

The Joy of Giving

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.”

Good morning! Nice to see you all this morning! Today we're celebrating the birthday of the Lord Jesus although we know it won't come till the 25th. But we're not concerned about dates. In fact, no one knows the exact date of the birth of Jesus. What we're concerned about is the greatest gift that God gave us. The gift of his own Son Jesus. And that's the reason for our celebration. Amen?

Talking about gift, how many of us here are expecting gifts this Christmas? I'm sure we all are. Especially the wives. And the men, what are you expecting? You're expecting to spend. Now, I'm joking about this but you know what, and the truth is, Christmas is not about getting. It's about giving. If you think about it, the first Christmas was all about giving. Mary giving birth, that's a joke, but we read Mary giving her life to God in the sense of submitting to God's will that she would carry the Savior in her womb. Then, we read of Joseph who gave his life to God as well when an angel instructed him to accept Mary as his wife.

Then, we read of the angels who gave the good news of the arrival of the Messiah to the shepherds in the fields and a host of angels appeared and gave praises to God. And the shepherds went to see baby Jesus and soon after gave of their time to spread the good news and gave praises to God as well. Then, the wise men came after two years, and although they were late like Filipinos they gave their best gifts of gold, myrrh, and frankincense to Jesus who was now a toddler. So, the first Christmas is all about giving.

And this morning, I want to focus on this act of giving that our Heavenly Father did for us about 2000 years ago.

God the Father gave to us his own Son for our own benefit. In John 3:16, the Bible says, “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.” This was a prophecy fulfilled hundreds of years before. In Isaiah 9:6 it says, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...”

These two verses and others more tell us that God is a giving God. He is a God who delights in giving. I believe he was happy when he gave Jesus. That happiness was shared by the angels when Jesus was born. They sang and gave praises to God. That’s a sign of happiness. Who wouldn’t be happy when a child is born? So, when God gave his son, Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, to us on Christmas day, there must be great rejoicing in heaven.

Giving is a natural attribute of God. It is one of his unchanging characteristics. And God wants us to be like him. When he gave Jesus to us, he set the example. He wants each of us to be a giver like him. You see, when you give it reflects what’s in your heart. It tells others who you are, what kind of person you are.

Giving is always a selfless act. However, it’s one of the hardest things to do. You see, giving doesn’t come naturally to us. We have to learn it. We have to be taught. You look at a child, and as cute as innocent-looking the child is, when you ask a child to share his or her food with you, that child’s natural reaction is to pull his or her hand away from you. That’s why parents have to always say to their little children, “Share, share”.

When Jesus was on earth, he gave as much as he could, as often as he could because to give or to share was in his nature just like his Father’s. He modeled it in his life. He gave his time, his resources, his talents, his love, and in the end his own life for others. He gave because there was joy in giving. In Acts 20:35, Paul quotes Jesus when he says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive”.

The word “blessed” in Greek can also be translated “happy”. So, Jesus is saying, you’ll be happy when you give. And that is true. You’ll feel happy when you see someone looking happy because you gave, right?

Now, let me share with you a few principles about giving that we will learn from John 3:16. But let me tell you beforehand that the kind of giving I’m talking about refers to our time, our talent, and our treasure. You give not only financially to others but you also give of yourself to others. So, keep that in mind as we go through these principles of giving.

1. True giving is motivated by love.

A saying goes, “You can give without loving but you can never love without giving.” Do you agree? I surely do. Giving is a natural outflow of your love. And that certainly is what motivated God when he gave his son to us. “For God so loved...” as the beginning of John 3:16 says. The reason he gave Jesus is because he loves us.

We cannot fathom God’s love. We cannot measure it. It is limitless and unchanging. The Bible says that “God is love” (1 John 4:16) He is not just characterized by love. Love is not just an attribute of God. God is love itself. He is the embodiment of love. You cannot separate love from God.

Everything he does, therefore, is loving. His thoughts toward you are loving. All the things he does to you are loving. You don’t need to be afraid of a vengeful, cruel, and unpredictable God which some of the world’s religions gods are. The God of the Bible loves you for who you are and whatever you do, no matter what.

