

The Greatest Gift (Go to Meeting) Roy Assanti—January 2, 2021

At this time we may look around and wonder; we're outnumbered. Everybody else is doing something completely foreign and alien to what we think and do, and how we we're made.

December 25th is marked as the birth of a Roman sun-god: Sol Invictus, and it was more popular than the Jan. 6 celebration of the Epiphany. Being of Italian origin, my parents would tell us about the ---- which is attached to the Epiphany.

If you've ever seen a silhouette of a witch on a broomstick, with the moon behind her, that is the --- and she refused the wise men in giving gifts; she decided to do it herself.

Authorities throughout history picked these pagan holiday seasons and converted them to so-called 'Christian' holidays. Fires were lit in the dead of winter to encourage the sun to return, because the sun was dying at the end of the year. Then it was reborn and the fire customs were dropped.

However, other pagan cultural habits were too entrenched to change that easy. It's easier to slap a Christian title, name or occasion on the day. It was not the birth of a sun with all these fires. They encouraged the sun to come back. It was rather the birth of the Son of God, a slight little twist, little stories. But accepted nonetheless!

- What does the true God have to say?
- Is there an inspired comment?
- Is there a clarification?
- Is there a delineation over what has been going on, and is going on around us at this time?

Jeremiah 10:2: "Thus says the LORD, '**Do not learn the way of the heathen**, and do not be terrified at the signs of the heavens; for the nations are terrified at them. For the customs of the people *are vain...*'" (vs 1-2).

We might be outnumbered a million to one in this world. We think differently!

"...for one cuts a tree out of the forest with the axe, the work of the hands of the workman... [this is how these pagan stories begin] ...They adorn it with silver and with gold... [Is this the way to serve God?] ...they fasten it with nails and hammers... [this is the way this world seeks to serve God] ...so that it will not move. They upright like the palm tree, but cannot speak. They must surely be carried because they cannot walk...." (vs 2-5)—*satire and taunt!* It's obvious!

The inspired Word of God shows the attitude has toward thee pagan traditions and origins.

"...Do not be afraid of them; for they cannot do evil nor good, for it is not in them" (v 5).

Verse 6: "*Therefore, there is none like You, O LORD; You are great, and Your name is great in might. Who would not fear You, O King of nations?....* [now we're talking truth] ...For fear belongs to You because among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms... [all the knowledge, technology, armaments and military technology and power] ...**there is none like You**. But they are altogether foolish and animal-like... [What kind of reaction would you get from those who keep the customs of this world?] ...**the tree is a doctrine of vanities**" (vs 6-8)—*just like flowing wind; nothing!*

Verse 9: "Silver beaten into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the goldsmith... [today we have our varieties] ...Violet and purple *are* their clothing; they *are* all the work of skillful ones." *A decoy, not commanded, not of God!*

Verse 10: "But **the LORD is the true God, He is the living God, and the everlasting King...** [these are the facts] ...At His wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to stand His fury."

Tie in Isa. 24; these are just words, but when we look into it and what it means:

Isaiah 24:20: "Like a drunkard the earth is staggering, yea staggering!..." *There's a time when the earth is going to be staggering like a drunken person; staggering!*

"...And it rocks to and fro like a tree hut! And its transgressions are heavy upon it; and it shall fall and not rise again" (v 20).

Wouldn't it be something to fear, to see what is coming to the earth. There's going to be a time when these things happen.

Jeremiah 10:11: "Thus you shall say to them, 'The gods who have not made the heavens and the earth, they shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens.'"

Whatever we see, however influential, it isn't going to last!

Verse 12: "**He has made the earth by His**

power...” *Imagine that!* Imagine this whole earth with the mountains, oceans, etc., has been made by His power!

“...He has established the world by His wisdom, and **has stretched out the heavens by His judgment**” (v 12).

We can’t begin to talk about the vastness of the entire, just visible universe, and how really insignificant just this world is in comparison to the many suns (stars), planets, galaxies; they are innumerable bodies out there.

Verse 13: “When He utters His voice, **there is a noise of a multitude of waters in the heavens....**”

What does that mean? *Imagine the sound of the roaring, crashing waves on the seashore. Howling winds during a violent storm!* Just like a continual thunder! It gives us an idea of the power that God holds. Compare this power to the false pagan customs and the little songs that go along with it.

