

Jesus: God's Gift

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Who likes getting gifts? Maybe children like gifts more than everyone. One Christmas, when I was little, I got up early before my parents and started opening the gifts with my name on them. The problem was that I didn't look to see where my name was written and so I ended up opening all the gifts under the tree. Why do we like getting gifts so much? The reason is because when we get a gift it shows that someone loves us. They took their time and effort and got a present that's just for us. So the gift is an expression of their love. I am here today to tell you about a gift that is better than all other gifts, combined. This gift is special. It's unique, it lasts forever, and you can never lose it. Would you like a gift like this? When we celebrate Christmas we are celebrating the birth of Jesus who is God's gift to us. Jesus is God's expression of his love for us and God's love is the best gift because it's what we really need.

The world we live in is a tough, cold and heartless place. These days everything seems to move so quickly. And either you keep up or it passes you by. Most people feel like they are over worked and under paid. Living in this world seems to be a struggle. We struggle to get through college, we struggle to work and pay our bills, we struggle in our relationships, and we struggle in our health. Every time when I watch the news, all I see is pain and suffering. We are worried and fearful. What will happen if we hit the fiscal cliff? Why is there so much corruption? Why are we so divided? Why are there so many killings? Why does there seem to be very little love? Sometimes I wonder, “Why does life have to be so hard?”

If the truth be told, we live in a cursed world. But it wasn't always like this. In the beginning, when God created the world he made it beautiful and abundant. God took care of everything for us, making sure that our home was the best that it could be; from the delicious food that grew in the garden, down to the way it smelled and how it looked; so pleasing to the eye. Today, we would call this paradise. This was God's first expression of his love for us. And we had it, it was all ours – that is, until one of us disobeyed God and sinned. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and thus sin and evil entered the world and from that time on, we have lived under the curse. Once sin entered the world, it spread and corrupted men's hearts until they were full of evil. (Gen 6:5) Sadly, the world we live in is a reflection of who we are. Ultimately, this is why life is so hard, because our world is so full of deceit, evilness and rebellion.

What do you think God should have done when he looked at how corrupt the world had become? If God is a god of justice, how could he let the guilty go unpunished? If one is guilty of a crime, they must be punished and pay for their crime otherwise it's not fair to the victim. Likewise, sin has to be paid for too and the Bible tells us that the payment for sin is death. (Rom 6:23a) What was God to do? Who could blame God if he completely wiped out mankind? After all, sin has to be paid for and the wages of sin is death. Someone has to die to pay the price demanded of sin. The just thing to do, would be to make each person pay for their own sins. Unfortunately this would mean that the whole world would have to be wiped out because the Bible also tells us that all of us, including you and me, have sinned. (Ro 3:23)

When we look at what the world has become, there seems to be a lack of real love for one another. For some people the holidays are a difficult time because they are disconnected, unfulfilled, distracted and hopeless. Because of this, suicide rates go up around the holiday season. This reveals the meaninglessness of life and how lonely people have become. And on their own, these hurting people will have to face judgment and pay the heavy price for their sin. However they're not alone for the Bible also tells us that each one of us will have to face the same judgment and pay the price for our own sin. (2 Cor 5:10) This is the destiny of all people.

We have a clear picture of what the world is like. And yet amazingly God still loved the world. So what did he do? He gave us a gift. Let's read John 3:16 together. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." From this verse we see that Jesus is the gift that God gave to us. Jesus is the expression of God's love for us. When God looked at the world, his heart hurt because he saw that people were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Mt 9:36) We had lost our way and were hurting ourselves and one another. God had compassion on us and instead of destroying the world as it deserved; he decided to save it by giving up what was most precious to him, his only Son.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son. I am amazed at how great God's love is. God's love is so sacrificial. He only had one son. How could he give him up for a world that rejected him? Who are we that God should give such an expensive gift to us? Surely, we don't deserve to receive such a precious gift as Jesus. But this is God's amazing grace and how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. The Bible gives a brief description of God's love. It says, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails." (1 Cor 13:4-8) God's love is so patient, kind, and eternal. He loves unlovable people, even his enemies. God is like a parent who loves their children only so much more than we can understand. A lot of people don't realize just how much God loves them because they don't know him personally. They don't have a relationship with him. In the movie "Home Alone" all the kids were afraid of their neighbor because he looked like a scary old man. They were afraid of him because they didn't know who he was. As it turned out, he was a kind and gentle man who actually saved the boy from the robbers at the end of the movie. People think that God is like that scary old man in "Home Alone." They are afraid to come to him. So when they experience hardship in their life, they ask, "Where is God?" and they wonder how he could have let them go through such difficulty. They try to understand God through their own experiences but they can't. They try to understand God based on their own fathers, all of which are flawed. Some people have had abusive or distant fathers and they think that God must be abusive or distant. However this can't be farther from the truth. God is faithful, kind and merciful. When I come home from work, my kids run up to me and throw their arms around me and give me a great big hug. They are happy to see me because they love and trust me and they know how much I love them. If I didn't love them, when I come they would run and hide. When we come to know God personally, we come to know him as our heavenly father and we trust him without doubting his love.

