

Christmas And God's Love

1 John 4:9-10

Pastor John Miller

I want to talk tonight about the love of God and Christmas. It's pretty hard to not talk about the love of God at Christmas. Amen? I mean, Christmas is all about God's love, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That one verse summarizes the whole Bible—God's love for a lost world, sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, that we might have eternal life.

The two verses I want to look at tonight is 1 John 4:9-10. John says, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him," that's the Christmas story. Verse 10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation,"—and I'll explain that word in just a moment, it means the atoning sacrifice—"for our sins." Christmas is all about the love of God. I believe the greatest demonstration of love is when God sent His only begotten Son into the world. That's a demonstration of God's love.

I want to look at three important truths tonight about Christmas and the love of God. I don't know if you're a notetaker, or you want to take notes, but write these down. First, the Bible proclaims that God is love very clearly. Look at it with me. Back up into verse 8, John says, "He that loveth not knoweth not God,"—here it is—"for God is love." There's the proclamation in the Bible that God is love. What does John mean when he says, "...God is love." What he means is that God—to His nature, His essence, His character—is love. It doesn't say, "God loves," He does. It doesn't say, "God is loving," He is. It says God in His essence, His very nature, and to His very character, "God is love."

Lots of people question the idea of a God of love. They say, "How can there be a God of love, and add to that, that is all-powerful, yet we have a world of suffering, a world of death and dying and sin and suffering, where's the God of love?" Actually, the truth is that God did not create the world in this state, that man rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden—Adam and Eve disobeyed God and plunged the world into sin and separation from God. Christmas is God's rescue mission—God coming into the world in the form of a man, or in a human body, in order to die for our sins to rescue us from sin, death, from the grave, and from hell. Amen? A Christian is all about God's love seeking to rescue us back to God. He means that God in His essence is love.

The Bible is clear about God's love in so many ways. If you're taking notes, write this down. God's love is declared to be great, Ephesians 2:4. It speaks about the great love of God. God's love is great. In the Greek language they basically had three words for "love." We have one word for "love," don't we? We'll say, "I love my wife," and "I love peanut butter and jelly sandwiches." Why are you laughing? Obviously, my love for my wife is not the same as my love for peanut butter and jelly, it's a lot more intense. Amen? All the women say, "Amen, amen!" The Bible has the word agape for a sacrificial, giving, self-denying love. When the Bible

speaks of God's love, it's actually a Greek word agape, or pronounced agapao, love; and there's the word phileo, we get our word Philadelphia which means brotherly love, and there's the word eros, which we get our word erotic from. It means a selfish, receiving love. Agape love is the love that's described in John 3:16 and here in our text of verse 8, "...for God is love." His love is great.

Secondly, His love is infinite. It means that there are no limits to God's love. It's beyond measure. The hymn writer said, "Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made; were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill, and ev'ryone a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry; nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky." The great, great infinite love of God is limitless. It is inexhaustible.

Thirdly, the Bible tells us, God's love is unchanging. The theologians use the word immutable for this. It means unchanging. You know, we all change. If you don't think you change, go back and look at yourself back in high school, if you've been out of high school for fifty years, and be depressed. "That was me? Oh boy!" Nothing stays the same. God is the only thing that is immutable or unchanging. Think about that. We know that God is love, God's love is infinite and great and limitless, but God's love is unchanging. It's not like He's going to love us today and hate us tomorrow, or He loves us today and He'll hate us next year, God's love is unchanging. James says in James 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." That's a fancy way to describe the unchangingness or the immutability of this God of love.

Fourthly, God's love is gracious. I love this. It means God's love is given to the undeserving. Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve. Amen? Mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve, and I hate to kind of mention this at Christmastime, but we all deserve hell. I just thought I'd encourage you. But, wait a minute! There's a God of love, God of grace, God of mercy, so God doesn't give us what we deserve, God does give us what we do not deserve, He forgives our sins and gives us the hope of eternal life. God's love is gracious. Only in Christianity do you get the grace of God. All other religions say, "Do, perform, and you will live." But Christianity says, "We cannot do. We cannot perform," but God says, "I'll give you My grace and give you eternal life."