“...He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightnings with rain, and brings forth the wind out of His treasures.... [by comparison]: ...**Every man is stupid for lack of knowledge; every refiner is put to shame by the graven image; for his molten image is a lie, and there is no breath in them**” (vs 13-14). *Every single little image and statue that is held dear!*

Verse 15: “They *are* vanity, the work of delusion... [a lie, deception] ...in the time of their judgment they shall perish. The Portion of Jacob *is* not like them; for He *is* the Maker of all things...” (vs 15-16).

You can see what God is inspiring and saying, the comparison:

I’ve done it all, I made it all! Look at My power. Don’t look at these foolish fables, silly things, silly stories. This is where the power abides!

“...and Israel *is* the tribe of His inheritance; the LORD of hosts *is* His name” (v 16). *This is the Source!* ‘I am the Source of all living, of all power.’

- What is He like?
- What is the focus of the true God?

Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart *is* deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?... [He answers the question]: ...I the LORD search the heart, **I try the reins...** [this is what’s in the heart and mind of God; He tries the mind and heart] ...even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (vs 9-10).

Again, more of the activity of God, what He does, His activity with us; He creation, His creatures on earth.

Proverbs 3:11: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be weary of His correction.”

- He corrects us
- He guides us
- He molds us
- He teaches us

Verse 12: “For whom the LORD loves He corrects, even as a father *corrects* the son *in whom* he delights.”

This doesn’t end; it continues. This is what we can continually experience; those that God calls and whose minds are open. Not to the fables and traditions of this world, but rather to the instruction, the leadership and guidance of the great God. It applies moreso as we see the trouble in this world continue and multiply.

We’ve been plucked and pulled out of this world. Our minds have been changed. We can understand and see something different.

Ephesians 2:1: “Now, you were dead in trespasses and sins.”

This is where God’s focus is. Not in traditions, not in useless customs and fables. This is the focus:

Verse 2: “In which you walked in times past according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air...”

Yes, there is a spiritual power that causes the deception and derails our thinking, and takes us away from the mind of God. However, this is the way we walk and have been taught.

“...the spirit that is now working within the children of disobedience... [we were there; we were all there] ...among whom also we all once had our conduct... [this is what we’re coming out of] ...in the lusts of our flesh...” (v 2-3).

It was a confusion, but now we are directed specifically by the great Creator.

“...doing the things willed by the flesh and by the mind, and were by nature *the* children of wrath, even as the rest *of the world*. But God, Who is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us” (vs 3-4). *We’re accepted and embraced by the great powerful God!*

Verse 5: “Even when we were dead in *our* trespasses, has made *us* alive together with Christ.

(For you have been saved by grace.) And **He has raised us up together...**" (v 5-6). *Not yet, but it's almost as if it's happened!*

"...and has caused us to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages that are coming He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (vs 6-7).

What wealth, tremendous joy and hope is there that lies ahead for each one of us.

Verse 8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this especially is not of your own selves; **it is the gift of God.**" *We're pulled out of this world, and we're given incredible riches!*

- I wonder, can we take in this vision? *It's revealed!*
- Can we take it in?
- Can we actual imagine what it's actually going to be like?
- Are these just words on a page?

or

- Do they come out in real life Technicolor?
- Activity?
- Action?
- Reality?
- Do these words leap out at us?

We've been told in advance!

- What excuse could we have for taking it for granted?

Revelation 5:8: "And when He took the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having harps and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song..." (vs 8-9).

We have briefly touched on spiritual sounds and so on, the voice of God. Can we imagine what this new song would sound like?

"...saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book, and to open its seals because You were slain, and did redeem us to God by Your own blood, out of every tribe and language and people and nation, and did make us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth'" (vs 9-10). **Can we imagine that?**

- the reality?
- the different form of life?
- the different goals?
- the different reality that will be before us?

Verse 11: "And I saw and I heard the voices of many angels around the Throne, and the voices of the living creatures and the elders, and thousands of

thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing'" (vs 11-12). *It goes on and on, the emphasis and greatness!*

Verse 13: "And every creature that is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and those that are on the sea, and all the things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him Who sits on the Throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing, and honor, and glory, and sovereignty **into the ages of eternity.**'"

- How long do you have to live? *We have a very short lifespan!*
- Can we imagine never ever having to die?
- Can we imagine glory, honor, beauty, joy, unending?

This is what we're looking at!

What must it have been like for the first man—Adam—when he awoke? He's suddenly there and he's got a beautiful garden, lovely animals, 'I'm alive!' This was life, and it was wonderful. Adam named all the animals and it was a beautiful world.

