

How God showed His love * 1 John 4:7-12

December 22, 2019 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

The more that I think about that passage, the more I realize how perfect it is for Christmas. Sure, there are no shepherds or angels or wise men or sheep, but it does tell us something very important about Jesus' birth.

Jesus' birth shows us God's love in action.

Christmas shows us what God's love looks like.

If you've ever doubted if God really loves you, I want you to be able to look at the Christmas story and say objectively – yes, God loves me deeply – so deeply in fact that He was willing to send His one and only Son into the world to give me life.

Let's dig a little deeper into our passage for this morning and I'll show you why I say that. 1 John 4, and we'll start at verse 9.

9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him (1Jo 4:9 NIV).

Now a couple of years ago, I used this passage for Christmas Eve and I did a little survey to see how you would show someone that you loved them. Remember that? The answers ranged from listening and encouraging to hugs and gifts, to noogies and someone actually said they'd show their love by buying their wife a fishing pole.

When God wanted to show His love to us, He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. That is how God showed His love us.

Little baby Jesus is a demonstration of God's love for us. He is the greatest gift of all, Emmanuel, God incarnate – but the fact that God sent Jesus to earth is proof that God loves us.

Now I know that many of you will know John 3:16; I memorized that YEARS ago; Anna came home this week working on memorizing it – and it goes like this: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Now often when we read those words, we hear them like this – "For God SOOOOO loved the world that He gave His only Son" – we think of the magnitude of God's love as the motivating factor in His decision to send Jesus to earth. "God loved us SOOOO much." Now that's true.

But the fact that the same person wrote both John 3:16 and 1 John 4:9 makes me think that we're not just talking about magnitude here; we're talking about 'manner.' Jesus' coming into the world shows us not just HOW MUCH God loves us; it shows us HOW God loves us – John 3:16 also says 'God so loved the world – that is – God loved the world in this manner – He gave His only Son. And that's exactly what 1 John 4:9 says, doesn't it? This is how God showed His love – He gave His one and only Son.

Why did He send His Son into the world? 1 John says 'to give us life' - cross reference that with John 3:16 and you realize that God sent His one and only son into the world to give us eternal life.

This is not just God saying that He loves us; this is God showing it by giving His Son and giving us life.

Now verse 10 is going to expand on that idea.

NIV 1 John 4:10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1Jo 4:10 NIV).

See, Christmas is not about our love for God; Christmas is about God loving us even when we were estranged from Him because of sin. People like to think that if there IS a God, then He loves us all as long as we're nice, and it's true that God does have love for all people. But the truth is – that whenever we put our own interests before God's we are separating ourselves from Him. We are creating conflict between us and Him. And justice demands that that breach be dealt with. Somebody's gotta pay when creation (that's us) rejects their Creator.

World history is littered with gods and mighty men who have paid back people who have wronged them – eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth – and that's what we deserved for abandoning our Maker.

But instead of falling on us in anger, God chose to bear the cost of sin and repair the breach Himself. He *showed us* how deeply He loves us by coming in the person of His Son Jesus, to bear the wrath we deserved so that we could go free. He came to be the atoning sacrifice for sin; that is, the sacrifice that makes it possible for us to be forgiving and reconciled to God. God Himself made it possible for us to return to Him.

And accept Jesus as our sacrifice, when we confess our sin and receive His mercy, He gives us the life that the previous verse talked about. Remember? This is how God showed His love for us – He sent His Son into the world to give us life - now add in verse 10 and here's what you get - He sent His Son into the world to die in our place, to forgive our sin, so that we could be reconciled to God and live with Him forever. So that 'whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life.'

David Jackman puts it like this:

"The ultimate purpose of this sending and commissioning [Christmas!!] was that we might receive eternal life in the place of certain death. It is only through Jesus that such life can come to us. He is the source and the channel of spiritual, eternal life" (BST).

And again, this all flowed from God's love for us. It had nothing to do with our attitude towards God. In fact, without God's intervention, we would all naturally turn our backs on Him. But Christmas says that even when we had NO interest in God, He loved us and gave His life for us.

The apostle Paul puts it like this - ~~But~~ God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

That's what real love looks like – the willingness to serve and benefit others, even when they don't deserve it – and that's what Christmas is all about.

Christmas shows us what God's love looks like – God Himself acting to forgive our sin and give us life – now and forever.

Now that's broadly true, but let's zoom in a little closer and see what God's love looks like under the surface. I'm going to pull three themes out of this passage: Christmas shows us that God's love is selfless; Christmas shows us that God's love is sacrificial; and Christmas shows us that God's love is unearned. (It is those qualities that led Him to forgive our sin and give us life).

So first, Christmas shows us that God's love is selfless.

I know that we're all residents of Canada so I think you can probably identify with this. It's been a snowy, blustery day but you're at home in your sweat pants enjoying a nice cup of hot cocoa, when all of a sudden there's a knock at your door. Somebody's been driving down the road and gotten themselves stuck in a snowbank; they need your help to pull them out. You gotta get all bundled up, leave the nice warm, cozy confines of your home and go out and face the elements to help this person. Now I know you're all generous people and so we would all go out and help without giving it a second thought but just think about what it takes to go outside and face the cold.

