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The Love of God in Christmas

One of the annoyances that a New Zealander must go through if they marry someone from another country is the process of applying for a partnership-based visa. When you apply for a partnership-based visa, Immigration New Zealand requires all sorts of proofs from the couple to show their genuine long-term committed relationship with each other. Essentially, they must prove their love.

People in this situation have to submit things like documentation of joint ownership of property and assets, residential property, perhaps a marriage certificate, birth certificates for any children that they have, personal text messages, and frequent usage of joint bank accounts, all as evidence of their relationship. It wouldn't be enough that the couple would simply say that they loved one another and lived together; it must be provable by the facts.

Friends, in a way, it is much the same in the scriptures. God leaves a track record of his love for his people over the scope of redemptive history. It is not as if we simply have to believe that God is love as an undemonstrated truth claim. Rather, God shows before all the peoples that there is a love in him far exceeding that which man may himself show. This love is all caught up in the coming of Jesus Christ. You see, Christmas shows us the receipts of God's love. Here's the proof of God's love.

These two verses that I want to put before you are sandwiched in between the Apostle John's call to the Christian church to love one another. We see in the first verse of the section in verse seven: "Beloved, let us love one another." In verse eleven, it says, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another." There's a sandwich there, a command for the church to love one another. It's plain and simple. The church of Jesus Christ is commanded to love one another.

But with what sort of love? Because there are many types of love. Our English use of the word gets muddled. If I said to you I love the broccoli salad that my mother makes every

Christmas, I would be saying something quite different than if I said I loved my mother herself, wouldn't I? There is a difference between my mother and a broccoli salad. I hope you can understand that. Though the same word is used, these are different loves.

In 1 John, the underlying word translated love here is not a romantic love or a familial love or a friendship love, but it is a charitable love, a giving love, a serving love, a merciful, generous, sacrificial love. John wants us to see that the believer's duty to love one another is not some arbitrary requirement, but rather it's a reflection of that love which God has shown them. The love we are to have for one another flows from the fountainhead of God's demonstration of his love in sending Jesus Christ into this world we remember this Christmas. God is love, and in Jesus Christ, as we are reminded, he has perfectly displayed and validated this love for the world to see.

And so for another year, this Christmas, we can all reflect on the reality that when Jesus Christ came into this world, before our eyes, at the touch of our hands, as sound to the ears, God gave man his greatest gift. The birth of the child Christ was the real and indisputable demonstration of his favor and loving kindness towards humanity. John points us to the one who became our covering for sins, and he says, "Here's the proof, here's the evidence, here's all the receipts you need to know that God loves."

I'm reminded of the song by William Rees. "Here is love, vast as the ocean, Loving-kindness as the flood; When the Prince of Life, my ransom, Shed for me his precious blood."

Let's consider the first thing we need to know about these verses: there is first love that sent the Son, love that sent the Son. The first proof of God's love in Christmas is that he has sent his Son into the world. This is the first observation in the text in verse nine. It says, "By this, the love of God was manifested in us that God has sent his only begotten Son."

Now, perhaps you get confused, as many do, when you hear Jesus spoken of as the Son or the Son of God, and you think, how could God, as a spiritual being, have a son? What then does sonship mean? Well, this sonship of Jesus is not a biological sonship, but it's a metaphorical sonship. Imagine a young boy who, through watching his father, begins to do as his father does and mimic his father. In the son's mimicking of his father, he becomes not only his biological son but his metaphorical son as well.

When the Bible talks about God sending the Son into the world, it means sonship in this metaphorical sense. It means that Jesus shares in perfect likeness in nature to God himself, and in this way is uniquely the Son of God in his humanity. Not only a man, but the Bible says this about Jesus: "for in him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form." The triune God has incarnated in the person of the Son, and this sonship is a reflection. In Jesus, we see God truly.

But how does this coming of the Son show us the love of God? Well, because you and I, our world, humanity, was not worthy of such a man among us. The one as pure as Jesus, one who was the object of God the Father's pure, unbridled, infinite love and delight—the perfect beloved Son—for him to assume a human nature and come and live amongst a wicked and

sinful people like us is beyond belief. It would be like the late Queen of England walking through the red-light districts of London. What is someone like her doing in a place like that? Well, it's much the same. Christ's presence in our fallen world is nothing short of the contrast of light to darkness, of holy to unholy, of sacred to the profane, of the blessed to the cursed.

