

GOD GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON

John 3: 16 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

As we have arrived at this second Sunday in December, I want this message in preparation for Christmas, to be a simple message of the most significant gift ever known at Christmas. All other gifts are in remembrance of this greatest gift and they are overshadowed by this gift. Paul said of the gift of Jesus, being sent to earth incarnate, in II Corinthians 9: 15, “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable/inexpressible, indescribable gift.” This word of Paul about God’s gift is a once only used word, **anekdiegetos**. Strong’s Concordance says of this once used word; it means “adequate words cannot be found to correctly describe the gift.” Translations include these translations, “precious beyond telling,” I love that. Also, it means “words can’t describe, explain, or tell it all,” or “too wonderful for words,” as the song, “More Than Wonderful.” As I prepared this first of a hopeful number of Christmas messages for 2020, I listened once more to Sandi Patti and Larnelle Harris sing “More than Wonderful.” I lifted my hands to Jesus and wept for joy as they sang that marvelous duet that they first sang together in 1984, but which they sang together again on August 2, 2012. That song transports anyone who is believing in Christ, with a heart for God, into a third heaven, and it is a foretaste of coming glory by and by. The words you know, but I remind you of--

“He promised us that He would be a counselor A Mighty God and the Prince of Peace He promised us that He would be a Father And that He would love us with a love that would not cease. Well, I tried Him, and I found His promises are true He's everything He said that He would be. The finest words I know could not BEGIN to tell Just what Jesus really means to me. For He's more wonderful than my mind can conceive He's more wonderful than my heart can believe He goes beyond my highest hopes and fondest dreams. He's everything that my soul ever longed for Everything He's promised and so much more; more than amazing, more than marvelous more than miraculous could ever be He's more than wonderful, that's what Jesus is to me. I stand amazed when I think that the King of glory Should come to dwell within the heart of man I marvel just to know He really loves me When I think of who He is, and who I am.” Chorus again.

Even though none of my words or any of our words can fathom the gift of God in giving us Jesus, believe me, we will spend eternity speaking and singing of God’s unspeakably precious, more than wonderful, inexpressible, and indescribable gift of Jesus. Today, God has emboldened my heart to try one more time to preach about His gift so sublimely spoken about by Jesus to Nicodemus in John 3: 16. “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.” I want to zero in on the word gave. In that word gave is God’s threefold message for us today.

What does it mean, “that He gave His only begotten Son.”? What is the significance of this Greek word, **didomi**? The little word means to give, to grant, to bestow, and to bring forth. But in the context of this verse we know and have memorized, what does it mean? - “that He gave His only begotten Son? We will never exhaust what it means, but let’s discover part of the glory. Why was God’s gift of His Son, Jesus the greatest gift to humanity for all time and eternity?

JESUS WAS THE MOST TENDER GIFT OF ALL. Notice (I.) Jesus declared in John 3: 16 declares, “For God so loved the world that He gave...” God saw our lost estate, He saw our hell-bound eternity, and Love found a way to redeem us. The mission in Christ’s incarnation, and Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem was the tender consequence of the love of God. But the tender part of this love of God, was Jesus’ willingness to come to earth as a baby boy, to grow up in a home like we have, and then to be willing to suffer on the cross, and to die in our place. The incarnation is the most tender and sensitive gift of all. Jesus never waited for us to come to Him; no, He came to us. When Zechariah the priest, got his voice back, after not believing the angel Gabriel who promised the aged priest and his elderly wife a son, Zechariah finally spoke. Zechariah spoke on the eighth day when his son, the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist was circumcised. Zechariah, named his little son, John, and he prophesied of his little boy’s role in preparing the way for Messiah Jesus. Listen to Luke 1: 76-79, as Zechariah prophesied, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” The word Zechariah used for tender here is **splagchnon**. It means literally, from the spleen, symbolizing from the intestines, a gut-wrenching gift, from the inner affections, from the bowels of God’s mercies. This is the strongest word in the Greek to speak of being moved with tender, sensitive, heart-yearning compassion. Sending the baby Jesus in Bethlehem, was the most tender gift of mercy from heaven’s portals to all of us.

One morning, shortly after the end of World War II, a soldier was making his way back to his barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his jeep, he spotted a little boy with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside the bakery, the cook was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, watching every move. The soldier pulled his jeep to the curb, stopped, got out, and walked quietly over to where the little fellow was standing. Through the steamed-up window he could see the mouth-watering morsels as they were being pulled from the oven, piping hot. The boy’s mouth was watering. and the soldier heard the boy groan as he watched the cook place them carefully onto the glass-enclosed counter. The soldier's heart went out to this nameless little

orphan boy. World War II left so thousands of fatherless orphans. The soldier stepped up beside the little boy and said. "Son...would you like some of those doughnuts?" The boy was startled. "Oh, yeah...I would!" The soldier stepped inside and bought a dozen of those fresh warm doughnuts, put them in a bag, and walked back to where the little boy was standing in the foggy cold of that London morning. He smiled, held out the bag, and said simply: "Here you are." As he turned to walk away, the little boy yanked on his coat and quietly asked him: "Mister. . . are you God?" So many gifts we give, are truly, loving gifts, but no one knows how to tenderly give the best like God does. God knows us through and through. God's tender sensitivity in giving us His mercy, is seldom preached about. We are never more like God than when we give tenderly and sensitively. Today, I testify and proclaim to you that the most tender gift in all the world is Jesus. The shepherds on the Bethlehem hills who heard the birth announcement of Jesus from the angel hosts of heaven found it so. It was the dead of night when the angel came with a host of heaven's angels to proclaim Jesus' birth. Those shepherds didn't wait until morning to rush to Bethlehem to see this most tender gift from heaven, born of a virgin, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Secondly,

