

Christmas is all about...the greatest gift

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 December 2017

Preacher: Brian King

- [0 : 00] Another popular one, I suspect, would be, I can do all things through him who gives me strength. Because that's probably a sentence from the Bible that many non-Christians have heard their Christian friends share on Facebook or quote to them.
- And another one, I think, will be the one that we've just heard this morning, which we often hear, especially during Christmas and Good Friday, the two major Christian celebrations.
- It's from John 3, verse 16. Let me just get this working. Next slide, Isaac.
- For God so loved the world, you just heard it read, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
- So if you're to go to a hotel, and if you happen to find a Bible in the drawer, it's probably been placed there by an organization called the Gideons. And in those Bibles, it's very likely that in the front pages, they would have printed this sentence in large font, maybe even in multiple languages.
- [1 : 19] 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.
- So clearly, Christians think that this is a very important sentence. Well, why is this one sentence so prominent for Christians?
- Well, given that it's often quoted during Christmas and Good Friday, it's clear that this sentence, Christians think that this sentence summarizes what Christmas and Good Friday is all about.
- In other words, it captures the very core message of the Christian faith. And if you are not a Christian here this morning, well, let me just tell you one more thing about this sentence by way of introduction.
- This sentence is not just for Christians. It's for you too. Notice that in this sentence, it talks about the world.
- [2 : 22] This sentence does not have in mind a subset of humanity called Christians. It has in mind everybody in this world, regardless of your religious or racial background.
- And notice, in the second half of the sentence, it talks about whoever believes in him. You see, this sentence is not just giving you information about God and Jesus.
- This sentence is an invitation to everyone, to you, to believe in Jesus. It doesn't matter who you are today.
- You're invited. You see, although we often call Christmas a Christian celebration or a Christian festival, Christmas is not just for Christians, or even primarily for Christians.
- Christmas is for the world. Christmas has no exclusive guest list. It's for you, whoever you are today.
- [3 : 30] A Buddhist, an atheist, a free thinker, a grandparent or a teenager, a worker or a student. It's for you. But what is this sentence all about?

At first glance, it might look pretty straightforward. And you might even be thinking that you've heard it all before. But this morning, I just want to break down this sentence for you. And you might discover that John 3.16 doesn't quite mean what you think it means.

You might find it full of surprises. And you might come to discover for the first time what Christmas is actually all about. So I'm going to break this sentence down into four parts.

Next slide. Firstly, the greatest good. The greatest good. This sentence starts with a person. And it's not us.

It doesn't start with I or we or human beings. It starts with God. Because before there was anything else, before there was a universe, before there were human beings, God was already there.

[4 : 42] He's always been there. Now, I don't know what comes into your mind when you think of the word God. Perhaps you're thinking of a super being with super powers, like in the superhero movies, someone like Thor.

Perhaps you're thinking of some abstract force, like in Star Wars. But those are human ways of thinking about God. It's using something in our human world to try to describe God.

The truth is, God is far bigger than that, existing outside space and time in ways that you cannot imagine. He's not just a superhero.

He's not just another human being with some extra powers. No, he belongs in a different category altogether from human beings. Just like human beings are in a different category from, say, something like sego worms.

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, another prophet in the Bible called Isaiah said this, To whom will you compare God to?

[5 : 50] The answer is nothing. God is that big. You see, to understand Christmas, to understand why it's so mind-blowing that this baby we often see in Christmas postcards and Christmas plays that we've just sung about is right there in our world, we need to begin first of all with who God is.

He's the biggest being, the greatest being in the universe. Next slide. And this God so loved.

He's not just the greatest being in the universe, he's the greatest good. Now, I don't think that surprises us anymore. We've heard it said so many times that God is love, that God loves, that we simply take it for granted.

God should love, right? Just like the grandpa and grandma should love their grandchildren. But I want us to see that it's also mind-blowing that God should love.

Because that's not how all religions think about God. Strictly speaking, in Buddhism, there is no personal God. There is only the law of karma, which is the chain of cause and effect in life.

[7 : 12] And then there's nirvana, the state of being free from desire. The goal of every Buddhist, at least in theory, is to reach nirvana and be free from desire, including the desire for love.

So in Buddhist thought, there is no place for a God who is personal, who is relational, and certainly no place for a God who loves, who is love.

Or take the Islamic God. Islam, like Christianity, believes in one God who is creator. But Islam, unlike Christianity, does not believe in one God who is at the same time God the Father.

