

“God’s Gift Of Love”

John 3: 16 – 21; John 15: 9 – 17; 1st Corinthians 13; 1st John 4:7 – 21 (Sermon)

During Advent we have been looking at the gifts God has given to us.

We have looked at God’s gift of hope, God’s gift of peace, and God’s gift of joy.

Today we will be looking at God’s gift of love.

How would you define love?

The dictionary defines love as affection, good will, devotion to someone, and a passionate attachment to someone.

Galatians 5:22 tells us love is a spiritual gift.

In our lesson from 1st Corinthians we read that love is patient, love is kind, love does not envy, love does not boast, love is not proud, love does not dishonor someone, love is not easily angered, love keeps no record of wrongs, love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and love always perseveres.

Also 1st Corinthians 13 tells us that love is the most important spiritual gift.

In fact 1st Corinthians 13 tells us that faith and hope are useless without love.

And 1st John 3:16 tells us; ***“This is how we know what love is: Jesus laid down His life for us.”***

You see love is much more than words; love is more than emotions; love is action.

Love is a choice we make to put another person’s needs and desires ahead of our needs and desires.

Love is sacrificing our self for someone else.

In our lesson from 1st John 4 we saw that God is the source of love and we can not truly love if we do not know God because ***“God is love”***. (1st John 4:8)

Christians have the ability to love other people because God first loved us.

Christians have the ability to love other people because God put His Holy Spirit in us.

So the first step is for us to receive God’s unlimited, unconditional, sacrificial love for us.

God’s love for us must become a reality in our life before we can reflect God’s love in our relationship with other people.

You see our love for other people is an outward expression of our relationship with our Lord.

If we do not love other people that is an outward sign that our relationship with The Lord is not right and that our relationship with The Lord needs our immediate attention.

In fact The Apostle John said; ***“if we do not love we do not know God.”*** (1st John 4: 8)

And whoever claims to love God but shows hate to another person is a liar. (1st John 4:19)

In 1st John 4:8 we are told God is love.

And in Colossians 1:15 we are told Jesus is the visible image of our invisible God. Jesus came to show us the Father (John 14: 9)

Jesus came to show us how much God loves us and how much God wants to be a part of our life.

God created humans in His image so that we could have fellowship with Him and so we could reflect His love.

I want you to think about what the world would be like if there was no love.

The reason there is so much hate, lying, violence, crime, and taking advantage of other people is because people have chosen **not** to accept God’s gift of love.

And Christmas is all about Jesus who is God’s gift of love to the world.

You see when a person totally accepts Jesus as their savior they are filled with The Holy Spirit so there is no place for hate, lying, violence, crime, and taking advantage of other people in their life.

The answer to the world’s problem of hatred, violence, and immoral behavior is not in new laws, the answer is not better schools, or more jobs, or more playgrounds.

The answer to the world’s problem of hatred, violence, and immoral behavior is Jesus Christ.

Remember God’s love for you is unconditional and unconditional love means, *“loving without any conditions”*.

God loves you because of who you are and God loves you in spite of what you have done or not done.

God’s love for you is not based on your performance.

God’s love for you has nothing to do with your goodness or your performance.

God’s love for you is pure and free from any manipulation.

God's love for all people is His sovereign choice. (Deuteronomy 7:7 – 8)

And as Christians we are commanded to love one another. (John 13:34)

When a person totally accepts Jesus and Jesus' way of life they are compelled to share the love of Jesus with the people God has put in their life.

Remember Acts 1:8 is a command; ***“you shall be my witnesses.”***

Jesus said ***“if you love me you will obey my commandments.”*** (John 14:15)

Love is God's gift to the world. But like every other gift you have to accept it for the gift to be any benefit to you.

And like every other gift you have to put God's love into practice for the gift love to be any benefit to you.

I believe that most every one of you has accepted God's gift of love.

That is why you are here today.