He knows your past. He knows exactly what’s going on in your life. Because he is not an impersonal God. He is not who is detached, who doesn’t care about your personal needs and wants. Matthew 10:30 says, “God even knows how many hairs are on your head.” Or how many are left.

Even how many gray hairs I have. How much personal can you get more than that? God loves me even when I want him to or not.

Can we then love the way God does? That's a difficult question to answer. Because it runs counter to our very nature. Our nature is self-seeking, self-glorifying. We want what is best and comfortable for us. Nothing wrong with that but when it comes at the expense of others, then that's what makes it wrong. And when we have this kind of attitude, it becomes hard to give. But for some, giving may not be so hard because they're expecting something in return. They want a return in investment, so to speak. Or they want to be recognized for giving of their money, time, or talent. That is giving without loving.

And yet, the Bible says it is possible to give because of love. It is possible because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. In **Romans 5:5**, it says, "And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." If you're a Christian, you have that capacity to love.

God has given you the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, so that you can have the kind of love that God has. Note that God gave you that capacity. You can't love on your own. You can't force yourself to love. You have to ask the help of the Holy Spirit to love. In fact, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You have to let that love grow. And you grow that love by practicing it daily.

In a practical way, you can do a little kindness here and a little kindness there. **Victor Hugo** says, "The great acts of love are done by those who are habitually performing small acts of kindness." Then, as it becomes a habit, you find yourself loving more and more and giving more and more. Who knows, your act of kindness can save a life.

Ilene Wright from New Orleans told the story of her pastor who told his story to his church years ago.

The story goes that the pastor noticed the family standing in front of him at a New Orleans convenience store did not have enough money to pay for their few items. He tapped the man on the shoulder and said, “You don’t need to turn around, but please accept this money.” The man took the money without ever seeing the pastor.

Nine years later, the pastor was invited to speak at a church in New Orleans. After the service, a man walked up to the preacher and shared this story about how he had come to faith in Christ: “Several years ago, my wife and our child were destitute. We had lost everything, had no jobs, no money and were living in our car. We also lost all hope, and agreed to a suicide pact, including our child. However, we decided to first give our son some food, so we drove to a convenience store to buy him some food and milk.”

“While we were standing in line at the store, we realized that we did not have enough money to pay for these items, but a man behind us asked us to please take the money from his hand and not look at him. This man told us, ‘Jesus loves you.’”

“We left the store, drove to our designated suicide site, and wept for hours. We couldn’t go through with it, so we drove away. As we drove, we noticed a church with a sign out front which said, ‘Jesus loves you.’ We went to that church the very next Sunday, and both my wife and I were saved that day.”

He then told the pastor, “When you began speaking this morning, I knew immediately that you were the man who gave us that money.” How did he know? The pastor was from South Africa and had a very distinct accent. He continued, “Your act of kindness was much more than a simple good deed. Three people are alive today because of it.”

True giving is motivated by love. **Mother Teresa once said, “It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving.”**

2. Give to everyone who is in need.

When God gave his Son, he didn't give him just for a select few or a select several. He gave Jesus to everyone. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world..." In the Greek, the word world refers to all the inhabitants of the earth. There are no exceptions, no discrimination. Therefore, God sent Jesus so that everyone in this world from Adam until Jesus comes again will have the opportunity to hear the good news of the salvation of God.

That is how all-encompassing the love of God is. His giving is motivated by his love for all mankind. Therefore, whatever the color of your skin is, whatever language you speak, wherever you may live, you are within reach of God's grace.

The Bible says in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The apostle Paul wrote those words to the early Christians. Even back then, the early church was already diverse. This is because Paul and the other apostles and disciples of Jesus reached out to people of various nationalities. In fact, on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached in different languages, those people who were present came from about 15 different nations.