What about what the second Adam has in store for those who love Him, for those who remain faithful to the end, regardless. Imagine this world! Imagine the reality of this world! This is not a physical Adam waking up and seeing a beautiful physical creation.

This is a spiritual awakening and a spirit world in God's realm!

Revelation 21:1: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea."

New ballgame! Not the prized earthly possessions that we value now!

Verse 2: "And I, John, saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." **Do you want to be there?** *Imagine it coming down!*

Verse 3: "And I heard a great voice from heaven say..."

A great voice brings some reality to this. Ear-splitting thunder! Power! Resounding authority! Profound announcement!

"...**'Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men; and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them and be their God'**" (v 3).

An invisible spirit realm. No more hidden, but there in real life in power and might right before

your eyes! This is wonderful! How much pain is there in this world today?

Verse 4: “And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes...”

God does not want us to suffer; He wants the fruit of the spirit, the joy, He will wipe every tear from their eyes. This is the reality that we put in our heart and mind and long for, look toward, hope for. How many tears are there in this world? Especially now!

“...and *there* shall not be anymore death, or sorrow, or crying; neither shall *there* be any more pain, because the former things have passed away” (v 4).

- no more Satan
- no more adversary of God
- no more the cause of pain

Verse 5: “And He Who sits on the Throne said...”

This is what God says in His heart. He’s for you and me, for all His creatures.

“...‘Behold, I make all things new.’... [new ballgame; it’s going to be just like God brought Adam to see the world, and now this is the glorious culmination of His plan.” (v 5).

“...Then He said to me, ‘**Write, for these words are true and faithful**’” (v 5).

- Do we trust God?
- Do we keep this vision in our heart and mind continually?

He said to *write it down*, ‘I want everyone to read this, “...**for these words are true and faithful**.”’

Verse 6: “And He said to me, ‘It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the one who thirsts, I will give freely of the fountain of the Water of Life.’”

- what encouragement
- what spiritual strength

Verse 7: “The one who overcomes **shall inherit all things**; and I will be his God, and he [and she] shall be My son [and daughter]”—*everyone is included!*

“...all things...”—the vastness of the universe, the unending billions of galaxies, each with billions of suns, not to mention planets. Why is so much out there in God’s plan? There’s so much to accomplish, to do meaningfully. Not with crazy traditions that we see today, meaningless fables going nowhere.

Unending achievement! Continual treasures and joys of life, and accomplishment is what awaits us.

Isaiah 9:6: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulders... [perfect leadership] ...and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, **The Prince of Peace.**”

What do we see today? *Trouble! Difficulties! Looming war!*

Verse 7: “Of the increase of *His* government... [it will never end] ...and peace...” we want:

- peace
- harmony
- joy
- accomplishment
- happiness

“...*there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and over His Kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with righteousness from henceforth, even forever.... [never ever ending] ...The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this” (v 7).

This is the joy that we will experience; Galatians 5:22: “But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control**; against such things there is no law” (vs 22-23). *Just imagine:*

- no more headaches
- no more pain
- no more fear
- no more worry
- no more doubt
- no more concerns
- no more panic
- no more political chaos
- no more bickering and fighting
- no more threatening

I’m sure tired of the political bickering and chaos! All of these terms are going to foreign. All these experiences have been brought into existence by the rebellion of the one who once was Lucifer and name was changed to Satan, the competitor and enemy of God.

We looked at the future, now let’s come back a little bit to the present; back to earth! This is time of trial. I recently received information about a member who had to go to the hospital urgently. The heart rate had gone down to under 30; it was a serious situation, and its an ongoing situation. Today there are troubles, difficulties and upsets.

1-Peter 4:12: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial....”

- today is a time of testing
- today is time to grow and draw close to God

“...among you *which is* taking place **to test you**, as if some strange thing *were* happening to you” (v 12).

It’s not strange! God needs to make sure that He’s not going have another Lucifer-come-Satan rebel in this joyous existence. Now is the time to strive. We’ve come back to earth; this is today. This is what is before us:

- we need to strive
- we need to face contrary winds
- we need to develop a determination

to walk and go God’s way against the odds!

This is what’s going to develop character within us that will keep us from ever turning against God, from ever turning as Lucifer.

Matthew 11:12: “For from the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven is taken with a *great* struggle, and *the zealous ones*...”

