

Love-Evidence of Our Resurrection and Eternal Lives

John 3:16

As we continue our sermon series, The Messages of Advent, we need to turn our eyes on Jesus Christ. **Hope** is our confident expectation of what God has promised. God's promises are fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ. **Peace** is the reconciliation to God through the cross of Jesus Christ. Our **joy** can be defined as "Our knowing, trusting, and abiding in Jesus Christ." Today, we will delve into the fourth message of Advent, "Love." **Love** is the evidence of our resurrection and eternal lives. All the messages of Advent direct us to Jesus Christ.

A few weeks ago, one of the church members came to me and shared a special Christmas ornament made a few years ago at our church. Let me read the words on the ornament. "Look at the Candy Cane. What do you see? Stripes that are red like the blood shed for me. White is from my Savior who is sinless and pure. "J" is for Jesus, my Lord. That's for sure! Turn it around and a staff you will see. Jesus, my shepherd, was born for me!" (Author Unknown) Do you remember this ornament?

This Advent, Christmas, and New Year must center on Jesus Christ, as the Advent season is connected to the Lenten season. I love this message, as it reminds us why Jesus Christ came to us - **This Is the Season, and this Is the Reason.**

A. W. Tozer states that John 3:16 is a summary of the Gospel message, saying "God had compressed all of the meaning of the Scriptures, into this twenty-five-word text." At that time, he used the KJV.

In John 3:16, we can find reasons why we must focus on Jesus Christ as we celebrate this season and keep our eyes on Jesus Christ throughout our lives.

Let us read John 3:16 together.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16 NRSV)

First of all, God teaches us about the love we are to share with the world.

So, God teaches us how to love one another through Jesus Christ.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16a).

Here, the most important word representing God's love through Jesus Christ is the verb "gave." Love is about giving rather than receiving; a loving heart is also an understanding heart. Because God loves us, he knows our greatest needs

and cares for them. What do we need? We need Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the answer to all the problems and needs we have in our lives. That is why God gave his only begotten Son to you and me and the world. That is why the motivation for God's action, sending his son Jesus to us and crucifying him on the cross, is his love. Apostle Paul understands that because of the love he has from God, he wants to live his life not for his own sake but for the sake of God and God's mission.

“For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for the one who for their sake died and was raised.” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NIV)

If we know and experience the love of God through Jesus Christ, we cannot remain inactive or complacent. That love we have in our hearts motivates us to follow what God is doing in the world. Love is about giving. Love is a sacrifice. It can involve sacrificing our best and most cherished possessions. That is why our acts of love are a form of worship.

So, as we anticipate and celebrate this season of Advent, we must check in on our motivation for worship, ministries, and missions. Do we have a compelling heart of love that we cannot resist to worship, do ministry, and participate in God's mission? Do you feel that God's love for you motivates you to do something for God? Or are we simply going through the motions of our yearly routine?

“I have been crucified with Christ 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.” (Galatians 2:20 NIV)

Secondly, God teaches us the content of our faith, which is Jesus Christ.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him....” (John 3:16a)

At the center of our faith is Jesus Christ, specifically his love for all of us through his death and resurrection.

That is why the Apostle Paul always prayed about his church members' faith and love for Jesus Christ. **“I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, I ask that you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth, together with all believers.”** (Ephesians 3:17-18 CEB)

Here is what John Wesley said about today's Scripture.

“For what should they believe? Ought they to believe that Christ was given for them? Then he was given for them. He gave his only Son - truly and seriously. And the Son of God gave himself, truly and seriously.” (John Wesley's Notes on John 3:16).

Last but not least, God teaches us that we must have eternal life through Jesus Christ.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NRSV)

During Jesus Christ's public ministry with his disciples, Jesus Christ encountered a culture in the Roman Empire that was largely indifferent to the concept of life after death. People of that time focused on enjoying their lives as they believed death was the ultimate end of life and existence.

Seneca (4 BCE – 65 CE) was a Stoic philosopher and statesman of Ancient Rome. He said, “Death is not an evil; it is only an end. It is the ending of a journey, but there is no pain in it.” Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) was a Roman author and philosopher who shared a similar perspective. He said, “The greatest of all evils is to die before you have lived, and after death, all is silence.”

In November 2021, the Pew Research Center conducted a study on Americans' views regarding the afterlife. Almost one-third of US adults stated they believe in heaven. However, more Americans believed in heaven than in hell. Among mainline Christians, 88% of them believed in heaven, but only 69% believed in hell. It means that there are Christians from mainline churches who have developed unbiblical concepts of heaven and hell. For those aged between 18 and 29, 63% believed in heaven and 55% believed in hell. As the age group became younger, the belief in heaven and hell tended to decrease.

That is the reason God sent His only begotten Son to us to save us and give us eternal life through Jesus Christ.

“God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us... For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.” (Romans 5:8, 10 NRSV).

Eternal life is about our reconciliation with God, which brings peace and salvation through Jesus Christ.

There was a young woman who was battling brain cancer. She and her family regularly attended church, and after graduating from high school, she went to a college on the East Coast. She wrote her graduation thesis about drive-in church culture in the United States. Unexpectedly, she was diagnosed with brain cancer and was hospitalized. The senior pastor of her home church visited her and discovered that she had not yet been baptized, which surprised him. So, he shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with her, and she accepted the Gospel and was baptized. The pastor said, "I thought she was baptized because she came to church for years with her family before she went to college. But I was wrong. I should have paid more attention to the spiritual states of my church members." The pastor was nearing his retirement age and shared this story at a pastor's conference.

Jesus Christ came to us to die on the cross, which was God's sacrificial love for all of us. Each of us matters to God. It's important for us to reflect on our faith—our faith in Jesus Christ and His love for us. Finally, we must take our eternal life in and through Jesus Christ seriously. Our faith in our eternal life through Jesus should serve as the foundation and motivation for our lives here on earth.