

“The True Reason for the Season – Love”

December 24, 2017

John 3:11-18

I. Introduction

Many people like the Hallmark Channel movies. They are enjoyable, but there is nothing really new about any of them—you can see every plot development coming a mile away. Especially the Christmas ones—a guy and girl meet, they dislike each other at first, then they fall for each other, they have some crisis/argument, and, finally, they reconcile in time for Christmas. Most claim to be about someone learning “the true meaning of Christmas” but not one of them is actually about it. See, the world's idea of the “true meaning of Christmas” is to be nice to other people. It's not a bad message, it's just not the meaning of Christmas; it's really not even close. But “*be nice*” is all the world has to offer. “*Be nice, help others,*” it's a great sentiment—but that is not the message of Christmas. As good as the message to treat others well is, God offers something so much more.

The key verse from today's Scripture describes the true meaning of Christmas—“**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**” Christmas is about God's love for the world. The Bible describes true love—agape love. Listen to this familiar description of love from **1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**: “**Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever!**” Unlike the implications of all the ads we see this time of year, true love cannot be bought—it is seen in our actions and attitudes towards others.

The real reason for the season—for Christmas—is the demonstration of God's love for mankind seen in the birth of His Son, Jesus. Christmas reminds us of the real suffering and death of God's one and

only Son that would follow His miraculous birth. This morning, let's take some time to look at these familiar verses from John 3 as we consider "The true reason for the season - love."

II. God's Motive for Christmas--Love

God's motive for Christ's birth; God's motive for Christmas was love; agape love. [John 3:16](#) begins with "For God so loved..." It is easy to think of God looking down on mankind—His creation—and their rebellion and disobedience, their sinfulness and saying, "I'm going to humble them and discipline them and punish them until they come back to me!" It's easy for us to think of God demanding the allegiance of mankind to satisfy His desire for power; His desire to be recognized for who He is! It's easy, because that is how we would think and act. But that wasn't God's motive—God didn't act for His sake, but for our sake. It wasn't to satisfy His desire for power or His desire to bring the world under His total rule, God's motive for the birth of Christ—for Christmas—was love—agape love for His creation.

Turn to [Romans 5:6-8](#). There was nothing in man that attracted God's love. As Paul reminds us in [Romans 3:10 & 12](#) "There is no one righteous, not even one . . . There is no one who does good, not even one." God loves us—really in spite of ourselves—God loves us because God is the personification of love, as [1 John 4:16](#) says, "God is love." Before the world was created, God foreknew the failure of Adam and Eve and made plans for sending His Son to save all who would believe in Him. The question is why? Why would God do that? The answer is simple, it's the true reason for the season—love. Just as the proof of Abraham's love for God was his willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, so, on a much larger scale, God the Father offering His one and only Son was the ultimate demonstration of His saving love for sinners.

In [Acts 2:23](#) Peter said, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." Jesus' coming to earth and dying on the cross wasn't an accident or a decision made on the spur of a moment; it was planned before the beginning of time. As God—as He told Nicodemus, Jesus knew that

He would be “**lifted up**” on a cross just like the bronze snake in the story told in Numbers—**turn to Numbers 21:4-9**. The solution to this “poison snake problem” was not in killing the snakes, making a special medicine, pretending they were not there, passing anti-snake laws or climbing the pole. The answer—the only answer—was in looking by faith at the uplifted bronze snake hanging on a pole.

In **1 John 4:9-10** John wrote, “**This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.**” Because of God’s love for mankind, Jesus came to be lifted up on a cross to die for the sins of the world. This is the motive—the reason—for Christmas: Love. God couldn’t help Himself—He loved us too much.

III. The Recipient of God’s Love—the World

Then we see the recipient or the beneficiary of God’s love—“**For God so loved the world.**” It was the world that God “**so loved.**” It wasn’t just a nation or all the good people or the people who loved Him, it was the world; the unlovely, the unlovable, those who love Him, those who hate Him, and those who never give a thought about God at all. All are included in God’s love. As the early church leader Augustine put it, “*God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love.*” This is God’s fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham back in **Genesis 12:3** where God told Abraham that “**all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**”

But God loving the world doesn’t teach universal salvation; i.e. that is that everyone is going to be saved. **Verses 17 and 18** from **John 3** indicate that people need to make a choice. They have to choose to believe or not to believe. Jesus didn’t come to judge the world; He came to give the opportunity for every person to be saved. Just like those who were bitten by the poisonous snakes had a choice to look or not look at the snake on the pole and be saved or not, people today have a choice. They can choose to not believe in Jesus and, then, like those who didn’t look at the snake, they will die in their sin. They will not

have eternal life; they will not spend eternity in heaven. But, like those who did look at the snake and were saved, those who choose to believe will be saved. They **will** spend eternity in heaven.

When Jesus said, “**Whoever believes is not condemned,**” He was saying that for the entire world, there is one Savior, there is one way for salvation for the world. Later, in [John 14:6](#) Jesus said, “**I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father except through me.**” Peter put it this way in [Acts 4:12](#), “**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**” God’s gift of love is made available to the world—“**to whoever believes in Him.**” Every person can receive God’s gift, but they each have to make a choice—accept it or refuse it—to look to Christ or not.

IV. The Gift of God’s Love—Eternal Life

Then we see the Gift of God’s Love. In [2 Corinthians 9:15](#), Paul wrote, “**Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!**” But the gift wasn’t God coming to dwell on the earth in human form, but as [Romans 6:23](#) says, “**The gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.**” This is the gift of Christmas, the gift of God’s love—Eternal Life.

