

Christmas 3:16
The Premise of Christmas
John 3:16

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Introduction of Text: John 3:16 is likely the most well-known, single verse of all of Scripture. Perhaps it was the first verse ever committed to memory. Perhaps it is the only verse committed to memory.

This morning, we begin thinking in earnest about Christmas. For these weeks leading up to Christmas, I am preaching on one verse—John 3:16. Someone called it the “Mount Everest of the Scriptures.” I was struck recently with how this one verse communicates to us the message and hope of Christmas. You know the verse, but I pray that God will help us to see God’s truth is a powerful way.

Text: ¹⁶For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Introduction: Former Secretary of Labor Raymond Donovan, who served under Ronald Reagan, tells the story of one time being on the President's plane--Air Force One. He was in the back compartment of the jet with all the other presidential helpers, while President Reagan was in the front of the jet in his private compartment. The phone rang in the back compartment and the voice said, "Mr. Donovan, the President would like for you to join him for lunch." Secretary Donovan straightened his tie and thought to himself how important he was to have the President ask him to join him for lunch.

Just as Secretary Donovan walked through the doorway into the President's compartment, the Red Phone rang--the Red Phone is the Presidential Hotline that is always next to the President. Wow! What a moment to be with the President of the United States! What major event could the President be involved in deciding? Thousands, No, millions of lives could be affected by what happened in the next few seconds. What could it be? Were we possibly going to war? Was there a major world crisis that had to be averted? Were our troops in severe danger of attack?

The President picked up the phone and said, "Yes--uh huh--Yes--Alright, what are my options?" Secretary Donovan's heart almost stopped. His mind raced. Then the President continued, "O.K. I'll have the Iced Tea!" and hung up. So much for an important event in the world's history!

There are a lot of events that have gone on in our lifetime that we think are of major importance, but they turn out not to be very much. But, I think you will agree that Jesus coming to our world, dying on a cross, and rising from the grave is the world’s most important event. This one verse in John tells us of the significance of Jesus’ coming. We celebrate Christmas, because Jesus came. Although this verse is so very familiar to us, I hope that you will see it again with me this Christmas season in a fresh way-- a way that ties together our need for Jesus, but also our need to share Jesus with others. I trust that our thinking upon this great truth discovered in John 3:16 will help us to see that we have a commission to help bring this good news to the whole world.

So, here is what we are going to do. We are going to take this verse, one phrase at a time, starting today with just the words, “For God so loved the world.” Here in this phrase is **The Premise of Christmas**—the

foundation of Christmas. Or we could ask it this way—“Why Christmas?” The answer? “For God so loved the world”?

Remembering God’s Love throughout History

Christmas starts with God. Christmas starts with God’s love. But, the birth of Jesus Christ was not the beginning of God’s love. The story of God in human history is the story of God’s love for humanity. The Bible is full of reminders of God’s love.

Deuteronomy 4:37

³⁷ Because He loved your fathers, He chose their descendants after them and brought you out of Egypt by His presence and great power,

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

⁷ “The LORD was devoted to you and chose you, not because you were more numerous than all peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But because the LORD loved you and kept the oath He swore to your fathers, He brought you out with a strong hand and redeemed you from the place of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Isaiah 63:9

⁹ In all their suffering, He suffered, and the Angel of His Presence saved them. He redeemed them because of His love and compassion; He lifted them up and carried them all the days of the past.

Jeremiah 31:3

³ the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued to extend faithful love to you.

Hosea 11:1

11 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.

Zephaniah 3:17

¹⁷ Yahweh your God is among you, a warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will bring you quietness with His love. He will delight in you with shouts of joy.”

Romans 5:8

⁸ But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!

Romans 8:35-39

³⁵ Who can separate us from the love of Christ?
Can affliction or anguish or persecution
or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

³⁶ As it is written:

Because of You
we are being put to death all day long;
we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than victorious
through Him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am persuaded that not even death or life,
angels or rulers,
things present or things to come, hostile powers,

³⁹ height or depth, or any other created thing
will have the power to separate us
from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Galatians 2:20

²⁰ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

1 John 3:1

¹ Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children.

Revelation 1:5

⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To Him who loves us and has set us free from our sins by His blood,

All of this leads to his incarnation—His coming, as John declared in the first chapter, to dwell among us.

Recognizing God's Love

So, first of all, this is a message of love. The love described in this verse is not just a word, but it is a tangible love. Jesus showed us His love in that He came. If His coming was not enough, He came, knowing that He was going to die.

This love is an amazing love. God made Himself into the form of a human and came to live on this earth.

God's **love** was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. (1 John 4:9)

Are you confused as to why Jesus came? The following bit of prose usually makes it way into Christmas cards. It's one of my favorite Christmas sayings.

If our greatest need was for information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need was for technology, God would have sent a scientist. If our greatest need was for pleasure, God would have sent an entertainer. If our greatest need was for money, God would have sent an economist. But since our

greatest need is for forgiveness...God sent a Savior. That leads us back to our text to see Jesus' own statement as to why He came.

Not only does this verse carry a personal message, but also we must notice that this verse has a global message. "For God so loved the world." Everything that we said about God's personal message is true for the whole world. God loves the whole world. In Jesus, He came to the whole world. In Jesus, He died for the sins of the whole world. He wants the whole world to believe in Him. He wants the whole world to be saved. Indeed, the last book of the Bible describes that worship scene in Heaven in which there are gathered people of "every tribe and tongue and people and nation." (Revelation 5:9)

How do we ultimately know of His love? He came.

Responding to God's Love

So what? How do we respond to God's love?

- **Receive His Love**

So What? We must believe. So, how should you respond to this personal message? You must respond to this personal message in a very personal way. The word used in this verse is **believe**.

The good news of Christmas is only good news if you personally respond. The good news of Christmas is only good news if you personally believe. Some will receive; others will reject.

- **Reciprocate His Love**

Return His love. Love Him back. Surrender to Him. Present yourself as a living sacrifice to Him.

- **Reflect His Love**

We are called to love as He loves. We are to love in the same extent—sacrificially, to the whole world. The world will know us by our love. John wrote much about this in a later letter—one we call 1 John. Listen to these words....

1 John 3

¹⁰This is how God's children—and the Devil's children—are made evident.

Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother. ¹¹For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another,

¹⁶This is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but closes his eyes to his need—how can God's love reside in him?

23Now this is His command: that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and **love** one another as He commanded us.

1 John 4

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

¹⁹ We love because He first loved us.

²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen. ²¹ And we have this command from Him: The one who loves God must also love his brother.

- **Retell the Story of His Love**

In 1861 William Booth, a Methodist preacher, looked at the suffering masses of people in London, and his heart was moved. He started a movement he called the Christian Mission to give them the gospel first and to help feed them in the process. It later became the Salvation Army. Much of his work involved enlisting Christians to share the gospel with these masses of people in England and around the world. He was a forceful man and he had little patience with Christians who told him they weren't called to missions. "'Not called!' did you say? 'Not heard the call,' I think you should say. Put your ear down to the Bible, and hear him bid you go and pull sinners out of the fire of sin. Put your ear down to the burdened, agonized heart of humanity, and listen to its pitiful wail for help. Go stand by the gates of hell, and hear the damned entreat you to go to their father's house and bid their brothers and sisters, and servants and masters not to come there. And then look Christ in the face and tell him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish his mercy to the world."