

Christmas is a time of exasperation. Oh, people are good. They contribute to charity, help the needy, hug the family and make Whoville a better place to live. But some people get bothered about the poor and the homeless. They get exasperated with God. After all, if God would just eliminate poverty, Scrooges wouldn't have to contribute any more. End of problem.

We like to have things equal. We want to be paid a fair wage for the work we do, and pay a fair price for the goods we seek. We like it when people earn their reward. Even when we give gifts at Christmas, we kind of expect something back, in a similar price range, that we're gonna like just as much.

We want it all equal, but life isn't fair. People who do good end up suffering. People who do evil never seem to suffer at all. The unfairness of life goads us to complain that it doesn't work out the way it should.

Fact is, the birth of Jesus wasn't altogether fair either. What did the human race do to deserve a savior? We broke our covenant with God. We let rich and poor grow poles apart. We followed other gods that promised other benefits. Oh, we did some good things, too. But if God played fair with everybody, I doubt there would have been a Christmas at all. From God's perspective, it's not fair to give sinful people the promise of salvation. But that's what happened.

God came into the world, Paul's Letter to Titus says, to show us goodness and kindness. We are saved because of God's mercy, "and not because of any good things that we have done." God didn't say, "I will save you from your sins but only if you earn it." God said, "I'll save you from your sins. Period. If you are cheating on your spouse, I can still forgive you. If you gamble too much, I can still forgive you. If you neglect your prayers, if you lose your temper, if you lie, if you don't contribute to charities, you oughtta repent, but you don't earn my love back again. I will still love you." We can't change that, and we will never, never, no matter how much we might try, we will never, never earn God's love. God gives it freely.

At Christmas God gives us more than we are worth. God's love came to us in miraculous style, a child born to a virgin who was pregnant, and not just dimpled.

This year, the year 2000, we have celebrated jubilee. We were challenged to grant and receive forgiveness. God will forgive you, no matter your sin. Can you forgive others, no matter their sin? Are you waiting for them to earn your forgiveness? If so, remember the message of Christmas, and the song of jubilee. Don't give people what they deserve. Give them what they can never earn. Give them love.