So the question is; *are you using God's gift of love by sharing God's gift of love with the people God has put in your life.*

John 3:16 is probably the most widely known verse in the Bible.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son”.

This verse tells us of the intensity as well as the inclusiveness of God's love.

God loves everyone.

God's loves includes all of us who rebel against God, complain about God, disobey God, and yes, all of those who totally ignore God **OR** those who deny God.

But this verse does not teach universal salvation because it does not stop here.

The last part of this verse contains a condition that says, ***“Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”.***

The condition is belief in Jesus.

God's love for us is infinite but God's love does **not** save us!

The only way to be saved from hell is by believing in Jesus and asking Jesus to save you from the penalty of your sins.

This word ***“believe”*** means more than an intellectual acceptance of the claims of the gospel.

Belief in Jesus includes trust that Jesus can and will save you, as well as your commitment to Jesus as your Lord.

True belief in Jesus will always result in a changed heart and a desire to live a life that is pleasing to Jesus.

John 3:17 makes it perfectly clear that Jesus did not come to condemn the world.

Jesus came to save the world.

But we must accept God’s gift of Himself and make it our own.

We must claim Jesus as our personal Savior and we must publicly acknowledge Him.

Jesus said; ***“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”*** (Matthew 10:32 – 33)

That is why we place so much emphasis on a public profession of faith in the church.

We do not want to miss the importance of verse 18.

Judgment is often thought of as happening at the end of the world on the last day.

But John makes it clear here that this judgment is already happening now.

“Whoever does not believe in the name of God’s one and only Son already stands condemned.”

We celebrate Christmas each year to remind us that our God cared so much for us that He left His throne in Heaven to die on the cross.

Jesus came to earth to die in our place.

Jesus willingly suffered and died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins and my sins so we could live.

Christmas calls us to express our thanks to Jesus by caring for other people and ministering to their needs in the name of Jesus.

God's love for us compels us to be ready, willing, and able to minister to other people's needs in the name of Jesus The Christ.

The Jewish people knew The Old Testament prophecies about God's promise to send a Messiah.

For centuries the Jewish people waited and hoped for their Messiah to come.

But sadly they did not recognize Jesus as their Messiah because they were looking and hoping for the wrong kind of messiah.

They wanted someone to save them from their temporary physical problems.

They rejected Jesus because Jesus came as a spiritual eternal savior.

Celebrating Christmas is not a one-time event each year.

Celebrating Christmas should be something we do everyday because Jesus came to be with us.

As we trust God, as we care for other people, as we are willing to let God use us to do His work in our lives, God will come to us in new and special ways.

Are you ready, willing, and able for Jesus to make a difference in your life in the coming year?

God gave us the gift of love so that we could love Him and so we could love other people.

When the Jewish religious leaders asked Jesus ***“what is the greatest commandment”*** Jesus said; ***“Love The Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it; Love your neighbor as yourself. All of the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”***
(Matthew 22:37 -40)

Jesus also said; ***“My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you.”*** (John 15:12)

As you know it is hard to show love that points to Jesus all the time.

It is hard to love those people that make our life difficult.

In fact, it is impossible for us to love other people without the love of Jesus living in our hearts.

The Apostle John tells us that love of God and love for other people are interconnected.

You see our love for God compels us to love other people.

As we begin to understand God's unlimited, unconditional, sacrificial love for us we begin to learn how to love other people.

In order to keep our focus on the goal of true love, we need to focus on Jesus' love for us.

We will experience God's love as we study The Bible, as we gather as the body of believers in worship, as we hear God's Word proclaimed, as we pray, as we praise The Lord for what He has done for us, and as we celebrate The Lord's Supper.

God's gift of His son Jesus Christ to you and to me is the greatest Christmas gift that has ever been given!

There is nothing more that God could do to demonstrate his love for us.

Now it is up to each one of us to fully accept God's gift of love and for each of us to share God's gift of love to everyone we come in contact with each and every day!

AMEN