

Date: 12/23/2012
Text: John 3:16
Title: The Wonder of Christmas is.....
Theme:

Introduction:

The Christmas season is about home. It is also about gifts and presents between friends and family members. Merchants and economists nervously await and watch if consumers will go all out to buy presents, thus boosting the economy. Christmas presents are an important part in our family. Every year, through presents and a personalized letter, I let my family member know how much I love them. When the children were young, I sometimes found myself saying, if you are good this year, then you may get this or that. When there are severe conflicts during the Christmas season, we may find ourselves saying that we don't really feel like giving anything. Very often, our gifts can be quite conditional.

This brings us to this familiar scripture passage: (ppt1) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. It is the verse that almost every Christian, from child to adult, knows by heart. We see this John 3:16 painted on sports fans' faces; written on banners in football and basketball games. This verse is often called the gospel in a nutshell. Martin Luther called it the Bible in the Bible (聖經中的聖經). It is about a gift; so let's thoughtfully unpack this verse on this Christmas Sunday.

I. A Cosmic relationship.

Ppt2 In Greek, this verse starts like this: For so loved, God the world 因甚愛, 神世界..

Here we first notice God and the world. From our reading of John chapter 1, it tells about the existence of a God. For many of us gathered here this morning, we recognize God's existence, or you probably won't even bother to come. You see, real atheists won't step into a church. Moreover, this God created this world, including mankind. Yes, we can recognize there is a God, but to accept this God as the creator may not go well with many. Furthermore, mankind, his creation, rebelled against him. This rebellion plunged the world into darkness; a moral darkness. So dark that the world would neither recognize nor accept him. The world is under his wrath, his condemnation.

The mayor of Newtown, Conn last week said, evil has visited our town. The shooting that killed 20 children and 6 adults is the evil of evil. This is the extreme evil coming out from one person. Then there is the ongoing fighting in Syria and the Middle East. Every day, parents mourned over the death of their children. Or take a look at the local news headlines; it is shootings and robberies, one after another. Even looking at ourselves, don't we also see different shades of evil within us? Yes, we all carry God's image, his beauty. Yet, because of Adam and Eve's rebellion, this image was marred. Consequently we also have a side that is opposite to God. In today's world, sexual immorality, lack of integrity and substandard workplace ethics are rampant. We have lost our moral compass. We, too, are in that darkness. This cosmic relationship between God and humankind is broken. We are his creation, yet we know him not. Man only deserves God's wrath and punishment. .

II. An intense love.

When our children are consistently and deliberately rebellious towards us, parents' hearts can grow cold towards them. Nothing hurts a parent's heart more than seeing their

adult children drifted away from them. When your spouse has been unfaithful towards you, not just once, but twice and even more, your love for him/her will also grow cold, right? The saddest words we hear in a marriage relationship is “I have no feelings for him/her anymore.”

Now, let’s see what John 3:16 tells us. (PPT3) “For God SO loved the world...” Even though God’s people are in darkness, not knowing nor loving him, yet this God, the creator of all, still so loves this world and mankind. It is an intense love.

On Sunday, in a funeral I officiated, the young granddaughter was crying so hard, feeling so torn over the passing of her grandmother. This intense grief was the outpouring of her intense love for her grandma. This past week, we have all seen pictures of heart wrenching grieving parents for the death of their children in Newtown, Conn. Again, such intense grief is an expression of their intense love for their children.

We remember when we first fell in love with someone; there was that intense love. Naturally we have this love towards those we like and those we love. But John 3:16 tells us God so loved the world. It is a world that has rebelled against him; turned its back on him. This intense love then leads to..

III. A Great Gift.

A gift expresses how much you love the person. To the person we love, we generally want to give him/her what we think is the best. I think of a brother in my former church who is a mechanic fixing cars and loves doing that. He can tear an engine apart and put it back. One time this is what he gave his wife for her birthday (ppt4 picture). This is a pair of automobile engine valves, the engine’s performance depends on the condition of these valves. Not only did he purchase, he had them specially coated

with some kind of material; carefully wrapped and then gave to his wife. It was certainly a surprise to her, to say the least. But knowing how much this pair of valves meant to him, she gladly accepted it.

