

“THE REWARD OF CHRISTMAS: HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

December 18, 2022, 10:30 AM

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

Introduction:

Christmas and the gospel are synonymous. That is why the summary of the gospel in John 3:16 makes such a great text for a series of Christmas sermons.

Christmas and the gospel have its origins in the love of God for a sinful and disobedient world. That love springs into action in the giving of a gift, and not just any gift but the highest and best gift, the one and only Son of the Living God being given to the world and for the world. The reason for giving the gift is to save the world from perishing. The world is lost, dead in sin and in imminent danger of justly perishing in eternal hell.

What a contrast we come to this morning, between perishing and eternal life, the two ultimate extremes of human destiny, two eternal realities that are infinitely separated from each other. We turn from the most terrifying and tragic possibility, to the most glorious alternative.

The reward of Christmas and the gospel is those who believe in Christ will not die but will live forever under the saving sovereignty of God.

This morning we come to the fourth and final aspect of the meaning of Christmas in John 3:16.

The Reward of Christmas - eternal life!

Some pastors write books about how you can have your best life now. Don't buy it. Don't settle on so little when so much is offered. If you strive for your best life now you will peak too soon and miss the greatest life of all, *eternal life in the life to come*. That is your best life.

Of all the things we seek and desire and wish for and strive after, this is the only thing set before us as the greatest reward. This is the one gift to prize above all others. If you have this you have everything. If you don't have this nothing else really matters.

What does it really profit a man in the long run to gain the whole world yet lose his soul?

Let's ask and answer four questions about eternal life.

Where is eternal life?

It may not be where you think. It's not far away in heaven, it's imparted to us in Christ.

John 1:4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 5:26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

John 17:3 This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

God is the only eternal being in the universe. Nothing else is eternal. So the only way to have something eternal is to have Him.

But God did not choose to keep this life hidden in Himself. He chose to reveal Himself as the fountain of life in His Son. From His Son flows all of God's life to us. Jesus is life itself. In Him is life. Christ's life is eternal life.

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Abundantly means fully, completely, and eternally.

This boldly declares the excellency of Jesus. There is no one else like Him and no other name on earth in which to trust for salvation and eternal life. We can't make too big a deal about Jesus.

How do we learn about this eternal life?

Though the eternal Word of Christ.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God
14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

John 6:68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

I John 5:11 This is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

The mission of the Son on earth is to reveal the glory of God's love, grace and mercy by saving sinners and giving eternal life to all who believe in Him.

His life is imparted to all who believe in Him. He that has the Son has life. *Not will have, but has*. John 3:36 says it is our present possession, not just some distant reality.

How do we receive His eternal life?

Romans 6:23 The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

By believing? Is it just some sort of vague notion of a God? No, not just by believing, but believing in him. What does that mean?

Up until now we have not mentioned the greater context of Jesus' words here in John 3:16. At the beginning of John 3, Jesus is talking to a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Jesus told Nicodemus unless you are born again you will not see the Kingdom of God.

That raised a concern for Nicodemus. How can you go and be born a second time? Jesus answers it is a work of the Spirit. So Nicodemus asks, "How can these things be?" And to his *how* question Jesus gives three answers, or one answer three times. Three times Jesus makes clear to Nicodemus what simply must be done.

John 3:15 *whoever believes in him* may have eternal life.

16 *whoever believes in him* should not perish but have eternal life.

18 *Whoever believes in him* is not condemned.

John 1:12 To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 12:46 I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

John 20:30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Believing in Jesus is turning from the darkness of your sin, and trusting and obeying His Word, believing in the name of Jesus in your heart, confessing His name. It is a present, personal relationship.

It is the greatest simplicity. No paperwork, no forms in triplicate. No applications or references or long lines. No appointments or long drives to the headquarters. No advanced reservations.

Faith in Jesus is the key to everything. He that has faith, has life. He that does not have faith, has death. Repent and believe, and you will have now eternal life.

All who believe in Him receive new birth (vs. 3, 5); gain eternal life (vs. 15, 16); are saved (vs. 17). All who do not believe perish (vs. 16, 10:18); lose their life (12:25); are doomed to destruction (vs. 17:12). There is no third option.

John 5:24 I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.

If you have Christ you already passed from death to life, you aren't waiting for it, you have it.

How long is eternity?

