

Holiday Leftovers
From the Series, “The Different Gifts of Christmas”
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Introduction

Yesterday, people all over the world celebrated Christmas. Christmas celebrations vary from family to family and from culture to culture. But all these celebrations all have something in common: The day after. The day after Christmas can be a problem. We’ve spent weeks enjoying holiday cheer. We’ve been building up and anticipating. All of a sudden, it’s all over. At some point, we all have to think about cleaning up. And that’s hard.

Up to this point, everything about the holidays felt special. We felt special. The day afterwards though, we don’t feel so special anymore.



Take for example, the holiday meal. Some families take the Christmas meal very seriously. When I was growing up, it was a big deal. There was always great food prepared with love. Usually, there was a lot of that food.

But then came the day after. That’s when you had to start eating the leftovers. Leftovers can be good, but they’re, well, leftovers. They’re not special anymore. At some point, if you’re prepared too much food, dealing with the leftovers becomes a burden. It feels like you’re eating leftover food forever. When you eat great food, you feel great. But when you eat leftover food, well, sometimes you feel like a leftover.

Are you a leftover? Am I a leftover?

It’s a good thing we’re studying the Scriptures together after Christmas. Because when we do, we meet with God. And in God’s eyes, ***you are never a leftover***. In fact, you are something very important. More than important – ***you are one of God’s favorite things***.

Today, we’re going to learn about it.

I. God's favorites from the beginning

We were among God's favorite things from the beginning. To find out, you don't have to look very far - You only have to open a Bible to the beginning. In the opening sentences of the Genesis story, we learn about all the things God created - ***And which of them was His favorite.***

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good..." (Genesis 1:1-4)

So, God creates the whole universe. It starts out rough - It's a mess. It's a big lump of material waiting to be molded and formed. It's dark. So, God decides to turn on the lights. God makes the light and calls it 'good'.

There's a lot you can do with light. Do you like light shows? Laser beams and flashing lights? Do you like fireworks? We'll likely see light shows and fireworks on New Year's Eve. Well, if we can do a lot with light, you can imagine what God can do with light. We've all seen pictures of galaxies and nebulae and celestial objects of fantastic size and beauty. With all due respect to all the people who create light shows and fireworks, God can put on a much better light show if he wants.

So, light is 'good'. But, is light God's favorite thing? Are fireworks and great shows of power what God likes best? Apparently not. Here's how I know: ***If light was God's favorite things, he could have stopped there.*** Instead, he made more.

"Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:9-10)

Do you like going to the beach? I do! We live up in the Northeastern United States, so we don't get to go to the beach much at Christmas time. But just wait until it gets warm! Oceans are immense and beautiful. Think of waves crashing on the shore, the fresh smell of fresh ocean air. But, are oceans God's favorite things? If they were, God could have stopped there. Instead, he made more things.

12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:12)

Oh flowers, fields full of beautiful, wonderful-smelling flowers. Forests full of beautiful trees. One of my favorite activities is a walk in the woods. God called the flowers and trees 'good'. But, are flowers and trees God's favorite things? If they were, God could have stopped there. He could have settled for a botanical garden the size of a planet. Instead, he made more things.

So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:21)

God makes “the great creatures of the sea” - Whales and dolphins and fish. He fills the skies with beautiful birds. Later, He populates the forests and the fields with animals. He calls all these things “good”. But, are fish and dolphins and whales and animals and birds God’s favorite things? If they were, he could have stopped there. He could have settled for a gigantic zoo. Instead, he made more.

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (1:27)

Then, the closing sentence of Genesis chapter 1 says this:

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was **very** good (1:31 emphasis mine).

Light shows are good. Oceans and skies and stars and planets are good. Fish and birds and animals are all good. **But human beings, they are very good.**

You want to know what God’s favorite things are? Humans - Men and Women. That means you and me. We are God’s favorite things. God holds a special place in his heart for all human life. And he likes lots of them. He likes oceans and seas. But he like seas of humanity better.

The Favorite Favorite

Now that we know about that, let’s move up: Does God have a “favorite - favorite”? Does God have something that he likes best of all? There’s a phrase that you’ve likely heard: “The apple of your eye.” When we hear this, we think of the favorite of the favorite. We commonly hear the phrase used in the English language to mean “something to be cherished above everything else”. It’s usually used for love and romance.

Here’s something interesting: This phrase comes from the Bible. God uses it for a special group of people: **He uses it for those who choose to follow him.** The first time the phrase appears in the Bible, it’s used for the ancient nation of Israel.

In a desert land he found him,
in a barren and howling waste.
He shielded him and cared for him;
he guarded him as the apple of his eye,
(Deuteronomy 32:10)

This is interesting. The phrase appears here, but it doesn't appear quite the way we use it today. God says that Israel was wandering around in the wilderness. He needed protection. God provided that protection, and he provided it as he would for the apple of his eye.

To understand this, you have to understand the language and culture of the day. When we think of apples, we think of fruit. So, we take that meaning with us when we read the Bible. We think, "apples taste good." Maybe apples are the best tasting fruit, so the apple of your eye refers to something that is your favorite?

The people in those days had apples. But they also had figs and dates and other fruits that are arguably sweeter than an apple. When we read the Bible, we tend to run into people eating fruits other than apples.