From the very beginning of time, Christians believe that God is God the Father. and so he has always loved. That is at the very core of his being.

Fathers love their sons. But Muslims cannot and do not say the same thing because God is not Father to them.

[8 : 23] Let me just make clear, I'm not putting down other religions. I'm simply describing, as fairly as I can, the implications of what my Buddhists and Muslim friends believe according to their own doctrine.

And it is the Christian God alone who can be said to be loved. Christmas begins with the greatest good.

God so loved. And only Christians can say that in a way that fits with what they believe. And so that is already good news, that the greatest being in this universe is a God of love from the very beginning of time.

But what is the object of his love? Well, next slide. We move on now to the second part. Secondly, the greatest love. The greatest love.

God so loved the world. And again, we're so used to hearing this that it doesn't strike us as something amazing. In fact, we might think that is God's job.

[9 : 33] Of course God should love the people he created. That's his job. But I want you to picture this differently. Imagine a family. And in this family, the father has an incredibly close relationship with his son.

From young, he bathes him, feeds him, clothes him, plays with him, sings him to sleep. He teaches him his ABCs and his one-two-trees, tells him stories, listens to his stories, gives wise counsel, listens to his problems, looks after him when he's sick.

But as the boy goes up, he rejects his father. He throws tantrums and smashes his father's things. He slams the door in his face.

He makes fun of his father to his friends. He steals things from his father and runs away. He even plans to murder his father.

And that's a more accurate picture of our relationship with God. You see, the world has slammed the door in the face of God.

[10 : 53] The world thinks it knows better. It simply wants to do away with God. You see, that's how we think. We think we know the best way to run our marriages and our families.

We think we know the best way to run our relationships. And our businesses. We all think we know the best way to run our lives.

We certainly don't want anybody, including God, to tell us how to run it. In fact, sometimes we make fun of God's ways. It's old-fashioned, we say.

Out of date. His word is an ancient word, not a modern word. We're modern people. But what do we see around us? Broken marriages, broken families, broken relationships, broken lives.

When we try to run our lives our own way, without any reference to God, we mess it up. And yet, Christmas tells us God so loves this kind of world.

[12 : 06] He loves the world that messes it up. He loves the world that slams its door in His face. He loves the world that wanted to murder Him.

He loves the world not when the world was cute and lovable, but when the world is bad and unlikable. Christmas happened because God, the greatest good, showed this kind of greatest love.

And in fact, Christmas is proof of this greatest love. But what form exactly did this greatest love take? Well, that takes us to our third part.

So next slide. Thirdly, the greatest gift. The greatest gift. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son.

And this is where Christmas comes in. Christmas happened because God is not a no-action, talk-only kind of God. He knows the world needs rescuing from itself.

[13 : 11] He knows the world is a messed-up place because we tried to run things our own way while ignoring Him. And that's what the Bible means by sin.

And so He took action as a God who loves. It's natural that He's a God who gives. And He gives His one and only Son.

That's the greatest gift He could offer. You might be familiar with the details of the Christmas story which we just heard earlier in our second Bible reading. An angel appears to Joseph and tells him, your wife, Mary, will give birth to a son and you have to give Him the name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.

He will rescue people from their own addictions to doing things their own way and not God. He will rescue them from the consequences of that addiction which is death.

Did you notice in the second half of John 3.16, next slide, it says that those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life. eternal life.

[14 : 24] Not just eternal life in itself. After all, eternal life in a world as messed up as our current world with all its war and disease and pain, well, that's no gift, is it?

No, no, no. It's eternal life in eternal relationship with God through Jesus. It's about returning to the family and having that close relationship between parent and child that we talked about earlier.

It's about knowing the person who is the greatest good in this universe, God himself. That's the greatest gift. How is this greatest gift given?

It is given as Jesus, this great gift, gives up his very own life. life. That's the story of Good Friday and Easter, but let me just give you a sneak preview.

Jesus grows up as the only person in this entire universe who never went against God and tried to do things his own way. But he came to die on the cross as the way to pay for our sin.

[15 : 38] And he rose again as proof that payment has been made. that's why Christmas happened. That's why Good Friday and Easter will happen later on.

And that's why John 3.16 is a sentence that Christians so often use whenever they want to talk about Christmas and Good Friday and about the Christian faith in general.

Because that's what it's all about. for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. But there is one more part to this sentence.

