



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: John 3:16

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Christmas 2018

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Wow, that's the fifth time I've seen that video, and every single time I get choked up. I hope, for some of you sitting here tonight that that gives you hope. There is always hope. I love Andrew, I've got to see the amazing transformation that is going on in his life, he was here yesterday at some of our Christmas Eve services. He was just glowing just being able to testify that his life is changing. So, praise God for that.

We're going to get back to Andrew in a minute, but, before we do that, I just want to say Merry Christmas to you. Whether it was last week, or last year, or maybe a long time since you've been in church, I'm glad you're here. It is just good that we can be together and talk about Christmas, and really how it has the potential for changing all of our lives for some of you. Christmas is a lifelong tradition, but for some of you sitting here it isn't. You didn't grow up in this culture or this religion. And so, Christmas is kind of a newer thing for you. There are so many things about Christmas that make it so amazing and so good. For a lot of us, you know tonight tomorrow we're going to be spending time with friends and family, we're going to be exchanging gifts. And that ought to be a lot of fun, it needs to be a lot of fun. But in the middle of all the lights, and the trees, and the gifts, and the really ugly sweaters, some of which are here tonight don't look, don't look at them, or even the nasty eggnog. For the life of me I'm not sure how that made it into Christmas. But even in spite of all that, there's something even better to celebrate.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ, God the Son, came from heaven and was born of a virgin whose name was Mary. And it says that he lived a perfectly sinless life for 33 years so that he could be our savior. Christmas is a celebration that Jesus has come to us. So, what we want to do is we want to look at a Christmas Scripture, a Christmas verse in the Bible it's very it will be very familiar to a lot of you, for some of you maybe not so much. And we're going to get from those words I believe what will help make this Christmas even better than it already.

So I'm going to ask you to stand for the reading of God's word. That's what we do here. We actually believe that the Bible is God's word that he gave it to us. And it's the authority for all of our life, and all of our faith, and so

we kind of when we read it, we stand to attention because we believe when we turn to God's word we're actually turning to God. And so, listen now, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."* Now I want us to all read that together out loud at the same time let's do that *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Let's pray Father we ask you now in the name of your son Jesus, that you would make these words come alive for us tonight. God, I pray that these words would help us to see again the majesty, and the beauty, and the potential that Christmas has to change us all. So, God we give you now our hearts, and we pray that you will speak to us clearly, and we pray this in Jesus name, Amen. You can be seated. These Christmas words that we just read are from Jesus himself. And they give us three things for us to kind of be reminded of in order to help make Christmas even more special. First of all, it tells us that God loves us. And then it says that that Jesus came because we need help. And then it tells us that Jesus came because only He can give us life; life Eternal. So, we're going to take a look at those three things just one at a time and just see what they mean for us.

First of all, we see here that Jesus came because God loves us. *"For God so loved the world"*. Now for some of you this may come as a surprise. You've never heard this before. I don't know if you're like me but growing up all I ever heard that God was either mad at me, or sad because of me. I heard that a lot growing up and looking back at some of those years, I'm sure there were some good reasons why that was true. But the Bible actually shows us how much God really, really does love you and me. When you read the Bible you quickly discover that God created us to love and to love in return. He created us to love and be loved. God didn't create us like the animals, he didn't create us like the trees, or the mountains, or the stars. No, we were created in His likeness. The Bible tells us to find our deepest meaning in the ability to love and to be loved in return. And if we were all honest and real tonight, all of us want people to know us and to love us, and we want to be able to do the same with others. And guess what, that longing, that desire was put in us by God. That desire to love and to be loved in return, because God wants us to know what it's like to be loved by Him, in His perfect, and pure, and satisfying, and faithful love, and he wants us to be able to know him and love Him back. Christmas reminds us that God is personal and that he loves us.

