

**First Baptist Church Merritt Island**  
**Senior Pastor Titus Green**  
**December 17, 2023**  
**Christmas Reveals God's Love**  
**1 John 4:7-11**

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As I'm out and about during this time of year, there's a question that seems to naturally come up in conversation. I overhear it in almost every setting I'm in...at work, at church, at the store, in restaurants...

This question is, "Are you ready for Christmas?" The cashier asks it at the grocery store. The waiter asks it at the restaurant. I ask it of people all the time. And I find it interesting how the vast majority of people respond to that question. Almost everyone I hear talking about being ready for Christmas is referencing whether or not they have finished shopping for Christmas presents. Being ready for Christmas has come to mean you have purchased all the gifts you plan on giving. In the minds of most people, gift-giving is at the heart of Christmas. It permeates the entire run-up to Christmas day as we count down the number of shopping days before Christmas. It permeates the days after Christmas as kids go back to school and ask the question, "What'd you get for Christmas?"

And the text that we will be studying this morning reminds us that, as misguided as that mindset has become, gift-giving is at the heart of Christmas. Christmas is about the greatest gift of love that has ever been given.

And that brings us to our text for this morning...

**1 John 4:9-10**

***In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.***

Twice in these two verses, John mentions the fact that God sent His Son into this world. And when did that happen? It happened at Christmas. Jesus arrived on earth because He had been sent by the Father. The word Advent means arrival. It's the celebration of the arrival of Jesus. So, this text is a great Advent text because it's specifically about why Jesus arrived at Christmas.

Verses 9 and 10 say that God sent Jesus as a demonstration of His love. He loved this world so much that He gave us His Son. And, through the gift of Jesus, verse 9 says we receive the gift of life. Verse 10 says we receive the gift of the propitiation for our sins.

When you put all of that together, you get our big idea for today...

***Big Idea: In love for us at Christmas, God gave His Only Son to give us life through His sacrificial death.***

Now, let's spend some time considering that big idea, one truth at a time.

In love for us at Christmas...Christmas is the display of God's love. Verse 9 begins with the words "***In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world...***"

The word “manifest” means to make something visible, to reveal something so it can be known. It’s kind of like what happens when someone tells you that they are able to do something and you finally say, “Don’t tell me, show me. Do it.” And if they are able to do what they say, their ability is made manifest. It’s visible and revealed.

That’s sort of what this passage is saying about God. God didn’t just tell us He loves us. He showed us. For God so loved this world...He so loved you and me...that He gave His only Son. Christmas reveals the fact of God’s love.

But there’s more here than God simply revealing the fact that He loves us. He is revealing the depth of His love for us. Verses 9 and 10 say God sent His Son but verse 9 specifically adds that God gave His only Son. The depth of God’s love is revealed in the preciousness of His gift.

Imagine this. A young man goes to propose to the woman he says he loves. He gets down on one knee, confesses his undying love for her, and asks her to spend the rest of her life with him. Then, he produces a ring and begins to place it on her finger. That’s when she notices the ring is made from a paper clip formed into a circle. And where there would normally be a diamond there’s a silver gum wrapper folded to look like a diamond. Instead of a diamond set in a ring of gold, she’s presented a gum wrapper set on a paper clip.

My question is, how loved do you think that young lady would feel? Well, Let’s ask her. Me, how’d you feel when I proposed to you that way? She felt deeply loved. Let me give you the quick backstory. My Mamaw loved Emily and wanted me to marry her. She thought I was delaying a proposal because I was a poor college student. So, one day while I was sitting next to Mamaw in church, I noticed she was messing around with something. The next thing I knew, she handed me a little ring she had made from a paper clip and a silver gum wrapper. She whispered, “You could just give her this...she loves you and this would be enough.”

Mamaw passed away before I worked up the nerve to ask Emily to marry me. But Emily knew that story and I knew it would be precious to her if I could incorporate Mamaw into the proposal. So, I made a replica ring and that’s what led to my deeply romantic and economical proposal. At least one carat of silver gum wrapper... That ring is precious. It’s one of one. Emily keeps it in a special jewelry box in her closet. She would never just give that ring away. It’s too precious for that. But I can imagine the day when Emily will love one of our grandsons and have a little talk with him about asking a girl to marry him. I can imagine her telling our love story and giving him that ring the way Mamaw gave one to me. And the depth of her love would be revealed in the preciousness of the gift.

And, in an infinitely greater way, Christmas is that. It’s the manifestation of the love of God. Not only the fact He loves you but the depth of His love for you. He gave His precious Son. His perfect Son. His only Son. God had no greater or more precious gift to give. Jesus is One of One. And God sent His Only Son into this world for you.

But John is saying that the depth of God’s love isn’t just manifest in the fact that God sent His Son. It’s not just manifest in the preciousness of the gift...it’s manifest in the purpose of the gift...God reveals His love for us through what He sent His Son to do.

1. God gave His Only Son to give us life...

***9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.***

God gave us Jesus so that Jesus could give us life. And some people might scratch their heads at that. Aren't we already alive? Don't we already have life? The answer is, "no." We don't have life. Not the way God intended.

You see, the story of the Bible begins with God creating man to live in perfect fellowship with Him in this world. But man chose to rebel against God. That act of sin separated mankind from the life God created us to live. Death entered the world in two forms: physical death and spiritual death.

Physical death means that our lives on this earth will one day come to an end. Even more, Spiritual death means we will live in brokenness and darkness.

That's the state of this world apart from Jesus. A world that is dying. A world gripped by brokenness and darkness. A world without true joy or peace or hope. Mankind is separated from the life of God. And if we die in that state, we will spend eternity separated from God.

