

Christmas And The Love Of God

1 John 4:9-10

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I'm going to read those two verses of 1 John 4:9-10. John says, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten"—unique—"Son into the world"—that's Christmas—"that we might live through him. 10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." You know, what greater theme could we talk about tonight than the love of God at Christmas. John, in this verse tells us that "this was manifested,"—or demonstrated or displayed—"the love of God"—verse 9—"because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."

I want to talk to you tonight about the love of God and Christmas. The greatest demonstration of God's love was Christmas, when " . . . God sent his only begotten Son into the world." I want to mention three important truths from this text and the verses around it about Christmas and the love of God. The first is the proclamation that God is love, the fact or the proclamation that God is love. Now, you back up one verse, if you're looking at it with me in your Bible, to verse 8 where John says, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." You see it there in the text? " . . . God is love." The Bible says God is light. The Bible says God is Spirit. The Bible says God is love.

Why is John talking about the love of God in this verse? Well, it's not written to be a Christmas text, but it's written to tell Christians that if you've truly been born again, that it will be evidenced in your life by love. Did you know that love is the birthmark of a true Christian? Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, in that you have love one for another." Love is the birthmark of a true believer. John isn't writing about Christmas, technically, this is not a Christmas text, but the picture of Christmas is there in that God, who is love, sent His only Son. What John is doing here is saying because God is love, and because God sent His Son in love to us, we ought to also love one another.

What does it mean that God is love? It means that God is to His essential nature is love, that God can do nothing unloving, that God in His essence or God in His nature is love. There's a lot of people that would question the concept of a God of love, "How could there be a God of love in a world of such suffering and sorrow and pain?" Even at Christmas it seems to almost magnify and amplify our hurts, our sorrows, and our pain. Some of you have been bereaved this year of a loved one or someone that you cared about and it's the first Christmas without them, and there's so much suffering and pain in the world.

Well, let me say this just quickly: we live in a fallen world. What do I mean by that? God did not make the world this way. Man sinned in the Garden of Eden and plunged the earth into sin, death, and destruction. So, we live in a fallen world, but Jesus came into the world as the Father in love sent Him to redeem us, to rescue us, back to God. All wrongs will be set right when Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, comes back and He reigns on the throne of David. We live in a fallen world, but that doesn't affect God's love for us. The Bible is clear that God is love.

Let me give you five facts about God's love from the Bible. The Bible says God's love is great. Ephesians 2:4 says we've sinned, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us," has forgiven us by His grace. The Bible says God's love is infinite, which means limitless or beyond measure. I love the words to Isaac Watts' song, "The Love Of God." One of the stanzas says:

The love of God is greater far,
Than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell.
Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man 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 Love Of God." So, the great love of God; the infinite, limitless beyond measure love of God.

Thirdly, God's love is unchanging. In James 1:17, it says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above . . . from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." The theologians used the term to describe this that God is immutable, which means unchanging. You know, we all change. If you don't believe it, you've been out of high school for fifty years, get your senior picture and look at it and weep. Just look around how things change. You know you're getting old, too, by the way, when you start saying, "Well, when I was a kid there were no buildings here, there were just fields, cows and horses." You start talking about all the things...there was nothing before and now everything's here. It's because you're old. Everything's changing, right? Or, you see somebody doing something real athletic and you say, "I used to be able to do that when I was a teenager, believe it or not." You know you're getting old and things are changing. But God does not change. Amen? He's that fixed point that is immutable and unchanging.

Did you know you can't make God love you more? You can't make God love you less. God's love is unchanging. It's uninfluenceable.

Fourthly, God's love is gracious. You know, it's only in Christianity that we learn we're saved by grace through faith, that it's not of ourself: it's a gift of God, not of our works, lest we should boast. All other religions say, "Do, and you will live," but we can't do or perform. God says in His Word, "In Christ, done. It is finished." Just receive what God has already done. God's gracious love means, like verse 19 in this chapter, where he says, "We love him, because he first loved us." And, God loved us when? When we were sinners. When we were separated from Him. When we were rebelling against Him and running from Him. Do you know that God gave His Son to die for sinners? Not for the righteous, but for the unrighteous which includes you and me.

Last, but not least, fifthly, God's love is declared to be eternal. I love that. It says in Jeremiah 31:3, God speaking to the prophet, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." God's love for you and me is everlasting. So, when we think about Christmas, let's think about and remember the love of God sending His Son to die for our sins. You might ask and say, "How can I be sure that God is love? How can I be really sure that God loves me? God has demonstrated His love in a very concrete way.

My next point about Christmas and the love of God is the proof of God's love. Look at verse 9 of the text that I first read. John says, "In this was manifested"—or displayed or demonstrated—"the love of God toward us, because that God sent"—notice that—"his only begotten"—unique—"Son into the world, that we might live through him." The word "manifest" again means to display or to demonstrate, so God has displayed or demonstrated His love.

