

Introduction: Pg. ____

What is Christmas about? Gifts & Glory

Gifts . . . (Sometimes we love, sometimes we don't; Sometimes they are suitable to our tastes... Sometimes they are not)

Glory . . . to God in the highest. . . Shepherds story

FCF:

**“Jesus: The Gift of Love and Life”
John 3:16-21**

{P} The Point: Receive the greatest gift ever known from the greatest love ever known.

Last week we saw this fascinating conversation between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus.

- How does one have life? It's by the Spirit.
- It's by the Cross (reread 14-15). The cross is the climax of God's mission to save. The cross is the how of salvation. That's why we sing so many songs about the cross. The cross changes everything . . .

BUT why would God do this? That is what we discover beginning in verse 16.

I. The love of God motivates his gift of life in Christ (3:16-17).

John 3:16

- **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**
- Do you know this verse? Can you quote this verse?
- If there is one verse that sums up the gospel of John, it is this. In fact, I believe a majority of people, if they only had one verse to explain the Bible, would go right here.
- John 3:16 seems to be a ubiquitous verse. You can even find it at many major sporting events! **PIC of JOHN 3:16 sign...**

BUT, if there is one verse in the Bible subject to the phrase “Familiarity breeds contempt,” it is probably this verse, because it is the most well-known verse.

- Listen, I say this in love and I'm looking in the mirror when I say it: If our attitude toward John 3:16 is been there, done that, we are lunatics.
 - That's madness.
 - If we can peer into these truths without a sense of amazement (WC), we have just said more than we know about the disposition of our hearts.
- You know what we need? John 3:16 every Sunday! On Repeat. This track is indefatigable and indestructible. It won't wear out and you can't stop it.
- My prayer is that God would help these words fall on our hearts with freshness & power. I hope we walk away amazed by these realities.

God's Love is limitless in its quality.

- What drives God? LOVE
 - God is love, which is why God gives love. Because love is who he is, he cannot help but pour it out to others.

- **"The very nature of the Triune God is to be effusive, ebullient, and bountiful; . . . He finds His very self in pouring out His love. Creation [and redemption] is about the spreading, the diffusion, the outward explosion of that love." - Michael Reeves**
 - **Effusive = "lacking restraint"**
 - **Ebullient = "overflowing with fervor, enthusiasm, excitement."**
 - **Bountiful = "abundant"**
 - **Explosion = "a sudden and spectacular bursting forth"**
- The Greatness of God's effusive, ebullient, bountiful and explosive love is seen in the "unmeasured intensity" of Christ's Sacrifice.
- That's what F. F. Bruce said: God's love is distributed with "unmeasured intensity; *the best that God had to give, he gave.*"
 - I'll give, but it's hard to give you my best. - Examples...
 - How do we see the matchless quality of God's love in John 3:16?
- God gave his best by giving his *only* Son.
 - Love gives. Love takes what belongs to self and provides for the benefit of the other.
 - God did not have to be coerced into giving his love. He gave generously and specifically.
 - God's love is not ambiguous or vague. It is clear and costly. He gave his one and only Son.
 - In some older translations monogenēs is translated as 'only begotten', but this is misleading, for the word monogenēs emphasizes uniqueness. (Kruse)
 - In Jesus, God gave us the most unique and precious gift he could give.
- God gave his best by sending his *only* Son to die a criminal's death.
 - "The word translated 'so' (understood by most to mean 'so much') is houtōs, a word used frequently elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel, never to denote degree (how much) but always manner (in what way) (8, 14; 4:6; 5:21, 26; 7:46; 11:48; 12:50; 13:25; 14:31; 15:4; 18:22; 21:1). - Kruse
 - Remember, verse 16 explains why verses 14-15 happened, why it is true. why we can trust it.
 - Verses 14-15 are all about the cross.
 - What more could he do to prove his love?
 - **"God proved His love on the Cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, 'I love you.'" - Billy Graham**

God's Love is limitless in its scope.

"For God so loved *the world.*" What does the word "world" mean?

