

# **“THE REALITY OF CHRISTMAS: HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**December 4, 2022, 10:30 AM**

**Text for the Sermon: John 3:13-17**

## **Introduction.**

In 1970 in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for Literature, Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, “One word of truth outweighs the whole world.”

John 3:16 is one of those truths, a truth that outweighs the whole world, a truth that silences a million lies, a truth that answers the hardest questions and erases the deepest fears, a truth that turns the world upside down.

There have been many great revelations of truth in this world of ours but none so great as this. There have been many great visitations by God in the past but none so great as the incarnation.

Last week we considered from this great text:

**The Revelation of Christmas**

**For God so loved the world**

This week we consider:

**The Reality of Christmas**

**that He gave His only begotten Son**

Forbes magazine once a year publishes a list of the wealthiest people in the world. You know the names, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Warren Buffet. But the only reason those men head the list is because of a serious oversight on the part of the Forbes researchers. There is someone who makes those men look like homeless guys.

God is the richest person in the entire universe. He not only owns the cattle on a thousand hills, but He owns the hills, the earth and everything in it. He not only owns more than everyone else, He owns everyone else and He owns everything they own (John Piper, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*, p. 89ff).

**Psalm 100:3** It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

When you create something it is yours, so everyone and everything is His. We are just trustees or stewards.

Have you ever noticed what the NT says about the wealth of the richest person in the universe? You don't find much mention of all of God's stuff. He doesn't talk about His cool toys and all the latest things He has made. His wealth is not described in terms of what He has created or what He owns.

The wealth of God is described in terms of His glory which He has had from all eternity and long before He made anything.

**Philippians 4:19** My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

**Jesus Christ** is the supreme visible expression and display of the vastness and infinite extravagance of God's wealth. In Christ we see the unsurpassing display of the riches of the glory of all of God's attributes.

In Christ we see the riches of God's love and kindness, His mercy and grace, His justice and righteousness. Jesus is the lavish display of God's great love and mercy. Jesus is the extravagance of God where we see His infinite wealth and power and mercy and love.

**Ephesians 1:7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us.

**Ephesians 2:7** [God loved us] ... so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

### **God Gave.**

Last week we said God is love and God loves. Love leads to action, it is not passive. **Love gives.** Our text says, God so loved the word that God gave. Giving grows out of love. Giving is what love does. The giving originates in the love of God and flows out of the riches of His love.

Love gives gifts. Christ is frequently referred to as a gift.

**John 4:10** Jesus answered her, "If you knew the *gift of God*, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

**II Corinthians 9:15** Thanks be to God for his *inexpressible gift!*

What God gives shows us the length He is willing to go to love. Christ is God's very best gift, the best He has to offer. That He gave His one and only Son, His one and only

begotten Son gives extra emphasis to making the point this is God's very best gift, the gift of Himself.

### **His only begotten Son.**

He gave His one and only Son, His only begotten Son. We are so familiar with these words we can't hear the initial shock of them anymore. But it is a stunning thing to consider the God of the universe has a Son. These are strange words to the first hearers.

We can't remember a time when we were startled by hearing that God has a Son so we pass over this verse as though it were common place. But as I said last week sometimes we need to slow down and savor what seems common or familiar and see new beauty in an old text.

Muslims are scandalized by these words. To say God has a Son means to them God had sex with someone, an angel or a woman. And that is blasphemy.

They don't understand the significance of the meaning of the word begotten. It doesn't mean born, it means of the same substance as, or same essence as. The Word was with God and the Word was God.

"Only begotten conveys the idea, not of derivation and subordination, but of uniqueness and consubstantiality: Jesus is all that God is and He alone is this" (Warfield quoted in EDT, p. 799).

C.S. Lewis said: "Rabbits beget rabbits; horses beget horses; humans beget humans, not statues or portraits; and God begets God—not humans and not angels." Jesus is not made or born, He is begotten of God, the same as God. Jesus is all that God is and He alone is this.

Some protest that a son cannot be the same age as a father, so Christ cannot be as old as the Father, which means Christ is not eternal and therefore He is not God.

But when did I become a father? I became a father at exactly the same moment that my son became a son. I have been a father for exactly as long as my son has been a son.

Fatherhood implies Sonship. God is eternally Father and Christ is eternally Son, begotten eternally from the Father; and equally God, sharing all the attributes of the Godhead.

The Son of God is the one and only unique Son of the Father. He has no other. Such is His love that He gives us His first, last and only Son.

The closest human picture of this is Abraham not sparing His own son for the sake of his love for God. God did not spare His own Son. It was the ultimate sacrifice. And God did this knowing full well how His greatest gift would be treated. He would be hated, opposed, killed, shown ingratitude, ignored, rejected. But did God hesitate to send His Son?

