

Christmas Love...answering why?

I Jn. 4:9-11

Intro. As Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany, he was determined to take over the German Church and dictate the nation's religion. He falsely accused hundreds of clergymen of treason, theft, or sexual malpractice. Priests, nuns and church leaders were arrested on trumped up charges. Religious publications were suspended. By his dictates, couples were encouraged to be married by state officials rather than by pastors and priests. In 1935, he outlawed prayer in public schools and did all he could to replace Bible reading with Nazi propaganda.

Hitler had greater difficulty with the holidays, however. For centuries Germans had faithfully observed Easter and Christmas. So rather than ban these holidays, Hitler sought to keep them but to reinterpret their meanings. Easter became a celebration heralding the arrival of spring and Christmas was turned into a festival that was entirely pagan. Carols and nativity plays were banned from schools in 1938 and the name "Christmas" was changed to "Yuletide." Holy days became holidays and the sacred was secularized.

The same sorts of things are happening in America today as social libertarians, aided by the media and the courts, seem determined to drain Christmas of its meaning. Just as Hitler did nearly 80 yrs. ago, Christmas is being transformed into a secular and commercialized, pagan holiday. In this climate when God is being systematically marginalized and replaced, Christians must strengthen our faith and increase the volume of our witness to the truth. This is a not a time for compromise or silence but a time of opportunity when the redeemed of the Lord must say so. **(Psa.107:2)**

This AM we begin a series of four messages that emphasize the meaning and impact of Christmas. At the risk of sounding like Hallmark movies, I've entitled these messages, *Christmas Love / Christmas Grace / Christmas Joy /* and finally, *Christmas Hope*. Each theme emphasizes a distinct aspect of the glory of Christmas. Let's commit this series of messages to the Lord. **Pray**

Let's turn our thoughts this AM to *Christmas Love*. For the benefit of our young people, my title has nothing to do with the song made popular by Justin Bieber! Instead I want to zero in on two verses of Scripture that testify of God's amazing love for a world of sinners. **I Jn. 4:9-10**. Let's read these together from the NIV version shown on the screen. **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.**

1. Love displayed – v.9

Now you're thinking to yourself, "*I don't see Christmas in these verses.*" But look again. **v. 9** says, **This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world...** I'm insulting your intelligence, but here's how Wikipedia defines Christmas. "*Christmas, which means, "Christ's Mass," is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, observed most commonly on December 25.*" So now you know! Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ...even the liberal-leaning Wikipedia still says so! Yet notice what **v.9** says, **This is how God showed his love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world.**

One of the most basic tenets of the Bible is that God loves us. He really does! The Four Spiritual Laws begin... "*God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.*" We confidently say "*God loves you*"...but how do we know it's true? Well, the Bible says so. That's a good answer. The theological basis for God's love is the twice repeated fact that **God is love**. - **I Jn. 4:8,16** In other words, love is an essential attribute or quality of who God is. It is God's nature to have good desires and plans for us. He cares for us and is benevolent to all of His creatures.

God's love for us isn't an on again off again emotion. His love proceeds from who He is and His love isn't contingent on who we are or what we do. Knowing all about us, God loves us anyway!

But somebody may say, "I'm from Missouri, the 'show me' state. I'd like some proof to help me know for sure that God really loves me." God has manifest His love many ways, but here John offers the crowning proof that God loves us. He wrote, **This is how God showed His love among us...** In other words, this is how God put His love on display for the world to see. To eliminate every doubt, God stepped onto the stage of world history in a way that Wikipedia recognizes and most of the world celebrates. The true meaning of Christmas is based in this historic display of God's love.

A story is told about a Sunday school teacher who talked a lot about love. One Saturday afternoon he replaced a section of sidewalk in front of his house. Just after he finished smoothing the wet concrete, a neighbor kid on his bike mindlessly sailed through the caution tape and right into the wet concrete. (Things like this happen, I know...because the road crew was Hispanic I wasn't damaged by their profanity.) But the kid in the story didn't get off as easy as I did. Having worked so hard, the teacher really let the boy have it...in English. Neighborhood news spreads quickly! The next day in Sunday school an outspoken student asked the teacher if he loved the boy who ruined his new sidewalk. The teacher answered this way, "I love him in the abstract, but I don't love him in the concrete."