I had a teacher in high school who mocked heaven as a place of sheer boredom, wearing white robes, playing harps, sitting on clouds. Boredom is a result of familiarity, of been there, done that. Won't the novelty wear off when we have been there ten thousand years?

That is an impossibility in the presence of an eternal and infinite God. He is an inexhaustible fountain of beauty, truth, goodness, love and knowledge. He is an endless expanse; He is a bottomless ocean. There will always and forever be more to know and enjoy. The pursuit of this will expand forever. The fountain that supplies our joy is infinite.

Ephesians 2:6-7 [God] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Is it possible for our joy to continue to increase forever? Is it possible to be more joyful each day than the day before everyday for all eternity? Is that possible?

The answer is yes. Along with Him showing the immeasurable riches of His grace, He will give our resurrected bodies and minds an ever-increasing capacity for joy, we will never stop growing in our ability to see and experience richer, fuller, more glorious things about God.

Heaven is a place where God plans to lavish on us with overwhelming abundance the infinite fullness of His staggering glory in a way that will overflow in pure joy and delight in us.

In other words, our enjoyment of God will never be complete but will escalate in ever-increasing wonder and awe, and intensity and intimacy, and in knowledge and understanding, and in love and joy forever and ever.

There will never be a moment in heaven when we will be able to say, there now, that is the end, that is the fullness or completeness of God and His goodness and blessing.

There will never be a time when we reach the summit of the highest height. There will never be a time when we reach the bottom of the deepest depth. What is the chief end of man? To

glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Start now and pray for an ever-increasing capacity to enjoy Him forever. It begins now because eternity begins when we are in Christ.

Boredom is an absolute impossibility in heaven, there will be none of it there, ever. Boring and heaven are oxymorons. They don't belong in the same sentence. If you think heaven will get boring, you know what the problem is? Your God is way too small, not big enough.

Application and Conclusion:

This is the reward of Christmas, this is what Jesus came to earth and died on the cross to give us. In the words of the missionary Jim Elliott, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Admonition to those who believe.

As Jesus is the vine and we are branches, abide in Christ and let His eternal life flow in you now. But it is not only a present possession, there is also the hope of a future, full realization.

Look forward to the day. Long for the coming of Christ. Welcome every thought of that day and what it will be like. Allow yourself from time to time to contemplate what a glorious day it will be. Think about it, prepare for it, plan for it.

I Corinthians 2:9 As it is written, "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."

Admonition to those who don't believe.

I am aware every time I do a funeral that in every family there is a mix of believers and unbelievers. I seek to be as clear as I can be and urge everyone to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation.

There is no unwillingness on God's part to forgive any sinner, who comes in faith, believing in Christ and repenting of all his sins, however great his sins. There is no one excluded from heaven who truly believes and wants to be there.

Isaiah 45:22 Turn [Look!] to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

Look! It is that simple, look up to Jesus lifted up on the cross, to be cured, saved from the serpent bit of sin.

Romans 10:13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

This is the time of year when the whole world is reminded the God of the universe stepped across the threshold of heaven, left His throne in the highest heaven and stooped so low as to become one of us, taking on our flesh and blood. He came to our world out of love for us to save us from our sin. There is held out to us life and death. I urge all to choose life.

It is a glorious truth that the God of the universe is the God of love. And it is an exceedingly great thing that His love is active and that He gave to us His very best and greatest gift, His one and only Son. And it is grace incomprehensible that the Son of the Living God should die for the sins of us sinners.

Christ is the only way to heaven, the only way to salvation. There is no other path, but glory to God, there is a path. Eternal life resides in a person. That is why it doesn't just say believe, but believe in Him. Don't miss the message of Christmas and of the gospel, eternal life is a personal relationship with a personal God who comes to us in Christ.

To give gifts this season without receiving *the* gift of eternal life is to miss the whole point.

May the Holy Spirit lead us to faith in Jesus so that our eternal souls are rescued from perishing and made to possess the most glorious inheritance.

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

Prayer: Eternal Father of glory, open the eyes of our hearts to see glimpses of your glory and open the eyes of our hearts to see the glorious hope to which you have called us. Fix our eyes on Christ's complete victory over death and His resurrection and our resurrection to glory. Holy Father, make these realities so clearly known to all of us that it chases from our hearts and minds, anxiety, grumbling, complaining, selfishness, fear, doubt, unforgiveness and increases in us joy, peace, hope and faith in Jesus.