### **God gave His only begotten Son.**

**Some people have a hard time believing that God loves them.** The words “only begotten,” or “one and only” are meant to emphasize in bold letters with an underscore just how great is the love of God for us. Out of all His riches, God gave His most treasured gift.

We were so beloved, so dear to God that for our sakes He did not spare His one and only son. We were so lost, so dead that God went to the greatest lengths possible to save us, He held nothing back, there is no more He could do than He has done.

He has spoken with loudest voice, He has written in the largest of letters, He has shown it with the brightest of lights, He uses angels to announce it with the clearest of intentions. I am struck by the picture painted in the hymn, The Love of God.

Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made;  
were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill, and ev'ryone a scribe by trade;  
to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry;  
nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

God has made His love so clear, that for anyone to doubt it or question it is to bring serious insult upon Christ, as if to say He is not enough, or He is a poor substitute. If God had given an angel, even an archangel or a seraphim or cherubim or some other creature even of the highest order, it would be of no help to us and therefore of no real love to us. So great is God's love for us and so precious is our salvation to Him He gives His Son over to us to die for our sins, for us who were ungodly.

How big a difference is there in your mind between an ant and an angel? Which is bigger, the difference between the ant and the angel, or the difference between an angel and God? The difference between the first two is miniscule compared to the vast, even incomprehensible gulf between an angel and God. So great is God's love for us that the gift He gave was no mere creature, not even an angel, but He gave Himself. Immanuel, God with us.

This is the glory of the gospel, revealed in the incarnation of Christ. This is the reality of Christmas. God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, His very self.

## Application and conclusion:

This calls for three responses.

*First, we must accept His gift.* Our experience of this love and our joy in this love will remain empty if we stay spectators of it. A cousin of mine posted a quote that is going around social media sites about why people end up in hell. It isn't because of tattoos, or drugs, or spending time in jail, or because they didn't live a good enough life or go to the right church, or because of that really dumb thing they did they don't want anyone to know about, or because of what someone else did to them.

There is one reason people end up in hell. Because they rejected God's perfect and best gift. They refused to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ and trust Him as their Savior and Lord. He has paid for all your sins, all the stupid things you have done, He died for you. God holds out to you His salvation as a free gift, everyone who accepts it will be save.

God has given us the very best gift possible. To reject the greatest gift is the greatest sin.

*The second response is not just to be receivers of the gift.* As blessed as it is to receive, it is even more blessed to give. Our joy is made complete when we share it and see it come to light in others. Our joy is multiplied when we see joy multiplied in others.

**1 John 4:11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Christianity is a giving religion, a giving faith. The Father gives the Son. The Son gives Himself freely. The Father and the Son give the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the gifts of the Spirit. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit give "grace upon grace" (John 1:16) upon multiplied grace.

Why do we cling so tightly to our time, affection, money, forgiveness, kindness? What is keeping us from opening our hearts and hands to love and give freely, extending mercy, giving of ourselves to others? Think for just a minute, from whom are we withholding something that would put on display the riches of God toward us?

If God's glory is displayed in His love and mercy toward us, how much more will that glory be displayed if we pass it on, share it, give it?

Let's move past vague words and become as visible and outward as God's love. Let's give freely, frequently, liberally, generously, and in ways that deny our selves. This is not a burden, it is a privilege and a joy. It is God-like.

*The third response is to have absolute confidence in this.*

**Romans 8:31** If God is for us, who can be against us? **32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

This is one of those If/then logic statements going from the greater to the lessor. There is a premise and a promise. If God already gave the greatest gift, unasked for, then what will He not give when asked?

If God did not spare His one and only Son, but freely gave Him up to us because this was His very best for us, then be assured He will never withhold from us anything that is good, and in our darkest trials know that it cannot be wrong, but only for our good out of His great love.

If God did not shrink back from already giving us His very best, then in every circumstance of real need He will not shrink back from giving us what we ask according to our need and what is best.

**Hebrews 4:16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive [the riches of His] mercy and find [the riches of His] grace to help in time of need.”

**John 3:16-17** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** 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.

One word of truth outweighs the whole world. One word of truth outweighs all the whole world.

One word of truth in your heart outweighs all the sin within.

One word of truth on your lips spoken in love will outweigh much hurt or anxiety or fear.

One word of truth will save a soul and give you peace.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, what more could you do for us than you have already done: We are humbled to be the recipients of such extravagant love. Too often we are anxious about tomorrow or the future. Help us to see the riches of your glory and how rich and generous you are toward us and that if you love us and care for us in this way, then what do we have to fear. Make your riches shine in our hearts. In Jesus name and for His sake, Amen.