However, there is something that an apple has that figs and dates don't have: A nice round shape. The shape of the apple is the same shape of a very important part of our bodies. It's the same shape as the pupil of our eyes. So, in the days the Bible was written, the apple of the eye referred to the pupil of the eye.

Think about that. And think about the passage we just read that talked about protection. If you were attacked, what part of your body would you instinctively protect the most? One thing you would protect is your eyes. If something comes at you, you immediately shield your face. You raise your hand - You turn your face away. You have muscles in your face that will immediately scrunch up if the eye is in danger.

You protect your eyes. Your whole body has reflexes designed to snap into action if your eyes are in danger. Why? You protect your eyes because they're valuable and irreplaceable.

This was an appeal that King David used when he prayed to God:

6 I call on you, my God, for you will answer me;
turn your ear to me and hear my prayer.
7 Show me the wonders of your great love,
you who save by your right hand
those who take refuge in you from their foes.
8 Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings
9 from the wicked who are out to destroy me,
from my mortal enemies who surround me.
(Psalm 17:6-9)

Let's develop this some more. When we first heard the phrase, "apple of God's eye", it referred to the ancient people of Israel. Those were God's people - people who followed God. God said he would protect them like the apple of his eye - Like the pupil.

Now we move forward a few centuries. We see King David. He was a follower of God. So, he calls upon God to do for him what God did under Moses. He asks God to protect him in the same way.

We learn something from this: All humans are special to God. They are the favorite part of his creation. But there's a problem: Many have fallen away from God. We have sinned. That creates a problem in our relationship with God. God still loves us, but now something is wrong.

Now, if people choose to follow God - If they choose to turn away from their sin, their relationship becomes something much more. Those people become the favorite of the favorite.

Because they are the favorite of the favorite, God offers wonderful things to those people. We just read that God offers great protection to those who choose to follow him. But, there's more.

When you look in a mirror, you (of course) see yourself. But if you look very closely - if you look at your eyes, and if you look into the pupils and the lighting is just right, you see something: *You see a little reflection of yourself in your pupil.* God made us in his image – in his likeness. When he looks at us, it's like seeing that little reflection in the pupil; the apple of his eye.

My friends, you have something that no other created thing in all the Universe has. You are made in God's image. You are a little reflection of him. ***That makes you very, very special.*** You were special the day you were born. But, there's a way to become even more special. You can choose to turn away from your sin and follow God.

I want you to understand what God offers. Above all things, he offers himself.

3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

I want you to understand what you just read. There is nothing more valuable in all the universe than the Creator of the universe. There is nothing more valuable than God. Far from being a leftover, you are special. You are so special to God that God offers you himself. He wants you to know him. There is nothing better that he can offer.

But again, we have this problem of sin. Sin fowls up our relationship with God. We can't do anything about our sin - We need God's help. That's why he sent his Son Jesus.

17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.
18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephesians 2:17-18)

We read here that we have access to the Father through Jesus Christ. For this to work, Jesus had to die for our sins. That's the heart of Christmas. It's not just that Jesus came to the earth - It's that he came to die for us.

Let's read something that the Apostle Paul wrote to his friends in the city of Rome:

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all— how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32)

Look at that – God will graciously give us all things. What kind of things? We have ideas of what we want, but God knows what really matters. Let's read on.

33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (Romans 8:33-35)

What do we need? We need God and his love. If we have that, we don't need anything else.

We all go down different paths in life. Some folks have a comfortable path. Some folks have trouble. Some folks have a relatively easy path. Others see hardship. Some go through life and it seems they can be friends with lots of people. Others see persecution. Some have a full stomach. Others have famine. Some have all the clothing they can wear. Others have less. Some have safety. Others have danger. Some live a long, full life. Others meet the sword.

In the end, what matters is whether you have the love of Christ. What matters is that you have God. You can have everything you want in life, but in the end, we all die. What matters is whether or not you have a place in eternity.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

Now, as always, there are two kinds of people reading today. There are those who know Jesus. You've chosen to follow him. You folks, hang on for a minute.

There are also those for whom all of this is new. Friends, God offers you something very special. **Unfortunately, up to this point in your life, you haven't accepted it.** As we said, God offers incredible things to those who choose to follow Him. Would you come and talk to us? There is

some important information on how to do that at the end of this article. We would love for you to know with confidence what it means to be the apple of God's eye. We want you to know what it's like to be the favorite of the favorite. Not because of who we are or what we've done - But because of God's love shown to us through Jesus Christ. For you to fully understand this, you must choose Jesus. Let us tell you how. Don't put it off.

For those who have already come to Christ, this is a reminder: How do we react to a being as wonderful as God who offers us such great love? Who has created us in his image?

There's an important statement in the book of Proverbs. Here's what God says to us:

Keep my commands and you will live;
guard my teachings as the apple of your eye.
(Proverbs 7:2)

When God speaks to us, we realize that he is sharing his heart with us. Everything we learn from God comes from someone who highly values us. **So, we highly value him.** We value his words. We value his commands. We go where he wants us to go. We do what he wants us to do. Along the way, we enjoy and trust in his strength, his protection, and his provision.

This day after Christmas, remember this: You may eat leftover food. but you are not a leftover.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net