We ought to shudder at the thought that a holy God, who is separate from sinners, would come and dwell so intimately in a place and among a people so defiled by sin, so plagued by wickedness, and in all our ways corrupted. But he came, friends, and just as promised in ages past, now therefore we see and we know God's love.

But there is a second thing in the passage here we see: God's love is love that grants life, love that grants life. This is the second proof: God grants sinners new life. The text says that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through him. Here then is the ultimate gift of what is available to you in Jesus. God comes in Christ to grant you a share of his life and lead you to eternal life. Jesus comes to live for us, die for us, and be raised from the dead for us, that through him, by the Spirit of God, we might experience his life within us.

This might seem a little bit strange to some of you. What sort of life could this possibly be about? I already have life. I have consciousness, I have will, I have being. What am I lacking this Christmas? Well, friends, until you have the gift of Christ, you do not have life, but you have death. You must pass out of death, out of darkness, and into Christ's light. We find this in Jesus' teaching. He says, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not hunger. He who believes in me will never thirst."

You see, there is life and life everlasting in Jesus because he brings us to a relationship with God. Until we know Christ by faith, we are not the objects of God's love, but of his burning wrath and indignation. God loves, but because he is just, he also hates. The scripture says in Psalm 7, "If a man does not repent, he will sharpen his sword. He has bent his bow and made it ready." Christ comes to live and die in the sinner's place because of what Jesus has accomplished. God can now pour out upon his people forgiveness, mercy, and grant the promise of eternal life with him forevermore.

Now we can have communion with God, but this is not something you will inherit by mere fact of your birth, but rather it's something we receive by God's grace alone. We need Christ's life because until we have that life, there is only death in us. You see, God's love in Christ grants life.

There is a third thing we see in this text: it is love that is undeserved, love that is undeserved. You'll notice in the text next in verse 10, "And this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son." In this way, we are reminded that the coming of Jesus was entirely of grace. We cannot earn God's love. We cannot work for it. We cannot even know it without God illuminating our hearts. Salvation is all of grace. We are so estranged from God because of sin that his love and salvation must come to us as alien. It must come from outside of ourselves.

We were not loving God, but he, out of himself, loved us. He loved his enemies, he loved those who rebelled against him, who broke his laws, who blasphemed his name, who rejected and crucified his Son. Still, the Son of his love, the Lord Jesus Christ, as he was dying upon the cross, cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The scriptures say in Romans 5:8 that God demonstrates his own love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Love that is undeserved. A fourth and final point is that love covers sins. Love covers sins. Now we are pressing into the heart of the gospel and why Jesus came, why Christmas is worthy of celebration. This is the ultimate purpose for which he came: to be the sin bearer of his people. God shows his love by dealing with our greatest need, for even in the name given by the angels to Jesus, we see God's love for his name. Jesus from Yeshua means Yahweh, God saves, and Jesus is held out to all who will believe that he has come to make payment for your sin.

Think at the birth of Jesus, the angels announced in Luke 2, "For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Saviour." Think of Simeon who took the child Christ into his arms and said, "For my eyes have seen your salvation." But what does this word in our text mean, propitiation? What's this big scary word? Some of your Bibles might have instead atoning sacrifice. Well, this speaks to the fact that Jesus' death on the cross was a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God against his people.

The cross he died on was the stage wherein God imputed to all the believers' iniquity to Christ, all their wrongdoing before God's law. Every violation to Jesus was credited, and so wrath is turned away. The cross he died upon was a stage, friends. Jesus became to his father an object of his horror, and Jesus himself bore the penalty for our sins. This is love that we can hardly comprehend, that the beloved Son of God would come into the world so willingly to be a sacrifice for our sins, that we who were once God's enemies and due his righteous justice might be set free.

Another author has said, "If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Saviour."

I'm reminded of the song, "I'm so glad that our Father in heaven tells of his love in the book he has given. Wonderful things in the Bible I see. This is the dearest that Jesus loves me."

This Christmas, remember that God gave us proof of his great love. He has sent his Son into the world. He was found in appearance as a man. The Holy One of God came amongst us. In the Son, God grants life in his name to all who will believe. This love is undeserved and it comes apart from us. But most of all, this is a love which covers sins. It's full and free forgiveness of all trespasses and wrongs. By the blood of Christ, God has purchased his people's salvation.

I close with a reminder that for all who wish to know of God's love, you must look away from yourselves for salvation. You must acknowledge and forsake sin. You must repent. You must believe upon Jesus and have life in his name this Christmas.

Shall we pray?
