

“God’s Greatest Gift” - Part 2”

Text: John 3:16

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on December 8, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Karl Barth is considered to be one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century. He wrote a 13-volume series on theology. A student once asking him, **“What is the most profound theological idea you have ever thought or heard?”**
 - He thought for a moment and then smiled saying, **“In the words of a song my mother used to sing me, ‘Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.’”**
 - Christmas is all about the love of God. In the words of John 3:16, **“God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son.”** That is, God loved a rebellious planet so much that He gave what was most precious to Himself, His only Son Jesus, to die that undeserving people like you and I might have eternal life with Him. Love motivated God to become a man and die that we might not perish but have eternal life.
- Dwight L. Moody, who was the Billy Graham of the 19th century, tells of his life-changing encounter with the love of God. It began when Henry Moorehouse, a twenty-seven-year-old British evangelist preached at Moody’s church for a week. To everyone’s surprise, Moorehouse preached seven sermons in a row on John 3:16.
 - As Moorehouse preached on God’s love in sending Jesus to save rebellious sinners, Moody confessed, **(SHOW SLIDE) “I never knew up to that time that God loves us so much. This heart of mine began to thaw out; I could not keep back the tears. It was like news from a far country: I just drank it in. So did the crowded congregation.”**
- This morning I am praying God would thaw our frozen hearts. I am praying that whether you are hearing this for the first time or the thousandth time that your heart would melt before the love of God.
 - In John 3:16 we see at least four aspects of the love of God. The first prepares us for the melting power of the last three. God’s love then is a *love that warns*, a *love that rescues*, a *love that is eternal*, and a *love that is free*.

A LOVE THAT WARNS

- The first thing to say about God’s love is that **(SHOW SLIDE) a love that warns.**
 - There is a word in verse 16 that we would prefer was not there and if it has to be there we wish it were softened or diluted. It is the word ‘perish.’ **READ 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.**
 - According to Jesus, all people *will* perish unless they believe in him.
- What does it mean to perish? Friends, it is here that I must tell you the bad news for only when you grasp how bad the bad news is will the good news of Christmas melt your heart.
 - According to Jesus, to perish means that when you die you will be eternally rejected by God in a place Jesus called “hell.” Jesus described hell in terrifying terms – a place of darkness, of weeping, of suffering, of anger and gnashing of teeth. But worst of all to perish is to have the face of God turned against you in judgement. Hell is not a place where people party and enjoy themselves because all good things like laughter and fun

are gifts of God. In hell all these good gifts are removed. To perish then does not mean you cease to exist when you die but that you exist eternally in this place of judgement.

- It is no wonder that when Dante wrote *Inferno* he envisioned a sign chiseled above Hell's gate that reads, **"Abandon all hope, you who enter here."**
- But when we hear Jesus say that we will all perish we immediately react saying, **"What have I ever done to deserve a fate like that?"**
 - The answer is found in that word 'world'. **"For God so loved the world."** 'World' means 'humanity in rebellion against God.' You see the Bible declares that although God is our loving Creator and ruler we have all rejected his rule. Wanting to live for ourselves we declared independence and rebelled against the very one who created us.
 - Take for instance the issue of sexuality. God commands that his good gift of sex be only enjoyed in marriage. Yet, our culture scoffs at this and rejects God. As we said last week in astonishing arrogance we have shaken our puny fists in God's face and said, **"If your laws don't appeal to me then I will reject you and I will be my own God."**
- What should God do with His creatures who spurn his love, reject His rule, and rebel against Him? God is just. But for him to be just means that we must give rebels what rebels deserve. And so we are all perishing.
 - But to our utter astonishment we read that God has loved this world – he has loved people who have rejected Him. God is just but God is also loving. And the first thing that God's love does is warn us that we are in danger of perishing.

IT IS LOVING TO WARN SOMEONE OF DANGER

- But you may say, **"How can you possibly say it is loving to talk about hell?"** Friends, the most loving thing you can do for someone who is in imminent danger is to warn them. To not warn them is unloving and cruel.
 - Some years ago a dense fog covered a major highway a few miles south of London. At 6:15am, a semi-truck carrying huge rolls of paper was involved in a major accident, colliding with dozens of cars and killing ten people. A police car arrived on the scene and two policemen ran back up the highway to stop oncoming traffic. They waved their arms and shouted as loud as they could but most drivers took no notice and raced on to the inevitable disaster ahead of them. The policemen picked up traffic cones and flung them at the car's windshields in a desperate attempt to warn drivers of the danger.
 - One policeman told how tears streamed down his face as car after car went by and he waited for the sickening sound of impact as they hit the growing mass of wreckage.
- Friends, rather than leave us to perish God has loved us. The first way he loved us was to send Jesus 2000 years ago to warn us of the imminent danger we are speeding toward. John 3:16 is the traffic cone Jesus throws at the windshield of your life. Out of deep love for you He waves his arms and shouts, **"You will perish if you keep speeding on in your rebellion against God."**
 - For a person to race to their own destruction they have to cover their ears and blindfold their eyes to all the warnings God gives, not the least of which is John 3:16.

