

The title for today's message is: **What did you give for Christmas?**

John the Baptist said: **“Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.”**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

“What did you get for Christmas?” That may be the most-asked question during the days immediately following Christmas “what did you get?”

Little children especially like to talk about what they got, they would say “I got this, and I got that.”

When a child go back to school they can't wait for recess so they could gather around classmates and show off what they got for Christmas.

They would even bring their Christmas gifts to school for show-and-tell that way, everyone could see what they got.

Now, this isn't just a “kid-thing, no! Adults like to talk about what they “got” for Christmas too. They cannot help but be excited when they get things.

Look, we all love to get things. We might try to act calm and cool and collected on the outside as we open our gifts.

But deep down, many of us are doing somersaults in our heads, because we just love getting things, especially for Christmas.

Yet, a question that is rarely asked after Christmas is over is this: “what did you give for Christmas? What’s that??”

Look, I don’t want to know what you got, I want to know what you gave?”
How about you, have you ever asked someone that question?

What did you give for Christmas? I bet if you did you would catch someone completely off guard.

Try it this year and see what happens. By nature, we’d rather talk about what we got, I mean that’s more about me, and what I have.

According to Luke, In the desert around the Jordan River, lived a man who wanted people to change their attitudes toward their possessions.

John the Baptist was that man, he was teaching the people to repent. Now, to repent means to turn around, to change direction in your life.

And John was preparing the crowds of people who came out to see him for the coming of the Messiah.

He was unusual, a man living out in the desert alone, dressed in a robe made out of camel’s hair, eating grasshoppers and wild honey.

And his message was different from what the people were used to hearing, he was telling them to change, to repent.

As the crowds came out to see John, God revealed something to John about these people.

Mainly that many of the people there weren't interested in changing their lives and preparing for the coming of the Messiah.

Look, John was a tourist attraction to them, and that's about it. That's why, in verse 7 John calls them a "brood of vipers."

In verse 8, John told them to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Don't just stand there, change. Do something so people can see.

If you're really sincere, if you're ready in your life to repent, change. He was telling the people that time was running out.

Verse 9 he said, "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

Wow, who was this John? Well Jesus called him the greatest of all the prophets. And John's words still speak to us today.

In many ways, we are like those people who came out to see John. We struggle with materialism too, don't we?

The Christmas season can really bring it out of us, more so than the other season of the year. "What did you get? Look what I got!"

Yes, we know that the Bible tells us that we should change, you know, be more spiritual, but as humans, we like to focus on material things.

Today, John the Baptist calls out to you and me, and he asks us the same hard questions.

For example, if you know what is right, why do you keep on doing what is wrong?

And if you know that it is wrong to be materialistic, why do you continue in your materialism?

How about, why nod your head on Sunday morning as we talk about these things only to go back to your old ways during the week?

That's what John the Baptist was addressing many years ago. He pointed out the sins of people, many people.

But then he pointed the people to a Savior when he told them in verse 16: One more powerful than I will come, of course, meaning Christ.

Do you feel guilty about the sins you have committed in your life? Look, all the times you have been materialistic, and focused on getting, you forgot about giving?

Do you feel guilty about all those times you've heard the Word of God, but then went home and slipped back into your old ways?

Change, change your ways and remember Jesus is able to do something that John couldn't do. Jesus is able to take your guilt away.

He takes your guilt away by giving you something he gives, his life as a sacrifice on the cross, yes he gives you that.

He gives you his righteousness, and takes away your sin. He gives you forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life.

He wipes your sins off the books and He takes your punishment away. Of all the gifts you receive this Christmas, nothing is greater than that!

And there's something else Jesus gives you, and that is the strength you need to change.

When the people in the crowd listened to John the Baptist, they wanted to change. They wanted to stop being people who were focused on getting.

"What should we do then?" the people asked in verse 10. And then, John gave them practical ways that they could change, look at verse 11.

John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."

Share, John told the people. Change your focus from getting, to giving. Tax collectors were struck by John's message as well. They repented.

They were forgiven. "Teacher," they asked John, "what should we do?" John told them to be honest.

He said "Don't collect any more than you are required to." Tax collectors were famous for taking more than they needed to.

They were very focused on getting. John told them to become more honest in their dealings with others.

Soldiers in the crowd were wondering what they should do too. John told them, don't extort money, and don't accuse people falsely.

Soldiers were well-known for taking people's money, "they would say either you give me your money, or I'll have you arrested for treason.

They were very focused on getting to the point where they would extort people. John said, stop that practice, and to be content with your pay.

These people remind me of the character Scrooge in the famous Christmas play entitled "A Christmas Carol."

The play begins with Scrooge only focused on getting, and hoarding all of his money to the point of hurting other people.

By the end of the play, he was the opposite, instead of getting, he was more focused on giving, and helping other people.

What changed those people in the desert? As they listened to John, they felt guilt because of materialism.

But they also felt joy, because of the Savior who was coming, who would take away all of their sins.

As John the Baptist said, let the one who has extra give to the one who has nothing.

How can you be someone who gives this year? Look for ways, look for opportunities.

Remember, you have a God, who gives and gives and gives to you. Let us worship him this Christmas by changing our focus from getting to giving. Amen.