

Christmas And The Love Of God

1 John 4:9-10

Pastor John Miller

Verse nine and verse ten of 1 John 4, follow me in your Bible. John says, "And this was manifested," or displayed or demonstrated, "the love of God toward us because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation," or the atoning sacrifice, "for our sins."

Christmas is all about the love of God. You can't celebrate Christmas without thinking about or talking about, or in this case, preaching about the love of God. The greatest demonstration of the love of God is when God sent His only begotten Son into the world. That's really the heart of Christmas; God loved the world and sent His Son into the world. It's the greatest gift by the greatest lover to the greatest need that was ever given. Now, I want you to see three important facts about Christmas and the love of God in this facet.

The first is the fact that God is love. And so it's a proclamation of the love of God. Look at it with me in verse eight. "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love." So if you back up just kind of a half of verse into verse eight, that verse ends with that proclamation, "God is love." Now what does John mean when he says that God is love? He means that God as to His very nature, and His very character, and His very essence, is love. It doesn't say, "God is loving," and He is loving. It doesn't say, "Love is God." It says, "God is love." So God, as His very nature is concerned, intrinsically, God is a God of love.

Now, I know when you make a statement like that, that there are some people that object to that and have a difficult time with that. They question the love of God in a world of suffering and a world of hurting and a world of tragedy and disasters. And we think, "Where is this love of God? How could he be a God of love?" But the Bible is very clear that God is love. Let me break down for you the kind of love that God has.

Number one, God's love, the Bible says, is great. The Bible speaks of the great love of God. In the New Testament, which was written in the Koine Greek language, they had to kind of coin a new word for love to convey God's love. We use the word love in such a broad spectrum.

We have a grandson with us these last few days for Christmas. He's two, and you should see him eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. It's amazing. The minute he gets it, he takes it apart and licks all the jelly off. Throws away the jelly, then eats the peanut butter. I mean, that's my kind of guy, peanut butter and jelly. And when he grows older, like His grandpa, he might say, "I love peanut butter and jelly." But he's also going to fall in love with a girl, and Lord willing, get married, and he'll say, "I love my wife." And I love peanut butter and jelly and I love my wife as well. But I only have one word to use for love my wife and love peanut butter and jelly, and obviously my love for my wife is far more intense and to a greater degree than the love that I have for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Right? All the women go, "Yes. Better be."

So we use this word love and we don't know how to really explain it or define it. In the Greek language, there was three basic words for love. Actually four, but I'll just share the three. There was a word Eros, we get our word erotic. It's a sexual attraction or desire to receive. Then there was a word Philao, we get our word Philadelphia from it; it means a kinship, fond-ship, or a brotherly love is what it means. Then there was the word Agape. That's the word that was coined and brought in by Christianity.

Agape is a divine spiritual love, and it's a love that seeks to give without expecting anything in return. It's a love that just gives and gives and gives and gives. It's a love that seeks the highest good of the object that is loved. I love that definition of agape love. It seeks the highest good of that object loved. And it goes on loving even when that object doesn't return that kind of love. When the Bible says, "God is love," it uses that Greek word agape, or agape love. It's a great love.

Secondly, it's a love that is infinite. That means it's limitless or it's beyond measure. There's no limit to God's love. God's love is infinite.

Thirdly, the Bible tells us that God's love is unchanging. Theologians use the term immutable. God doesn't change. In the book of James it says that, "All good gifts come from the Father of lights," referring to God, "with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." Kind of a fancy phrase to describe the immutability, the unchangingness of God. So God, because He doesn't change and God is, by His very essence, love, His love is unchanging.

But the Bible also says, and I love this, that God's love is gracious. It's undeserved. Now, this only is true and taught in Christianity. All of the religions teach that we need to perform and be good enough for God to love us. But the Bible teaches that God loves us even when we were in rebellion toward him. Even when we were running from him and resisting him. Even in our sinful state and rebellious state, God still loved us. So God's love is gracious; you can't earn, merit, or deserve the love of God. God's love is unearned, unmerited, undeserved. And if you're here this evening and you think, "Well, God can't love me because I'm such a horrible person." The truth is, God loves you no matter what you are, because God is love.

Then the Bible also tells us that God's love is eternal. Jeremiah 31:3, where God said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore, with loving kindness, have I drawn you." So at Christmas, what do we think about? We think about a God of love. Amen? And Christmas is all about the love of God. But you might ask yourself, "Well, how can I be sure that God loves me? It's one thing for God to be loving, but how do I know God loves me and cares about me?"

And the second thing I would like to talk about Christmas and the love of God, is the proof of God's love. So first of all, it proclaims, "God is love," but the Bible also gives us proof of God's love. I want you to notice it in the ninth verse of 1 John 4. It says, "In this was manifested," or displayed or declared, "the love of God toward us, in that God sent His only-begotten Son that we might live through Him." So God, noticed, displayed or demonstrated His love.

