

A very Merry and Joy-filled Christmas to one and all,

Today I offer a Modern Day Parable as told by H. David Burton. May it touch your soul and lift your spirit on this most holy of days. The parable is titled: "The Shopper." The scripture lesson is included in the parable.

A woman tells the story of what occurred on a bus:

I had been Christmas shopping all day long. When the bus finally arrived, it was packed with holiday shoppers in the same exhausted mood as I. I sank into the only vacant place, near the back, by a very handsome gentleman. He politely helped me to situate my packages and even held some of them himself.

After jovial conversation among the passengers, the gentleman began in a quiet, melodious voice, deepened with experience, to teach me a lesson that I have never forgotten. "Hear now the parable of the shopper. A woman went forth to shop, and as she shopped, she carefully planned. The hard-earned money was divided, and the many purchases were made with the pure joy and delight that is known only to the giver. Then the gifts were wrapped and placed lovingly under the tree."

"In eager anticipation she scanned each face as the gifts were opened."

"What a lovely sweater,' said the eldest daughter, 'but I think I would prefer blue.'

"Thank you for the cassette player, Mother. It's just what I've always wanted,' said her son. And then aside, secretly to his sister, he continued, "I told her I wanted the one with the automatic reverse and an extra speaker. I never get what I want!"

"The youngest child spoke out with the spoiled honesty of her age, 'I hate rag dolls! I wanted a china doll.'

"One gift still lay under the tree. The woman pointed it out to her husband. 'Your gift is still there.'

"I'll open it when I have time,' he stated. 'I want to get this bike put together first.'"

"How sad it is," continued his soft, beautiful voice, "when gifts are not received in the same spirit they are given. To reject a thoughtful gift is to reject the loving sentiment of the giver himself. And yet, are we not all sometimes guilty of rejecting?"

He was not talking only to me, but to all of those on the bus . He took a present from my stack.

"This one," he said, holding it up and pretending to open the card, "could be to you."

He pointed to a rough-looking, teenage boy in a worn denim jacket and pretended to read the gift card.

"To you I give My life, lived perfectly, as an example so that you might see the pattern and live worthy to return and live with Me again. Merry Christmas from the Messiah.'

"The gift of example is a precious yet often rejected gift."

"This one," he said, holding up a pure, white present, "is for you." He held out the gift to a worn-looking woman, who in earlier years must have been a real beauty and was still attractive in her slim black skirt, black tights, and heels. She allowed her tears to slip without shame down her painted face.

"My gift to you is repentance. This Christmas I wish you to know for certain that though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, and I the Lord will remember them no more. Have a happy New Year. Signed, your Advocate with the Father.'

"Ah, repentance, something every Christian needs," said my seatmate.

"But that isn't all. No, here is a big, red package." He looked around the group and brought a ragged, unkempt, little child forward. "This big, red package would be for you if He were here. The card would say, 'On this Christmas and always, My gift to you is love. My love is pure! It is not dependent on what you do or what you look like. I love you as you have been, as you are now, and as you will be in the future. From your brother, Jesus.'"

"And this silver package to you, madam," he said with a bow to an aging grandmother two rows behind.

"Yes it would be for you, because you would appreciate it most of the time. His precious gift to you would be the gift of salvation. The surety that you will rise from the grave and live again with a perfect, resurrected body. The card would read, 'I give this precious gift freely to you and all men, by laying down My life for you. Signed, Your Saviour.'

"One final gift," said my seatmate. "The greatest of all the gifts of God. Eternal life! A chance to receive the same quality of life that Christ Himself lives. But though this gift is to all men, it must be assembled. He has given us the instructions. They are here in the scriptures." He tore off the paper to reveal a worn, well-used book. He stood up. He was leaving, making his way slowly down the aisle. He paused just as he reached the front and said, "One last gift. Peace! Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." [John 14:27] With those words, he was gone.

How we receive these gifts, these precious gifts from the Babe of Bethlehem, is the telling point. Are we exchangers? Is there really anything else we would rather have? Is there a feature missing? It is what we do with a gift long after we have opened it that shows our appreciation. Have we used it, worn it, displayed it, or cherished it? How does Christ feel when we don't even take time to use His gift of repentance, the one He purchased at such a great price? How sad it is when gifts are not received in the same spirit that they are given.

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim  
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***There was a problem with making a good contact with Facebook last evening. We are not the only church having problems trying to Live Stream the worship service. We'll try again on Sunday. I hope that you have been able to watch the Christmas Eve Service – wasn't the music glorious?***

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