Don't you agree...it's always easier to love in the abstract? It's easier to talk about love than it is to actually love somebody who offends you...to love in a self-sacrificing way. John made this distinction in **3:18** where he wrote, **Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.** Loving in the concrete is costly and often inconvenient. But real love demands expression. **1 Jn. 4:9** insists God's love isn't abstract or theoretical. His love for us was expressed in a concrete way. The first and primary demonstration of God's love is rooted in history the whole world knows about. God's love was displayed by the **Incarnation** - the fact that He **sent His Son into the world.**

In more than 100 verses, Jesus said He was **sent** to earth by His Father. Jesus was **sent** just as God **sent** prophets to Israel and Jesus **sends** His followers into the world. The fact that Jesus was **sent into the world** is consistent with His pre-existence. I mean...a person who doesn't exist can't be sent. Unlike any human being, Jesus existed before His birth. Twice John the Baptist said Jesus existed before him even though Jesus was born 6 months after John. (**Jn. 1:15, 30**) But Jesus made a more startling claim than that in **Jn. 8:58**...a claim that fried the grits of Israel's religious leaders. "**I tell you the truth,**" Jesus answered, "**before Abraham was born, I am!**" **I am** is God's name!

So the NT explains that Jesus existed before John and before Abraham. But that isn't all...**Jn. 1:1** says, **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** Notice, the **Word** which is a proper name for Jesus Christ, **was with God in the beginning or with God** at the time of creation. As this verse and others testify, Jesus is the Creator by whom everything was made. Then a few verses later, **v.14** says, **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.** - **Jn. 1:14** **The Word** becoming flesh is what *incarnation* means.

So the *incarnation* or birth of Jesus the world celebrates every Christmas was the means by which God entered the world. Eternal spirit, took on human flesh. The One who existed from eternity past, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the body of a young Jewish virgin named Mary. Then 9 months later, the Creator of everything was born like any other child. While the world's philosophers were trying to become God, God became man! By this miraculous birth God **sent His Son** into the world.

In the inimitable words of Max Lucado... "*Mary didn't know whether to give Him milk or give Him praise but she gave Him both since he was, as near as she could figure, hungry and holy.*"

Joseph didn't know whether to call Him Junior or Father. But in the end called Him Jesus since that's what the angel said and since he didn't have the faintest idea what to name a God he could cradle in his arms."

Gal. 4:4 says, **But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...**The virgin birth was the sign given to identify God's Son and Israel's Messiah. 600 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah made this startling promise. **Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. - Isa. 7:14** Because God's thoughts about us and plans for us are benevolent and good, He sent His Son to earth.

2. Love measured – Eph. 3:17-19

But let's get back to **I Jn. 4:9, 10**. These verses answer the "WHY" of Christmas... **Why** did God **send** His Son from a perfect heaven to a broken world? Why did the eternal and holy Son of God take on a human body with all of its susceptibilities, dependencies and limitations? **Why** did Jesus endure such hatred, hostility and rejection? Being found in appearance as a man, **why** did He humble himself and become obedient to death--even death on a cross? (**Phil. 2:8**) That first Christmas raises more questions than answers! But the one question that sums up every other is this...**Why** would God conceive such a plan and do such thing? The answer is given in **I Jn. 4:9...This is how God showed his love among us...**Jesus was sent to demonstrate how much God loves us.

In **Eph. 3:17-19**, Paul prayed for fellow believers...**And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.** Paul's prayer is intriguing because he asked the Lord to give us power to grasp something we can never know completely and to measure something too vast to measure. Measuring Christ's love is like measuring the universe itself...we can't find its outer edges. Despite all of our grasping and measuring, God's love in Christ will always be greater than our measuring tape.

But **I Jn. 4:9, 10** offers some help. The first thing that helps us measure the love of God is the fact that **He sent his one and only Son into the world**. Notice, Jesus is God's **one and only Son**. The parents among us know what it is to love a child. We'd risk anything for them. But for a moment, think about the parent with only one child. Aside from being spoiled beyond repair...that single child is the center of their universe and the object of their affection. Am I right about that Reeva? Now multiply the love of that parent by infinity and you have the love God the Father has for His **one and only Son**. As God's **one and only**, there were no others to replace Jesus or to fill the void when He was gone. With all reverence let me put it this way...to God the Father and the heavenly host of angelic beings, the Son of God was the darling of heaven! For eternal Spirit to take on human flesh was pure condescension and an enormous step downward. Yet God sent His Son into this dirty world filled with hatred / heartache / and injustice. God sending His Son to earth was like parents who send their only sons into ISIS controlled territory. It was like the prince who takes up residence in a ghetto.

In the original language, the word **monogenes** was used in the Septuagint of Abraham's *only son* Isaac. In the NT it was used of the *only son* of the widow from Nain. **Monogenes** means **unique one** or **incomparable one**. It reminds us that Jesus is God's Son in a way that is absolute and entirely exclusive. By sending His **only Son** into the world, God was initiating contact / revealing who He is / and making an enormous sacrifice to save us. Mark it down, God's love isn't passive...it doesn't sit idly by. His love is perpetually active and was made concrete when He sent His Son to earth. The measure of love is how much it gives. And God gave us His best...His one and only Son. Jesus is the gift of God. It's no wonder Paul wrote, **Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! – II Cor. 9:15**

Yet this concrete display of love doesn't register or mean much to those who don't realize how sinful and lost we were without Jesus. **v. 9** continues...Because God loves us, **He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.** Here John reminds us of something given special emphasis in the NT. Apart from God's intervention we were spiritually **dead** because of sin. We were unresponsive to God who is the source of life. Because we were dead, we couldn't hear Him / see Him / or come to Him...so He came to us. Medical science can do a lot for people who are sick and even near death. But once a person dies, nothing more can be done. That was our condition apart from Christ. It isn't that we had one foot on a banana peel and the other in the grave. Like Lazarus, we were in the grave already. It took a miracle of power and grace to raise us to life.

Eph. 2:1 says we were dead in our transgressions and sins... Then **vs. 4, 5** say, **But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.** There it is again...**Because of His great love for us...God made us alive.** Apart from Christ's salvation, physical death is followed by the sinner's first day in eternal punishment. But because God loved us, He sent His Son on a life-saving mission. Jesus came to remove the stain of sin that separated us from Him and give us new life. We can hear this Good News a hundred, but it won't mean anything until we accept God's diagnosis and face our sinfulness. I mean, a person can live next door to a cardiologist who does amazing things surgically. They can celebrate his birthday in a neighborhood party. But until they have a heart attack and need his services, they will never appreciate what the doctor does. In the same way, no one appreciates Christ or the love of God until they feel chest pains and come face to face with their sinful condition and need of Him.

So, we begin to grasp Christmas love when we realize that God sent His only Son into a broken world that hated Him. But our measuring tape stretches further when we consider how hopeless we were and how much we needed His gracious gift of love. But there's more.

3. Love qualified - v.10 - This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Some who at least acknowledge the God of the Bible...feel certain He doesn't love them because they've done so many sinful things to offend Him. They're secretly humbled and ashamed. They may not realize it, but their brokenness puts them on the path that leads to salvation and God. **(Matt. 5:3)** Others have convinced themselves God ought to love them because they're so loveable. They feel God would be unfair if He didn't love them because of all they do for Him. They view God's love as an entitlement. I've tried to share the Gospel with people who have such a high opinion of themselves. It's like trying to straighten a wall using a level, but the wall is so far off...the bubble is completely out of sight! People who think this way are miles from the salvation path.

The fact is, God's love is free, uncaused and spontaneous for people in both categories. In **v.10** John wrote, **This is love: not that we loved God...** Let's be clear, John says, we're not talking about our love for God. The fact is, none of us love God as we should. Our love is measurable and predictable, His love isn't! On our best days our love is imperfect / inconsistent / and tainted by selfishness. Pop theology says good people seek God and God responds to their request. They say this is how salvation happens. But that's not what the Bible says! According to the Bible, by nature and because of sin and the fall, we are enemies of God and at war with Him. **Rom. 8:7** says, **the sinful mind is hostile to God.** This is affirmed again in **Rom. 3:10-12** which says, **"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."** **Rom. 5:7, 8** sums up our hostility versus God's love. **Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. "But God demonstrated His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**

So **I Jn. 4:10** insists that God loves every one of us regardless of our lack of love for Him. He loves those whose lives are messed up by sinful choices and as a result, feel certain God could never love them. But He also loves those who think God ought to love them because they're so darn loveable. The truth is...whether we're inflated or deflated / puffed up or empty / humble or proud, God loves us. That's what **v.10** means when it says, **This is love: not that we loved God...**

But there's still more here because John goes on to say that God sent His only Son to earth for a purpose. Jesus came to restore us to life by atoning for our sins. **v.10** explains, **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** Here we're told that God sent the One who was dearest to Him to be sacrificed on a Roman cross. John says listen to me...do you want to see a concrete demonstration of what love is? Look beyond the Bethlehem manger to Calvary's cross. The baby born in obscurity is the Son of God. But the perfect Son of God was sent to die in agony in your place...so you could live. This is love expressed.

So **v.10** transitions from love shown by the Incarnation to love demonstrated on the cross. The phrase **atoning sacrifice** or **propitiation** (KJV) is rooted in the sacrificial system of the OT. **Atoning sacrifice** means *acceptable offering* or *satisfaction*. Through the death of Jesus, the righteous demands of God were met with respect to His judgment against sinners. Did you ever hear sweeter words than "paid in full?" By Christ's **atoning sacrifice**, every sin debt, past, present, and future, was cancelled. Every sinful entry on our permanent record was erased. And the moment we believe this and accept God's gift of love, we are justified. When God saw the sacrifice of His Son, He was satisfied. **Heb. 10:12, 14 - But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God...because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.** So mark it down, God loved us so much, He was willing to suffer pain and enormous loss in order to pay the sin debt we owed. This is love! It was forever made concrete by the righteous Son of God dying for a race of unrighteous people. This amazing love God is the only explanation the Bible offers for the birth and death of Jesus Christ.

Let's return for a moment to the introduction of this message. In light of Christmas love, why do you suppose this Christmas and Easter are under such attack? Why do the dark forces of this world want to change the name / alter the meaning / and if they could...rid the world of this holiday altogether? I'll tell you why...these holy days declare God's love with a megaphone. **John 3:16** says, **"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 hinges on this incredible display of divine love and every attack against it is Satanic. They are attacks aimed at who God is and the saving gift of love He offers the world. Satan's strategy is to cast doubt and repeat the lie he told Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. His ambition is to convince the world that God doesn't really love anybody.

Christmas is the story of God becoming a human being in the Person of Jesus Christ. Why did God do such a thing? Because He loves us! Why was Christmas necessary?...Because we were dead and in desperate need of a Savior! Why does God love us as He does?...because He is love. Why do we celebrate Christmas each year?...We celebrate out of gratitude for what God has done for us. Why is this annual celebration so enormous?...Because God's love is so vast it eludes our grasp and defies all measurement. We remember His magnanimous gift of love by giving each other gifts by worshipping Him / and by being especially conscious of the poor and less fortunate around us. Come back tonight at 6 PM and we'll discuss the ways we ought to respond to God's love.

So write it down, the true meaning of Christmas is love. God loved us and provided a way—the only Way—for us to be saved and spend eternity with Him. He gave His only Son to take the punishment for our sins. Like other gifts you receive this Christmas, God paid the price our sin demanded in full. We are free from condemnation when we accept His free gift of love. Let the redeemed say so!