A LOVE THAT RESCUES

- But God's love does not simply warn. In the second place we see that God's love is **(SHOW SLIDE) a love that rescues.**

- **READ 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.**
- Out of love, God gave a gift to a world that rejected Him that we might not perish. What was that gift according to this verse? His one and only Son, His most precious Son, His beloved Son.
 - Remember God is a Trinity, a tri-unity. There is only one God but He exists in three distinct persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 - Two thousand years ago the eternal Son of God was given to the world. He took on human flesh and was given the name Jesus.
- But here is the critical question: why would God give us His Son? Why did God become a man? Why Christmas? The next two verses plainly state it. **READ 17-18 - ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever 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.**
 - Oh what love! He did not come to condemn us though we deserved it. No, Jesus came to save, to rescue, people who are perishing. How did he rescue us? Through his voluntary death on the cross. On the cross God unleashed all the judgement that is due to us on Jesus so that we do not have to face it. God rejected Jesus so that we do not have to be rejected. God caused Jesus to suffer and to perish so that we do not have to suffer or perish.
 - Oh what sacrificial love. The Father voluntarily sacrificed his own Son and Jesus voluntarily sacrificed himself to rescue underserving rebels like you and me.

“HOW LONG WILL IT BE UNTIL I DIE?”

- There is a story that has circulated for years about this kind of self-sacrificial love. It’s tough to track down the exact source and the details vary but here’s the gist of it. It involved an eight-year-old boy and his younger sister who was dying of a rare and serious disease. Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her older brother who had survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness.
 - The doctor explained the situation asked the boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. He hesitated but a moment later he took a deep breath and said, “Yes, I’ll do it if it will save her.”
- And so he and his sister lay side by side and the transfusion began. The colour began to return to her face but his face grew pale. After a little while he looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, “How long will it be until I will die?”
 - Being young, the boy had misunderstood the doctor; he thought he was going to have to give her *all* his blood.
 - He thought he would have to die for his sister to live but he was willing to do it.
- The message of Christmas is far greater even than this. God would have been perfectly just to allow us to perish. But out of love for us, God sent Jesus to save us but he told him that it would cost him *all* his blood. Jesus understood fully what that meant and he said, “Yes, I’ll do it if it will save them.” And so, Jesus, our true older brother, took on human flesh at Christmas 2000 years ago.
 - He then went to the cross where he, metaphorically speaking, laid down beside us. His blood was drained from his body until he cried out, “It is finished” and he gave up his spirit.

- Jesus took our sins upon himself so that we could be cleansed of our sins through his blood.
- Oh what sacrificial love that God would give His Son to perish that undeserving sinners like you. What self-sacrificial love that the Son would give up his life that undeserving rebels like you and I could be rescued.

A LOVE THAT IS ETERNAL

- But God's love is even greater than this. In the third place let your heart melt before this fact: God's love is **(SHOW SLIDE) A love that is eternal.**
 - **READ 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.**
- So, God's love does not just warn and rescue rebels from perishing. Positively speaking, God warned and rescued in order to grant undeserving rebels eternal life with Him. He rescues us *from* eternal perishing *for* eternal life.
 - But many people today imagine heaven to be a rather boring place. In one of his *Far Side* cartoons, Gary Larson depicts a winged man seated in heaven on a cloud. There is no one near and nothing to do. The caption describes his despair as the man says, **"Wish I'd brought a magazine."**
- If heaven is sitting on a cloud with nothing to do then I agree it will be boring but Jesus describes it as life. To be with God eternally will mean we that we experience all the fullness of what it means to be human. And isn't life what we all want and what we are all searching for.
 - Every self-help book, every seminar on improving your life, the millions we spend on vacations and entertainment are aimed at this one thing - to find that deep happiness and joy that is the fullness of life.
 - But after trying so many things most end up singing with U2, **"I still haven't found what I am looking for."** And even when we do get tastes of this fullness of life, when our joy is as full as it can get, we still agree with the poet Wallace Stevens who says, **"even in contentment I feel the need of some imperishable bliss."** We all want a fullness of life that will never fade.
- And out of love this is what God gives to rebels who turn to Him - an eternity of imperishable bliss. In fact, Jesus said **"I have come (that is come to the world at Christmas) that you might have life and have it to the full."**
 - For all who receive Jesus that life begins now and when we die carries on into an eternity of imperishable bliss.
 - God's love is a love that warns, a love that rescues, and a love that is eternal.

