

# All For Love's Sake

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Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, we often call this time of year the season of giving, right? In fact, between your family gatherings, corporate parties, school gift exchanges, charitable contributions, chances are you give more to other people this time of year in the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas than probably the rest of the year combined.

That's not because you don't care about people the rest of the year. It's just this is the season of giving, right? There's all kinds of things that we do, all kinds of gifts that we buy. But we all know that the quantity of gifts we give doesn't necessarily reflect a genuinely giving heart, right? Let's be honest for just a moment, okay? Some of us have some gifts under the tree that if it weren't for a particular obligation, wouldn't be there, right?

There's a difference between going out and really thinking hard, as I know all of you men have done, and putting all of this time and effort into purchasing something for your wife that would express the tremendous love that you have for her.

I know all of you have done that. You haven't waited until now. You've got it done. It's under the tree, right? There's a difference between doing that and going out and purchasing a gift for that distant relative, maybe a third cousin that just happens to be showing up to the family gathering this year.

[ 1 : 3 0 ] You know what I mean? If it wasn't for the fact that they're showing up this year, they show up once a decade, and if it wasn't for the fact that they're showing up, you wouldn't have bought them a gift. But because they're there, you can't not get them something.

And so you've gone out, and your wife has sent you out, and you've picked up something for that distant relative. There's a difference in the giving between those two things, right? One is really a gift of obligation, and the other one is really a gift of love.

It's one thing to go to the store and really, as Julie and I have done for our girls, to really think through gifts that would express our love for our daughters.

It's a different thing, right, Joseph, to be sent out, to have to get a gift for that boy that she just insists on bringing to Christmas dinner this year, right?

There's a difference in giving in those two scenarios, isn't there? And as we really think about the giving season, we think about gifts, of course, we do those things ultimately because we do care in some way.

[ 2 : 2 9 ] Otherwise, we wouldn't do it. Generally, we wouldn't do it. But there's a difference in the way that we give sometimes. We all do quite a bit of giving at this Christmas season. But the true spirit of giving is not founded on an obligation.

It's founded on love, right? This little verse here in John chapter 3 concisely reveals to us God's perfect gift given to humanity as a result of his supreme love.

Remember, God's under no obligation to us. There is nothing about us that requires or pushes God to do anything for us.

There's no obligation that would drive him to give us a gift. But because of his immeasurable love, he is actually giving us everything in his only son, Jesus Christ.

And without a doubt, John 3.16 is the most famous verse in all of the Bible. But there is a danger that accompanies our familiarity with it. Though we all know it, and most of us could quote it even from heart, as many of you probably did just a moment ago, we may find that our hearts are somewhat dull to the magnitude of the truth conveyed in this little verse.

[ 3 : 5 6 ] So what my goal is this morning, and what I think should be our goal in this season of giving, is to think about what is the greatest gift that was actually ever given.

A gift not given out of an obligation to man, but out of God's divine and supreme love for man. And so my purpose this morning is really not to do an exposition of John chapter 3 as much as I want to do that.

But we don't have time for that. But it will be helpful for us to understand just a little bit of background as to why this verse exists, why it is that Jesus has said this, or at least John has made the commentary on what was taking place with Jesus here in chapter 3.

John wrote at the end of chapter 2 that at this point in Jesus' life and ministry, he had been in Jerusalem. And while he was there, we see first the righteous anger of the Lord as he turns over tables and he drives out the money changers out of the temple there.

But then immediately following that, at the very end of the chapter, John says that Jesus had done a few signs and wonders and miracles, miraculous things in Jerusalem, so that many people had begun to believe in his name, is what John says.

[ 5 : 12 ] But the problem was, as John goes on to say, and what Jesus understood to be true, is that though they were excited about Jesus, they were intrigued by him, they were interested in him, none of them, or at least most of them, weren't actually committed to Jesus in faith.

And so Jesus, John says, doesn't commit himself fully to those people because he knew what was true of their hearts. And what was in their hearts was really just some type of intrigue about the things that Jesus was doing.

It wasn't that at this point, most of them were not committed to Jesus in faith and who he was and what he was doing. One such person was one of the leaders of the Jews, a prominent teacher of the Jews named Nicodemus.

And as we get into chapter three, we find that Nicodemus, in the secrecy of the night, goes and finds Jesus in order to find out as much about him as he can.

He wants to try to figure out exactly who Jesus is and what really is the purpose in him coming. In fact, at the end of the day, it's not very often that someone comes to town healing sick people with his touch, opening blinded eyes with his words.

