

Philanthropist Revealed!

God's salvation is...

✚ **free** (vv.3-5a)

✚ **clear** (vv.5b,6)

✚ **clean** (v.7)

In the name of Jesus, God's shining Epiphany Light, dear mirrors of God's grace in Christ:

Winning the lottery is not all it's cracked up to be. I wouldn't know from experience, but our family did cross from one side of the tracks to the other in my childhood. We moved from the poverty of no home of our own and welfare people giving us food, to a huge new house which the carpenters called "the Hotel." Since I've told this story a few times over the past twenty years, I won't bore you with the details such as what state it was with those snow capped mountain peaks and bald eagles soaring high above the sage and jack pines. The point here is that sickness and sadness did not go away. Tragedy still came stalking at times. Heartache and grief continued especially for the benefactor who gave the gifts.

If you actually won the lottery, you might wish like other winners that your life could go back the way it was before so many relatives came out of the woodwork and you had to decide between heartbreaking needs. Secret philanthropy makes sense because resources are limited. Which is why the Epiphany season is so awesome. In the bright light of Jesus' words, works and miracles we see the most wealthy, most generous, most unlimited **Philanthropist Revealed!** I have to tell you, **God's salvation is...free, clear and clean.** And seeing our own poverty makes us especially appreciate the fact that it is...

✚ **free** (vv.3-5a)

Do you ever wish you could go back to your childhood when Christmas presents were thrilling and free? Older children just seem to ask for money which doesn't sparkle like those childhood treasures. When I was very young my parents could barely buy clothes for their seven children. Our grandparents' gifts excited us, but not until years later could Mom and Dad afford presents interesting to our friends.

When we talk about the way were spiritually, the situation is bleak beyond compare. Pastor Kogler, one of our guest preachers, tells about his gerontology class in a local university where most students don't have a clue about the difference between spirituality and Biblical Christianity. They are so hungry, an empty shell as we all are by nature. Paul describes himself and Titus with us in our first verse: *"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another."* In the Holy Spirit's original Greek God says we were so *"foolish"* that we did not have the ability to perceive in our minds the good things of God. We were like a blind man who must first receive sight before turning on the lights will do him any good. Our disobedience was not just against earthly authority or even our parents, but everything good that God wants to give us for blessings. Our sin-dead souls were *"deceived"* by every foolish idea that came around the bend. "Snake oil, anyone?" And we still feel the chains of our enslavement *"by all kinds of worldly passions and pleasures"* whenever it is hard for us to say, "I forgive you," even when someone near and dear says they're sorry. *"Malice, envy; being hated and hating each one another"* may seem far away until your family has to settle a large estate. Congregations can get really messed up if gifts are not received with wisdom and faith-born love.

"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." It's a good thing too, because there were no righteous things we could do to please God. We were like a child with screw driver and hammer turned

loose in a garage with your shiny new car. Can the kid really improve anything? But every dent, every stain of sin, God removed forever when He sent Jesus to live and die and live again for us. We just needed to know. We needed *“the kindness and love of God our Savior”* to appear. We needed Epiphany purely *“because of his mercy”* and not any merit or worthiness in us. We needed the **Philanthropist**, the divine Lover of humanity with unlimited resources to help and to heal – **Revealed! God’s salvation** is truly **free**, but it wasn’t cheap. It cost Christ’s holy, precious blood. If only we could keep this ...

clear (vv.5b,6)

“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.” Literally, this would be “the Holy Spirit’s washing of born-again and over again newness.” It breaks my heart to see how many people are unclear about this **salvation** from God and how so many preachers keep feeding the confusion. Why don’t these excited attenders at some of the modern Evangelical mega-churches ask their pastors what right they have to say their baby Baptism was not good enough. Show us from the Bible because God’s Word says Baptism is not our work, nor is it just a symbol. *“Not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy He saved us through the Holy Spirit’s washing of rebirth and renewal.”*

You should have seen the terror in Joann’s eyes one day at a group home when she asked, “Will I have to get dunked again if I join New Life?” When I asked what that was all about, she told everyone around the table how a church she once joined said her infant Baptism did not count and she would have to be immersed – in her wheel chair. She could not swim, nearly drowned, and simply did not want to repeat that terrorizing experience. Such things happen in churches that insist everyone can have their own interpretation of the Bible. I was glad to tell her the interpretation the Bible gives of itself. God tells us how steady, strong and true His covenant of love is in words that are unmistakably **clear** to all who will put a hand over their mouth and listen. I love these words from God through Isaiah: *“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,”* says the **LORD, who has compassion on you.** (54:10 NIV) The true God of the Bible really is rich in mercy and compassion. He sent a scared disciple named Ananias to tell the repentant persecutor, Saul of Tarsus: *“Brother Saul, receive your sight!...And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”* (Acts 22:13-16 NIV) Is that **clear** or what? **Free, clear, and God’s salvation is...**

clean (v.7)

We need to understand who is doing the saving. Remember 9/11 when bodies kept plummeting from the Twin Towers? Firemen’s ladders would not reach. Christ Jesus is the only courageous fireman who could climb this high and save us from the burning high rise of sin-cursed humanity. Jesus refused to let us jump into the raging fire pit of hell. *“[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”*

Ah, that’s **clean!** This is where human traditions need to bow before God’s Word. Pastor Kogler says every university class brings tearful students saying, “I never knew God did so much for me!” Friends, God wants you to know. He already justified us with the entire world – no conditions, no exceptions. *“Having been justified,”* He says. This is no lottery! God wants to make us *“heirs having the hope of eternal life.”* He does this by bringing us to faith as we hear in Peter’s first epistle. Along with all the prophets, apostles and evangelists, Peter proclaimed this same **Philanthropist Revealed.** Everyone who trusts **God’s salvation** can shout with Paul and Peter: *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you.”* (1 Peter 1:3f) Shining Epiphany light: **Philanthropist Revealed!** Amen.