



Christmas 2016

Heaven-Sent Gift

Gift of Love

1 John 4:7-11

Message #1 of 3 – S718

Sermon given on December 18, 2016



CALVARY CHAPEL
FRENCH VALLEY

Sunday Morning Service

Pastor Rick Lancaster

Gift of Love

1 John 4:7-11

Opening Comments

- Here we are, one week from Christmas
- December 25th is the day we choose to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ
- We don't really know when Jesus was born
- Many dates have been put forward, from sometime in September to March
- There is no record of anyone celebrating Christ's birth until 336AD during the reign of Emperor Constantine
- A few years later the Pope declared December 25th as the official date that Christmas was to be celebrated
- Many of the traditions that we have for Christmas have a pagan origin
- Because Christians were often persecuted for their faith
- Many of them adopted some of the practices of the local cultures they lived in, except that they gave them sanctified, Christian meanings
- Christmas trees and mistletoe are just a couple of those
- One of those traditions was the exchanging of gifts
- Next weekend, more gifts will be exchanged, at least in the US, than any other time during the year
- And so I thought it would be good to take a little time and remember why we do that
- And we will do that by focusing on the gift that was given to us
- Let's pray now and then get into our text
- **Pray**

Teaching

- **Gift of Love**
- Please turn in your Bible to **1 John 4**
- The Bible has been described, rightly so, as God's love letter to His creation, mankind

- Some people have a hard time seeing that in the Old Testament, but the New Testament makes that very clear
- And that is especially true in this letter that the Apostle John wrote
- All through this letter John reminds us of the words that he heard from the lips of Jesus **John 13:34-35**

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

- Love is not just some religious exercise or emotional state
- Love is the foundation upon which all of Christianity becomes Christian
- And so it makes sense that to call ourselves Christians, we would respond to God's love by loving God and others
- Which is exactly what John starts out telling us to do
- **1 John 4:7-8**
- The kind of love that John is talking about is not a human kind of love
- It's not a falling in love kind of love
- It is not a love that is fickle and easily wounded
- It is not a love that can be ignored or walked away from
- It is a kind of love that transcends all of our emotions and desires
- It is a love that gives, and gives, and gives, with no thought or receiving or taking
- It is a love that gives to the deserving and undeserving equally
- It is a love that does not judge the worthiness of the person being loved
- This is the kind of love that every human soul longs for
- It is the love that we were created for
- This is the love that many people spend their whole life looking for – often, in all the wrong places
- When we talk about love, in the way that John is using the word, we are talking about a love that humans are incapable of producing
- John is talking about the love of God, what we call agape love – that's the Greek word he uses
- John is telling us that we are to love like that

- But how can we love others with God's love if we are incapable of loving that way
- John says that two things must be true in your life if you want to be able to love in this way; 'born of God and knows God'
- Turn to **John 3**
- When John talks about being 'born of God' he is not talking about physical birth, because everyone who can read or hear that is physically alive
- He must mean something different
- **John 3:1-3**
- It seems that Jesus answers Nicodemus' question before he asks it
- Nicodemus doesn't understand
- **John 3:4-8**
- In addition to being born physically, you must be born spiritually if you want to see the kingdom of God = please God and go to heaven
- Nicodemus still doesn't get it
- **John 3:9-15**
- Verse 14 tells us that the spiritual birth is possible because Jesus will be lifted up on the cross and die
- In fact, Jesus says later that is the only way to spiritual life **John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**
- Verse 15 tells us that by believing that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, we have eternal life = spiritual life forever
- And then Jesus tells us why God did it
- **John 3:16**
- When we exchange gifts on Christmas day, it should remind us that God gave a gift of love to the whole world – His own Son
- When we celebrate the birth of Jesus, it should remind us that gift was given to the billions of people born for the last 2,000 years
- Turn back to **1 John 4**
- Our Heavenly Father is God – Almighty, Sovereign over the whole universe
- He could have created any system He wanted to get His creation to heaven

