

The Point of Christmas: The Greatest Gift Ever Given

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In our contemporary, politically correct culture, it is sometimes said that there is a *war on Christmas*. We often see Christians as the warriors in the battle to save Christmas from leftist groups hostile to public expressions of faith in Jesus Christ in the public square.

Interestingly, this dynamic was not always the case. There was a period of American history when the war on Christmas was waged not by the world but by the church. The Puritans in 17th and 18th century colonial America were extremely hostile to the Christmas holiday. They typically derided the holiday as “foolstide” instead of “yuletide.” For over 20 years, celebrating Christmas was a criminal offense in New England, until the English crown flexed its muscles and forced a Christmas celebration in Boston in 1686. The royal governor of Massachusetts was so nervous about violent backlash to this event that he was flanked by armed guards as he entered the town hall to recite Scripture and sing Christmas hymns!

The Puritans had several reasons for bringing an end to recognizing Christmas and banning celebrations of it. Speaking of Christmas, the reverend Hugh Latimer wrote, “Men dishonor Christ more in the twelve days of Christmas than in all the twelve months besides.” In 1712, Cotton Mather preached a sermon in which he told his flock, “The feast of Christ’s nativity is spent in reveling, dicing, carding, masking, and in all licentious

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liberty...by mad mirth, by long eating, by hard drinking, by lewd gaming, by rude reveling!"

Most of us today probably would not come to the same conclusion about Christmas celebrations as the Puritans, but there is still something to be said for their concerns. Whenever the Christmas holiday falls on a Sunday, we see numerous churches closing their doors that morning because their congregations would be too busy celebrating the holiday to attend services. Does anyone else see the tragic irony? Too often, even in the church, we have lost the point of Christmas.

So, what is the point of Christmas? What is it that we should be celebrating, and that should be central to this significant day? The Sunday school answer that even the world knows is the birth of Jesus. However, as we have been asking this month, why was Jesus born? Why was Christmas necessary?

Today, we arrive at our fifth and final reason for Christmas: Jesus came to give us a lasting, eternal gift – a gift that never gets outdated, gets replaced by a new model, wears out, and gets lost. Jesus came to give eternal life to everyone who believes. Our passage in [John 3:16-21](#) begins with these familiar words, **“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.”** One significant point is that this gift is received by faith. Eternal life is a gift not to anyone, not even to everyone, but specifically to those who believe. Belief in Jesus is critical to receive the greatest gift ever given.

This passage gives us three reasons to believe in Jesus.

First, believe in Jesus because *He is the proof of God's love.*

Jesus is all the evidence we need of God's love. While John weaves this point throughout our passage, he makes it explicit in verse 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's love here finds its expression in the gift of His one and only Son.

Other passages in Scripture also relate that God's love was most clearly displayed in the gift of the Son. For example, [Romans 5:8](#) says, **“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”** When Paul says that Christ died for us and John says that God gave the Son, they are saying the same thing. For John, the giving of the Son was the gift of Him to us by handing Him over to death. God's love for sinners was seen in the death of Christ, which achieved two things for us. Christ's sacrifice bought our forgiveness of sins through His shed blood, and it secured our righteous standing before God through His obedience to the point of death.

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Jesus' death was unique in that it was effective for those people, who would believe, in saving them from God's wrath. Jesus' death also ended with His resurrection. God's plan in giving the Son over to death included and culminated in His resurrection from the dead and His subsequent exaltation as King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus' death, while real, was temporary. It was not final. It was the path to Him for glory, and Christ willingly chose it as He and the Father demonstrated their great love for sinners.

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Second, believe in Jesus because *He is the rescue from God's judgment.*

Notice specifically verse 18: **"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."** The word 'judged' in this verse carries the connotation of condemnation, and the idea of being convicted of sin before the judgment seat of God. Believe in Jesus because He is the rescue from God's verdict of guilty against your sin.

One fascinating aspect of the incarnation of Christ is that He did not come to judge the world. Christmas was not about *judgment*, but *salvation*. Salvation does imply judgment, however, which is what Jesus makes clear in verses 18-20. Jesus did not need to come to put sinners under the judging sentence of God because they were already there and destined for eternal damnation. Christmas seems like an odd time to discuss God's wrath and judgment, but it is a vital part of this season of remembrance and celebration because Jesus came to rescue us from God's wrath and to save us from being condemned by God's Law.

Jesus also gives a test of faith in verses 20-21, which is obedience. Obedience is always the test of faith. Those who practice wickedness do not come to Christ. They don't want their sin to be exposed because they love their sin, and they don't want to forsake it. On the other hand, those who come to Christ hate their sin and want to be rid of it. They want their sin exposed by His light so that they can walk in His truth.

No one should think that merely acknowledging the reality of Christmas is what Jesus has in mind in this passage and throughout the teachings from His ministry on earth. Rather, Jesus desires repentance, and trust and willingness to follow wherever He leads. True belief is manifest by coming to the Light, seeing our sin for what it is, and forsaking it.

Third, believe in Jesus because *He is the Giver of eternal life.*

In verse 17, we see that we are saved through the Son: **"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."** It is the Son who gives us this life.

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John's Gospel is full of this truth about Jesus being the giver of life. In 1:3, we learn that Jesus was the agent of God in creation, the One who made everything. In verse 4, we read that Jesus inherently possesses life. In verse 12, it is Jesus who gives us the right to become children of God. In verse 16, it is from the fullness of Jesus that we all receive grace upon grace. Repeatedly, John points us to Jesus for life. The clearest expression of this is in [John 5:21](#). Jesus said, **"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes."** Then in [John 6:48](#), He declared, **"I am the bread of life."** Jesus Himself is the one who gives His people eternal life.

Over the past five posts, we have answered the question behind the question of *Christmas: What's the Point?* We have seen that Christmas is so much more than the mere birth of Jesus, but that His incarnation in a Bethlehem manger overflowed with eternal significance for all who call upon His name. Jesus was born *to reveal God's glory, to fulfill God's promises, to save His people from their sins, to bring salvation from sin, and to give eternal life to everyone who believes.* May we remember, appreciate, and praise the point of Christmas as we cherish our Lord plan and purpose to give us eternity with Him.



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