

Transcript of Sermon By
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First Baptist Church
Rome, Georgia
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Some Assembly Required

John 3:16-24

Meditation Text:

I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.

—Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, there was a movement where major cities around the world would have expositions. This movement transferred into the World Fairs that were scheduled every so often. I believe it was in Great Britain where there was an exhibition, and the American contribution to it was straight out of the Industrial Revolution. There were all of these machines. There was steam hissing, pistons moving in and out of sleeves, and gears and wheels turning. It was quite the sight. In typical British understatement, one Britain was speaking to a member of the delegation and said, "Yes, it is quite impressive. Now tell me, what will you do with all these things?"

That seems like a good question for Christmas morning. I am not sure what shape your house was in when you left it today. If you no longer have children at home or they have not arrived yet because they are visiting other in-laws, probably your home is in pretty good repair. But if you have children, there is a good chance that you left your living room or den in a state of disrepair. I can always remember the expression, "It looks like a bomb went off in here." There was paper, boxes, and gifts everywhere.

You hear people saying things like, "Don't throw that away yet. Where's that gift card? Wait, wait, wait. I put that necklace in that box somewhere. Let me go through that before you throw it out."

What will we do with all that stuff? A few things will be returned. A few things will be worn well and used regularly and played with. A couple of things might be forgotten. We always find something in the bottom of a drawer and think, *I forgot that I got that*. There will be a few things that will say, *Some assembly required before using*. I mentioned this to a young father and he just shook his head and said those were words that put fear and trepidation in his

heart. You know they are going to ask for a Phillips-head screwdriver and 3/8-inch wrench that is probably not included in there. You are going to have to figure out how to put these things together before it can be used.

During the Christmas holidays as we have encountered good Christian friends, as the spirit of God has been developing around us and in us in the course of worship and good greetings being shared, there are some spiritual gifts that have come to us as well. Some of these things are the well wishes of the season: *Merry Christmas*. Sometimes the watching of a movie and seeing how families come back together: the *longing for reconciliation*. At Christmastime, it seems to break down the emotional barriers and things we might not say to each other every day of the year: *It's Christmas. Go ahead and hug somebody. It's Christmas. Go ahead and give a tender greeting*. It's Christmas and sometimes hope seems to flare up just a little bit more. It's Christmas, and we dream that the angels might sing and we might hear it or hear a whisper from God in a night sky. It has come in the song of the choir, the phrase of a prayer or the lighting of a candle. All of these things are gifts that have come to be jumbled around and left lying behind us in the month of December. Now with these things that are just as much gifts as things that came in boxes wrapped up in paper and nice little bags, what will we do with these things? What will we do with the longing for reconciliation, the well wishes, the glimpses of hope, the things that we heard in a prayer or a song, the things that the choir led us to see or that came to us in the lighting of a candle?

Some will be forgotten. Some will be treasured and remembered. Some might as well be returned. Some of these, too, need some assembly before using. Some of these things that God has laid before us, put across our paths, and dropped into our hearts over the last month require some participation on our part before they turn into what we really wanted.

We have this in the toys and gismos that our children get. We have been befuddled by screws, tabs, slots, cables, and plugs, but when we finally finish and get it together, we think, *This is what I wanted to give*.

The same thing is true with all these spiritual matters. The moments of generosity that made us feel so good when we walked by the Salvation Army kettle or wrote an extra check to one of the charities around town now needs to be fitted together with commitment and inserted into our hearts so that it has some permanence. Tab A of well wishes needs to be put in Slot A of ministry so that there is a lasting affect from all this good that we want to see accomplished in the world. If we would just snap longing for reconciliation into the willingness to forgive, we might find that the result is healing in our families. If the whisper of God's voice could somehow be screwed into participation in worship and attached to our hearts, maybe the echo of God's voice would continue much longer.

We think about some assembly required with toys and electronics and a computer desk and the assembly seems daunting at times, but with patience and persistence, we find the real gift when it is all put together. The spiritual assembly is the same. The real gift of Christmas is not a paid holiday tomorrow. The real gift of Christmas is not an increasing gross domestic product. The real gift of Christmas is a life made whole in Jesus Christ. The real gift of Christmas is that we might have life.

In the New Testament, this is often referred to as being saved. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him.” This is what God’s intention is for us. Sometimes it comes and looks like a box full of things that is supposed to turn into a train set or whatever it may be, but when it is put together, we see it for what it is. All of these experiences of the last month could just be isolated things, pieces of something that are, by themselves, what we think they are. But maybe with the patience and persistence of putting them together and incorporating them into our lives with some participation and partnership on our part, we find before us assembled this life that is healed and whole, this life that we would describe as saved. But some participation, some effort, some assembly, is required.

For those who will be patient and persistent and do the work, the very gift of God is waiting for us.

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