Lastly, and fifthly, God's love is eternal. Jeremiah 31:3 where God says, "...I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." God's love is everlasting, and in kindness God draws us to Himself. Maybe you're here tonight and you haven't experienced the love of God in your own heart. I don't think it's any accident that you're here tonight. God wants you to experience His love—not just to know about it or to hear about it or to sing about it at Christmas, but to actually experience it in your life, to experience the loving draw of the Spirit convicting you and drawing you to His side, to pursuing you and saving you by His grace. That's the love of God.

Christmas is a time especially that we should remember that God is love and that God actually

loves you and me individually and personally. The Bible says that He has the very hairs of our head all numbered. Every time you brush your hair, comb your hair, or wash your hair, you lose what little hair sometimes we have, right? So, God gets His calculator out and changes the number. Some of you that don't have hair give Him no problems at all. To think that God cares for me, and the Bible says not one sparrow falls to the ground but what He takes notice of. The God who cares about the creation, the sparrows, cares about you, His dear child. God's love is gracious and merciful and higher than the heavens.

You say, "How can I know that God really loves me? Can it be that God really loves me? How can I know that? What evidence is there of the love of God?" That's my second main point tonight, the proof of God's love. There's the proclamation, "God is love," but there is also the proof that "God is love." Look at 1 John 4:9, "In this was manifested,"—there's the word, it means to display or demonstrate—"the love of God toward us," stop right there for a moment. "In this,"—or this is how God's love was displayed or manifested or made known. How? Because in verse 9 it goes on to say, "...because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world." God sending His Son—God the Father sending God the Son, the second Person of the Godhead—"into the world," is a demonstration or a manifestation of the love of God.

Notice in verse 10 it says God, "...sent his Son," and in verse 14, "...the Father sent the Son." We read on Christmas cards quite frequently from Isaiah 9:6, which was spoken, by the way, six hundred years before Christ was born in Bethlehem. The prophet said, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,"—or sent. When Jesus came into the world, He was actually sent by God the Father, but He also volunteered for the rescue mission—He said He came of His own volition and His own will. He came, "...to seek and to save that which was lost." Someone said, "God wrapped His love in flesh and blood and sent Him down to man." Christmas is God saying tonight, "I love you," and He demonstrated that by sending His Son into the world.

Notice in that verse, "...that God sent his only begotten Son." What does that term mean? I think that a lot of times we read it, we hear it, but we don't really stop to ask ourselves, "What does it mean, '...his only begotten Son?'" It doesn't mean that Jesus was created or that He came into existence at any point in time because He's the eternal, second Person of the Godhead. It carries the idea of unique—the only unique Son. The word "begotten" means special or unique. Years ago I looked up the word "unique" in Webster's Dictionary just to think what kind of a definition they would give, and it said one of a kind, having no equal. I've never forgotten that. I thought, Boy, that's a description of Jesus Christ. Amen? There's no One like Jesus—one of a kind, having no equal. So, "...his only,"—unique—"Son," the only One perfectly suited to be able to redeem mankind. Jesus is truly unique, the only Son of God.

In what way is Jesus unique? Let me break it down for you. First, He is eternal. As God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, He existed from all of eternity. In John's gospel 1:1, it says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,"—or God was the Word. There are three things said about Jesus there, "In the beginning was the Word," Jesus is the Word, the logos, so He's the eternal word. "...and the Word was with God," He's the personal Word. It means face to face with the Father. "...and the Word was God," He's the

divine Word. So, He's the eternal Word, He's the personal Word, He is the divine Word. Secondly, He preexisted His birth at Bethlehem. If He's eternal, then He preexisted Bethlehem.

