter expression of dereliction? Of abandonment?

But that's not all the Son gave up when he came to earth. Look back to our Philippians passage. Verse 6-7: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **but made himself nothing.**" The actual Greek word means, "emptied himself." When the Son came to earth, he EMPTIED himself. Of what? Did he stop being God? Yes or no? NO...he didn't stop being God. The New Testament speaks clearly and repeatedly about the divinity of Jesus.

BUT...he was God in a very different form. And he was God who willingly emptied himself of a lot of what it means to be God. What are the qualities that we attribute to God? Eternal-that is, he is outside of time. Omnipresent-he is EVERYWHERE. Omniscient-he knows EVERYTHING. Omnipotent-he has all power and can do ANYTHING. Those are the traditional expressions of the nature of God.

So...was Jesus eternal? Was he outside of time or did he enter INTO time? He came as a baby. He grew up. He became older; a child, a teenager, a man. He lived, aged and died. So...Jesus emptied himself of...gave up eternity.

Was Jesus omnipresent? Of course not. Part of taking on human form meant that if he was in one place, he was **not** in another place, right? What must it be like to go from being an omnipresent being to being confined in a single human body. Alice Burrows shared this thought with me: "It had to be a tight fit. The divine Jesus stuffed like a sausage into a human skin." So...Jesus emptied himself...gave up omnipresence.

Was Jesus omniscient? Careful now. This is a tougher one. Did Jesus know everything? How about when he was a baby? Did he just LOOK like a baby or was he really the All-Knowing One in a baby disguise? If that were so, how could Luke say that Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man"? How about as an adult, then? He seemed to have supernatural knowledge. He knew what people were thinking; knew what was going to happen in the future. So yes or know...was Jesus omniscient? Can you think of a time when Jesus DIDN'T know something? How about Matthew 24? Jesus was talking about the end times and said, **"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."** So, by his own words, Jesus emptied himself...he gave up omniscience.

Was Jesus omnipotent. Could he DO anything he wanted to? He did miracles, he calmed storms, he walked on water, he raised the dead. Sounds pretty powerful. Was he ever NOT able to do something? How about in Nazareth? Mark 6: **"He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith."** So...Jesus emptied himself... he gave up omnipotence.

Eternity, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence...how much did the Son give up to come and save us? Christmas morning, you are going to open presents. Some will be nice...but there might be one that will take your breath away because it is such an amazing gift and you KNOW it cost someone a lot. When you stop to think about how much God the Father and God the Son gave up...how much it cost them...for Jesus to come on his rescue mission to earth...it ought to take your breath away. **Jesus gave up everything...including his life...because God refused to give up on us.**

A few weeks back our latest Welcome to the Family class stood up here for you to take their vows of membership. Among that group of 38 there was one couple; the Purbaughs. They are quiet. Ron especially. In fact, when I asked them to stand up here and tell their story, I think the thought almost made Ron sick to his stomach. But they DID agree to let me tell it for them.

Ron's dad beat him as a boy so Ron grew up with a negative view of God who is Father. Linda's first husband was also physically abusive and she got out of that marriage. The Lord gave these two wounded souls to each other. They lived together for 18 years. Ron learned about what a real father was by being a father to Linda's kids. Learning to BE a good father opened his heart to his heavenly Father. Linda experienced in Ron a man who loved her and was safe, and whom she valued, respected and enjoyed. Their relationship was life-giving...but they never married.

They started coming to Chapel Hill together even though Ron still wasn't sure about God. One Sunday, apparently my sermon included something about living together being a sin in the eyes of God. (It is, by the way!) Linda became convicted and shortly after that, they came to me and asked me to marry them. I did...and it was a wonderful, meaningful, redemptive ceremony. But God wasn't done.

Last fall, Ron, who was still struggling with this whole Christianity thing, agreed to come with Linda to the James Project. He didn't get to the first evening, but Linda was sitting near Pastor Jim and when we all broke up into groups, Linda overheard Jim saying he was going to start a men's group. She told Jim about Ron and thought he might be ready to try a Life Group. Would Jim invite him to join his? Jim did, he joined and has been coming ever since. And somewhere in that time...somewhere between LifeGroup and Welcome to the Family, Ron gave his life to Jesus Christ. I will never forget the moment when Ron AND Linda knelt down together on the kneeler up here and—together—were baptized into faith and into the Body of Christ.

God never gave up on Linda. God never gave up on Ron. And in the end...after they had discovered God's persistent and gracious love...THEY gave up. They gave up their resistance, their broken and dysfunctional past, their resentment towards an abusive husband and abusive father, their preconceived notions about what God must be like, their insistence on living their own way instead of God's way, their spiritual independence... they gave up all of that. And of course, they got so much more in return.

Your God has not given up on you. No matter what you have done, who you are, what other people think about you, how big a failure or fraud or fink you know yourself to be, God has not given up on you. But he gave up everything to seek and to save you. **What do you need to give up to be saved by God?** What are you WILLING to give up? Your hateful self image? Your bitterness. Your abusive past and your unforgiveness about it? Your obsession with your appearance? Your addiction to money or credit or flashy things?

Jesus never gave up on you. He gave up everything to save you. Listen once more to the Christ Hymn as we find it in the Message:

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Read** the passage out loud.
- **Reflect & Apply Individually:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **Reflect & Apply Together:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **Pray together:** tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **Dig deeper**
 1. Has anyone ever given up on you? Or you on someone else? Can you remember a time when someone **didn't** give up on you, even though they might have? Please share.
 2. God might have been tempted to give up on humanity and start over. Instead, he gave his Son. Both the Father **and** the Son gave up a lot when Jesus came to earth. Can you name some of these things?
 3. Can you think of something that **you** need to give up in order to become the Christian you long to be? Would you be willing to share?