First and foremost, but God doesn't just love us; God loves us unconditionally. And that makes it even better *"For God so loved the world."* Notice it doesn't say *"For God so loved the important people, or the successful people, or lovable people"*, no. God loves you and me. And that is an amazing statement. God loves you more than anyone else could ever love you. And here's the cool thing, it's not because your soul lovable, amen, right? No, God doesn't love us because we're so good, he loves us because *he's* so good. And therein lies the difference. You know it's a big mistake to think that God loves like we human's love. God's love isn't conditional on what we can do for him. That's how we humans love. God's love is unconditional.

Now in the greatest Christmas movie of all time. So, you agree. Right? The greatest Christmas movie ever. We have a story where Buddy, travels great lengths passing the seven levels of the candy cane forest, through the through the sea of swirly twirly gumdrops, and then ultimately he walks through the dangerous Lincoln Tunnel. All for what? To see his dad. He wants a relationship with his dad. Now guess what? God has gone to greater lengths than Buddy the Elf. He left his throne in heaven and came to earth. The whole Bible beginning middle and end is one continuous narrative of God's pursuing love. Even if it's been a long time since you've tried to connect with God I want you to hear tonight that God still loves you, and he sent Jesus to prove it. Actually, Christmas really is the greatest love story in the whole world. Jesus came because God loves us unconditionally.

Here's a second thing. Jesus came, because we need help. He gave his only son so that we would not perish. It's unfortunate, but for a lot of us, we have to realize how bad our situation is before we can really appreciate Christmas, before Christmas actually matters. You remember Andrew's story, right? Parents divorced going back and forth between homes, playing sports, getting hurt. It was his whole identity and now that's gone. People that he loves around him are dying. Now, your life may be different than Andrews, but let me ask you can you relate to this part of a story? Can you relate to sometimes how hard life can be? I mean we need help because life can get hard sometimes. Just in the last week, I've talked to people and prayed with people who were really struggling. I know people who are in the service right now who are courageously battling cancer. People whose marriage is in shambles and their family is just fractured.

Your story may not be Andrew's story, maybe it's not heroin, maybe it's not suicidal thoughts, but like Andrew let me ask you when life gets hard, are you still trying to handle it in your own strength without God? Because listen, that's part of Andrew's story isn't it. I mean life just started getting so hard and so discouraging and Andrew turned to all the wrong things. And unfortunately, a lot of times we do that. We don't know how to fix it, and we end up reaching out to things that just make matters worse. Jesus came to bring us peace, and comfort, and hope in the face of life's greatest trials and tribulations. Because we need help when life in this world gets hard. But we also need help because we sin. Sin is something we've all done, sin is something we all do. It's the angry words we have spoken against that friend or that spouse. It's those inappropriate things we've looked at, that envy in our heart wanting someone else's life. Sin runs deep. It's who we are. It's kind of like spiritual DNA, sin is in the character of every human heart. That fierce longing for independence from God is what the Bible refers to as sin. Someone once said this *"sin paves the pathway of separation from God"* because sin says to God, *"I don't need you, I can do this better without you God"*. Fact that basically says, *"God I'm better than you"* and Jesus says the consequence of this path leads to perishing. Now that's just the Bible way of saying that sin left undealt with will always bring pain. Always.

One of the joys of my recent life is becoming a grandpa. And every time my 18-month-old grandson Brooks sees an opening, he runs full steam. And every time we chase him, because we know it will result in a lot of pain. So far, so far he's still not convinced we're right, okay? Every time, if there's an opening he runs. Our world is a lot like Brooks. We tend to run away from the one who can help us the most. Our country needs big help. We need help in things like hatred, and war, and crime, and poverty and disease. And then on a micro, level kind of personally, we need help, we need help in broken trust, and damaged relationships, and addictions, and selfishness, and people pleasing and workaholism and personal regrets. We need his help.

See sin is sin is more than just being on Santa's naughty list. All of these are the painful results of believing that we can do it without God. And Christmas becomes amazing, it becomes *really* amazing at that point when we realize how much we really need Jesus. It's at that point where Christmas changed us forever when we realize that it's all about God sending Jesus to earth to restore the separation that sin has brought between us and God. Jesus came because God *really* does love you and he came because we need his help.

