

Merry Christmas! I hope that Santa Claus was good to you and that you found everything that you wanted under the Christmas tree this morning. I love Christmas with the beautiful hymns, the Christmas trees, all the lights and decorations, and the hope and joy that this season brings. However, at times we get so caught up in all the trimmings that we forget the real reason for this season.

Now while we focused on the Christmas stories in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke last night, I believe that the one scripture passage that really sums the real reason for our celebration this morning is found in the third chapter of the Gospel of John, verses 16-17. Listen to these familiar words again:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Now that it's finally Christmas Day, and as we get ready to say goodbye to 2022 and hello to 2023, some of us might spend some time this coming week reflecting on the past year and the future, letting our minds wander considering some of the deep thoughts of the world. Such as: do vegetarians eat animal crackers? If olive oil comes from olives, where does baby oil come from? If con is the opposite of pro, is Congress the opposite of progress? If the 7-11 is open for 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, why do they have locks on their doors? If nothing sticks to Teflon, how do they make Teflon stick to the pan? And finally, why do we drive on parkways and park in driveways?

Now some of these are funny, but here's a real serious question for us to ponder this morning – what if there was no Christmas? What if Jesus had not been born on that eventful night in Bethlehem so long ago? What if the words of John 3:16 were not true or have yet to be fulfilled? Have you ever wondered about this?

We basically take Christmas for granted; it has become part of our lives, our culture, our history, our family, and our economy. Think about how much Santa Claus, decorating the Christmas Tree, exchanging gifts, sending Christmas cards, visiting family and friends, watching the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, and listening to that classical song *Grandma Got Run Over by the Reindeers* have become routine for us.

Just think what would happen if there was no Christmas; if December 25th was just another day on the calendar. If Jesus had not come, then there would be no John 3:16. Now there's a depressing thought; if God doesn't love the world, He doesn't love us. And because He doesn't care for us, He didn't send His Son to save us; to restore the broken relationship with us. It

would mean that God had finally given up on us; that He had finally had enough of our disobedience and wayward ways.

But without Christmas and the birth of Jesus Christ, then the most serious concern is that there would be no Easter, no cross, no empty tomb, and no resurrection. You cannot separate Christmas and Easter! We would still be under the bondage of sin and death. The grave would be the end for all of us; funerals would truly be sad occasions for there would be no hope of eternal life with God or ever seeing our loved ones again.

God would still be the God of the Old Testament; One of judgment and punishment, a tough task master. We would have never known the other side of God. Through His Son Jesus Christ, we have seen the love, compassion and mercy of God that while it has always existed, it was not fully manifested until Jesus came into the world.

Our guidance for living the godly life would still be the Ten Commandments with all those “thou shalls” and “thou shall nots.” Jesus would not have simplified our lives by summarizing the Ten Commandments into: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.” God is love and that love is demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ, in His obedience, His death and His resurrection.

And think about how much worse the world would be today without the love of God? Without His love we would definitely be a hopeless society. How many more wars and deaths would there be without Christianity? Who would care for the poor, homeless, lost, and less fortunate of society? Or a more serious question is - could our world have even survived this long without the love of Jesus Christ in the hearts of men and women?

And what about forgiveness? Because Jesus came, we have forgiveness of our sins, a second chance when we fall short. And then there is God’s amazing grace. Would there be any grace without Christmas? The letters in GRACE, G-R-A-C-E, stand for “God’s riches at Christ’s expense.” Without the birth of Jesus Christ and then His death on the cross, we would have never known the extent of God’s love, mercy, and grace. Without Jesus there would still be a veil in the Temple separating us from God; the possibility and opportunity for a personal relationship with God would never have existed; that void and nagging in our hearts for the Lord would have never been satisfied.

But the Good News this morning is that we don’t have to play “what if;” Jesus did come on that wonderful night long ago in Bethlehem. And with Him came God’s love for each one of us. God in His magnificent wisdom and mercy sent His one and only Son to become one of us; to be born in a humble stable of a young Jewish peasant girl; to be worshipped by lowly shepherds; and later to be presented with gifts from strangers from the East. God came into the world that

night as one of us to turn the world upside down and to show us the only way to true joy and peace in this world. He came to bring hope and light into a world full of darkness; and an outreaching hand to a world that had lost its way and had broken its relationship with its Creator.

God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. He became one of us so that we could become like Him. He loves each of us as if there is only one of us to love. Jesus came for you, to bring you the gifts of love, hope, joy, peace, forgiveness, and salvation. Who could ask for anything more on Christmas! Thank God that there is a Christmas; may we celebrate its meaning and joy not just today, but every day of our life. Merry Christmas!