This describes the nature we need to have now; we need to see that vision. We need to be zealous and strive for that prize. This is the time to produce and grow in determination and character. Today as we live our lives, there is no choice. We need to produce or perish.

The problem is that we must push against a contrary mind. Our mind is naturally geared contrary to the way of God. I know we know Matt. 25:14, but is it reality to us? *We’re used to the story, we know it!* But we’ve got to be so that we have to take it seriously. We’ve got to consider what is being said.

Matthew 25:14: “For *the Kingdom of Heaven is* like a man leaving the country, who called his own servants and delivered to them his property.”

We have the down payment, the earnest of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 15: “Now, to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one; he *gave* to each one according to his own ability... [to trade, to increase] ...and immediately left the country. Then the one who had received five talents went and traded... [we have to work, increase what God has given us—the Spirit, the power—multiply it] ...with them, and made an additional five talents. In the same way also, the one who had *received two talents* also gained two others” (vs 15-17).

Verse 18: “But the one who had received the

single *talent* went and dug in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.”

- Am I hiding my talent?
- Am I refusing to grow?
- Am I counting something as too hard? Too difficult?
- Am I asking ‘why’?
- Am I saying ‘why not’?
- Why can’t I do this?

Verse 19: “Now, after a long time, the lord of those servants came to take account with them. Then the one who had received five talents came to *him and* brought an additional five talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered five talents to me...’” (vs 19-20).

Can you imagine coming before Christ and you’ve grown and hearing these wonderful words.

“...see, I have gained five other talents besides them.’ And his lord said to him, ‘**Well done**... [put yourself in that position] ...**good and faithful servant!** *Because* you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” (vs 20-21).

These are the words we all want to hear!

Verse 22: “And the one who had received two talents also came to *him and* said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; see, I have gained two other talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘**Well done, good and faithful servant!** *Because* you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (vs 22-23).

Verse 24: “Then the one who had received the single talent also came to *him and* said...”

This is the position no one wants to be in. Now is the time when we need to produce. Be awake; don’t sleep! That’s the message!

There are excuses: It’s too hard. I was out of work. Or this or that happened. The excuses!

“...‘Lord, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter’” (v 24).

Whatever we do we must overcome, we must grow, we must never ever excuse:

- whether it’s that we have to forgive someone that is so difficult to forgive
- whether it means that we have to give something that is so difficult to give
- whether we have to trust God in a situation that is so difficult

You know your situation. Whatever we have to do, whatever it cost, take that step forward now!

Verse 29—*this is the principle*: “For to everyone who has, *more* shall be given, and *he* shall have abundance; on the other hand, **as for the one who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken from him.**”

It’s not easy! It’s not a walk in the park! The prize is unending life! Unending inheritance! Joy! I guess we just ‘prime the pump’ in these few years that we have. We ‘prime the pump’ and then get the system going. According to God’s wisdom it flows.

It’s hard to work against deceitfulness, and we’re so deceitful by nature. We move in a way that is contrary to natural direction that our heart and mind goes.

Hebrews 12:4: “You have **not yet resisted** to the point of *losing* blood in your struggle against sin.”

We have to resist! We must resist against what is wrong! What is sin! We’ve got to do that to move God’s way! We’re going enter in through the hard and bumpy road! We must take heed and be warned. We have to be particular. It’s not an easy path.

Matthew 7:13: “Enter in through the narrow gate... [it’s not the wide gate, not the easy way] ...for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way...”

- Why are these warning there?
- Why are these words inspired?
- What are they for?
- What are they telling us?

These are the questions we need to ask ourselves!

- Why is it there?
- Why doesn’t it say it’s a wide gate and easy to get through?

NO! Verse 13: “Enter in through the narrow gate, for **wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction,** and many are those who enter through it; for narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way that leads to life, and **few** are those who find it” (vs 13-14).

Earlier we read Jer. 17:9 about our nature being deceitful. This is the way that the Apostle Paul put it in Rom. 7. the natural state of mind, the mind that we have to battle against:

Romans 7:14: “For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am carnal, having been sold *as a slave* under sin; because what I am working out myself, I do not know. For what I do not desire... [Isn’t that the way it is, the easy way, the wide

gate?] ...to do, this I do; moreover, what I hate, this *is what* I do” (vs 14-15).

That’s the nature! The struggle! The striving that we have inside of us! It’s on purpose, because it shows God the intensity. We develop the character, the strength to strive against wrong, even though we want to do it.