Now think about what it took for Jesus to leave the glory of Heaven, where there is no sorrow or sickness or pain and enter into a finite world where He couldn't even move His own head for four months. He went from being able to create with a simple word to not even being able to say a single word. He was perfect, spotless, sinless and yet He chose to identify with us and not just that but to suffer and die for us. That's selfless love. He put our interests before His own and chose to act for our benefit, rather than His. Christmas shows us that God's love is selfless.

God's love is selfless; it's also sacrificial. Right? It's easy to love someone when all you have to do is to send them a card. It's easy to love someone when you give them a hug. It gets a little harder when it costs you something. It's really challenging when it means you have to give up something you value. Imagine how Jesus felt, knowing that He would lay down His life for us.

He came to earth and lay in that manger, surrounded by sheep, knowing that someday, He would die as a sacrificial lamb. I read something really interesting this week, that given the timing of Jesus' birth, the shepherds could have been raising that year's Passover lambs; Jesus came to be the ultimate Passover lamb, who gave up His life that we might live. God's love is sacrificial.

God's love is sacrificial and it's also unearned.

John couldn't be more clear, could he? Verse 10 – This is love – not that WE loved God, but that He loved US!

Jesus didn't come to earth because we proved that we loved God. Quite the opposite in fact. Without Jesus, we would be lost in our own selfish pursuits – following our own desires away from God.

But God didn't wait for us to get right with Him before He would love us. While we were still His enemies, He loved us and gave us His Son to reconcile us to Him. That's undeserved love.

If you've ever thought 'boy, I'd like to know God better, but I could never love Him enough to earn His favour' – listen – Christmas says – 'You don't have to love Him enough. You don't have to do enough good deeds.' Our relationship with God does not depend upon our love for Him but His love for us. All you need to do is acknowledge your sin before God and receive His grace.

If that's you, separated from God; come back to Him, just as you are. God already loves you; Christmas proves both how much He loves you and how He exercised His love; turn your back on sin and let God love you. God's love is selfless. God's love is sacrificial and God's love is unearned.

Christmas shows us that selfless, sacrificial and unearned love.

Now here's the thing – that's a valuable insight in and of itself. But if you look again at 1 John 4, you'll see that it's not the whole story. John has actually put bookends around this idea to encourage us to do something about it. Look at 1 John 4 again.

Verses 9-10 show us what God's love looks like; verses 7 and 11 invite us to extend that love to others.

John is saying - Christmas shows us what God's love looks like; God calls us to show it to others.

Look at verse 7 - 7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

This is why God was willing to exercise selfless, sacrificial, undeserved love – it's because He IS in His very nature LOVE. David Jackman puts it like this.

“John is not identifying a quality which God possesses; he is making a statement about the essence of God's being. It is not simply that God loves, but that he is love” (BST).

And John takes it one step further – if God is in His very essence love, and we are God's children, then it makes sense that we too would exhibit the love of the Father.

Anna and I were talking one night about the subjects she enjoys in school and she said – I like history but I really don't like math. And I said (you poor girl), you got that from me. The point being – that we inherit things from our parents, don't we? And since we are children of love, John says – we too ought to love one another.

That's verse 7; now look at verse 11. Verse 11 echoes that point - 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11). (And again, this is the very same language – identical actually in Greek – to John 3:16) since GOD loved us with a love that is selfless and sacrificial and undeserved, we should love others with a love that is selfless and sacrificial and undeserved.

John is leveraging God's love for us to motivate our love for others.

Christmas shows us what God's love looks like; God calls us to love like that too.

So there's the application for us – it's really quite straightforward – since God loved us with a love that is selfless and sacrificial and undeserved, we love others in the same way.

We love with a love that is selfless – a love that puts the interests of others before our own. Jesus calls us TO help that person in a snow storm, to help a person shovel their drive, to treat a rival fairly, to put down your book and help another person when all you want to do is keep reading, to do the thing that

no one wants to do. It's tough, but Jesus has already set an example for us, that might walk in His footsteps and put others first.

We love with a love that is sacrificial – a love that doesn't count the cost. Clearly our lives and actions don't atone for sin like Jesus' did, but still, we make sacrifices for the benefit of other people. Howard Marshall calls that the very essence to love – self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. *“Here we see the two factors which determine the nature of love: on the one hand, self-sacrifice, and, on the other, action done for the benefit of others” (1 John, NICNT, 214).* What will that look like for you when you interact with your family at Christmas? When you think about giving? Certainly, Jesus calls us to be wise in our dealings with other people, but He has also modelled the importance of sacrificial love.

We love with a love that is unearned – that might be the toughest of all. I think we can default very easily to having an unconscious ranking of who deserves to be loved and who doesn't and yet Jesus has set the bar super high here. When we were still His enemies, He laid down His life for us. Don't make people earn your love before you love them; love them and let them love you in return.

Christmas shows us what God's love looks like; God calls us to love like that too.

Awhile back, we learned a verse from 1 John as a memory verse during kids time. Remember this? It's a very important verse. And I think it's especially relevant for our passage today. We love because He first loved us.

He demonstrated that love at Christmas, sending His Son to give us life; and we responding to giving ourselves for the benefit of others. This Christmas, love because He first loved you.