When our children were young, we used to have a little book that we would read to the kids that said, How do I know that God loves me? Let me count the ways. You'd turn the page, I know God loves me because He's given me a mommy and a daddy. Turn the page, I know God loves me because He's given me food to eat. I know that God loves me because He's given me hands and feet. I know God loves me because He's given me a bed to sleep in. I used to think about that when I read that to my children, those are truths, but what about a child who has no mommy or daddy? How did they know God loves them? What about a child who has no food to eat? What about a child who has no hands or feet? What about a child who has no bed to sleep in? How do they know that God loves them? How do you know that God loves you? Well, the answer is in our text, that God " . . . sent His Son," to die for us that we might have eternal life.

Look at verse 9, " . . . because that God sent"—look at the word 'sent'—"his only begotten Son into the world." So, in verse 10, " . . . sent his Son;" in verse 14, " . . . Father sent the Son;" in Isaiah, almost 700 years before Christ was born, the prophet said, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," so He was sent or given. God the Father sent God the Son, and God wrapped His love in flesh and blood and sent Him down to man. Christmas is God saying to you and me, "I love you."

What does the term, “. . . only begotten,” mean? “. . . God sent his only begotten Son.” Let me tell you what it does not mean. It doesn't mean that He was generated or that He was created or that He was born for the first time. Jesus Christ did not start His existence at conception in the womb of the virgin Mary. Jesus Christ, as the unique Son of God, is the eternal God Himself. Again, there is one God, three Persons—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. God the Father sent God the Son through the power of God the Spirit and Jesus was born of a virgin, so He was God-Man. He is eternal.

You know, the word “unique” for Jesus Christ is so appropriate. Years ago, when I was preaching on this very subject, I wanted to know what does the word “unique” really mean? How do you define something that's unique? We use that, “Oh, that's unique,” or “That's unique.” I simply opened up a Webster's Dictionary and looked up the word “unique.” I'll never forget the definition: one of a kind, having no equal; one of a kind, having no equal. There's no one like Jesus Christ. Amen? Jesus Christ is absolutely perfectly unique.

Let me give you some ways He's unique. He is eternal. John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” and God was the Word. Secondly, He is also preexistent. He wasn't born for the first time in Bethlehem, He preexisted. That's why He is sent before Bethlehem. Verses 9, 10, and 14 all tell us that Jesus was sent by the Father. Thirdly, He was born of a virgin, Isaiah 7:14, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” which interpreted is “God with us.” When the angel came to Mary in Nazareth and said, “Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women . . . And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son,” He's going to be the Son of God. He's going to be the Redeemer, the Messiah, save His people from their sin, and what did Mary say? “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” I've not been intimate with a man. How am I going to have a baby? And the answer came from Gabriel to Mary, “. . . the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee,” that the Spirit of God will “. . . come upon thee,” and that which is conceived in your womb will be the result of the Holy Spirit. Mary said, “Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word,” and Christ was born in Bethlehem.

An edict was sent out by Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. They lived north in Nazareth, but the Child had to be born in Bethlehem, about 90 miles south. What husband in his right mind would put his wife on a donkey and take a 90-mile ride in the last stages of her pregnancy? You know, if anything will induce labor, that will induce labor. But the prophet Micah had said five hundred years before this, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” God put it in the heart of this Caesar of Rome that he would make this edict to get this peasant couple to take this journey at the last stages of pregnancy down to Bethlehem, which means house of bread, where the Messiah, the bread of life, would be born fulfilling God's holy Word.

Another unique thing about Jesus was He was truly God and truly Man in one Person—no one else, He's unique, one of a kind. He was born of a virgin, He lived a sinless life, He was God

manifested in the flesh, and then He died a substitutionary death upon the cross. That word is very important. When Jesus died on the cross, He wasn't just dying on the cross to demonstrate God's love for us or to show us that we should give ourselves to others. He was literally taking our place. He was the substitute for our sin, and He died voluntarily. The Father sent Him, He volunteered to come, and He willingly laid His life down upon the cross as the substitute for our sins. Then, He was buried, and we know what happened three days later, right? He rose from the dead.

