



The Gift

John 3:16-21

I. INTRO

- A. One of the greatest joys in life would have to be seeing children light up in anticipation of receiving a carefully wrapped gift.
1. And the closer our relationship is to the child, the more that joy is multiplied back to us.
 2. This simple act of gift-giving is a reflection of the Advent Season where we consider and anticipate the Gift that IS Jesus Christ. Sometimes we fail to see that Jesus Christ, Himself, is The Gift.
 3. I hope that you don't find it derogatory when I say that God came to us wrapped in an earth-suit (flesh and bones).
 4. Jesus, the Creator of the universe, left the perfection, majesty, and undefiled harmony of heaven to come to earth (to us) as a vulnerable child.
- B. Today, I would like for us to reflect for a few minutes on this Gift that IS Jesus.
1. We will look at THE most famous verse of the Bible – John 3:16.
 - a. We've seen it almost everywhere -- in the end-zone of a football game, or through the glass backboard of a basketball game.
 - b. We've seen the verse on billboards, or on tracks people have handed us on a street or in a mall.
 2. We most often see this verse removed from its context, so I'd like to read John 3:16-21.
 3. The gospels of Matthew and Luke tells us the details of the first Christmas – Who? What? When? Where? And How? The gospel of John tells us the WHY? Or, the implications of the first Christmas.
- C. I will read the verses, say a short prayer asking for God's help to see the implications for our lives, and then I'd like to make two points for our reflection:
"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send

*the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸ He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought [or, shaped of fashioned] in [or, by] God.” -- John 3:16-21 [a lot of male pronouns here. The Greek word is *anthropos*, which refers to both males and females.]*

II. BODY

- A. We can see by the context that this Gift From God comes to us with both Great Comfort as well as a Significant Challenge.
- B. So, first we'll look at the Comfort of Christmas and then we'll look at the Challenge of Christmas from these verses.
 1. **The Comfort of Christmas is infinitely beneficial to us, intensely costly for God, and absolutely free for us.**
 2. **The Challenge of Christmas calls for us to see our need, to see that there is a clear dividing line, and to journey in God's grace.**
- C. Let's look at them one at a time...
 1. **The Comfort of Christmas is infinitely beneficial to us, intensely costly for God, and absolutely free for us.**
 - a. The Benefit – “*For God so loved the world...*” (v. 16)
 - 1) When we encounter the word *world* in v. 16 it is not so much that the world is BIG, but that the world is BROKEN. Our world is full of brokenness, and rebellion, and (downright) wickedness.
 - 2) What is most shocking about Christmas is that God would be willing to love something so broken. He could have kicked this world to the curb but instead God sent His Son in reconciling love to offer us salvation.
 - 3) v. 17 – Jesus didn't come to judge us, or to condemn us, or to rub our noses into the carpet of our own failures. He did not come to lecture us about how we've blown and disappointed

Him, He didn't come to beat us up for making a mess and wreck of this planet.

- 4) He came that the world might be saved through Him (end of v. 17). And that by His birth, life, death, and resurrection He might secure forgiveness for us AND access to a holy God who demands perfection in His presence.
- 5) The holy ambition of Jesus is to bring back to the Father all those who would believe in Him.

b. The Cost

- 1) Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity. He is fully God and **co-equal, co-eternal** with the Father and IN the unity of the Holy Spirit.
- 2) We get a sense of the cost in the three words from v. 16: *only begotten Son*.
- 3) The word *begotten* does not mean, "gave birth to." God the Father and God the Son have eternally existed together.
 - a) It's difficult to think about or explain in human terms.
 - b) But let's think of it this way: The Father and the Son are two distinct persons but one in essence. It may be better to think of the Son as the Light from the Lamp, or the Heat from the Fire.
- 4) The first Christmas marks the point in time when God would send His *only begotten Son* from His side into this broken world to be broken BY this world and to be broken FOR this world.
- 5) It was costly. God could have kicked this world to the curb but instead He sends us His *only begotten Son*.

c. Absolutely Free

- 1) The essence of the gospel is that salvation is absolutely free. This is what distinguishes Christianity from every other religion or philosophy of life.
- 2) There is nothing that we can do to earn God's love or favor. John 3:16 is clear – God loved us before we loved Him. God initiated the rescue plan.

- 3) Christmas comforts us. Christmas shows us a God who has gone to great lengths to make room for us in His family.

2. **The Challenge of Christmas invites us to see our selves as we really are, to see that there is a clear dividing line, and to journey in God's grace.**

- a. V. 18 is a transition verse and then we find in verses 19-20 that Jesus is digging into our souls and explaining why some people believe and some don't.
- b. Seeing ourselves as we really are
 - 1) Vs. 19-20 are strong and straightforward words: *"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."*
--John 3:19-20
 - 2) I don't want to water these words down. I would say that these verses don't mean that we are all **as evil as we can be**.
 - a) The verses mean that our hearts are naturally bent toward fulfilling our own selfish desires -- and that there are many things that we would rather hide in the dark.
 - b) For instance what if a copy of your browser history for the last week was distributed to everyone in this room?
 - c) Or, maybe you've had a pretty good week online – what if a list of all you thoughts for the last week were distributed to everyone in this room?
 - d) We tend to think of darkness as our friend.
- c. There is a clear dividing line
 - 1) These verses reveal that there is no middle ground. We are either willing to humble ourselves and own-up to the darkness that exists inside us – and let God shine His light on us – or, we chose to prefer the darkness.
 - 2) It means we are willing to be called out on being our own boss or king. And to bow our knee and live for God.
- d. Journey in God's grace

- 1) These difficult verses conclude on a grace note: *“But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought [or, shaped or fashioned] in [or, by] God.”*
- 2) This is where the phrase “see the Light” comes from. This verse is telling us two things:
 - a) Those who “practice” the truth come to the Light. The word *practice* is a good description. There are wide verities of applications. The Greek word can mean practice, to commit to, or to go on a journey – as in choosing a path.
 - b) The end of v. 21 speaks to the grace and sovereignty of God. Everything has been: *“wrought [or, shaped or fashioned] in [or, by] God.”*

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Some of us need to Come home to God’s Christmas grace. It’s one thing to **profess** Jesus – it’s quite a different thing to truly **prefer** Jesus.
- B. I’ll wrap it up with this: Suppose someone that you knew to be a person of considerable means came to you home and gave you a wrapped gift.
 1. You were excited and grateful. You placed on the mantle. You told your kids (or your grandkids) – everyone who came to your house that this Person gave you a gift.
 2. But what if you never unwrapped the gift? The gift would technically be in your possession but it would not truly benefit you.
 3. This Christmas, unwrap The Gift if you haven’t already. See yourself as you really are, repent of your bent toward selfishness and step onto the pathway of God’s grace, truth, and beauty.