

Christmas Eve 2017 "The Motivation for the Incarnation"

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Date: 24 December 2017

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- [0 : 00] During this Christmas season, we have been working our way through the prologue to John's Gospel, talking together about some different aspects of the Incarnation.
- In particular, in the last couple of weeks, we have been considering how Jesus leaves the glories and the comforts of heaven and enters into our pain.
- We've said that when the Word becomes flesh, He sacrifices the status and privilege of divinity and He runs toward the pain and suffering of this world.
- And that's glorious. It's awe-inspiring to consider what God has done when the Word becomes flesh. But it also begs the question, why?
- Why? What could possibly motivate God to leave those glories and comforts in order to enter into pain and suffering?
- [1 : 17] What could drive Him to do that? This morning, we get to the climax of John's prologue and we'll get to see a glimpse of the heart of God in becoming man.
- Hear God's Word from John chapter 1, starting at verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.
- The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through Him.
- He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him.
- [2 : 26] He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
- And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- If you turn over just a couple chapters to chapter 3 at verse 16, we hear these familiar words. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.
- For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. This is God's holy word.
- Let's pray and ask Him to teach us together. Father, we give You thanks for Your word. We thank You for Your love for us and how it is displayed beautifully there.
- [3 : 45] Father, Father, would You give us Your heart. By Your Spirit, teach us and change us this morning, that we might know more of Your heart this Christmas.

Pray in Jesus' name. Amen. When we ask the question of what motivated God to become man, to send His Son as the Word become flesh, the answer is profound, but it's not complicated.

It's love. That's it. I'm not even going to leave you in suspense. The sermon's kind of over at this point. It's love. That's all there is to it.

Love. If we look at the definition of the incarnation that we've been considering, you'll see it's in there. The incarnation is the intentional entrance of the divine Son of God into our fallen world in human flesh to secure our redemption at the cost of His life.

Why? Because of His great love. It's because of His great love that He would do that. Love.

[5 : 03] It's certainly there in John 3.16, those words you're familiar with, but that word love is not even in the verses we're considering in John 1.

Rather, what we'll see in John 1 this morning is God demonstrating to us how much He loves. When I was a freshman at Clemson, several upperclassmen reached out to me very early on.

They welcomed me in. They made me feel part of a community and like I had a home during that very difficult transition that we all go through and leaving home and living away from home for the first time.

They made me feel a part of a community, especially in RUF, the campus ministry that I was involved in there at Clemson. And so that next year, when I was a sophomore, I was on the ministry team with RUF and before the year started, I went to our campus minister and said, that's what I want to do.

I want to be focused on those new freshman guys. I want to make them feel loved. And so I asked him, I said, what would you do?

[6 : 15] How do you make them feel loved? And his answer was not exactly what I was expecting. I was looking forward to hearing like strategies and events to do and things to say and things not to say.

And he gave a fairly simple answer, but it's stuck with me for many years. He said, well, if you want them to feel loved, I would say the easiest way is to start by actually loving them and then just kind of see where that takes you.

But it's actually best if you really love them. And I thought, wow, that's crazy. You mean it's actually easier to love them than to pretend that I love them and try to make them feel like I love them to actually begin caring about them.

And that step one is genuinely loving is true because love is a feeling and a commitment that drives actions, isn't it?

Actually loving them was easier than pretending to. When you actually love, it will be demonstrated and usually then felt as well.

[7 : 29] In John 3.16, we see that God so loved the world that he gave. There's really no other or better explanation for the incarnation, for the seemingly inexplicable decision that Jesus made to sacrifice for us than love.

Love fuels God's heart. It overflows from God's heart because, as the Bible tells us, God is love.

1 John 4.8. From cover to cover of the Bible, it's a story of a God who loves. Loves enough to have relationship with the people he created.

Loves powerfully enough to deliver them out of Egypt and slavery. Loves patiently enough to bear with their sin, their idolatry, their rebellion against him.

Loves persistently enough to bring them back from exile and bring them to the promised land again. The love of God is a love that reaches down to care about and to tangibly help those who are in need.

[8 : 44] As Sally Lloyd-Jones says, God's love is a never-stopping, never-giving-up, unbreaking, always-and-forever love.

It's an irrevocable commitment to relationship with his people, to their ultimate good, no matter what it takes. And sometimes it takes a lot, a lot of sacrifice, as it does in the incarnation.

