

# FOCUS ON FAITH

Stephen G. Derges, Elder & Worship Pastor,  
Bridgnorth Baptist Church



## UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Most of us are (probably rightly) wary when we're offered something for nothing. Obviously we all love bargains especially a BOGOF (Buy One - Get One Free) but when someone comes up to us and offers us something absolutely free, often our first response is, "What's the catch?" We're suspicious that they're trying to rip us off, that there will be a sting in the tail, or possibly that the product or whatever they're offering is so bad that they have to give it away.

Over the past few weeks during the period of Lent, many Christians have been 'giving something up' but others have been looking to do something a little more positive - they've been 'giving something away' instead. It's been fascinating though to hear about the reaction some people have had. One radio reporter tried to give complete strangers an apple as a test, and soon found out that people on the street just didn't want to know.

**Christians may be categorised as naive to believe that someone would demonstrate this kind of unconditional love but millions of us do!**

The problem is that human nature being what it is sometimes people are hurt and taken in by things that really do turn out to be 'too good to be true'. Whether its greed or gullibility it's a sad reflection on life that some people will try and get one over on others. It occurs everyday in business when persuasive marketing campaigns entice us to purchase a product which purports to be better than its competitors or which makes

other unsubstantiated claims about their effectiveness.

And sadly someone somewhere will fall for a honey trap. It could be because they are offered a financial inducement or possibly sexual or other favours in order to betray confidences. 'Beware of strangers bearing gifts' is a maxim we need to remember because a bribe is a bribe - however attractively it seems to be packaged and promoted.

By now some of you reading this will be wondering where I'm going - or possibly what planet I live on - but please bear with me.

As we head into Easter we remember the astonishing account of a man who lived 2,000 years ago in a (then) obscure region in the Middle East, who claimed to be God's only Son. It was a miraculous yet somewhat inconspicuous beginning - but the way he lived his life was truly incredible and his death (and what happened next) was genuinely mind-blowing!

This man - Jesus - willingly sacrificed his life for other people. Now I'm not saying that this was unique - many people have paid the ultimate price for others - but (here's the punch line) the Bible says Jesus gave his life for those who weren't even friendly towards him - actually for those who were his enemies. What does that mean? Basically that even though we'd messed up - we'd gone our own way rather than God's way - he was still prepared to die for us.

Jesus himself said, "Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I'm here inviting outsiders, not insiders - an invitation to a changed life, changed inside and out" - Luke 5: 31-32 (The Message Version).

And what Jesus offers is a free gift - the gift of an eternal relationship with him - with no strings attached. You see the point is we can't earn our way to heaven; we can't buy everlasting life; even the good things we do on earth don't qualify us for God's favour or absolve us from what we've done wrong. That's not to say we shouldn't be sorry and make restitution or that in return we don't seek to serve God with all we have, but Jesus offers us unreserved acceptance.

Does that sound too good to be true, even too easy or simplistic to believe? Christians may be categorised as naive to believe that someone would demonstrate this kind of unconditional love but millions of us do because we've experienced it and found that our faith - which cost Jesus everything - is actually a free gift to us.

And that brings me to the really amazing aspect of the Easter story. Jesus didn't stay dead. There's no question that he lived and died - the history books confirm that - but historians (even secular ones) also testify that 3 days later he came back to life again. That's why this free gift is special and worth taking advantage of. It comes with a cast-iron guarantee. Jesus has done it - the resurrection that Easter Sunday proved he is God's Son and that his promise of abundant life is available to everyone.

Have a great Easter - the cost of Jesus' unconditional love was immense but the benefits are free to us all.

For information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other Christian resources, log on to [www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk](http://www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk)