

"Christmas Love"
Selected Scriptures
Series: Advent 2008, #4
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Theme: **God's Christmas Love Makes An Everlasting Difference.**

Introduction

A well-known theologian and writer was asked, "Of all the theological insights you have had, which do you consider to be the greatest?" The theologian thought for a moment and then said, "The greatest theological insight I ever had is this: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"

"*Christmas Love*," God's love for us, is the theme of this last Sunday of Advent. In the last three weeks we have thought about the great Advent truths of hope, peace and joy. Now we turn to the one that is behind each of those, God's love for us. The truth we are looking at is that *God's Christmas Love Makes An Everlasting Difference*.

We will look at that by exploring two basic questions:

- What is God's Christmas love?
- Why is God's Christmas love important?

With the excellent Christmas program we just had, let me assure you that my talk this morning will be a bit shorter than normal (*please hold your applause*).

What Is God's Christmas Love?

The hymn writer *was* correct—"The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell." Let's walk together through a brief summary of God's love, organized along the lines of *Four Key Descriptions* of His love from Scripture. As we do, be very clear on this: God's love is not simply intellectual, and certainly not cold and detached. God's love has deep, vibrant warmth beyond our ability to take in.

The first key description is that God's love is part of His eternal, unchanging nature. Just as the Bible tells us God is holy, is spirit, is light, so it tells us that "love is from God" and "God is love" (1 John 4:7, 8). The point is that love is part of who God is, part of His character, His nature.

And God never changes. He tells us through the prophet Malachi, "I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Israel, are not consumed" (3:6). It was because of God's steadfast, never changing character that He did not obliterate Israel because of their sin.

Not only is God's character set without any changes, He never drifts off course to the slightest degree. James 1:17 tells us that with God "there is no variation or shifting shadow." There always has been love between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus said in His prayer to the Father in John 17, “You loved Me before the foundation of the world”—before He created time and space (17:24).

We might say, “Yes, I can see that about God, but “What about this sinful world?” “What about sinful me? I’ve really blown it!” While our sin moves God’s holiness and righteousness to anger, discipline and judgment, that never eclipses, never extinguishes His love. God told the rebellious people of Judah who were headed for judgment that He would one day rebuild them as a nation for, He said through Jeremiah, “I have loved you with an *everlasting love.*” (31:3)

Christmas Love, God’s love is part of His eternal, unchanging character.

Secondly, it is His committed, sacrificial care for our good. The most familiar verse in the Bible tells us “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” God *gave*. God gave *His only begotten Son*—God the Son—not only to be born into our world on that first Christmas, but to take our sin on Himself, to die to pay for our sin.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:32 that God “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all.” Again, in chapter 5, verse 6, “while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” Then in verse 8, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

I have read the Biblical statements time after time, read analogies and illustrations and tried to picture what it meant for Christ to humble Himself, to become one of us, to lay down His life for my sin, your sin. Yet I have not come close to fully understanding God’s committed, sacrificial love for us.

Next, the Bible tells us God’s love is exercised according to His purposes. This is another aspect of God’s love that can be difficult to put into perspective. One thing this means is that we cannot manipulate His love to meet our agenda.

God is sovereign and works all things according to His own *purposes*. Ephesians 1:11 tells us “we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined *according to His purpose* who *works all things after the counsel of His will.*” Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 1 that God “has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own *purpose* and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” (verse 9)

God has His purposes for our world, for us. Those purposes are grounded in eternity. Ultimately, all things are for His glory—to demonstrate and magnify His perfect character and ways, including His perfect love.

God always exercises His love according to His *purposes*. I am glad He does! The best of our perspective, our most thoughtful and caring purposes will always be limited, incomplete, imperfect.

Finally, today's fourth *key description* of God's love is that God's love is given by His choice alone. This is similar to, but distinct from the last description. God's purposes are the big picture. His choices are the details. Consider one specific: there is nothing you or I can do to make God love us, or not love us. "Really?" Yes, really. As God gave the people of Israel instructions for living in the land He was giving them, He reminded them,

"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD *loved you* and *kept the oath* which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)

God told them, "I did not choose you because of who you were or what you had achieved, but, because I *loved you* and I *am faithful* to my word." As Moses recalls in his prayer in Exodus 33, "And [God] said, '...I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.'" (verse 19)

Think about two implications here. One thing all man-made religions have in common is that they try to earn the favor of their god or gods. God says, "You can't do that with Me, the one and only true God! It's impossible! I will be gracious to the ones to whom I choose to be gracious." Yet people keep on trying, trying, trying.