I know some of you are thinking, Is this an Easter sermon or a Christmas sermon? It's both. You cannot look at just the cradle at Christmas. The cradle led to the cross. The cross led to the tomb. The tomb led to His resurrection. Amen? Jesus rose from the dead—unique. Jesus came back to life in a glorified, eternal, immortal body. That is unique. People who die don't just come popping out of the grave three days later. Jesus said, "Destroy this temple,"—body—"and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

So, He lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary death, He rose from the dead, and the story of Christmas isn't over yet. Guess what He did? He ascended back into heaven—visibly, bodily ascended right back up into heaven—and He sat down at the right hand of God the Father in heaven in a place of authority. Again, it's not over yet. What's next? Jesus Christ is coming again. Amen? I believe that Jesus Christ is coming back, and He will establish His Kingdom on the throne of David, and He will reign forever and ever, and ever, and there will be no end to His Kingdom, and He will reverse the curse. He will restore earth back to peace on earth, "... good will toward men." And, there will be peace on earth. There won't be any peace until Christ comes, the Prince of Peace, but Christmas is about the future hope as well. We don't just look back at the cradle or the cross or the tomb, we look forward to the coming again of Jesus Christ, and He will reign forever and ever and ever. That's what Isaiah prophesied when he said that He will sit upon the throne of David and reign forever. Christmas proved His love when He sent His only Son. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" I love that. "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" How do you describe Jesus Christ.

So, we see the proclamation that God is love, we see the proof that God is love, but thirdly, and lastly, we see the purpose of God's love at Christmas. Why did God send His Son at Christmas? He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Now, if you have a Bible, in 1 John 4, look down at verse 14, it actually says there, "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." We have seen, we testify, God the Father sent God the Son to be the Savior of the world.

In Luke 2, when Christ was born and the angels went out to tell the shepherds, the angel said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Aren't you glad He didn't say, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a politician." That'll save us, won't it? A philosopher. A military leader. No, a Savior. The world was lost in sin and

needed a Savior. Jesus came not to just teach us good things, not to just give us a great example—He did do that—He came to save us from our sins, and He came to make His blessings flow as far as the curse is found. He came to be the Savior of the world, and then here in verse 10 of our text, God “ . . . sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Do you know what that word “propitiation” means? It’s a big theological word. It basically means that He died to satisfy the demands of God’s broken law. He paid the penalty. You could rephrase that: He died to be the atoning sacrifice or paid the penalty for our sins.

A couple of years ago, it was at Christmas, I was preaching at my former church in San Bernardino on a Sunday morning. I was running a little late, which preachers sometimes do, jumped on the freeway here at Scott Road going north up the 215, no one on the freeway, I gotta preach, I’m late. I started driving too fast. Now, “If we confess our sins,”—God—“is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Don’t look at me that way, you’ve gotten more speeding tickets than I have, right? So, I got pulled over. I can imagine people driving by, “There’s Pastor Miller on a Sunday morning getting a ticket.” I got a huge fine, so I had to pay the fine. But once the fine was paid, guess what? No double jeopardy. They couldn’t come back and want more money, it’s paid for. It’s satisfied.

Remember when Jesus died on the cross and He cried the words, “Tetelestai,” it is finished, paid in full. The debt has been paid. That’s what it means—propitiation. It means to satisfy the demands of God’s righteous law. When Jesus died on the cross, He died to satisfy the holy righteous demands of God’s law which had been broken and violated.

Thirdly, He sent His Son that we, verse 9, “ . . . might live through him.” Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” Jesus came at Christmas to bring us eternal life, to bring us forgiveness of sin so that we could be born of God. He left heaven and came to earth so that we could have a home in heaven. He left His Father in heaven and came to earth so that I could have a Father in heaven. He died so that I might live. He took my sin so that I could be forgiven. Amen? All of this is rolled into that little cradle. God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made Man, all of the hopes of humanity. This is why John said 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 believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,”—the greatest hope; the greatest hope.

So, Christmas proclaims that God is love. Christmas is proof that God loves us and sent His Son, and Christmas says the purpose that He came to earth was to die for our sins so that we could be forgiven and have eternal life. You know, when you open your gifts at Christmas, after you’ve opened all your gifts, you don’t take your wallet out and go around paying everybody, “Thank you for the underwear. Here, I want to pay you.” I used to have a friend in high school. Every year he’d just call me all bummed out, “All I got was underwear and socks!” I’ll pray for you. But you don’t pay for your gifts—right?—they’re given out of love. You just receive it.

God loves you so much that He wants to give you eternal life. He wants to forgive your sins and

make you His child. Your sins can be forgiven because of Christmas. You can be right with God. You can know that when you die, you'll go to heaven. You can spend eternity in heaven with God because two thousand years ago, God in His love, "... sent his only begotten Son ... that we might live through him." But you must open the door of your heart and invite Christ to come in. Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door,"—of your heart—"and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in." But it takes a step of faith of realizing, I'm a sinner. I'm lost. I'm on my way to hell. But Jesus came to rescue me. He came to die for me; and I believe in Christ, I trust in Christ, I received Christ, and His righteousness is then given to you so that you can go to heaven when you die. If you haven't trusted in Jesus Christ, we're going to close in prayer and I invite you to pray this simple prayer of asking Jesus to forgive your sins, to come into your heart, to make you a new person, to give you eternal life, and to give you a hope of heaven. You can know that you'll go to heaven when you die. Let's bow our heads and pray.