When my children were young, we used to read a book to them at bedtime that I remember so well. The title of the book was, How Do I Know God Loves Me, Let Me Count The Ways. And when You open it, it says, God loves me because He's given me a mommy and daddy. God loves me because He's given me hands and feet to play, and God loves me because He's given me a warm bed and a roof over my head, and listed all the things that are indication that God loves me. But after reading that for some time, I began to think, what about kids who don't have a mommy or daddy? What about kids that don't have hands and feet? What about kids who don't have food to eat? How do they know God loves them?

Then I thought about Christmas. Christmas is that once-for-all statement in concrete. Not just the abstract, God is love, but in concrete, that God demonstrated or God manifested or God displayed His love by actually giving us the greatest gift that was ever given, the gift of His only begotten Son. So that's how we know verse nine, because God sent His only begotten Son into the world. And I want you to note in verse 10, it says, "Sent His Son." And again in verse 14, "The Father sent the Son."

600 years before Jesus was even born, Isaiah, in chapter nine, verse six said, "For unto us a child is born, unto us, a Son is given." So the child born speaks of His humanity; the Son who is given speaks of His deity. God the Father gave the greatest gift, the gift of His only Son. Someone said God wrapped His love in flesh and blood and sent Him down to man. Now, we might ask, what does the term only-begotten Son mean? Well, the answer is that it means only unique. Doesn't mean that He started in a point of time or that He was born in a point in time, but the term, the phrase, Biblically, carries the idea of the unique One. The only unique Son of God.

Years ago when I came across that, I looked up in the Webster's dictionary the word unique, because I wanted to make sure I understood that term. And the definition of unique is, "One of a kind. Having no equal." I love that. So Jesus Christ is unique. Amen? He's one of a kind and He has no equal. There is no one like Jesus. Jesus is the eternal God. John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus pre-existed His birth at Bethlehem.

Now before you were conceived, you didn't exist. Now don't think about that too much, it'll freak you out. You ever try to think about what if I never was, what would it be? If you never were, you wouldn't worry about it. Okay? But hidden in that statement, God sent His Son, is clear affirmation that Jesus pre-existed Bethlehem. He was sent. And it's an indication that He is eternal and that He was with God the Father. So He is the eternal God, the pre-existent God.

And then thirdly, he was born of a virgin. This makes Jesus unique. You know that no one before this and no one after that. I know there are all the myths and the stories about other people being born of a virgin, but I believe that Jesus life indicates very clearly that he was unique. And the Bible tells us very clearly that Jesus was born of a virgin. Again, the prophet Isaiah, speaking hundreds of years before His birth, said, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Emmanuel," which being interpreted is,

God with us.

We know the story that Gabriel was sent from heaven to a young virgin, she was probably in her early teens, 13, 14, maybe 15 years old, and surprised her. She was living in the City of Nazareth. And said, "Behold Mary, thou art highly favored. God is with you." And she was freaked out. Anybody who saw an angel, freaked out. Jews believed that if you saw an angel it meant that you were going to die, so she's freaking out. And he actually tells her, "You're going to have a baby." And she said, "How is this going to happen? I'm not married yet, I'm a virgin. I don't know," she used the phrase, "I don't know a man." And so the angel described that, "The power of the highest shall come upon thee, and the Holy Spirit shall overshadow thee, and that which is conceived in your womb will be the work of the Holy Spirit."

I believe, because the Bible clearly teaches, that Jesus was conceived in the womb of a virgin by the work of the Holy Spirit. And what it does is indicate that because of that, Jesus is unique. He is both man and God. He is both fully human and fully divine in one person, Jesus Christ. What a glorious truth that is.

Then many months later, Jesus was born. We know the story. In Bethlehem, Luke chapter two, Shepherds in the field were awakened by angels again. And the angels said, "Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy, for unto you as born this day in the city of David, a savior who is Christ the King. And you'll find this baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And the angel said, "Let's go immediately to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass." And these shepherds ran and saw Jesus and Mary and Joseph in the stable and they beheld the Son of God.

So Jesus was born of a virgin. He was fully God and fully man. Then he lived a sinless life. Think about that. Never thought a sinful thought, never said a sinful word, never got impatient with anybody. Never did anything wrong at home. Can you imagine raising a baby? Probably glowed in the dark. Made it easy to change His diaper at night. His room is always immaculate. Amazing to think about.

He performed miracles. Born of a virgin, lived a sinless life. He raised the dead. He gave sight to the blind. He cleansed people with leprosy instantly. He spoke at great distance about people who needed to be healed and people were healed instantly. The power of His word. He was the Word made flesh tabernacling and dwelling among us. And then he died a substitutionary death. Not just a death on the cross, but a substitutionary death. What does that mean? It means that He took your place. He was substituted for you and I. He died in our place. The death of Jesus Christ was a substitution for sinners. He was sinless, He was the Holy Son of God, but he went voluntarily and died vicariously upon a cross.

But you know the story of the uniqueness of Jesus, He did something that no one else has ever done. He rose victoriously, bodily from the dead. He rose in an immortal body that He will have for now all eternity. So not only did He pay for our sins on the cross, which is God's Christmas tree, but He rose from the dead.