And so in John 1, we are shown, in essence, how much God loves. In the incarnation, God demonstrates the reality and the enormity of the love in his heart as he takes on flesh.

Kids, if you were to think at Christmastime, what is one way that our parents show us that they love us, what would you think of?

How do your parents at Christmastime show you that they love you? You got any idea? Presents. That is one way, isn't it? They give gifts.

[9 : 53] Giving gifts is one way to show love. And God gives us gifts. The gift of God, Romans 6.23 says, is eternal life.

That true and everlasting life referenced in John 1 and in John 3.16. A gift that really can't be matched. The best gift you could possibly ever receive.

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus didn't come to give merely a little social improvement, a few family values, temporary political deliverance.

No, he came to give eternal life, which in the meantime can and does transform all of life.

But he came primarily to meet our greatest need, life in the face of death, which is what we deserved. God so loved the world that he gave.

[10 : 59] But he didn't just send a gift in the mail. That would have been loving, certainly. But he didn't just send a gift in the mail. That gift of eternal life is given in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 John 4 says, the way God shows that he is love is by giving himself. He loves us so much more that he would even give himself.

Look at verse 9 of 1 John 4. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.

So that we could have life. God himself came. He gives himself in the incarnation. That's another way at Christmas that many of us will show love or will receive love.

By showing up. Right? Don't you love when people don't only send gifts, but some of you are here this morning because you have shown up face to face in the lives of those you love.

[12 : 06] You've perhaps come a long way. And don't we appreciate and receive that love all the more when we know how much it's cost them to get there? All they've had to sacrifice to be there with us because they love us.

In Jesus, God shows up to be Emmanuel. God with us. We've considered it over the last few weeks as light breaking into our darkness.

As God running toward our pain. John says it this way in verse 14 of chapter 1. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

You may know that word for dwelt, dwelt among us, is the word that in the Old Testament was for tabernacle. God's mobile home, the place he lived among his people, even while they wandered through the desert and failed to trust him and obey him.

Here God lived in the tabernacle. And so this verse is telling us that the word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

[13 : 18] He shows up to demonstrate his love in person. Not merely driving across the country to be with someone he loves, but reaching across space and time, moving heaven and earth so that he can be with us.

So God didn't just give a gift, but he actually gave himself. And one final demonstration, he doesn't just show up himself temporarily, but permanently.

This is not the obligatory 24-hour drop-in because it's the holidays and I don't want to get in trouble with mom and dad. No, the incarnation establishes, confirms our permanent relationship with God.

Verse 12 of John 1. To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

God gives not just life, not just eternal life, but he gave the right to live that life as his children in relationship with him, with him as our father.

[14 : 37] Born into God's family, given the right to be his child because we wanted it so badly and we worked so hard? No.

By the will of God, it was his idea to have you in his family. How much does God love you? God demonstrates his love by not merely forgiving our deadly sins and giving us life, by not merely entering into our world and our lives here and there from time to time to help us out in tight spots, but particularly by once and for all adopting us into his family forever.

You know that I love the image of the judge who says our penalty is paid in full by Jesus and we are declared not guilty but righteous before him.

And that same judge in criminal court jumping out from behind his desk, grabbing you by the hand, running all the way down the hall to family court and adopting you as his child, becoming your father.

Behold what manner of love the father has for us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are, 1 John 3.

[16 : 01] How much must the heart of God be full of love towards you that he would adopt you into his family? How committed is he to this relationship with you?

How certain is he that he never wants to be separated from you? To those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, born by his choice.

Behold what manner of love the father has given to us. Now God's word has been challenging us and I've been pushing us a bit in the last few weeks to consider how the incarnation challenges us and how God sends us into the lives of others.

The darkness of the world, the suffering of those around us every day. But today I have to admit and we have to remember that there's no way we will sacrifice our comfort and our riches and our peace to run toward pain unless we actually love.

You can't pretend that. It's no surprise to you that God calls us to love others. Right after that great definition of love in 1 John 4, John says this, this is how God loves.

[17 : 31] He's loved. He's loved us and sent his son. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

We are to love each other. Our brothers and sisters in Christ, elsewhere our neighbors, and even our enemies, we're called to love.

We are called to give sacrificially, to show up in the pain, to give of ourselves, and consistently to be there for a relationship that is outlasted only by the eternal relationship they can know with their God.

We are called to love how? Like God. We are called to love as we have been loved, as he has loved us.