(PPT 5) John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that is, Jesus, to the world. For the 1st century Jews, they remembered 2K years ago, God asked Abraham to offer his one and only son, Isaac, to God. Isaac was the son God gave to him when he was 99 years old. Isaac was most precious to him and Sarah. Yet, out of his obedience, he was willing to offer him to God, but God stopped him and provided a lamb to take Isaac's place. Now, 2K years later, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, into the world.

The gift he gave to the world is His one and only son. Further more God placed our sins on Jesus. And for our sake, he died on the cross so that the punishment that is due us is now on Jesus. As the prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 53:5-6, (PPT6) “5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Before God, we are all condemned because of our sins, we all deserve punishment. But God so loved the world, that he gave us his one and only son, so that we do not have to be punished. Giving his son into the world and onto the cross, was the ultimate expression of his intense love for us. There is more,

IV. The purposeful gift of God.

I remember one year, for my wife's birthday, I gave her a vacuum cleaner. How do you think she felt? Or like a husband who gave his wife a fly swatter (蒼蠅拍) for

Christmas. (this is a true story) If you are the recipient of the vacuum cleaner, or a fly swatter, how would you feel? There seems to be a purpose behind these gifts. I give you this gift so that.... Well, some motives to our gifting's are rather selfish. I give you the vacuum cleaner so that you can keep the house clean. I give you the fly swatter so you can swat the flies. I give you this computer so you can help me with the typing.

John 3:16 also tell us that God's great gift to us has a purpose. (PPT7) He gave his son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. To believe means to trust and accept him (PPT 8 John 1:12), to recognize my sins and accept his dying for me. To believe also means my willingness to listen and to follow him.

There is also the contrast between perish and eternal life. Eternal life means spending eternity with God. However, besides the duration, there is also the quality aspect. Jesus, in John 10:10, said that he has come so that they may have life and have it abundantly. An abundant life means a life with purpose and direction. An abundant life means a life with direction, characterized by loving God and men. A life that follows Christ wherever he leads us. This life comes as a result of putting one's trust with God.

On the contrary, without God, we are already condemned, being separated from God, both now and eternally. To perish is about being separated from God. Again, to perish not only has that duration element (eternal), but also the present day aspect. Without God, life has no proper moral direction, is chaotic and it follows the crowd.

God's gift is for our good that we will not perish but have eternal life, and it starts here. Having said this, it is also important to understand that we being in darkness, do not have the ability to see our real situation; or the ability to put our faith in Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit that awakens us into recognizing our sinful condition. The Holy Spirit opens

our eyes to see our need to trust Jesus. And above all, the Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to put our faith in him. God Himself enables us to believe in Jesus, his gift to the world.

Conclusion:

On this Christmas Sunday, from our study of this Bible in the Bible, John 3:16, we learned that God had this intense love for the people he created. Even though we are rebellious and living in darkness, he still reaches down to love each one of us. Not only loving us with this intense love, but also gave us the most precious gift, his one and only son. So that when we believe in him, he will remove us from darkness into light, from rebellion into obedience to Him, from chaos into order and peace. And when we die, we will spend eternity with Him. No other religion or philosophy can make such claims.

Dr. Ironside was a famous preacher in the early 20th century. After a meeting in SF, an agnostic came up to him wanting to have a debate with him about the existence of God. Ironside agreed but added this condition. “When we meet next time, I will bring 100 individuals whose lives were changed as a result of believing in Jesus Christ. And you will bring two people whose lives were changed because of being an agnostic.” This person never showed up again.

What is the wonder of Christmas? It is not just the warm, fuzzy and cozy feeling. It is not about going and coming home. It is not just about the giving and the receiving of presents.

The wonder of Christmas that calls for such celebration? (PPT 9) It is that God so loved the world that he gave his only son, whoever believes in him, will not perish but have eternal life.

Since it is a gift, from the almighty God to the world, to you and me, then it calls for a response. Will you receive this gift, His one and only son, Jesus Christ? Many of us have already received this gift. So this is a time to celebrate and also a time to once again looking forward to his coming again.

There maybe some who have not received this gift in a personal way. This morning, this Christmas may be the time for you to receive this gift.

Let us pray.