So with this principle in mind, our giving should not be limited to only those who are our favorites or those we predetermined to give to. Everyone should be given a fair shake. Jesus himself said, "Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back." (Luke 6:30)

Now I know some of you are going, "But, Pastor, how about those who ask for money to spend for their destructive habits like an addiction? Or those who keep on borrowing an item you know they can afford to buy?"

The answer is that those words of Jesus must not be taken literally. He said those words in the context of loving your enemies. The verse preceding that says, "If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.

If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.” I don’t think Jesus is suggesting that you tell your enemy to keep on beating you. He is just saying “don’t harm others or don’t take revenge”.

So, how do we interpret the words of Jesus, “Give to everyone who asks you”. Well, we must interpret it or better yet, act on it with spiritual discernment. A few examples will illustrate my point. First, you don’t give when

a. The person is not needy.

Should we give to the rich? The Bible is clear that giving to the poor is commendable – not the rich. Those who are not truly in need should not be given whatever they ask. A simple scenario makes this point clear. Your teenager asks you for a new iPhone in place of something that is still working. Should you give it to them based solely on Jesus’ words in Luke 6:30?

b. The person will cause harm to themselves. Should we give money to an alcoholic or drug addict who will very likely use it to fuel their addiction?

This does not mean we should not give. It merely means that money may not be the best gift. Which is more helpful? To give \$20, or to give 2 hours? We can give our time by becoming the person’s friend, meeting their needs directly (taking them to eat, getting them a place to stay, etc.), or taking them to a ministry specializing in breaking their addiction and helping them recover. Compassion doesn’t blindly throw money at those who ask. Compassion seeks to alleviate suffering.

c. The person is being dishonest. While there are dishonest people out there panhandling and begging for money, we must be very cautious about refusing to give based on this idea. However, it is often easy to separate the honest from the liars. Simply ask a few questions about what the person needs. If they’re asking for money, what do they need it for? Then see if they’ll let you fill that need directly

(buying gas at the gas station, eating a meal with them, taking them to a shelter or ministry, etc.). The fake ones will not let you do this. They want cash and cash only. Those who are truly in need will not refuse your help.

True giving is motivated by love. Give to everyone who is in need.

3. Give even when it hurts.

We call this sacrificial giving. This is the kind of giving that our Heavenly Father displayed when he gave Jesus. John 3:16 says, "...that he gave his one and only son..." Now, I said earlier that the Father rejoiced together with the angels when Jesus was born on earth. There was no hurt there. However, John 3:16 refers to the fact that God gave his only Son to die for our sins. There was so much hurt there. Because there's no denying the fact that the pain to sacrifice your own child for the good of others is so unbearable.

It really hurt. I can imagine the heart of God being torn to pieces as he sent his Son Jesus to earth with the knowledge that eventually Jesus would die a brutal death. But God did not withhold his own Son Jesus. For our sake.

He knew that our greatest need is a Savior. He knew that our only hope is the Messiah. We were all condemned to die because of our sins. Nothing or no one can save us. The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) And so he let Jesus be crucified on the cross so that he may die for our sins. We all needed forgiveness and the death of Jesus accomplished that. It hurt God to give Jesus but it was necessary for our salvation.

Can we give until it hurts? Someone said, "When it comes to giving until it hurts, most people have a very low threshold of pain." How is your threshold of pain? Are you able to withstand the pain when necessary? You know, it's so easy to give when it doesn't affect us at all. Like when you have spare money, no problem. You have spare time, no problem. You have spare clothes, no problem.

But when you don't have anything to spare, that's where the rubber meets the road. Because it means you really have to dig in in order to meet the need of someone who asks genuinely. But let me tell you. If you are able to give sacrificially, God knows that and he honors that. He will reward you.

I remember the time I was still a Bible student in New York years and years ago. It was Friday night and our class ended. It was already 9:30 pm. I was very tired. Being a part-time student, I went to school after work and was just eager to go home and rest. Besides, I had to finish an assignment that was given to us by another instructor. It was an assignment on preaching and it must be done before my class at 9 am the next day. I was just half-way through the sermon and I knew I had to spend a few more hours on it upon reaching home.