Before your conception—before you were conceived in the womb—you did not exist. Now don't think about that too much, you'll blow a fuse. "What if I never ever was," or "What if I never existed?" But there never was a time when Jesus was not. Again, when you think about that, it's so mind blowing and stretching that our little brains cannot really wrap around it or comprehend it, but Jesus is eternal and preexistent. That's why, in verse 9, He was sent, He came into the world from heaven; in verse 10, He was sent; and, in verse 14 of our text, again, He was sent—God sent His Son. And, how did He come into the world? Through the womb of the virgin Mary. The Bible is very clear that Mary was a virgin. She said to Gabriel when he announced the birth of the Son of God, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" And Gabriel said the Holy Spirit, "...shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee," and that which is conceived in your womb will be the work of the Holy Spirit. It was a miraculous conception in the womb of Mary. Then, He grew and was born, so Jesus Christ is truly God come from heaven, truly Man, came through the womb of the virgin Mary, taking on humanity.

In Isaiah 7:14, the prophet said, "...Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name,"—we sang it tonight—"Immanuel,"—which interpreted is God with us. And the angel said to Joseph, "You'll call His name Emmanuel," which is God with us. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was truly God, truly Man, one Person, not two people, one Person—Christ, two natures, fully human and fully divine. What a glorious truth that is! He was truly God and truly Man.

In John 1:14 it says, "And the Word,"—which was eternal, personal, and divine—"was made flesh, and dwelt among us." That word literally means He pitched His tent among us. That's what God did at Christmas! How do I know God loves me? He pitched His tent among us. He took on real humanity but lived a sinless life. He was a real Man, but mark it well, He was a sinless Man—there was no sin in Christ. He was the holy Son of God, came through the womb of the virgin, and lived a sinless life. By the way, He just so happens to be the only Person on planet earth who has ever lived without sinning.

If you're here tonight and you say, "Well, I've never sinned," the Bible says you're a liar and the truth is not in you. The Bible says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Some say, "Well, speak for yourself, preacher boy." "The heart is deceitful...and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

We've all rebelled against God. Pride is sin. Lust is sin. Jesus said if you look on someone with lustful thoughts, you've committed sin. If you have anger in your heart toward someone, Jesus said you've already committed murder. How do you drive around in Southern California on the freeways and not kill someone? Like the little boy that said, "Mommy, why, when Daddy drives, do all the idiots come out? There's never any idiots when Mommy drives, only when Daddy drives." How true that is. We've all fallen short. God set the standard of perfection.

We've all inherited a sinful nature from Adam, thus we've all fallen. So, we are sinners by birth, we are sinners by choice, and we've been living in rebellion to God, and God has to come and give us a new heart, give us a new nature. We must be born again.

Then, Jesus was crucified. It speaks of His cross. He died a substitutionary death when Jesus died on the cross. You know, I don't celebrate Jesus but what I remember the virgin birth, the incarnation, the sinless life, the substitutionary death that Jesus died on the cross in your place, in my place. Isaiah 53, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...and with his stripes we are healed." Jesus took our place on that cross, and then He was buried. What happened three days later? He rose again from the dead.

It's not just the cradle, it's also the resurrection, and then He's coming back again in what we call the Second Advent or Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Amen? We celebrate His first coming by looking back at the cradle, but we're also looking forward to the crown. Amen? Read Revelation 19, Jesus is coming back as "...KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS," in power and glory, and oh what a wonderful world it will be when Jesus Christ comes back as King and reigns on earth forever and ever and ever and ever and ever. Amen? One thing the Bible says about that time, "...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares."

I was watching a Smithsonian documentary on building aircraft carriers. I don't know why, I was just watching it. Those things are huge, and they cost so much money and take so many years, and then they get blown up at sea. Think about all the weapons of war, all the missiles, guns, bullets, and all that we put together. In the ancient language of the Scripture, "...swords into plowshares...spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation...any more."

We sing, Joy to the world the Lord has come, right? Let earth receive her King. That's the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. I never celebrate Christmas but what my heart thrills to think God always keeps His promises—if He came the first time to rescue us from sin, He'll come the second time to reign forever and ever as "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

No wonder Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable,"—indescribable—"gift." One of the greatest gifts ever given was the gift of God's Son. Have you ever received a gift at Christmas and didn't know what it was? You open it up and say, "Uh, uh, thanks, I think. What is it?" God's gift is indescribable, not because we don't know what it is, but because He's so amazing and so wonderful because it comes by God's love, comes by God's grace, and it meets our greatest need.