A LOVE THAT IS FREE

- But God's love goes deeper still. In the last place we need to say that God's love is **(SHOW SLIDE) a love that is free.**
 - To be accurate it is free for us but it certainly was not free for God. What cost God everything He freely offers to us. Notice two things about this love that is free.
- **(SHOW SLIDE) First, God's love is free for all people, not just a few people. READ 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.** Oh what love there is found in that one word **"whoever."** This offer is open to all.

- You cannot say, **“I am so bad that God cannot accept me.”** ‘Whoever!’ You cannot say, **“I am too young or old.”** ‘Whoever!’ You cannot say, **“Jesus is just for white western people.”** Jesus was eastern and the word ‘whoever’ includes all ethnicities, and socio-economic classes, and every other label people may put on themselves.
 - God’s love is given freely to all people.
- But secondly and most astonishingly **(SHOW SLIDE) God’s love is free in the sense that you do not have to earn it.**
 - Notice what John 3:16 does not put a price on this invaluable gift of eternal life. It does not for instance say, **“that whoever can live like Jesus did will not perish.”** So many people misunderstand Christianity. They see Jesus as a great example and think that becoming a Christian means getting a second change to start being a good person like Jesus. If the message of Christianity is, “be like Jesus and God will accept you” then that is the worst news anyone could ever hear. Why? Because no one can live like Jesus.
 - The price of eternal life is not living like Jesus. What is the price? There is no price. It is a free gift.
 - All other paths say, **“You have a problem and here is what you have to do to fix it.”** Then they give ideas on how you can pull up yourself up by your bootstraps. True Christianity says, **“You cannot do anything to stop yourself from perishing. But what you cannot do for yourself, God has done for you. He has done it all in giving Jesus to you and all you have to do is receive the Rescuer and you will not perish. It is free.”**

WHAT IT MEANS TO BELIEVE

- But notice carefully that like any gift must be received to be enjoyed, so Jesus must be received in order to rescue you. According to John 3:16 we receive God’s gift of Jesus by believing in Him. **“Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”**
 - What does that mean to believe in Jesus? What does it mean to have faith in Jesus? This is the critical point this morning because notice that Jesus divides the world into two camps, those who do not believe in Him and consequently perish and those who believe and consequently are rescued and given eternal life.
- So what does it mean to believe? We will develop this in detail next week but notice two things here.
 - Negatively it means that you do not try to save yourself. Many people today try to save themselves by saying, **“Well, I am pretty good person. I will just try to act better and God will accept me.”** Jesus says, **“No, you cannot rescue yourself. Your situation is hopeless.**
 - So negatively speaking you have to admit that you are guilty, are perishing and cannot earn God’s favour by trying to do better.
 - Speaking positively though, to believe in Jesus means that you trust that He is God’s provision to bring you life. You come before Him and say, **“God I admit I am a guilty rebel and cannot save myself from judgement. But God I believe that out of love you provided Jesus to die for me. Jesus I believe you can save me and I look to you as my only hope.”**
 - And listen to the promise – **“Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”** God’s love is a love that is free!

CONCLUSION

- Do you see the love of God for you? Out of love He warns you of your perilous condition. But he does not just warn, out of love God acts to rescue you at great sacrificial cost to Himself. But he does not just rescue you and leave you on your own. No! Out love He promises to bring you into an eternity of imperishable bliss.
 - One would think that the price of such a rescue and such a glorious future would be enormous but God offers it freely to rebels. He does not charge but only says, **“Give up your rebellion against me, trust in my Son to save you, and you will not perish but have eternal life.”** Oh the love of God!
 - This is the meaning of Christmas: **“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.”**
- So how will you respond to the love of God? I can imagine three responses. First those who say, **“I don’t want it.”** You have heard the good news but you want to continue in your rebellion.
 - I plead with you to reconsider. You have everything to lose by rejecting Him but conversely you have everything to gain by receiving his gift.
- Or perhaps you are saying today, **“Tell me more. God’s love does sound amazing but I would like to hear more.”**
 - We would love to talk with your further about this. We have a course that will run in spring called *Christianity Explored*. You are welcome to talk with any pastor or person at the church.
- Or perhaps you are in the third group who says, **“I want it.”** You say, **“I never knew God loved me so much. I had no idea all that He did for me.” I want to give my life to Him today. I want to receive the gift of Jesus.”**
 - I am going to put a sample prayer up on the screen that help give you some words to receive this gift.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Prayer.