

THE REASON FOR CHRISTMAS: THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES WILL NOT PERISH

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: John 3:13-18, 36

Introduction:

We began the Advent Season considering the great *revelation of Christmas* which is there is a God and God is love and God loves the world.

Last week we considered the *reality of Christmas* and how incomprehensibly great is the extravagant gift of God in giving us His one and only eternally begotten Son, Jesus Christ. God gave us His highest and the best.

This morning we consider the *reason for Christmas*, the great necessity behind the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The Reason of Christmas that whoever believes in Him shall not perish.

If so great a love is required that the very Son of God must be given on our behalf, if this is the only solution, then just how grave is the problem?

Have you noticed the Christmas angels in the Christmas story come announcing that all human beings are in grave danger of perishing?

When the angel came to Joseph he said, “You shall call his name Jesus for he shall *save* his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

When the angel appeared to the shepherds he said, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a *Savior*, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

What’s with all these angels at the first Christmas talking about our need of salvation?

None of the Christmas cards we get and send have messages on them like that. They all say: Peace on Earth ; Joy to the World; Glory to God.

How come we don't see Hallmark's Christmas cards that say things like: “Saved from Sin” or “Delivered from Death” or “Rescued from Perishing”?

Back in my college days during breaks and summers I worked in a box factory in Wichita, Kansas. There was one old guy there when anyone asked where he was going, he always had the same answer, “To hell if I don’t change my ways.”

It always got a chuckle. But it always struck me as chilling. Did he really believe that and if so why didn't he change his ways instead of joking about it?

It's staggering how casual and flippant we are about such a great horror. It's impossible to describe how terrible hell is, or overstate the horror of everlasting torment and endless suffering.

There is a terrifying judgment hanging over our world because of the world's sin.

Two funerals here in five days should remind us death awaits us all. We are perishable. There is an expiration date stamped on every one of us. And on that date we will perish unless the expiration date is replaced with a redemption date.

Perish

It is amazing one of the most loved and memorized verses in the Bible has such an ugly word in it. Perish. It's like the song *Amazing Grace*, one of the most well-known and much-loved Christian songs in the world and it has that unpleasant phrase, "saved a wretch like me."

Many people love John 3:16 but don't honestly think about what it is really saying. How can there be in one verse the words God, love and perish? Some people question this, how can a loving God allow people to perish, or let people go to hell?

That statement reflects a purely human perspective of love and a flawed one at that. Like a boyfriend saying if you love me you will have sex with me. Like a child saying if you love me you won't spank me. Since God is nice and loving, full of grace and mercy, He won't send anyone to hell.

A boyfriend who loves, protects his girlfriend from his own selfish lust. Parents who love their children discipline them when they disobey. A God, who is only loving, is a very small, lopsided God. God is loving and holy and just and righteous. God is infinite and sin is an offense against an infinitely pure and holy God.

Yes, God is love and God is loving, but He doesn't love everything, like sin, injustice, evil, wickedness, darkness. His love and justice compel Him to do something about what He doesn't love.

God's love is most evident in giving us a very clear warning about judgment and hell, and giving us such a loving solution, a way to escape judgment and hell.

John 3:16 warns us of a very serious truth and it calls us to take seriously the implications of this verse. We see this by the context of the verse which most don't know or ignore.

Remember how I connected the words “God gave His only son” to the OT story of Abraham willingly sacrificing his only son. This word perish is also connected to another OT story which we see in that strange verse in John 3:14.

What is this business of Moses lifting up a serpent? It’s from Numbers 21.

Numbers 21:4-9 The people became impatient on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” 6 Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

The people sinned against God and their sin brought death into the camp. Sin is like the deadly venom of a snake. The wages of sin is death. They needed saving from death, they couldn’t save themselves. They cried out for deliverance, for salvation, and God raised up a solution. If they would look up at the bronze serpent they would live.

Their salvation was outside of themselves, beyond their own power, in fact beyond any human power. They had to put their faith in something else. Those who believed were saved.

God put that story in the OT as an illustration. In the face of death our only hope is to look up in faith to the Christ lifted up on the cross. The sin that poisoned us to death and sends us to hell is put on Christ. If we repent and believe as they did, we will be saved.

The point of the OT is to point us to the coming of Christ. The point of the NT is to point to the salvation that has come into the world. The whole point of church history is to point back to the saving mission of Christ.

God has been announcing this warning for thousands of years before and for thousands of years after. The entire world is under the just condemnation of the wrath of God.

It’s that simple. God hates sin. God’s wrath will be poured out in judgment on all sin.