There's one last point I want to make, and that's the purpose of God's love. Why did the Father send the Son at Christmas? First, to be the Savior of the world. Look at verse 14. I didn't read it yet in this chapter, but it says, "...that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." Jesus came to be the Savior of the world. In Luke 2, the angel said, "Fear not: for, behold, I 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 Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Jesus came to save us from our sins.

Secondly, Jesus came to die for our sins on the cross. I've already mentioned that. Look at verse 10, "God...sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." That word "propitiation" means that He was the sacrifice, the satisfying, substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. When we break the law and do our time in jail or pay our fine, then the law is satisfied. When Jesus died on the cross, He cried, "Tetelestai," it is finished, paid in full. When Christ's righteousness is imputed to me by my trusting Him in faith, and my sins are paid in their penalty by Christ on the cross, God is satisfied—It is finished. Amen? I am forgiven and I am free. Amen?

He also came not only to die for our sins, but He also came that we might have life. Verse 9 says, "...that we might live through him." Jesus said it like this, "I have come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly." Nobody but believers have that kind of life in their soul. It's eternal life. Again, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world,"—the greatest lover—"that he gave his only begotten Son,"—the greatest gift—"that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,"—the greatest, greatest gift. Amen?

It's up to you tonight to see your need of Christ, to open your heart and believe in Christ, to be born again and forgiven of your sins. The Bible proclaims that God is love, God loves you; the Bible gives us the proof of God's love, He sent His Son; the Bible gives us the purpose of God sending His Son, to die for our sins. The most important thing that you can ever look at is your need for forgiveness. The Bible says your sins have separated you from God, but Jesus came to bring us back to God. He came to redeem us, to buy us back to God, to forgive us and to give us eternal life, to give us abundant life—life not only everlasting but a new dimension of life, eternal life in the soul of man.

You say, "Well, what do I have to do to have this eternal life? What do I have to do to have this life that Jesus brought at Christmas?" First, you need to recognize that you have sinned and that the wages of sin is death. You need to realize that you are a sinner separated from God, that what God says about you in His Word is true, not worrying about what other people say, what other people think, but what God says in His Word—we are sinners who need salvation.

The second thing you need to do is repent, the Bible says, which is a Greek word *metanoia*, which literally means to change your mind and as a result turn around. It not only means change your mind, but it means a change of mind which results in a change of direction.

You realize you're a sinner, you repent, you are willing to turn tonight from your sin, and the third thing you need to do to receive God's gift of eternal life is just receive by faith. What is faith? It's trusting in Christ. It's simply saying, "I believe. I trust. I put my faith in Him, not my good works or my good deeds, not the things that I have done, but what Christ has done for me on the cross." This is what we call the gospel—that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He rose from the dead according to the Scriptures on the third day, and that we can be forgiven by faith. The Bible says it like this, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God,"—there it is, Christmas—"Not of works, lest any man should boast."

I want to give you an opportunity tonight to receive that “gift of God,” eternal life. Again, I don’t think it’s an accident that you are here tonight. I believe that God brought you here to hear this message, to give you this opportunity to stop running from God and to run to God, the God who created you, the God who loves you, the God who sent His Son Jesus to die for you and rose from the dead; and if you’ll trust in Him tonight, and put your faith in Him, if you’ll open up your heart and receive Him tonight, your sins can be forgiven, you can have eternal life, you can know that when you die, you’ll go to heaven, and you’ll have the life of God in your soul. Amen? Let’s pray.

If God has spoken to you through this message today, and you’re not sure that you’re a child of God, maybe you don’t know for sure that if you died today that you would go to heaven, you’ve never really trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, I would like to lead you in a prayer right now inviting Christ to come into your heart and to be your Savior. As I pray this prayer, I want you to repeat it out loud right where you are after me. Make it from your heart inviting Christ to come in and be your Lord and Savior. Let’s pray, “Dear Lord Jesus, I’m sorry for my sin. I pray that you’ll forgive me and come into my heart and make me Your child. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to live for You all the days of my life. I believe in You. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

If you prayed that prayer and you meant it, God heard that prayer, and I believe that God will and does forgive your sins. We’d like to help you get started growing in your walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. God bless you.