- When we read "world," we probably insert the word globe. We probably naturally think "every person on the planet." But let's take a closer look. . .
- The term world is used (check this out) *78 times* in John's gospel. Often it refers to the physical, created universe. It can also refer to humanity in general (see 1:10). But, more specifically, in context, it often refers to *sinful* humanity.
- That is what John means here, as is clear from the words that precede this verse (Go read the Numbers account again) and the words that follow (the people who loved the darkness).
- God's love is not given toward people who are indifferent. We are not indifferent toward God. His love was given, is given to people who rejected him!
- Would you give the life of your child for someone else? Would you even entertain the thought? I think many of us would say: I'll give my life but not his life, not her life.
- But GOD not only gives the life of his Son, but he gives the life of his Son for enemies.
- Romans 5 puts it like this: **"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:7-8)**
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 - Christ died for the world, "that whoever believes in him . . ."

John 3.16-21. Why Christmas. Multidimensional Love

- the phrase could be rendered “everyone who at any time believes” (Harris)
- Ev-ER-ree-ONE. Say it with me: Ev-ER-ree-ONE. Everyone!
- Do you know what this means? Not a person you will set your eyes on who is beyond the reach of God’s grace.
- The love of God in Christ is not reserved for one group of people, but all groups of people. We want to be a church that loves the world because God is a global God. (Great Commission Offering - 12/13)

God’s Love is limitless in its effect.

- His love is designed to lead us back to life.
 - “Should not perish but have eternal life.”
 - To perish means we die: not simply physically, but there are spiritual ramifications. We are dead on the inside, which is why we need rebirth (as we saw last week).
 - Sin brings death. Sin brings separation from God, not simply alienated from God temporarily, but alienated for eternity.
 - You don’t want that. I’m telling you, you don’t want the misery and the experience of forever brokenness by not turning to Christ. What you want is . . . LIFE. Eternal Life.
 - As Charles Spurgeon said: “Nothing puts life into [people] like a dying Savior.”
 - Eternal life . . .
 - Is as much or more about a quality of life as it is the length of life.
 - To ‘have eternal life’ is to know God, i.e. be in relationship with him and experience all the blessings which flow from that, both in the present age and the age to come. - Kruse
 - Don’t miss this: Eternal life starts now! Breathing. Animates. Wakes us up. Moves us. Pleases us.
 - Look at v. 17: **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.
 - Jesus came to hold out life, not pronounce sentences of condemnation.

T: That’s why Jesus came. That’s why Jesus died, because God is love and God wants us to experience LIFE! He is a good, and he is generous. Now, please hear the truth vv. 18-21 are designed to teach us . . .

II. God offers his gift to all, but each person must receive or reject the gift (18-21).

John moves to discuss *how* people respond to this gift. When you boil it down, there are only two ultimate outcomes that flow from two personal responses to Jesus: We will either side with him or side against him; we will receive or reject his gift. [Read 18-21]

- **The Results** for Believers & Not-Yet Believers (18a):
 - Verse 18 takes us into the courtroom. Only one of two verdicts. Some will be condemned, sentenced to the consequences of a guilty verdict. Some will be forgiven and enjoy the freedom that comes from a not guilty verdict.
 - IF you believe in Jesus, trusting in his sacrifice on your behalf, you are not condemned but forgiven and declared innocent.
 - Why? Because though our sin causes us to be separated from God and earns us death, Jesus stepped in our place and did what we could never do! (Lived, died, rose again - I trust in him and receive his gift)
 - If you do not believe, you are already condemned. This is because you are not neutral, no one is born neutral. We are born with a great capacity to turn away from God and reap the grave consequences that result.

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- Like elementary art critiques, we have walked up to the Da Vinci's masterpiece and critiqued it, not exposing defects in the art but exposing defects in our ability to see. When someone looks at Christ, he is not the one on trial; we are. (Adapted from F.F. Bruce)
- If you are not yet believing, I want to ask you with all humility, have you truly looked at the masterpiece?

T: Those are the results, but . . .

