

John 3:16

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

God Gives Eternal Life

I.

Today—Christmas Day—we come to the last sermon on the Gospel in a nutshell.

The point of Christmas, the purpose of God, is that we have eternal life. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they were immediately sent out. “Now, so that he does not reach out his hand and also take from the Tree of Life and eat and live forever—’²³the LORD God sent him out from the Garden of Eden.” (Genesis 3:22-23, EHV). If our first parents had taken fruit from that tree also, they would never die—they would live in a sin-filled world forever. Only if they died could they enter everlasting life. Only then would they find the place where: “[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4, EHV).

II.

Often our sights are lowered during Christmas celebrations. We are urged to look at the good things of life; good cheer, good family times, good presents, goodwill among people. These things are certainly good, but they are not the point of Christmas. None of these things represent the reason Jesus came. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16, EHV). *Eternal* life—not temporal life that might be just a little bit better than what we already have.

Can we have a Christmas celebration without good cheer, good family, good presents, goodwill? Can we enjoy Christmas without these temporal blessings? Can we rejoice with great joy when we have nothing to be cheery about—no family around, no presents, problems with loved ones or the circumstances of life? For many in our society, this is the Christmas they have—the *life* they have. Can they rejoice?

In some ways, those facing difficult times have an easier time rejoicing than those blessed with many good things in life. They have a better chance to find the *true* joy and meaning of Christmas. The true joy and meaning of Christmas are not found in any of those peripheral things like family and good cheer. They are found in God—in his love and promises. “God so loved the world.”

It is the goodness of God, not the goodness of life or people or family or things that we celebrate. It is on his goodness that we build our lives. The goodness God brings us in Christ Jesus assures everlasting life to all who believe in him.

What will determine whether *this* Christmas is a joyful Christmas for you? What if all the family plans and gift giving and partying have completely fallen apart? Are you still able to celebrate Christmas?

What is the point of the celebration? *Who* is the point of the celebration? What blessing does Christmas promise?

III.

Christmas is the great rescue event of God. We were captive to the “prince of this world.” We were enslaved by sin. We were doomed to God’s wrath and punishment because of our sins. We were rightly destined for hell. We belonged to Satan and his kingdom forever.

And then...came an invasion. “In the fulness of time,” when conditions were just right, God made the assault on Satan’s kingdom.

It seems so simple. God the Son was born of Mary as Jesus of Nazareth in the little town of Bethlehem. Satan *tried* to counter the attack. King Herod was his emissary, attempting to snuff out the young Christchild’s life. God countered by warning the Magi to return by a different route, and not to tell Herod where the child was. Satan countered by killing all the babies in Bethlehem. God countered by warning Joseph in a dream to move Jesus and Mary to Egypt until the threat was over.

Time after time, counterattack after counterattack, the battles continued throughout the life of Jesus. Finally, the Father released Satan to inflict the tortures of hell on his only-begotten Son. God the Father abandoned God the Son on the cross for three hellish hours. Finally: “Jesus shouted with a loud voice, ‘*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Mark 15:34, EHV).

IV.

Why did all this happen? So that you and I might never undergo that hell—the hell we deserve. He took your place and mine. He was the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—your sin and mine. He won the battle against Satan: “He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:8-11, EHV).

That’s what Christmas is. Do you believe that? Do you celebrate that? Do you accept that gift of eternal life? Christmas is the D-Day invasion—the day our liberation began. *That* is something to hold our focus. That is reason to rejoice. That is *the* reason to rejoice. God bless your Christmas celebration. Amen.