[ 6 : 27 ] It's not very often that someone comes to town teaching with an unparalleled authority. In fact, it's only happened once in history. And Jesus was the one who did it.

And he comes to town and Nicodemus can't get this guy off his mind. He's not exactly sure who he is. He says, Jesus, we know that you must be at least from God because only someone from God could do the things that you're doing and could teach in the way that you're teaching.

And he's inquisitive. He's trying to figure out who is Jesus and why did he come? And in the course of that conversation, Jesus reveals to Nicodemus that all of his efforts in morality and religion were insufficient to actually grant him entry into the kingdom of God.

He couldn't gain eternal life through all of the things he was doing. He had committed his entire life at this point to religious works, good works, all the things he could possibly amass in order to please God.

And in the course of this conversation, Jesus basically blows all of those efforts up. And he says, none of that is actually good enough. For a person to find entry into the kingdom of God, Jesus said, he must experience a spiritual rebirth.

[ 7 : 43 ] Verse seven, Jesus plainly says, you must be born again. And of course, Nicodemus was hardened to this statement. He was confused by the statement.

And so he asked for clarity. A few verses later, he says, how can these things be? And what results from that question eventually gets to verse 16, which is this wonderfully simple explanation of the gospel.

And in summary, this was Jesus's response. Eternal salvation, eternal life, the kingdom of God, forgiveness of sins is only found through faith in Jesus.

And it's a gift issued from the immeasurable, indescribable love of God. So then as we think about this verse in relation to Christmas, we find out that John 3.16 actually tells us why anyone should care about the birth of Jesus.

Have you thought about that? There's not many births that we celebrate in this life, is there? We celebrate one another. We rejoice and we each have a designated day.

[ 9 : 07 ] How many people outside of your family, your friend, your circle of network, do you ever celebrate their birth? No one.

Why is it that we should care about Jesus's birth? Well, John 3.16 tells us why. It contains the true meaning and purpose of Christmas and why Christians are so committed to celebrating it. So in our study this morning, we're going to look at this verse just quickly. And I wanted to show you three things. I want to show you what is God's perfect gift, what motivated him to give it, and how you can receive it.

God's perfect gift, what motivated him to give it, and how you can receive it. If you like to keep notes, maybe you write this down. This is how I have my notes structured today. The first thing I wrote down was the gift of God.

The gift of God. And I want you to go back to verse 16, except we're going to come back to the first phrase in just a minute. I want you to look at that middle phrase. John writes that he gave his only son.

[10:13] He gave his only son. So the perfect gift of God didn't come in a fancy box with a decorative bow. As we just read a moment ago, it was wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger in Bethlehem.

Because the greatest gift that's ever been given to the world and in the world was not a thing, it was a person. God himself wrapped in human flesh.

This is why Isaiah said in Isaiah 7, 14 that Harper read a few moments ago or quoted a few moments ago, this is why the angel said he will be called Emmanuel, which means God is with us.

God himself has become a man. God is with us. Therefore, he will have this title of Emmanuel.

Christmas isn't about the birth of a man who came into existence 2,000 years ago in Palestine.

That's not what Christmas is about. Christmas is about the incarnation of the one true God who has always existed and who has always been.

[11:23] The creator of the universe entered his creation and subjected himself to the weakness and frailty of fallen man.

This is what the whole Bible's about. Philippians chapter 2 says it. Paul describes it this way and maybe one of the most comprehensive looks at the deity and incarnation of Jesus.

This is what Paul wrote. Though he was in the form of God, form there meaning in his very essence, that's who he was, the unchangeable quality of who Jesus is. Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

In other words, the glory that comes with being God, he was not willing to hold on to that in order that man and all men would be condemned to hell. He did not think equality with God, the glory of being God as something to be grasped, to hold on to.

But Paul says, he emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. Form, same word.

[12:29] In the first half of the verse, Paul says Jesus in his very essence and who he is, the unchangeable quality of his character and of his personhood is God. And then him being God takes on the form of a man, the very essence of who he is, who that unchangeable quality now of who Jesus is, is both fully God and fully man.

So what we celebrate in the birth of Christ is not the beginnings of a man, but is the incarnation of a being who created you and who created everything that you see and who has always existed.

The king of all willingly became the lowliest of all. The one who is continually surrounded by the praises of angels leaves the glories of heaven to suffer at the hands of men.

The creator subjects himself to his own creation in order that he might save it. And what is this according to John 3, 16?