John 3:19-20 This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

God has sent His light into the world, and those who will not come to it, those who love darkness, will receive darkness forever. Those who persist and continue in iniquity will perish in eternal and everlasting hell.

The key word in the key verse is the word believes.
Whoever believes will not perish but have eternal life.
Whoever does not believe will not have eternal life but will perish.

Our text speaks of the benefit of believing and the danger of not believing. Let's consider finally the danger of unbelief.

Unbelief.

There is an adage in the legal profession that "He who has himself for a lawyer, has a fool for a client." In other words, it is folly to appear in a court of law before a judge without an advocate and mediator.

Unbelief is folly, it's foolishness of the highest order. It's the attempt to appear before the righteous and just judge of the universe without any advocate or mediator, without any defense lawyer to plead our case.

More than folly, unbelief is a great sin. Unbelief is the rejection of the offer of a mediator and an advocate. God in His mercy offers His own Son to be our lawyer and it is foolish unbelief to decline. It would be like saying, "God, thanks but no thanks, I think I can handle this on my own. I think my own works and abilities and good deeds can speak for themselves. I think I can show that my sin is not all that great or that big a deal; I can make it go away on my own."

If the greatest love that has ever been shown in the world is the sending of God's own Son to the world to save the world, then the greatest evil and wickedness is to ignore and reject that gift.

To know this love, to have heard the Gospel, and then refused it, that is the definition of a person who is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Hebrews 2:3 "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

If a man will not believe, then he cannot be saved. It is as simple as that. It is suicidal to turn away from the remedy only remedy which saves our souls.

There is no other escape from death, but this one. And for those who reject Christ, nothing but death remains. Those who show contempt for the Gospel extinguish the only light of hope by which men may be saved.

II Thessalonians 2:10 ... [they] are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

You can know if you are perishing by one simple test. Do you care nothing for the cross of Jesus? Do you disdain the cross or consider it foolishness? Does it leave you cold, do nothing for you? If so, you are perishing. Or do you love the cross, do you trust it to be your atonement for your sin, do you believe it to be the means by which you are justified to a righteous God?

How many people in Lynden call themselves Christians, but don't really give Jesus much thought and don't particularly love Him or trust Him or obey Him or serve Him? They assent to the belief that He rose from the dead, yet live and act as though He were still dead.

How many people have memorized this verse and know it, but are unaffected by it? How many are there who's hearts remain unchanged, their lives untransformed, their wills un-surrendered? Secretly they remain committed only to themselves and to worldly pursuits and pleasures.

Application and conclusion:

How important would it be to you for someone to say to you something that would result in saving your life?

I tremble to think there is anyone in the hearing of my voice whose eternal soul is right now in danger of perishing eternally. I cannot bear the thought of anyone in this flock facing the reality of eternal death because they refuse to acknowledge their sin and refuse to repent of it and refuse to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

When someone says to you and to me that we will perish forever if we don't put our full faith, trust and confidence in Christ, that is love of the greatest kind. It is my love for you that compels me to plead with you to repent and believe.

I plead with you young people to surrender your life to Jesus by repenting and believing. I plead with you who have made a profession of your faith, but aren't taking it seriously or walking in it, to get real, to be honest, to grow in your faith and love for Jesus.

Look up to Jesus lifted up on the cross for your salvation, who died for your sin so you could be delivered from certain death. Look up to Jesus, love His cross, love His truth, long for His appearing and coming again.

John 10:28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.

Look at the example of Paul's own life.

I Timothy 1:15-16 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

God's Son came at Christmas to save you, there is no better time than Christmas to believe and be saved. If I can help please talk to me.

Do you know anyone who is perishing? Are you praying for them? Are you open to God using you in their life to rescue them from death?

Christmas is good news because there is bad news that it speaks to. Jesus came to rescue the perishing from sin and death. The world is under a curse. But Christ has come "to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found."

John 3:16, 36 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Prayer: Holy Father in heaven, you sent your only Son to earth to tell us the truth about our condition and our future. Thank you for sending to us messengers of the gospel, missionaries, pastors, parents, grandparents, friends, thank you for not leaving us in the dark. Father, move our hearts to compassion for the lost, stir our hearts to care, and stir us to get over our fears and tell someone else the most important thing someone else told us. And if there is someone here today or someone listening to this sermon who doesn't yet believe, send your Holy Spirit to them through your Word, and make their hearts open to believe the true reason for Christmas. May they be willing to make that most important decision of their life and to profess their faith in Jesus Christ.