I don't know about you, maybe it's just because I'm a preacher, but when I think about Christmas, I think of the incarnation. I think of the crucifixion. I think of the resurrection. And not only that, I think of the ascension and the exaltation of Jesus, that right now He is in Heaven at the right hand of God the Father. And I take it even a step further. I'm not done yet, okay? I think of the return, the second advent. If you're going to celebrate His first advent, you've got to celebrate His second advent. Christmas every year reminds us that Jesus Christ is coming again as King of kings and Lord of lords.

So He ascended back into heaven, He's exalted the right hand of God the Father. And what a glorious truth that he's coming again to reign on the throne of David. One of the reasons that God became a man was to fulfill the Davidic Covenant through the lineage of King David, the King, the Messiah, would sit upon the throne forever and ever. So God, at Christmas, proved His love when he sent His only-begotten Son. In 2 Corinthians 9:15, Paul says, "Thanks be unto God for His indescribable gift." What a glorious gift was the gift of God's Son.

But the third point I want to make about the love of God at Christmas is the purpose of God's love. There's the proclamation God is love. There's the proof that God is love; He sent His Son. But what about the purpose? Why Christmas? What's the significance of God loving us and sending His own Son? Well, number one, in this passage, to be the Savior of the world. The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. When the angels said to the shepherds, "Fear not," they said, "for behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

They didn't say politician, praise God. They didn't say a philosopher. They didn't say a military leader. They didn't say an investor. They said a savior. And that's what the world needed, it was lying in darkness. And the world is in darkness still because Christ came to take us out of this world one day, but he takes us out of the kingdom of darkness by being born again of His Holy Spirit.

He also came to die for our sins on the cross. So He came to be the Savior of the world, and he would do that by dying on the cross. I want you to look at the verse, verse 10 of our passage. It says, "God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." That's a big kind of theological word, but it's not that hard to understand. Propitiate means before, to satisfy. So to propitiate means that he is the atoning sacrifice that satisfies the demands of a holy, righteous God whose law had been broken or violated.

A few years ago, I was preaching at my former church, Calvary Chapel, San Bernardino, and I must confess, I was running a little late. I got up early, had to drive from here back. And I got on the freeway, nobody on the freeway, and I was going a little fast. Actually, I was going super-fast. And I got a big fat ticket. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse from all unrighteousness." So don't look at me, you've gotten tickets before too. How could you Pastor Miller? You probably got a lot more than I have.

So I had to send the money in with the ticket and pay a big fat fine for going. I won't tell you how

fast I was going, but I was speeding, okay? But once it was paid, the law was satisfied. You could have no double jeopardy there. The law was taken care of, everything was cool. I could go preach and have a clear conscience. And that's what Jesus did when He died on the cross, He said, "It is finished." To tell us died, paid in full. And the father was satisfied and rose Him from the dead. So he came to die upon the cross so that, notice, that our sins could be forgiven. Christmas is all about God loving us, sending His Son to die on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven.

There's a third and last point I want to make. It's in verse nine, and that is that we might have life. He came to be the Savior of the world. He came to be the propitiation for our sins. And He came that we might have life and that we might learn to love one another. Notice in verse nine, that we might live through Him. Jesus came to give us life. Jesus said it like this, "I have come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly." Not only life, but abundant life.

Can you say tonight that you have abundant life? You have an overflowing life? Is the joy of Christ this Christmas filling your heart. As we began to sing tonight, it was in the back of the sanctuary, just such joy filled my heart. What a blessing to know Christ at Christmas. Amen? And to worship the Christ of Christmas and to understand its true meaning. What a blessed thing that is. If you don't know Jesus this Christmas, He is knocking on the door of your heart and He wants to be born in you. The Bible says in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world," the greatest lover, "that he gave His only begotten Son," the greatest gift, "that whosoever believes in Him should never perish but have ever lasting life." Amen?

The greatest hope of all the gifts that you'll get this Christmas, the greatest gift that you could ever get, is the gift of God's love sending His Son to die in your place on the cross. Rising from the dead, ever living, that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But you must accept that gift by faith; it doesn't come automatically. At Christmas, people give you gifts and they expect you to receive it and to open it up, and that's what God has done. He gave you a gift. He sent His Son to die on the cross so that you could be forgiven, and he wants you because he loves you, to open your heart and invite him to come in.

How do you become a Christian? By faith in Christ. By the grace of God. By turning from your sin and trusting Jesus Christ as your Savior, you can be born of God. Jesus left Heaven so that you could go to heaven. He left His heavenly Father so that you could be born of God the Father and have a father in Heaven. He died so that you might live.

Christmas is all about the love of God. Love of God greater far than tongue or pen could ever tell. And if you don't know that love, I encourage you this Christmas to humble your heart and say, "God, forgive my sins. Be born in me. I surrender my life to You. I trust You. I believe in You, and I receive that gift of eternal hope." Let's bow our heads in prayer.