And ultimately Jesus came to give us life “that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” In a Christmas devotional I've been reading this month, just kind of leading up to Christmas getting my heart ready for you know what Christmas is all about, the author wrote these words he said, “*the Christmas story is a destination story. It's about an amazing journey that changed everything. He made this broken world his destination so that our final destination would be a place where every form of brokenness has ended and where we would live with him in a complete peace and harmony that will never end.*” Now, I want you to notice back at the verse that we started with, what the only condition is for that life of complete peace and harmony. The only condition for eternal life is belief in Jesus. Not the plastic nativity scene Jesus, but the Jesus that God determined to be the answer to all the destruction that sin brings into our lives and into our world. Now if that message is hard for you to process, I totally get it. The message that Jesus really is the answer. I understand why that is just it's hard to contemplate. Because this world we live in keeps relentlessly telling us over and over, if we just get that promotion, if we just find that special someone then we'll finally have life that that'll give us life, if we just get a little healthier, and a little skinnier, and if we if we just get a little bit more money in their retirement account, if we just get a few more of those toys, if we just get that better house, if we just live the dream, we can live the life.

It's hard to imagine that the Christmas story is promising us that true hope and true life isn't in a *thing*. It's in a *person* and his name is Jesus. He came to die for us so that we could stop living for ourselves, because if we are if we were honest, living for ourselves is what got us and this world into this mess in the first place, right? That's what that's what causes the whole big mess. He came and lived a life of perfect loving obedience to God. And then he came to die a death of love on a cross, sacrificing his own *sinless* life as a payment for the forgiveness of our sin. So that all who believe in him would be welcomed into the arms of God's love forever and ever. See once our sin is

forgiven and dealt with, the separation between us and God is ended. And he might be thinking *“Steve I've heard that before, but you don't know my life. You don't know where I've gone. It's too late for me”* and I would say to you remember God didn't do all of this for us because we are so good, he didn't wait until we figured out how to get ourselves worthy of His love. No, his love being unconditional, he did all this for us because He loves us. And today you can actually have real lasting life a life that will never be found. Listen to me now. The life Jesus is talking about here will never be found, if we continue to look for it horizontally. This is a life that can only be found when we look vertically. God sent Jesus to die, so that you can live. That is the most important thing that Christmas is all about. And God wanted you to hear that.

Some of you right now are finding that Christmas in Jesus's is about way more than maybe you originally thought. And I think there are some of you right now who are thinking *“listen maybe it's Jesus who's missing in my life.”* You're ready to ask him to forgive you and save you and give you eternal life. Now let me warn you though, let me warning sticker, following Jesus isn't an easy life, because you're going to have to stop trying to be God, if you're going to follow him. If you're saying to yourself right now *“hey if this Christmas thing is real I want it. If you're saying OK OK, I get it. I'm ready to stop running.”* And holding Jesus off at arm's length. If you're thinking I'd like that forgiveness, I'd like that peace, and that hope that lasts even through some of life's hardest trials. You can have that.

In just a minute, I'm going to say a prayer it's not a magical prayer, it's not a it's not a potion that's going to you know just mystically do weird things. It's all about where your heart is. And the prayer is just going to sound something like this, *“God, I admit I'm a sinner and I need forgiveness. I'm done. Stopped trying to be God not going to run anymore. I want to ask Jesus to forgive me. Give me new life.”* And if you want to start right there tonight you can. I'm going to ask all of us to just bow our heads and close our eyes and just sit still for a minute. If in some way and somehow I've described where you find yourself right now, ready to just stop running. Ready to just stop trying to find all the meaning, in all the happiness, horizontally if you're ready to look to Jesus, and pray these words *“Dear God, I admit I'm a sinner and I've been trying to be my own god. Thank you for not giving up on me today. I surrender. I believe Jesus came and died for me so I'm going to stop running. Jesus, I receive you as my Lord and Savior and I ask you to forgive me of all my sins. Dear Jesus, thank you for saving me and for giving me new life, amen”*