Another amazing thing about God's love is that it's free of charge. There are no strings attached. In our ministry at IIT we want to reach out to students and show them the love of God. One way we do this, is by serving cookies and coffee during finals - free of charge. While we were serving so many students asked us, "How much is it?" and when we responded "Free," they're puzzled and asked, "Why are you doing this?" We said, "Because Christmas is coming and we want to bless your finals." The students were amazed to get something free of charge. God's love is free of charge and it's for everyone. God doesn't play favorites. His love is extended to all people. There are no special qualifications or conditions that we have to meet in order to receive God's love. It's for all who believe. (Jn 6:35 – Jn 8:12 – Jn 11:25)

Let's read John 3:16 again. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." God sent his son into the world not to punish us but so that we may not perish and have eternal life. The Bible promises that one day Jesus is going to come back and he's going to take all those who believe in him to heaven where we will live with him forever. The curse of this world will finally be gone and we will have paradise once again. It will be a beautiful place, with crystal clear water and streets of gold. God himself will dwell with us and wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will pass away. (Rev 21:4) This is our eternal hope: to live with our heavenly father in his kingdom forever. But some may say, "That's a long way off, what about here and now?" Jesus said that he came so that we will have life and have it to the full. (Jn 10:10) Not only will we have eternal life in heaven, but when we believe in Jesus, we will have life to the full on earth. Often times our lives fall into a rut and we become numb and lifeless like zombies doing the same things days after day after day. There is a danger that our lives can seem meaningless. However when we receive God's love through Jesus, our life can be totally changed. We will not be the same person that we once were. For Jesus gives new meaning and purpose to our lives.

One day Jesus met a woman at a well. She was a lonely woman who thirsted for love. But because of her sin, she looked for love in all the wrong places. She sought to fill her heart with the love of men but each one failed. She had 5 failed marriages and ended up living with a man. The other women of her town shunned her because of her sin. She felt so alone, so unloved. But Jesus loved her and embraced her as she was and gave her the gift of God - living water. When she experienced Jesus' love for her, her soul was satisfied and heart was restored. Living water flowed within her and the loneliness left her as she began to love those who hated her. God's love changed her and quenched her thirst.

When I experienced God's love for me personally, my life changed as well. In the past I thought the way to happiness was to enjoy life. So I made it a priority to live it up through partying. Eventually my party lifestyle began to ruin my life. I was kicked out of the apartment where I lived, I was fired from 2 of the 3 part time jobs I had and I was kicked out of college twice. Even though I had family & friends around me, I felt so lonely. No one seemed to understand my situation. It was then I experienced God's love for me through Jesus who gave his life on the cross. He came to me at a time when I needed him most. It was through an Easter conference that I could taste God's love for me personally. It was then my life changed. I began to long for eternal life instead of living for the moment. God restored my life and I was able to graduate from college, get a job, and establish a wonderful family. God has been so gracious to me, more

than I deserve. God became my heavenly father who loved me and provided for me and I know that one day I will see him face to face and there will be no more pain or sorrow, only joy and happiness.

One person I know said, “I really want to believe –but how can I? How do I know that Jesus is real? How do I know if he is true? And I told him that God gave us another gift, the Bible. I know that there are many negative misconceptions about the Bible these days. The Jesus Storybook Bible has great description of the Bible. Some people think that it’s an outdated book of rules telling us what we can and can’t do. The Bible does have some rules in it but they are there to show us how life works best. The Bible is more about God and what he has done for us. All the stories in the Bible are really telling one big story. The story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them. And at the center of the story, there is a baby. Every book of the Bible whispers his name; Jesus. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle – the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.

God recorded in the Bible all the promises he made about his son Jesus. There are more than 300 prophecies about Jesus recorded in the Bible. I heard that if we took just eight of these prophecies, the probability of one man randomly fulfilling all eight, would be about 1 in one trillion. And the chance of one man fulfilling 48 of them would be 10 to the 157th power. Now imagine the probability of Jesus fulfilling over 300 of them. What this shows is that practically speaking it was impossible for this promise to be fulfilled. But because God loved the world so much he kept his promise against those odds and gave us such a precious gift in Jesus. This reveals God’s faithfulness and patience and how he bore with mankind from the first generation until now.

And just as a gift that is left under the tree is no benefit to anyone, we have to accept God’s gift to receive it. Just like any other gift, unless we accept it when it’s given to us, it’s not really ours. But as soon as we accept it, it becomes ours. Likewise when we accept Jesus then we become God’s children (Jn 5:24) and we have an inheritance that is kept in heaven for us. (1 Pe 1:4) When you think about what gift you want this Christmas, think about what you need? You might want a new iPhone but what you need is God’s love. For God’s love gives life where there is death, joy where there is sorrow, comfort here there is pain and peace where there is anxiety. God’s love satisfies our soul in a way that nothing else can. And it is God’s love that saves us from our ultimate destruction.

Jesus is the best gift for us because he gives us life. Not an empty meaningless life, but a life full of love and purpose with hope for eternity in the kingdom of God. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro 6:23) Jesus Christ is the gift that we all need. Will you accept this gift today?