

**Valley View Chapel**  
**December 5, 2010**  
**Essentials, Part 10**  
**“God’s Greatest Gifts”**  
**“I believe in....the forgiveness of sins,**  
**the resurrection of the body,**  
**and the life everlasting. AMEN”**

### Introduction

The second Sunday of Advent is actually the perfect time to bring the series on *The Apostles’ Creed* to a close because the creed’s final words tell us about three gifts which God gives to the person who puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. These gifts are more fantastic than anything you could possibly receive on this or any other Christmas. I guarantee that 100 years from now, every Christmas present you’ve ever gotten will be totally irrelevant. But “God’s greatest gifts” will still be “giving” 100, 1,000 and even 1,000,000 years from now!

Let’s take a closer look at these three incredible gifts that will last for all eternity.

### The Forgiveness of Sins

*USA Today* had an article entitled “Psychologists now know what makes people happy.” What do you suppose is the one indispensable ingredient to human happiness?

Is it *fame*? Tiger Woods is famous yet he is not a happy man today.

Is it *power*? Kim Il-Jung, the president of North Korea, has power but I doubt that his enormous power makes him happy.

Is it *wealth*? Donald Trump is a rich man but he only seems happy when he firing people.

The *USA Today* article said that *forgiveness* is what is most strongly linked to happiness. In other words, *happy* people are *forgiven* people.

This bears out what the world-renowned psychiatrist Karl Menninger, the founder of the famed Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, once said: “If I could convince my patients that they were truly *forgiven*, 90% of them could be released tomorrow.”

People everywhere yearn for forgiveness.

Ernest Hemingway once wrote a story about a father and his teenage son. In the story, the relationship became strained and the boy ran away from home. His father began a journey in search of his lost son. Finally, in Madrid, Spain, in a last desperate attempt to find him, the father put the following ad in the local newspaper: “Dear Paco, Meet me in

front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father.” The next day in front of the newspaper office, eight hundred “Pacos” showed up. They were all seeking their father’s forgiveness and love.

Horace Bushnell, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Connecticut pastor and theologian, declared: “Forgiveness is man’s deepest need and God’s highest achievement.”

“Humanity’s deepest need” was met and “God’s highest achievement” was demonstrated when Jesus died on the cross to pay the price of our sins.

If forgiveness is our deepest need, then what does forgiveness mean?

### **Forgiveness means:**

First, forgiveness means salvation.

“Salvation” means “deliverance from a dangerous situation.” Christ came to deliver us from three dangers: death, sin, and hell.

Death is dangerous because sooner or later, our time will come to leave this earth.

Sin is dangerous because it keeps us from being the kind of people we want to be.

Hell is dangerous because once our life is over, there are no second chances. We cannot reverse the eternal consequence of the choice we made in this life concerning Jesus Christ.

But salvation also means *wholeness* or *health*. To receive God’s salvation is to realize our potential as people made in God’s image. It is to experience personally Jesus’ promise in John 10:10, “I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.” (NIV)

Second, forgiveness means redemption.

The word “redeem” means “to buy back.” In Bible times, slaves could be “redeemed” or “set free” if someone paid the required price.

Paul told the Corinthians: “You were bought at a price.” I Corinthians 6:20 (NIV)

Humanity was in slavery to the fear of death and the grip of sin. By shedding his blood on the cross, Jesus paid the price of humanity’s liberation.

Paul reminded the church at Ephesus of this in Ephesians 1:7, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace....” (NIV)

Third, forgiveness means reconciliation.

Because of our sins, we are the enemies of a holy God. Isaiah 59:2 says: “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you....” (NIV)

The Bible says in II Corinthians 5:19 that God initiated reconciliation with those who had offended him: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ....” (NIV)

God wants to get close to us, to have a personal relationship with us, to be our friend, to be reconciled to us.

Forgiveness means we are saved, redeemed, and reconciled!

But forgiveness is not automatic. We need to fulfill two conditions.

### **Two conditions for salvation:**

First, we must repent of our sins. To the Athenians, Paul said: “God...demands all people everywhere to repent.” Acts 17:30 (NIV)

To “repent” means “to think differently” or “to change your mind.” Specifically, it means to change your mind about *sin*. Before we came to Christ, we didn’t think much if at all about what pleases or displeases God. But when we come to Christ for forgiveness, we really want God to make us the kind of person *he* wants us to be.

