

The Gift

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It was almost time for the party, and Sherry was running late. She just finished wrapping the gift that she spent weeks shopping for. Patsy was her best friend and Sherry wanted to find something special for her forty-fifth birthday. She finally found it yesterday, a black pearl bracelet. Patsy loved pearls and was especially fond of the more colorful ones. The black pearls that Sherry found had an iridescent hue of blue, and she knew Patsy would really love them.

She picked up the present and headed out the door, careful not to crumple the tiny curly ribbons attached in abundance on the top of the small treasure. Patsy lived just two doors down, and already several cars were crowded along the curb on both sides of the street. Sherry trotted along knowing the party had already started. Thankfully, she thought, it wasn't a surprise party.

Once there, she rang the doorbell. In a flash the door was opened, and cheerful light and lively music poured out to greet her. She entered and said hello to those standing in the foyer. Making her way through the mingling crowd of friends and family, she spotted Patsy at the far end of the room. Their eyes met and Patsy squealed with delight.

"There you are, I was about to call a squad to go pick you up," Patsy said laughingly as she made her way toward Sherry, and upon reaching her she hugged her friend tightly. Then Sherry stepped back and handed Patsy the present. "This is for you," she said with a smile.

Patsy was stunned; she didn't know what to say. She immediately got down on her knees and asked Sherry if she could please have the gift. Sherry worriedly looked down at her friend and wondered if she lost a screw somewhere down the line. "Why are you asking for something that I already gave you?"

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Of course Patsy didn't do that; she just took the gift and thanked her friend heartily, putting on the bracelet as soon as she took it out of the box. The point of this silly little story is that it reminds me of another Friend, who had a very special gift that He has given to His dear friends, and yet many of them will still ask Him for it after they already had possession of it, instead of just thanking Him.

Paul teaches us of this gift in his letter to the Ephesians, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast.*" Ephesians 2:8-9 (RSV)

The gift is salvation, and it's free, yet the question is still asked quite often, "How can I receive salvation?" The answer to this *cannot* start with, "First you must..." because that phrase can only end with a physical deed. Nowhere in scripture does it say that we must walk down the aisle, or get down on our knees and ask Jesus to enter our hearts, yet most churches teach this all the time. The Bible, however, teaches the contrary, because if there is anything physical that a person must do for salvation, then he has something to brag about. God says there are no works involved so that man *cannot* boast.

But if there is nothing for us to do, how then *are* we saved? Paul says in his letter to the Romans that if we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, then we will be saved.<sup>1</sup> If the belief is in your heart, then your mouth will speak the evidence of that belief. Paul goes on to say that the Lord richly

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 10:9

blesses all who call on Him, and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!<sup>2</sup> So once you have that desire to know the Lord, your only prayer should be, "Lord Jesus, thank you for saving me!"

Let's go back to the story and look at it another way. In Patsy's case, there was no reason to ask for the gift that her friend gave her. Sherry handed it to her and that was that. But what if Patsy called Sherry the week before and *asked* for the present. For one thing, that's considered rude in most circles. But more importantly, what if Sherry decided *not* to give her friend anything even after she asked for it? Some friend, huh?

We can rejoice because Jesus would *never* do that. He says that *everyone* who is given to Him by the Father *will* come to Him, and *He will not cast them out!*<sup>3</sup> Once the Father has chosen us, He gives us the gift of salvation in which Jesus was faithful unto death, to die on a cross for our sins, plus the faithfulness of the Father who raised Him from the dead for our justification.<sup>4</sup>

Nowhere in scripture does it teach that we must accept the Lord as our personal savior. It does, however, teach us that there is no one who is righteous, not any of us! Each and every one of us has sinned and we fall short of the glory of God.<sup>5</sup> It also teaches us that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>6</sup>

*But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:8-13 (NIV)*

Patsy accepted her gift from Sherry without asking for it. She didn't get down on her knees and beg for it. When Patsy was aware of her friend's presence, she just called out to her, accepted her gift happily, and said thank you. When we are aware of Jesus, we call out to Him; but not as a stranger, He already knew us from before the foundations of the world!<sup>7</sup> And we will know Him because we have that desire to be close to Him. We accept the gift of salvation from the Lord Jesus Christ, not because we asked Him for it, but because He gave it freely to us; it is ours, we can't help but accept it! All we can do now is thank Him for it and show our appreciation by living our lives for Him. We love Him because He first loved us!<sup>8</sup>

Do you believe that Jesus is the Lord? Do you believe that He died on the cross to pay for your sins, and then rose from the dead? Do you believe that He is alive and sitting at the right hand of God the Father? That's the gift! You can't "*not*" accept it if you already believe it! And although it may be hard to share a string of pearls, it's easy to share the gift of salvation. All we need to do is tell everyone about the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done for us, and if they have been called by the Father, then they will come to realize that they too have received His gift!

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 10:12-13

<sup>3</sup> John 6:37

<sup>4</sup> Romans 4:25

<sup>5</sup> Romans 3:10,23

<sup>6</sup> Romans 6:23

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 1:4

<sup>8</sup> 1John 4:19