- He could have created a religion, where its adherents would get to heaven through rituals and observances – by their own ability and faithfulness
- He could have created some people to be with Him in heaven, and created everyone else to go to hell – without choice
- He could create a system of balances, where the good of our life is measured against the bad in our life – if the balance tips toward the good, you go to heaven, if the balance tips toward the bad, you go to hell
- None of those kinds of systems reflect the nature of God
- **1 John 4:9**
- God is a relational being, whose primary motivation is love
- And as a radical display of that love, He sent us a gift from heaven – His Son Jesus
- God did that because He loves us
- Not because of our religion, not because of the rules and commandments that we obey or break, not because there is something good or bad in us – He just loves
- **1 John 4:10**
- God loves us, not because of our love for Him
- The Bible is clear, we are incapable of loving God the way we ought to – but He loves us anyway
- In fact, the only way we can love, as God loves, is because He loves us first, and we receive His love
- The Bible does not teach that we need to love God to be saved – it says that we need to believe to be saved
- God loves us and saves us before we love Him because we believe that Jesus died for our sins
- Then God enables us to love Him and others the way we should

Romans 5:5

The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

- God's love compelled Him to express His love by sending us a gift from heaven – a heaven-sent gift of love
- So this week, by all means, give gifts

- But let them be gifts of love
- **1 John 4:11**
- The greatest gift that God could give us was His love manifested in the sending of His perfect Son to be born to a humble woman in the city of Bethlehem
- As we celebrate this wondrous heaven-sent gift of love, let us keep the main thing the main thing
- It is not about the gifts – it is about love – let your gifts be expressions of the love of God poured out into your heart by the Spirit
- The greatest gift you can ever give anyone is love
- Long after the wrapping paper is thrown away, and the Christmas meal is eaten, and the gifts are lost, broken, or worn out – the love you express continues
- Gifts can be exchanged, re-gifted, or thrown away, but love lives in the heart of the giver and the receiver of that love
- As we prepare to close this service, I would like to leave you with three right responses to the heaven-sent gift of the love of God
- The first right response is **Walk in His Love**
- As believers in Jesus Christ we should walk in His love **Ephesians 5:1-2**

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

- Nothing pleases God like His children walking in His love
- The second right response **Return to His Love**
- Life has a way of distracting us away from things that are important
- Even away from the love of God
- In the book of Revelation, Jesus wrote seven letters to seven churches
- The very first one was to the church in Ephesus
- **Revelation 2:1-3**
- This church was busy doing things, good things
- **Revelation 2:4**
- Our first love is the love of God
- I have loved my wife Kelly for over 35 years
- But she knows and is happy that she is my second love

- She knows that I love God more than her
- She is okay with that because she also knows that the only way I can love her is by loving God, by loving her with the love of God
- Notice what Jesus tells this church that was doing great works
- **Revelation 2:5**
- It is a sin torn away from God's love
- So whether you are involved in sin, doing things you know are wrong in God's eyes or you have just allowed your love for God to grow cold, the answer is the same
- Stop whatever you are doing and start loving God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength
- The first two possible responses – Walk in His Love – Return to His Love
- The third right response is for those who have never known the love of God – **Receive His Love**
- John 3:16 says that God loves the whole world
- The Father sent Jesus as a gift to the world – a heaven-sent gift of His amazing love
- And just like any gift, all you have to do is receive it
- You don't need to get your act together before you accept Jesus
- You don't have to clean yourself up before you come to God
- The Bible makes receiving the gift a very simple process **Acts 16:31 Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.**
- So precious is the gift of Jesus Christ, that the Bible says there is a severe consequence for not receiving Him **2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**
- Next Sunday we celebrate the day the Heaven-Sent Gift, Jesus Christ came into the world
- The Bible teaches us that all of heaven celebrates when just one person receives the free gift of salvation
- God has a perfect gift for you, will you receive it today?

- Amen - have a radical week