- **The Results are Based on our Response** for Believers & Not-Yet Believers (18b):

John explains these responses with the metaphor of light and darkness. LIGHT reveals the state of things. It represents truth and life. The claim of this gospel is this: Jesus is brilliant LIGHT. Radiant Light. Stunning light. Darkness, on the hand, represents human rebellion against God, falsehood, and that which leads to death.

- *Verses 19-20* explain the response of those yet to believe.
- These are stark terms. People reject God's love because they possess a "love of a different kind: a paradoxical love of darkness and a corresponding hatred of light."
- Why? Because one of our greatest fears is exposing our flaws. To step into the light is to readily admit that we don't have it all together, which is one of the American obsessions. You got this. You don't need help. You don't need them. You don't need him. And so rather than saying, "Hey, I need change;" they say: "Hey, you might need to change, but not me. I'll pass. I'm all set."
- Isn't it ironic: we are so much quicker to admit our flaws in the realms of health and diet, intellectual and professional development. We might even be willing to admit that our relationships are not what they should be, BUT when it comes to our spiritual lives before God, we assume we don't need change.
- John says it's because of misplaced affections (misplaced loves) and pride.

T: Not so with those who believe: they are stepping into the light, saying: "I don't have it all together. I'm not all set. I need to be set straight by the one who made me for himself in the first place!"

- *Verse 21* reveals the response of those who believe.
- Rather than running from the light and hating the light, they run to the light because they love the light.
- They are glad to be seen in the light because they want people to know the difference the light has made in them.
- Let me show you how this works.
 - God is light (1 John 1:5).
 - He shines his light into our hearts and we are made new (2 Cor. 4:6).
 - We become light like He is light (Matthew 5:14)
 - Then we shine his light to others (Matthew 5:16).
 - BUT ALL THE While - it is not our light we shine, it is his light that is shining. We are just the instrument.
 - All that we do, is a result of HIM, his work, his light... It's ALL for his glory - to radiate his radiance.
 - IF you see something good in me, know that there is something beyond me, bigger than me, dwelling in me. Namely the light of Christ, the Spirit of Christ.
 - My goal is to shine the light and not let the silly, foolish junk in my life put any kind of dimmer on the light.
 - Jesus was on billiwatts... you can't measure his brightness. Infinite brightness!!! And our job is to shine his billiwatts by watts & megawatts. You hear me?
 - This is the essence of what it means to glorify God.

Conclusion:

John 3.16-21. Why Christmas. Multidimensional Love

Let me plead with you to receive the gift. If you have yet to believe and receive, this is the greatest Christmas gift you could ever receive, and that is a understatement of colossal proportion. Once you receive, whether that's today or whether that was some time ago, once you receive - give . . . Let me give you two ways to give this Christmas Season.

Give God Heartfelt Gratitude . . .

- In light of what he has done, how can we not be grateful?
- This is not an: "Oh, thanks." This is not a: "Oh, kinda cool. Almost forgot to send a thank you note."
- So what is gratitude? "**Gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.**" - **G. K. Chesterton**
- This is: What!?! You did that for me? You gave that to me? You spared no expense for me? I'm shocked. I'm in awe. I'm stunned. I'm taken back.
- And on top of that, Romans 8:32 says: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)
- Do you see the logic? If God would do this, what would he withhold from us? Absolutely nothing!

Give God and Others Generous Love...

- This Christmas season... Serve someone. Give a little more or a lot more than usual. Speak a word of hope. Be there for someone.
- You want to shine light? Love. Love in your actions... Love with your words... Why not make it your goal to tell at least one person, one friend about what Christmas means to you? Or two? Or Ten?!
 - Let me tell you a little secret: John only uses the word salvation six times and only four of these relate directly to the salvation Jesus came to bring (Kruse). Why is this? Because he uses other concepts like *light & life!*
 - That's so good! we can talk salvation without mentioning the word salvation... figures/metaphors that explain God's salvation!! we need to become more like John. :) We can talk about Generosity. Grace. Hope. Fullness.

Are you grateful for what God has done for you? Are you full of his generous love that you might pour it out to others.

Receive the gift of Christ! Give the gift of Christ!