Y'all, we better pray for God's heart to love like God, because we don't love like that naturally. We ought to pray that we would actually, truly love, because there are a lot of people hard to love in our lives.

[18 : 42] Not just the ones we've talked about this morning, like college freshmen, family members at Christmas. Don't raise your hand if you've got hard people to love sitting on the pew next to you this morning.

Just think it and anticipate the next 24 hours together. You can make it. There are a lot of people who are hard to love that God is sending us to show his love to.

But that's exactly what his love is like. God's love is for the unlovely. You know, that's what John 3.16 actually says when it says, God so loved the world.

Remember last week, what we learned about the world? It's a world in rebellion against him. Who doesn't love him. Who ignores him. Who won't receive him.

And God so loved that world that he sent his son into it. He showed us his love while we were yet sinners and enemies of his by being born in a manger, living perfectly, and then showing his love to its fullest extent by dying on the cross in our place.

[19 : 56] God's love is for those who are against him. It's love for the unlovely that makes them lovely because he loves them rather than the other way around.

So if you feel unlovely this morning, if you think your failures and your shame have made you hard to love, perhaps have even put you beyond the reach of God's love, you need to know that's not the case at all.

God's love is drawn to and reaches toward the most unlovely. God, give us that love. Love for the unlovely.

Love that is both deeply felt and tangibly demonstrated. Robert Benson is the original author of a Christmas story that many have adapted and I'm going to do that as well this morning.

It's the story of a homeless boy in Chicago on Christmas Eve. I'll read. It was a cold, dark night. A blizzard was coming.

[21 : 07] A little homeless boy was selling newspapers on the corner. He finally walked up to a policeman and said, Mister, do you know where a poor boy could find a warm place to sleep tonight?

I sleep in a box in the alley and it is very cold. It's the night before Christmas. I sure wish I had a nice, warm place to stay. The policeman told the little boy to go down the street to the big white house and knock on the door.

When a lady comes to the door, you just say, John 3.16 and she will let you in the house. The shivering little boy ran to the house. He walked up the steps and knocked on the door and a lady came to the door.

He looked up and said, John 3.16. The lady said, Come in, my son. She took him inside the warm house and gave him a seat in front of the fireplace.

The little boy sat near the fireplace and thought, John 3.16, I don't know what it means, but it sure makes a cold boy warm. Later she asked him, Are you hungry?

[22 : 10] And he said, Well, just a little. I have not eaten in a couple of days. She sat the boy down at the kitchen table full of food. He ate and ate until he was full.

As he was eating, he thought, John 3.16. I don't know what it means, but it sure makes a hungry boy full. She took him upstairs to a huge bathtub filled with warm water.

She told him to take a warm bath and put on warm pajamas. And as he soaked in the tub, he thought, John 3.16, I don't know what it means, but it sure makes a dirty boy clean.

Then she tucked him in bed and kissed him on the forehead. The boy lay there and thought, John 3.16, I don't know what it means, but it sure makes a tired boy rested. The next morning was Christmas Day and the woman gave the boy a big wrapped present.

He quickly pulled off the ribbons and opened it and he was surprised to find new clothes and a Bible. He happily thought again, John 3.16, I don't know what it means, but it sure makes a poor boy happy.

[23 : 17] And the lady took his Bible and sat down near him and asked him, do you know John 3.16? And he said, no ma'am, I don't. The first time I heard of it was when the policeman told me to use it.

She opened the Bible to John 3.16 and he read, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

And she said, you are always welcome in this house and I would love for you to be a part of my family but even more importantly, you are loved by God and can be a part of his family forever.

Now he understood what Christmas really was about. He held his new Bible as he sat in front of the warm fire and thought, John 3.16, now I know a little what it means and it sure makes a cold boy feel warm inside.

It sure makes a lonely boy feel loved. What a beautiful story of love for the unlovely demonstrated in word and in deed for God so loved the world that he gave, that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.

[24 : 49] When God wanted to show us his love, he gave. He gave himself. He gave himself forever to us as our father so that we, though we be completely unworthy and unlovely, would be his children who know and revel in and delight to share freely his immeasurable love.

Let's pray. God, we worship you for your heart of love. we plead with you that you would give us your heart that we might truly love in the way that we have been loved.

Father, would those of us who haven't experienced that love for ourselves this Christmas see a glimpse of it in a baby in a manger in a God who would become flesh for us because of his great love for us.

Do that work in our hearts. We ask for Jesus' sake and for the sake of those he would send us to with his love. Amen.

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