I was about to go down the stairs of the building that was located on 72nd St. when the school registrar called my attention. She said, "Rolly, are you headed to the subway?" I said, "Well, not really but what can I do for you?" I had driven by car to Manhattan and I parked quite a few blocks away. The subway was on the opposite side. I was hoping she'd say, "Oh, that's ok. See you tomorrow".

Well, what she said was, "Do you think you can walk your instructor to the subway?" I hesitated a bit but I forced myself to smile and said, "Sure, no problem."

I waited for a few minutes which became several minutes before my instructor emerged from his office. In any case, we walked down the stairs then made our way to the subway. Afterwards, I walked hurriedly back to where my car was parked. I looked at my watch and saw that it was now 10:30. I drove as fast as I could toward Jersey City in New Jersey and arrived at my home at past 11. When I opened the door, I was greeted by a friend who was renting a room in the house I lived in. He said, "Rolly, I had to catch the train. There's an emergency at home.

Can you please drive me to Journal Square?” He was imploring me. What can I do? If I declined, I might feel guilty the rest of my life.

So, although feeling hungry and tired, I told him to get in the car and drove him to the train station. I came back home at the stroke of midnight. By this time, all I wanted to do was to just go to bed and sleep. But I had to work on my assignment and I thought that eating something would energize me. Well, after eating, it didn't. I was so tired and sleepy I went to bed and set my alarm for 7:30 am. I figured I would work on my sermon for an hour.

The next morning I woke up. But I saw that it was only 6 am. I tried to go back to sleep but I couldn't. In fact, I felt that I was wide awake. I even said, “Lord, please let me go back to sleep. I need more sleep.” But he didn't answer that prayer. Instead, I felt an impression saying, “Get up, get up. Work on your sermon.” I shrugged it off but I just couldn't go back to sleep. So, I got up from bed, opened my laptop and tried to finish my assignment. And the most amazing thing happened. The words were flowing. The sermon was taking shape. I was feeling confident.

After about an hour, I was done and had extra time to have breakfast and practice the sermon. I was early in class. Each of us in the class had to deliver the sermon and then receive a critique from our classmates. When it was my turn, I walked nervously to the front and began. Then, I was finished. And my heart pounded as everyone was quiet and my professor asked the class, “What's your feedback?”

Someone raised his hand and said, “If it ain't broke, don't fix it.” Everyone nodded in agreement. In short, they felt it was a very good sermon I delivered.

Folks, I'm not saying this to brag about myself. That wasn't me, that was God. He worked it out despite my imperfections. All because I gave my time to help others the night before. Even when it hurt.

God honored that and rewarded me. The Bible says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) I was so happy that day. I experienced the joy of giving.

True giving is motivated by love. Give to anyone who is in need. Give until it hurts. Three principles to guide us.

Before I conclude, let me show you this video. A wonderful story about giving. It’s the story of a man who is alone and seem isolated. His wife appears to be deceased and his adult children are living far away. He was walking on the sidewalk one day and encountered a lost dog. Watch what happens next.

VIDEO

There it is, the first decision point. Is he going to look away or is he going to get involved? A stray dog, lost and in need of love. He decides to take the risk.

Give and it will be given unto you.

Life is so good when we open our hearts. When we share of ourselves, when we give of ourselves.

Ah, there it is. The next key decision point. God, no, it’s too much. Too much generosity. But you know what the Bible says. Give till it hurts.

What you just saw there is what Christmas is all about. We open our hearts and stretch ourselves in order to give of ourselves to others. Just like what Jesus did for us. He opened his heart and stretched his arms on the cross to give of himself to us.

This Christmas and even after Christmas, will you give out of love to others? Will you give to anyone who is in need? Will you give till it hurts?

The last part of John 3:16 says, “that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

When you believe in Jesus, you're giving your life to him. God will honor that and will reward you. The reward is eternal life in heaven. Because we know that Jesus rose again from the dead, you too will rise from the dead. Friend, Jesus died and rose again for you. Will you give your heart to Jesus?"