A gift. It's a gift. A perfect gift. Thou who was rich beyond all splendor, all for love's sake became as poor.

[13:48] Thrones for a manger did surrender. Sapphire paved courts for stable floor. Thou who was rich beyond all splendor, all for love's sake became as poor.

You know, often when we think about the Christmas story, the scope of our thoughts is generally limited to this small portion of scripture in Matthew 1 and 2 and Luke 1 and 2 that tells specifically the nativity story.

But I want to remind you again this morning that God's gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ is the main point not of Matthew 1 and 2 and Luke 1 and 2 but of the entire Bible.

Everything in God's word speaks to this moment, to this person, to this gift. Think about it. As you understand the Bible and how it's put together, it begins with creation and the curse of suffering and

death that resulted from man's sin.

And then the Bible ends with God restoring all things to His intended purpose. And everything between that first creation and the final creation, everything in between in God's word is all about this Savior, this appointed deliverer from God that would come and save His people from their sins.

[15:19] The Savior is the gift referred to in John 3, 16. It would take me the rest of my life to explain all of that to you as we go through the scriptures.

Let me just generally give you two things to think about as we think about the story of the whole Bible and how it relates to Jesus as a gift. The opening pages of the Bible tell us that God created man and woman in His image to glorify Him.

Our kids have learned this. How and why did God create us, kids? God created us. Smell? They know it, right?

When we learned that in our kids' class, the thing that they did to try to understand what this means is they went and they stood at the mirror where Miss Faye is sitting. And they looked at themselves in the mirror and I said, what do you see?

And they said, me. You see a reflection of themselves. And the Bible says that God created Adam and Eve, man and woman, in His own image to glorify Him.

[16:21] It meant that He didn't create them as little gods. That's not what He meant. It means that He created them in perfect innocence to be a perfect reflection of Him, to reflect who He is and to reflect His perfect character.

But Adam and Eve fell from that. God's adversary, Satan, deceived them. They disobeyed God, they sinned against God, and they fell short of the glory for which they were created.

And since God is perfectly holy and just, their sin had to be punished. If He just let it go, He wouldn't be God. And He certainly wouldn't be just. But He had to punish their sin.

But in the midst of this punishment, in the midst of the announcement of this curse of their sin, He gave them a promise. And the promise is that He would provide a Savior to rescue man from eternal death.

In the midst of the consequences, God's grace was shining through in this promise. In Genesis 3.15, God tells man and woman after their sin, I will put enmity between you, speaking to Satan, the serpent, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

[17:38] He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel. From the very beginning of the Bible, we see the problem. This whole book, what it's about, is about God creating us for His glory.

Us falling short of that glory and in desperate need of God's mercy and grace. And in the midst of that, right at the beginning, God says, I'm gonna give you a promise. I'm gonna send a deliverer, a Savior that will save you from your sins.

And everything following that in the entire Scripture is about that. It all points to that. Then we get a little further in the Old Testament. And as you continue to read, you'll find that there are all of these illuminating pictures and illustrations that point to God's promise of redemption.

All kinds of things. We see a picture of Israel being God redeeming His people. We see the sacrificial system in particular. Year by year, the Israelites, the people of God, were required to come in order to reflect their need for salvation.

They would bring and supply for themselves a lamb. A lamb that was one year old. It had to be perfect, without blemish, spotless. And they would bring it to the temple of God or to the tabernacle of God and they would sacrifice that lamb as a reflection of their own sinfulness and of their own need for God's mercy.

[19:02] But the problem was that lamb was never enough. Every year, they had to do it again. No matter how hard they searched, no matter how perfect of a lamb they could find, there was never one that really atoned for their sin.

It wasn't possible. Of course, God set this in place in order to show them something. That nothing in and of themselves was capable of forgiving their sin.

They continually repeated the process year by year, which served as a reminder that their only real hope was God's mercy. And God's mercy would have to come through the fulfillment of His promise, not any work that they would do on their own.

The gift of God's Son in John 3.16 is the fulfillment of that promise. Because the people could not supply a lamb that was worthy to forgive their sins, God provided one for them.

He sent His only Son, the only perfect sacrifice capable of paying the price for man's sin once and for all.

[ 20 : 22 ] Galatians chapter 4 tells us that when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

If you study much about in the Gospels about John the Baptist, you'll remember in John chapter 1 as Jesus comes through that portion of Galilee, verse 29, it says, John saw Jesus coming toward him and what was it that John said?

Behold what? The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. You say, well, all that lamb talk is just coincidence.