But Jesus came to give us life, to restore us to the life of God. And, just like sin brought death in two forms, there are two aspects to the life that Jesus came to bring...

The life that Jesus gives is eternal life. *John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

Jesus gives us life that lasts forever. Anyone who will place their faith and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior will be from an eternity experiencing eternal death and separation from God in hell.

Christmas brought the gift of eternal life, but gift of Christ's life isn't just a life that never ends. I can't imagine living forever if I had to continue on the trajectory I'm on...my body falling apart and the world growing worse. Continuing in this trajectory forever is the last thing I want to do. The life that Jesus gives isn't just a life that lasts forever.

The life that Jesus gives is abundant life. *John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

Abundant means to be more than ordinary...to abound...the picture is one of a bowl that is so full, it's overflowing. That's abundant life. A life that is overflowing with the life of Christ in you.

What did God desire to give you at Christmas? An eternal and abundant life in Christ.

Just think about how that reveals the heart of the Father for you. He wants to give you a kind of life that only Jesus can live. He wants to give you back even more than what the enemy has stolen from you. He wants you to have a life that is overflowing with love, and overflowing with joy, and overflowing with peace. That's why He gave us Jesus.

And that brings us to the last part of our big idea...

2. God gave His Only Son to give us life through His sacrificial death.

***10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.***

Two weeks ago, we talked about propitiation. It refers to an appeasing sacrifice, or a pleasing gift. It's not a word we use often, but the first-century audience reading this message from John would have been very familiar with the concept.

In the ancient world, pagan cultures believed there were lots of different gods and they believed it was really hard to predict what mood those gods were in. That meant, they never knew whether or not the gods were going to bless them or curse them. So, most pagan cultures came up with a way to give a gift to the gods as a way to please them and get blessing from them. That gift to the gods was known as a propitiation. A gift that pleased the gods and guaranteed blessing from them.

And the Bible takes that concept and uses it to describe Jesus. He was a gift of propitiation.

You see, because of our sin, not only are we separated from the life of God we are completely unable to make ourselves pleasing to God. The bible says that even our good works are tainted by our sin. And we can't have the life we talked about earlier until our sin is dealt with in a way that no longer separates us from God.

So, in His great love for us, God offered His own gift on our behalf. God offered the most pleasing and satisfying gift in all of existence. God the Father gave Jesus Christ His Son. When Jesus died on the cross, He was a sacrifice for our sin. He satisfied the justice of God that requires a payment for sin. And He made the Father completely satisfied on our behalf.

That's how we can have the eternal, abundant life of Christ instead of suffering the consequences of our sin. Jesus came to be our propitiation. He came to die so that we might live. He came to please God the Father on our behalf so that nothing would hinder Him from pouring out the riches of His blessings upon us.

And that's the great gift of Christmas.

At just the right time, that very first Christmas, God sent His Son, His only Son, His precious Son into this world to die for sinners like us so that we could have eternal, abundant life in Him. What more could He have done to show He loves us?

Several years ago, I came across a story that I shared with you once before and I was reminded of it again as I prepared for this morning.

A man named Brennan Manning was born Richard Francis Xavier Manning. In his early years, he went by Richie. He grew up in New York during the Depression, and his best friend was named Raymond. Richie and Ray were inseparable. They went to school together. Double-dated together. They even enlisted in the Army together where they fought in the Korean War together. One night, in a foxhole, Richie and Ray were sitting together talking about the good old days in Brooklyn. Suddenly, a live grenade came flying into the foxhole with the two best friends. To hear Manning tell the story, his best friend looked at him, smiled, and threw himself on the grenade, dying to save His friend.

Years later, Richie Manning became a priest and was encouraged to change his name in honor of a saint and Richie Manning immediately thought of his best friend, Ray, Ray Brennan. That's how he came to be known as Brennan Manning.

As a priest, Brennan still struggled. He was an alcoholic who had to be removed from the priesthood.

And within his struggle, he found himself back in his old neighborhood. He went to the house of Ray's family. After sitting and talking about old memories, Brennan Manning began to open up about his struggles. He had made such a mess of his life that he couldn't believe anyone could love him. He doubted the love of God. He even doubted the love of His best friend, Ray. He asked Ray's mother if she thought Ray really loved him. At first, she thought he must be joking to ask him such a foolish question. But he insisted that he was serious. Ray's mother was enraged, and her answer came with a furious tone...

"What more could he have done for you?" she shouted. "What more could he have done for you?" In that moment, Brennan Manning said he had an epiphany. It was as though he was standing before the cross of Jesus. And for some reason, he was wondering "Does God really love me?" He imagined Mary there at the foot of the cross, the Son of God laying down His life and she asked, "What more could He have done for you?"

Friends, if you ever wonder about God's love, if you feel the weight of your sin and brokenness, if you hear the voice of condemnation over your sin, if everyone in your life has turned their back on you and you wonder if God has joined their ranks, if you ever ask, "Does God really love me enough to give me eternal and abundant life?" Look at Christmas through the lens of the cross. What more could He have done for you?

His love was made visible when He gave the greatest gift that has ever been or could ever be given: He sent His only Son to die in our place so that we could have life in Him. This Advent season, look at Christmas through the lens of the cross and do you know what you will see? You will see the love of God.

1. Receive God's gift of love and life in Jesus.

Come to Jesus in faith for eternal life?

Come to Jesus in faith for abundant life?

Love

Joy

Peace

Patience

Kindness

2. Rejoice in God's gift of love and life in Jesus.

Are you Celebrating the true gift of Christmas? How much of your celebration of Christmas includes stopping and being still before the God who loves you, contemplating His great love, asking Him to help you believe and clearly understand His love? How much of Christmas is about mindful worship instead of mindless tradition?