

**Christmas According to John**  
**Why God Became Man: God's Great Love, part 4**  
**John 3:16-121**  
December 24, 2017

We finish our Christmas today, "Christmas According to John," "Why God became Man." Last week Matt's point was that the new birth is the work of God. Today we consider Why God Became Man: Because of God's Great Love, looking at John 3:16-21, some of the most famous and maybe favorite verses in the bible. But because it is so well known we may be tempted to gloss over the passage. Yet these verses summarize the Christmas story. Christmas is the display of God's great love to toward his enemies to save them from being bad or sinful.

**God's Great Love**

The first truth we see in this passage is God's great love, "God so loved the world." This is God the Creator and Sustainer of everything. He is loving, holy, just, merciful, and gracious. He is also moral and he relates to us on the basis of morality, what is right and wrong. And he created us in his image, so we are morally responsible creatures and God holds us accountable for our actions, desires, and our thoughts.

That God loves us is not a novel idea for westerners. Most of us believe that God loves everybody, especially them. What's not to love! God's love for the world is this, "his yearning, warning, and invitation to all sinful humanity as He invites and commands them to repent and believe."<sup>1</sup> What makes God's love so great is that this love is directed toward his enemies, traitors. The love of God is not so simple. We often say that God loves the sinner but hates the sin but that contradicts Scripture. Fourteen times in the Psalms alone God is said to hate sinners.<sup>2</sup> God can love and hate people at the same time for different reasons. God is love (1 Jo 4:8) and loves humanity in one way while at the same time hates what is contrary to his nature (Ho 9:15). Christmas displays God's great love in that God loves his enemies.

**God's Great Sacrifice**

God's love is demonstrated in giving or sending his Son, an infinitely great sacrifice. The sacrifice was infinitely great because the Son is infinitely valuable. The Father and the Son were infinitely and eternally happy, loving and enjoying each other. They were content with each other. So, it was out of the fullness of their love and joy that overflowed in a choice to include their enemy in their love and joy. Christmas displays God's great love in the great sacrifice of his Son.

**God's Great Promise**

"God so loves the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." This creates a tension with what Matt said about the new birth last week. His main point is that God makes dead people alive. "The Spirit blows where it wishes, you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit (3:8)." The new birth is the work of God. Yet the offer of the gospel is open to all, whoever believes. So, we have these two truths in tension yet they are compatible. Salvation is the work of God and the offer of salvation is open to all.

But the promise of eternal life is not universal or automatic; it is only promised to those who believe. John tells us what he means by belief at the end of the gospel, "believes that he is the Christ, the Son of God (20:30)." Believing that Jesus is more than a wise man, a sage, a miracle worker, but the Christ, the Saviour of the world. Two weeks ago, I made the distinction between sign faith and saving faith. Sign faith sees Jesus as a miracle worker. Saving faith recognizes your personal need for Jesus as Savior, saving you from your sin. And believing is not a one time act, but a pattern of life. Daily, you are looking for Jesus to save you from you sin.

Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. The text contrasts perishing with eternal life, should not perish but have eternal life. Perishing is the opposite of eternal life. John tells

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<sup>1</sup> DA Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, Crossway, 2000, p.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Psalm 5:4-5; 11:5; Prov 6:16-19.

us that eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ (17:30). That means we are his children, recipients of his grace and love, eternally safe and secure in Him. Perishing is the condition of humanity outside of faith in Christ and forever experiencing his wrath for rejecting His Son. Eternal life is only for those who believe. One must believe, trust Christ, look to Christ, for the forgiveness of sin. This is his conclusion, whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (17). Christmas displays the great promise of eternal life for those who believe.

Questions for Life Groups:

1. Do you have a favorite verse or passage of Scripture?
2. What is the significance of the Christmas story?
3. How did David define God's love in 3:16?
4. What did David say about God loving and hating sinners at the same time?
5. How can God love and hate sinners at the same time?
6. Does God love all people equally?
7. Why was the sacrifice of the Son so great?
8. What is the great promise in these verses?
9. What is perishing and how is it contrasted to eternal life?
10. Why is it contrasted to eternal life?
11. What does it mean to believe?