So next slide. Fourthly, the greatest need. The greatest need. Jesus is a gift. And like all gifts, we didn't earn it.

That's what makes it a gift. it's not about being a good boy or girl. If so, that would make it a reward, not a gift. But like all gifts, it needs to be received.

[16 : 49] And that's why there is one more part to this sentence. 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.

the way to receive this gift, you see, is to believe in Jesus. The word believe here doesn't just mean I agree in my head.

The word believe here means I trust with my life. Let's say that we are going to fly to somewhere in the interior of Sarawak.

But when we arrive at the helipad, we see a helicopter that looks very old and worn. with parts that looks like it's going to drop off any time. But the pilot insists that the helicopter only looks that way.

It's actually in very good condition. It's ready to fly. And besides, he's the best pilot in Malaysia. How do you show that you believe in the pilot? Is it by saying, I believe or I agree with you?

[17 : 56] No, it's by actually getting onto the helicopter and letting him fly you. you're trusting him with your life. If you don't get on the helicopter, you can say as loudly as you want, I believe.

But you're not really believing. You're not acting on what you say. And that's what it means to believe in Jesus. You are now trusting him with your life.

You're trusting him when he says, when he promises that by receiving this gift and giving yourself to him, you will have eternal life. You will have a restored relationship with God.

You will know this God who is love. And that's our greatest need. When we believe in Jesus, we are trusting him with our lives.

And so that means we cannot just say, oh, I get eternal life, but I don't really care about what God says about the rest of my life. No, no, no. To trust someone is an ongoing process, isn't it?

[19 : 05] So to believe in Jesus is not so much about just saying a prayer, it's to trust him with our lives. That's the essence of it. That's why so many Christmas carols refer to Jesus as the king in their lyrics.

Heart the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn king. Because to trust him with your life is ultimately to say, he's your king.

And that's our greatest need. Because if Jesus is not our king, we will perish. Did you notice that part in the sentence? No Jesus, no eternal life.

And that means perishing, dying, suffering, eternal consequences. Jesus. But trust Jesus and that means receiving the greatest gift of all.

Well, that surely makes the choice crystal clear. So this Christmas, know what Christmas is about. It's about God, the greatest good, showing the greatest love gift.

[20 : 18] By giving his only son, so that we can have the greatest gift, eternal life, knowing God and Jesus, and have our greatest need met.

Perhaps you're not a Christian here this morning. Well, why not choose this Christmas to receive the greatest gift? Trust him with your life.

perhaps you're someone who thought you were a Christian today because sometimes you go to church, but you realize that you've never understood what Christmas and what Christianity is actually all about.

well, today why not take that step and make Jesus the king of your life today? Trust him with your life. In a moment, I'm just going to lead us all in a prayer to receive Jesus as the greatest gift.

It should be on the next slide. And if you want to receive Jesus, you can repeat after me when I say this prayer. There's also a response card that you came in along with a track that also explains this sentence.

[21 : 28] And I ask that everyone just fill it in and then we will pass it along to the ushers when the ushers come and collect it during the closing song. So if we can just all do that now, just fill it in and the ushers will come around and they can pass any pens if you need a pen.

And we can also work out how to follow you up, especially if you've made that great decision to say that you trust in Jesus with your life. Perhaps this morning you still have many questions, that's alright, there's still too many questions you have and you're not ready to take that step yet.

Well, why don't you just take I want to know more about Jesus, I would like to talk with someone to know more about Jesus, or maybe you want to take that I want to go to that Christianity Explore course next year.

But let's take a moment now, you can also read the prayer on the screen, and then we'll pray together. But remember, the essence of believing in Jesus is not just saying the prayer, it's trusting him with your life.

So let's just take a moment and I'll let you fill in the response cards before I say the prayer. of Tele-a.

[23 : 07] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Well, if you want to trust in Jesus with your life this morning, will you join with me in saying this prayer?

I'm going to lead us in praying now. Dear God, thank you so much for sending Jesus, your only son, as the greatest gift.

I know I do not deserve this gift, but your punishment as someone who has shut the door in your face.

[24 : 46] Thank you that you still love me in spite of this. I want to receive this gift and trust Jesus as my saviour and king.

I want to be in a relationship with you as my heavenly father and to serve you from now on. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

So the ushers will come and collect the cards and Allison will lead us in our final song for this morning. Amen. Bye.

God bless you. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.