

Genuine Love Gives Sacrificially

On December 10, 1905, a short story by William Sydney Porter (who wrote under the pen name, O. Henry) was printed in a New York newspaper initially entitled, “Gifts of the Magi.” The story is told of a young married couple whose names are Jim and Della who are very much in love but are struggling financially. Times are hard and the company that Jim works for has recently cut his salary and there’s barely enough money to pay the rent and buy food. Although it’s the day before Christmas, neither Jim nor Della has enough money to buy the other a Christmas gift. After Jim goes to work Christmas Eve morning, Della counts the meager amount of money that they have, \$1.87, which is not enough to buy a gift of any consequence and certainly not enough to buy the gift that she has long wanted to get for her husband—a watch chain for Jim’s watch that he loves so dearly. After thinking about it, she determines that she’ll sell her most prized possession—her beautiful, long hair—to a nearby wig company, which she does and receives \$20. She then goes and purchases the platinum watch chain for \$21 and goes home.

After arriving at home she spends some time trying to curl her, now very short hair. As she does, she whispers a short prayer, “Please God, make him think I am still pretty.” Upon Jim’s arrival at home later that evening, the first thing that he notices when he sees Della is her hair. He doesn’t say anything, just looks. To break the awkward silence Della asks Jim to open the present that she has for him as she confesses that she sold her hair to buy his gift. Jim opens the gift to find a beautiful, platinum watch chain for his most prized possession, his watch—a watch that was special to him because it had belonged to his father and to his grandfather. As Jim looks at the watch chain that Della has given him, he hands Della the gift that he has for her. As she opens the gift she’s struck by the fact that it’s a beautiful set of hair accessories and combs—a gift she had wanted, but is no longer of any use to her. She looks at Jim in surprise and says—“how were you able to afford this wonderful gift?” Jim confesses that he sold his watch to buy the gift for Della. Jim and Della loved each other so much that each of them were willing to sacrifice their most prized possession to give a gift to the other. This story reminds us that genuine love always gives sacrificially (1 Corinthians 13:1-8a). The story ends with the narrator noting the mutually sacrificial gifts that Della and Jim gave to each other and then speaks of the gifts given by the Magi (wise men) to Jesus.

As I think back to the Christmas recently past and look forward to the coming New Year, I’m reminded of the greatest gift ever given. God gave his only Son, Jesus Christ, for sinners (John 3:16). His gift is the greatest gift because it addresses our deepest need. To understand the importance of God’s gift we must look at what the scriptures teach us about our sin. Because of the fall of Adam into sin, we’re all born into this world as sinners. We’re unable to perfectly obey God as we’re required to do (Matthew 5:48). We may pull together a measure of external obedience but, perfect obedience from the heart is impossible for broken sinners.

What are we to do? In and of ourselves we can do nothing to address our sin problem. This brings us to the remedy for our sin that scripture gives. Jesus Christ lived the perfect life that we’re required to live but cannot. His perfect life and sacrificial death on the Cross are

credited to all those who are united to him by grace through faith in his finished work (Romans 3:1-31; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 2:1-10; 1 Peter 2:24). God made the greatest sacrifice in the giving of his only Son for sinners. “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

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