Second, we must believe on Christ. To “believe” means to put our faith in *him alone* and in his *finished work on the cross* for our forgiveness. We stop trying to earn our way into God’s favor through good works, church attendance or a moral life. When the Philippian jailer cried out: “What must I do to be saved?” Paul didn’t answer: “Join the church; get baptized; give some money; keep the 10 commandments; do the best you can.” He said: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved....” Acts 16:31 (NIV)

The moment we repent and trust in Christ alone, our sins are forgiven and all our guilt is taken away. We become new people inside - clean, forgiven, adopted into the family of God. This staggering truth prompted theologian Martin Marty to observe: “Miracles can occur without special effects. It takes more doing for a holy God to forgive an errant person than it does to part the waters of the sea.”

### **The Resurrection of the Body**

The last statements of the creed - “the resurrection of the body is the second of God’s fantastic gifts given to those who believe.

Jesus said to his disciples on the eve of his death: “Because I live, you will also live.” John 14:19 (NIV)

If Jesus is *not alive today*, if he is still in the grave, then no one has any assurance of eternal life. *Our* resurrection from the dead is intimately connected to *his*.

In I Corinthians 15:51-54 Paul described this blessed hope which the believer has in Christ - the resurrection of the body from the dead: "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'" 1 Corinthians 15:51-54

Christians will be raised in eternal, never-dying, perfected bodies. But what is our final destination? Both the Bible and *The Apostles' Creed* affirm the reality of a literal place called "heaven."

### **The Life Everlasting**

Everlasting life is the third of God's wonderful gifts named in *The Apostles' Creed*.

Actor Kevin Costner confessed his longing for heaven. In an interview, he was asked if he believed in heaven. Costner replied: "I desperately want to! I mean, I really want to believe that a part of me will continue on after this life and that there's more to me and to this life than just what's here on Earth. Yes, I want to believe."

C.S. Lewis understood this nearly universal longing for heaven and wrote about it in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*: "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water.... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably, earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing."

We all want to live forever in a perfect place. Even the hard-core atheist wishes this were true.

But sadly, not everyone will go to heaven because *heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people*.

Jon Krakauer in his riveting true story, *Into the Wild*, related the sad and tragic tale of Carl McCunn. I want the author to tell the story in his own words.

"McCunn [was] an affable, absent-minded Texan who moved to Fairbanks during the 1970's oil boom and found lucrative employment on the Trans-Alaska pipeline construction project. In early March, 1981...McCunn hired a bush pilot to drop him at a

remote lake near the Coleen River, about seventy-five miles northeast of Fort Yukon on the southern margin of the Brooks Range.

“A thirty-five-year-old amateur photographer, McCunn told friends that the main reason for the trip was to shoot pictures of wildlife....His intention was to remain in the wilderness through August. Somehow, though, he neglected to arrange for the pilot to fly him back to civilization at summer’s end, and it cost McCunn his life....

“In late August, as the days grew shorter and the air turned sharp and autumnal in the Brooks range, McCunn began to worry when nobody arrived to fly him out. ‘I think I should have used more foresight about arranging my departure,’ he confessed to his diary....‘I’ll soon find out.’

“In November he finished the last of his rations. He felt weak and dizzy; chills racked his gaunt frame. The diary recorded, ‘This is sure a slow and agonizing way to die.’

“‘I can’t go on like this, I’m afraid,’ McCunn wrote sometime in late November....‘Dear God in Heaven, please forgive my weakness and my sins. Please look over my family.’

Two months later, on February 2, 1982, Alaska State Troopers came across his camp, looked inside the tent, and discovered his body.”

Carl McCunn went “into the wild” but the absent-minded Texan forgot to tell the pilot to pick him up.

### **Conclusion**

The words he penned three months before his cold and cruel death were indeed prophetic: “I think I should have used more foresight about arranging my departure.”

Perhaps some of you this morning are so connected and captivated to the things and pursuits of this present world that you have neglected to “arrange your departure.” The Bible warns us for our own good: “Now is the time of God’s favor. Now is the day of salvation.”

You can have a joyful life on earth and “life everlasting” in heaven when you die. But you must arrange the details of your departure before it’s too late.

I end this series of sermons on *The Apostles’ Creed* with the true and thought-provoking words of C.S. Lewis: “Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.”