No. No. The promise of Genesis 3.15 was always the plan of God to fulfill in a perfect lamb except that perfect lamb wasn't an animal, it was a person, His only Son.

But even still, how could Jesus save us from our sins? His death on the cross was a substitution. He took our place.

[ 21 : 35 ] He bore the wrath of God against our sin. But His death was only sufficient because He had no sin of His own with which He had to pay. Consider that.

This is why the Bible makes so clear that Jesus was not just a man from God, but Jesus is the man of God. He is God in the flesh. No other man could have possibly been sinless.

Even by our very nature, when we're conceived from conception, we have this nature of sin, this depravity that is deep within us that must be redeemed.

But Jesus didn't have that because Jesus wasn't born of man, He was born of God. He's the perfect Son of God without sin. Therefore, only His death was sufficient enough to atone for our sin.

no other sacrifice would work. And that was the plan of God. 2 Corinthians 5.21, we quote this often. For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

[ 22 : 46 ] In the sacrifice of the perfect Lamb, a transaction takes place, a switch. we, in our sin, deserve nothing but God's wrath.

Jesus, the perfect one, takes our place, absorbs the wrath of God against our sin, takes it upon Himself in order that we, the sinful ones, may have His righteousness applied to us.

Why do we celebrate Christmas? Because of that. Why do we care about the birth of Jesus?

Because of His death. Why does John 3.16 say that God's Son was a gift?

Because how else could you describe Him? Thou who art God beyond all praising, all for love's sake became as man.

Stooping so low, but sinners raising. heavenward by thine eternal plan. Thou who art God beyond all praising, all for love's sake became as man.

[ 23 : 57 ] So first we see the gift of God. Secondly, we see the call of God. The call of God. Look again at verse 16, except this time I want you to see the last phrase. Whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. So it's clear here. The purpose of God's gift, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was that we might have eternal life.

But the word order in this verse is important. He doesn't lead with eternal life. Because the eternal life that God offers is an alternative.

It's an alternative to the spiritual death to which we are all condemned. Do you notice that?

Whoever believes in Him, He doesn't just say whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.

He actually says whoever believes in Him first will be rescued from eternal death, from perishing, meaning that we are all automatically by nature destined for death, eternal hell, eternal separation from God.

[ 25 : 04 ] But the gift of God was such that whoever believes in Jesus Christ will not have to perish, but will have eternal life. We're spiritually dead in our sins.

Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 1 tells us that. We desperately need divine rescue. And the birth of Jesus, this nativity story is part one of God's divine rescue mission.

He gave His Son to rescue us from spiritual death and eternal hell. Look at verse 17, just after it.

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, not yet at least.

He will return. And when He returns, it will be to judge. So be ready for that judgment. But in this coming, that wasn't the reason. He did not send His Son to condemn the world, but that the world

through Him might be saved.

This is why in Matthew chapter 1, we read a moment ago, the angel says to Joseph, she will bear a son. You shall call His name Jesus, which is the New Testament version of Joshua, which means God will save, for He will save His people from their sins.

[ 26 : 25 ] This brings a particular urgency to the issue of God's gift. Urgency. Urgency. Sometimes we get in our mind, if we're not super familiar with the Bible, and maybe we've only been told the good parts and the flowery parts, we get this idea in our mind that all of us are destined for eternal life, unless you're somebody like Hitler.

We're all destined for eternal life, but if you follow Jesus, you'll just have a better quality of eternal life. That's not at all what the Bible teaches. That's not at all what John 3.16 teaches. No, what we're destined for is eternal hell.

All of us. All of us. Unless we're rescued, none of us are destined for eternal life. So what God calls us to is faith.

And He says, if you will believe in My Son, if you will believe and follow My Son, He will take your death, and you will receive His life.

We come to Jesus because we'll spend eternity separated from God if we don't. And this incredible gift of God is not universally applied.

[ 27 : 40 ] Those who will not believe and follow Jesus are eternally condemned. Jesus said as much in verse 18. Look at it. Verse 18.

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.

God's gift of eternal life through His Son can only be received by faith. Salvation is not something that you can earn by spending your money, giving away your goods, or committing yourself to morality or good works.

God calls us to receive His gift only one way, by believing in His Son. And this divine rescue only comes, only comes to whosoever will follow Jesus in faith.

Romans 10. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

[ 29 : 00 ] For with the heart, Paul says, one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the scriptures say, everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.

For there's no distinction between Jew and Greek. The same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Which tells us, Jesus stands ready and willing to rescue you from your sin. The question is, will you answer God's call?