Secondly, I am sure you have known people who have thought that God could never love them because of what they have done, or not done; or who they are, or are not. God says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." Aren't you glad for that! I am! God does what He pleases and no one can prevent, question or change His choices.

As you try to understand Christmas love, God's love, remember these *Four Key Descriptions*:

- It is part of His eternal, unchanging nature.
- It is His committed, sacrificial care for our good.
- It is exercised according to His purposes.
- It is given by His choice alone.

I stated that the main truth for today is that *God's Christmas Love Makes An Everlasting Difference*. That brings us to our second question.

Why Is God's Christmas Love Important?

How *does* it make an everlasting difference? Let's consider this from a pair of contrasts. First, what does it mean to us, what are we *without* His Christmas love? For one thing, *without* God's love we are *without a Savior*.

We know we need a Savior because:

- all of us are sinners by nature and action (Rom. 3:23);
- and because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). That is, dead in being separated from God who is holy and loving; dead having no spiritual life now. And, being separated forever from God, and so, forever receiving, experiencing the just punishment for our sin.
- We know we cannot remedy this ourselves. The smallest stumble makes us guilty of all of God’s holy and righteous standards (James 2:10). So even our best and most sincere efforts cannot make us right, cannot justify us before God. (Romans 3:20)

It was in *love* God the Father sent God the Son to be our Savior. “God so *loved* the world that He *gave* His only begotten Son...” (John 3:16). “... God demonstrates His own *love* toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ *died* for us.” (Romans 5:8)

Without God’s Christmas love there is no Savior. And without God’s Savior, we would be hopelessly and forever spiritually dead, separated from God. And while there is much, much more that can be said, to be succinct, *without* God’s Christmas love all is lost.

- There is no true hope, peace, joy or love.
- There is no true purpose for us to fulfill.
- As Paul wrote, we have no hope and are without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:12)

Now, let’s move to the other side of this contrast. What does it mean to us, what are we *with* God’s Christmas love? For one thing, *with* God’s love we *have a Savior!*

- Luke records the angel telling the shepherds, “there *has been born* for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (2:11)
- The apostle John declared, “the Word *became* flesh and *dwelt* among us, and we *saw* His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (1:14)
- Paul wrote, “When the fullness of the time *came*, God *sent forth* His Son, *born* of a woman, *born* under the Law so that He might redeem those who are under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)
- Again, “God demonstrates His own *love* for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ *died* for us.” (Romans 5:8)
- Once more, “when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He *saved* us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His *mercy*, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope

of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4-7)

This was no emergency bandaid solution! This is God’s eternal plan, purpose and blessing. Ephesians 1 tells us,

“[God] chose us in [Christ] *before the foundation of the world*, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He *predestined* us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” (verses 4-6)

And in time, when we came to God through Christ, God has *poured out His love* within our hearts through the Holy Spirit He gave to be within us. (Romans 5:5)

And so as a result, because of this,

“If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the *love* of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who *loved* us. For I am convinced,” Paul concludes, “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the *love* of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(Romans 8:31-39)

And while there is much, much more that can be said, to be succinct, *with* God’s Christmas love all is gained, all is ours!

- There *is* true hope, peace, joy and love!
- There *is* true purpose for us to fulfill!
- We *are*, as Paul wrote, “blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ!” (Ephesians 1:3)
- We *have been* raised up from being spiritually dead and are seated with Christ in the heavenly places! (Eph. 2:6)
- We are *eagerly waiting* for Christ our Savior to return from heaven, where our true

and everlasting citizenship is! (Philippians 3:20)

- We *now* long to, and *then will* always, forever be with Him! (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Yes, make no mistake about it, *God's Christmas Love Makes An Everlasting Difference!*

Conclusion.

Many of us know and are experiencing this, the greatest and most beautiful gift ever given. Thank and praise God for His love now.

Some of us may know about it, but have not yet received and opened God's gift of *Christmas Love* in Jesus. You are not experiencing the everlasting difference He wants to bring to you.

Bertha Adams was seventy-one when she died. Sadly, because of malnutrition, living with donated clothing and things, she weighed only fifty-one pounds when she died. After she died authorities found a key to a safe deposit box among her possessions. When they opened it, they found over \$1 million in cash and securities. She was wealthy! But, tragically, she failed to open that box and benefit from its resources.

That may be where you are spiritually. God's *Christmas Love* wrapped up in Jesus is a treasure beyond measure and description. He offers that treasure, His love, Himself to you today. Jesus offers to

- forgive all your sins;
- give you life forever with Himself;
- give you true hope, peace, joy, love and so much more.
- *Open the box*, reach out to Jesus now and place your faith in Him.
- If you have questions or want to talk about this, talk with me, Pastor Tyler, or someone else today.

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