Verse 16: “But if I am doing what I do not desire to do, I agree with the Law... [God’s way] ...that *it is* good. So then, I am no longer working it out myself; rather, it is sin *that is* dwelling within me” (vs 16-17).

God gives us a contrary nature that we have defeat, overcome.

Verse 18: “Because I fully understand that there is not dwelling within me—that is, within my fleshly being—*any* good. For the desire to do good is present within me; but how to work out that which is good, I do not find.” *We lose our cool, our equilibrium!*

Verse 19: “For the good that I desire to do, I am not doing; but the evil... [we come to hate evil] ...that I do not desire to do, this I am doing.”

It’s almost as if God rubs our nose into the contrary way. *We get to hate it!*

Verse 20: “But if I do what I do not desire to do, I am no longer working it out myself, but sin *that is* dwelling within me. Consequently, I find this law *in my members*, that when I desire to do good, evil is present with me” (vs 20-21). *It’s always a struggle!*

Verse 22: “For I delight in the Law of God according to the inward man.” *Inside of us we love God’s way!*

Verse 23: “But I see another law...”—*a contrary law*; this is the way that God causes character to be developed inside of us.

“...within my own members, warring against the law of my mind, and leading me captive to the law of sin that is within my own members” (v 23). *Only God can rescue us!*

Verse 24: “O *what a* wretched man I am! Who shall save me from the body of this death? I thank God *for His salvation* through our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of this, on the one hand, I myself serve the Law of God with *my* mind; but on the other hand, with the flesh, *I serve* the law of sin” (vs 24-25). *Striving always against this downward pull!*

At this time of the year as our mind is on the outside world: false customs, pagan traditions. We naturally have a defense against that. It’s most important not to go the way of the heathen. What’s more important than that? ***To keep control of our***

mind and heart to strive in this battle and to grow and draw close to God! Fight this natural nature that we have that is contrary to God.

Luke 18:9: “And to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others, He also spoke this parable: ‘Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one *was* a Pharisee and the other a tax collector’” (vs 9-10).

This is so simple; we know this parable! But we have to ingest it and keep the lesson with us throughout our conduct continually.

Verse 11: “The Pharisee stood and prayed... [he knew and studied] ...with himself in this manner: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unrighteous, adulterers—or even as this tax collector. I fast twice in the week, *and* I give a tithing of everything that I gain’” (vs 11-12).

I’m righteous. I’ve been seeking You; You can’t fault me.

But this is the attitude that God accepts! The sinner! The weak one:

Verse 13: “And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat himself on *the* chest...”

There are none righteous, not one; none of us. He realizes it, the other guy doesn’t.

“...saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner.’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other...” (vs 13-14).

Here’s the principle, something that we need to practice in our conduct day-by-day.

“...For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled; and the one who humbles himself shall be exalted” (v 14).

The Greatest Gift:

If someone said to you, ‘Be my buddy; be my friend. I’ll tell you what I’ll do, if you are my friend, I’m going to give you \$20-million.’ Would you turn that down?

*What God is offering us is far, far more!
He’s offering us:*

- unending life
- optimum life of joy
- riches that don’t end

John 15:12: “This is My commandment: that you love one another, as I have loved you. **No one has greater love than this: that one lay down his life for his friends**” (vs 12-13). ***This is the greatest gift!*** God gave His life so that we could have life

forever!

Verse 14: **“You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you.”** *It’s worthwhile!*

Verse 15: “No longer do I call you servants, because the servant does not know what his master is doing. But **I have called you friends** because I have made known to you all *the* things that I have heard from My Father.”

Life unending at a very low price, even though we are not deserving. This is got to be the greatest gift that anyone would ever offer you or me!

Scriptural References:

- 1) Jeremiah 10:2-10
- 2) Isaiah 24:20
- 3) Jeremiah 10:11-16
- 4) Jeremiah 17:9-10
- 5) Proverbs 3:11-12
- 6) Ephesians 2:1-8
- 7) Revelation 5:8-13
- 8) Revelation 21:1-7
- 9) Isaiah 9:6-7
- 10) Galatians 5:22-23
- 11) 1 Peter 4:12
- 12) Matthew 11:12
- 13) Matthew 25:14-24, 29
- 14) Hebrews 12:4
- 15) Matthew 7:13-14
- 16) Romans 7:17-25
- 17) Luke 18:9-14
- 18) John 15:12-15

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