Because too many people are trying to circumvent the call of God. They're trying to do it their own way. Does it work? Won't work. There's an urgency to this.

Believe or die. Believe or die. City of Light is a group that I like to listen to out of Australia. They just released a new song last week.

[ 30 : 06 ] Here's how the third verse goes. So I find my rest in Jesus. He who came to rescue me. Jesus saved me from the darkness.

I will rise to life with Him. Have you found your rest in Jesus? Has He saved you?

You personally? Has He saved you from the darkness? Do you know? When you die, will you rise to life with Him?

Or will you perish? Thirdly, we see the love of God. The love of God. Now we get back to the first phrase. Verse 16. For God so loved the world.

For God so loved the world. This was the motivation and the gift. And I said at the beginning that true giving is not founded on an obligation. It's founded on love.

[ 31 : 11 ] God is under no obligation to us. No one's twisting His arm to force Him to provide eternal life. the great plan of salvation is God's plan.

He alone devised it. He alone executed it. He alone offers it. And the thing that motivated Him to give His Son for our sins is His divine love.

And you may be saying, well, why does He love me? That's a great question. That's one I can't answer. Because He doesn't love us because we're lovable.

He loves us because He loves us. Because in His very essence, what He is is love.

God Now that doesn't diminish the reality of His holiness and His justice. God must judge sin.  
[ 32 : 19 ] His perfect love doesn't overwhelm the other attributes that He has. He is perfectly loving and He's perfectly gracious. He's also perfectly just and He's perfectly righteous against sin.

So how does this work? Remember 2 Corinthians 5.21 He made Him to be sin who knew no sin so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God.

When we come to Christ, it's not that God's love turns a blind eye to what we've done. It's that no, we're recognizing that God is actually taking the sin that I have committed and He has punished His own son for it.

And in return, He's taken the perfect righteousness of His only son and He's actually applied it to my life, the one who doesn't deserve it. Why? Love.

Love. Love. For God so loved. Romans 5. While we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

[ 33 : 30 ] Listen, Christ died for the ungodly. Christ didn't die for the ones that are doing pretty good and trying pretty hard. He died for the ungodly. Paul goes on to say, one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would even dare to die.

But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Do you see this? Do you see this?

Listen, in our sin, we don't want God. We may want the benefits of God, we don't want God. Our hearts are hard. They're depraved. Yet God, even despite the fact that we don't want Him since His own Son anyways, that while we are sinners, Christ dies for us, not because we're lovable or because we're doing a good job and He just couldn't take it, He just wanted to help us out a little bit. No, that's not what happened. It was out of His divine love that He bent down and He came to earth so that He could die for filthy sinners like you and me. Why? Because of His love.

John 3.16 plainly says that the object of this love is the world. It's the world. Remember, this comes at the end of a conversation with a prominent Jew who would have only spoken of God's love as it related to Israel.

[ 34 : 54 ] There was no fault in their mind for God loving anyone else. But Jesus expands this. He says, God's love isn't just for the Jews.

God's love is for the world. That's what makes possible God's call for whosoever at the end of the verse because His love, the object of His affection is the whole world.

In other words, you won't be excluded from God's saving love on the basis of your nationality or on the basis of what you've done up to this point or how terrible of a sin you've committed.

God loves the world. Jesus died for the sins of the world. And since you're a part of the world, that qualifies you for His grace.

But it's only for whosoever. There is a limit to that. He doesn't just throw it out willy-nilly. It's for whoever will hear His call and follow Him in faith.

[ 36 : 10 ] 1 John 4 in this is the love of God and it was made manifest among us that God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

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.

That word's important, actually. It means the appeasement of God's wrath. That when Jesus took our place on the cross, it appeased the Father's wrath for all who will believe.

Not just for everyone, for those who will believe His own. Jesus, God's only Son, in summary, came to earth to save sinners from eternal death and hell.

He who was rich became poor. He who is God became a man. And though He was sinlessly perfect, He laid down His life for the guilty like you and me.

[ 37 : 26 ] He took our place, He bore our shame, He paid our debt. And then He rose from the dead to prove that His sacrifice was sufficient for all of our sins to be forgiven.

And He did all of that according to the riches of His everlasting love. He willingly, He joyfully went through hell so that you and I wouldn't have to.

but His gift of eternal life is not something that can be earned through what we do. It can only be received through faith and who He is and what He's done.

In John chapter 10, Jesus said that when the gospel is preached, His sheep would hear His voice, He would know them, and they would follow Him.