Jesus came to die as a sacrifice for the sins of every individual. He knew from the beginning of time what was going to happen. There were prophecies about the coming Redeemer sprinkled throughout the Old Testament. For one example, turn to [Isaiah 53:5-6](#). As Jesus said in [John 3:14](#), “**the Son of Man must be lifted up**”—He came to be lifted up on a cross; to be crucified but following that He came to be resurrected and later lifted up into heaven. Turn to [1 Corinthians 15:3-5](#). This is God’s ultimate gift of love to the world: the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and then His resurrection three days later so that the world might have eternal life. This is the only way that we can be healed from the wages of sin and live forever in heaven. As Jesus said in [John 3:18](#), “**Whoever believes is not condemned.**” Or as [Romans 8:1](#) says, “**There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**” This is the gift of God’s love—of Christmas—eternal life.

V. The Outcome of God's Love—Life or Death

Finally, in the last part of [John 3:16](#) we see the outcome of God's love, “**whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.**” This offer—this gift—is for “whoever”—there are no restrictions. But know that God's judgment is black and white—there is no grey. A person is either a sinner (regardless of the severity of his sins) or, if he has accepted God's gift, he isn't a sinner. You are either a child of God or you're not.

Paul wrote in [Romans 3:23](#), “**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” For this reason no one can ever be good enough to get into heaven on his or her own merits. There is no way an imperfect being could get into a perfect heaven. So something had to be done. The penalty for sin had to be paid. So God took care of it; this is God's gift. This is the outcome of God's love: Life or Death.

But the outcome of God's gift is up to “**whoever.**” All “whoever” needs to do is believe in Jesus. To have eternal life, “whoever” needs to believe that Jesus is the Son of God; that He died for “whoever's” sins and that He rose 3 days later from the grave. As we read so often from [Romans 10:9](#), “**If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.**” Whoever believes will have eternal life—they will spend eternity in heaven. But whoever doesn't believe or chooses not to make a choice condemns himself. Not making a choice or choosing not to believe sentences one to an eternity in hell—a place of eternal torment. The outcome is up to “whoever”—to every person. The outcome is life or death.

VI. Conclusion:

Advent and Christmas have many memories for many people. It is a time for getting together with family and friends; a time for sharing, catching up, and exchanging gifts. But it is also a time to stop and think of the Greatest Gift ever given. We need to take time to thank God for the reason for the season-- His gift of love—His gift of eternal life. God's gift was more than the birth of a baby who was born in a manger. God's gift really was the sacrifice for sin so that whosoever believes will be forgiven and will

have eternal life. Without this, there really isn't any reason to celebrate. Without Jesus, life is a miserable existence full of blood, sweat and tears which ends with death followed with an eternity in hell. Without Jesus there can be no true hope, no peace, no joy, no love.

So what is your choice? What have you decided to do with Jesus and God's gift? Have you accepted God's gift and the hope, joy, peace, and love that come with it or is God's gift still unopened—unaccepted? The choice is yours—choose wisely. God loves you so much, He wants to give you the greatest gift He could possibly give. A famous story helps illustrate the point—it's a story of a small girl and set of fake pearls.

The cheerful girl with bouncy curls was almost five. Waiting with her mother at the checkout stand, she saw a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box. "Oh please, Mommy. Can I have them? Please, Mommy, please?"

Her mother checked the back of the little foil box and said, "Jenny, these pearls only cost \$1.95. If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you to do and raise your allowance. It won't take long for you to save enough money to buy them yourself."

Her mother was right. After only two weeks, Jenny had enough money saved for the pearls. Her mother took her back to the store, where Jenny proudly counted out her money to the cashier. Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel pretty and grown up. She wore them everywhere: Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or took a bubble bath. Her mother said that if they got wet, they might turn her neck green.

Jenny also had a very loving daddy. Every night when she was ready for bed, her daddy would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story. One night when he finished the story, he said to Jenny, "I love you, sweetheart. Do you love me?"

"Oh yes, Daddy," Jenny replied. "You know that I love you."

"Then give me your pearls," her father said.

Jenny was confused. “Oh, Daddy, not my pearls,” she said. “But you can have Princess, the white horse from my collection. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me last year? She’s my favorite.”

“That’s okay, Honey,” Jenny’s father said. “Daddy loves you. Good night.” And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.

About a week later, after story time, Jenny’s daddy said once again, “I sure do love you, sweetheart. Do you love me?”

“Daddy, you know I love you.”

“Then give me your pearls.”

Jenny was confused again. “Oh, Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful. You can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper, too.”

“That’s okay,” Jenny’s father said. “Daddy loves you. Good night.” And as always, he gave her a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed. As he came close, he noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek. “What is it, Jenny? What’s the matter?”

Jenny didn’t say anything, but lifted her little hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, “Here, Daddy, it’s for you.”

With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny’s daddy reached out with one hand to take the necklace. With the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case and gave it to Jenny. When she opened it, she found a beautiful strand of real pearls.

This is what God’s love is like. He has a beautiful gift—eternal life and the hope, peace, joy, and love that come with it. But the story also represents all the things that get in the way of the gifts that God wants to give us. What is keeping you from enjoying God’s gift of eternal life and hope and peace and

joy and love? “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).