JESUS WAS THE MOST SACRIFICIAL GIFT OF ALL. (II.) We read in John 3: 16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Let us think about this gift. Paul tells us, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, a virgin, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons." (Galatians 4: 4-5) What was Jesus position and condition in eternity past, before the fullness of time, when Jesus arrived in Bethlehem? Paul reminds us in Philippians 2: 5-8, of Jesus' sacrifice as he commands us to have this mind in ourselves, which is ours in Christ Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped (or held on to) but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." For Jesus to come, He first had to leave the majestic glory of heaven. In doing that, Jesus made the choice with the Father and the Holy Spirit (three in one) to accept far less than He deserved to give us infinitely more than we could ever deserve.

What was Jesus' sacrifice? He never held onto His heavenly glory as something He had seized unlawfully, or something He obtained by robbery. No, Jesus' glory in heaven was His treasure from eternity past. Yet, He never selfishly clutched or clung to His eternal treasure. He gave up his heavenly throne for a manger and a cruel cross to die upon. He gave up His majestic splendor in exchange for suffering, and shame, as He bore our sins to Calvary. Jesus laid aside His prerogative as God the Son—yes, He gave up His rights as the eternal Son, and He came to earth as a man, taking the role of a servant. Jesus put aside the garments of

glory to take on the dying flesh of humanity. Paul wrote about this most sacrificial gift in I Timothy 3: 16, saying, “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: (speaking of Jesus, Paul continued) He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.” In Max Lucado’s new 2020 book, “Jesus,” he wrote this year these powerful words. “I am watching a family of black-tailed squirrels. I should be working on a Christmas message, but I cannot focus. They seem set on entertaining me. They scamper amid the roots of the tree north of my office. We have been neighbors for three years now. They watch me peck at the keyboard. I watch them store their nuts and climb the trunk. We are mutually amused. I could watch them all day. Sometimes I do. But I have never considered becoming one of them. The squirrel world holds no appeal to me. Who wants to sleep next to a hairy rodent with beady eyes? (No comments from you, wife Denalyn.) Give up the Rocky Mountains, bass fishing, weddings, and laughter, for a hole in the ground and a diet of dirty nuts? Count me out. But count Jesus in. What a world He left. Our classiest mansion would be a tree trunk to him. Earth’s finest cuisine would be walnuts on heaven’s table. And the idea of becoming a squirrel with claws and tiny teeth and a furry tail? It is nothing compared to God’s becoming an embryo and entering the womb of Mary.” Thirdly, and I know that I am only scratching the surface of the meaning of “He gave His only begotten Son.”

JESUS WAS THE MOST LOVING GIFT OF ALL. (III.) We read, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” I have just been focusing today on the gift—He, the Father, who loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son. We haven’t even begun to finish the verse, “that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. Years ago, I preached this message in Iasi, Romania, to some begging, loud and demanding Gypsies. I was preaching to them, from inside the fence around a church. The pastor got angry and forbade me to preach to them through the fence. Seeing, as his guest, that I was bent on preaching to these Gypsies who robbed me of \$180.00, stealing my wallet, earlier in the day, I deeply desired to lead them to Jesus. This disgusted pastor threw open the gates to the church and invited these Gypsies in who had never been in that church before. He motioned, “Bring them inside the church.” Inside the church, I looked at these folks that were hated in Romania, and everyone said, “They are all thieves.” I said to my interpreter, Cristi Tepes, “Do you remember the first convert of Jesus as he died on the cross?” He answered, “Yes, he was a thief.” So, I preached John 3: 16 to them. My 5-fold message was simple 777 That day 33 Gypsies prayed with me to receive Jesus. One of those Gypies became a pastor.

As I finish this message on my third point of this text, I declare to you all—this text is everybody’s favorite text. What can I tell you more than you know about

Jesus being the most loving gift of all to you and me and all humanity? Probably, I will fail to tell us anything new. Yet, I want to remind us today of the greatest story of love in the world. The very origin and initiative in salvation is not us seeking God, but God come to earth, seeking each of us. Don't believe the stories that God was such a stern, angry, unforgiving God, He had to be pacified so He could be persuaded to forgive. But look at Jesus' words to Nicodemus. Jesus told Nicodemus that God started it all with His great love. God the Father sent His Son, Jesus to earth because He loved you and me. When you go back, back, back, to eternity past, at the back of everything, there is the love of God. The mainspring of the incarnation is the love of God.

It would be easy, as William Barclay declares, "to think of God as looking at us in our heedlessness, our disobedience, and our rebellion and say, "I'll break you: I'll humble you and lash you and discipline you and punish you and scourge you until you come back." It also would be easy to think of God as seeking the allegiance of all of us in-order to satisfy His desire for ultimate power, and His own desire for a completely subject universe. Yet the tremendous thing about this text is that it shows Almighty God acting not for His own sake, but for our sake. It was not to satisfy God's desire for power that made God act. It was not to bring into being a universe that God would force to bow before Him. This gift, "For God so loved the world that He gave," was a gift to satisfy God's love. God is not the universe's monarch out to treat us as subjects to reduce to our knees in obedience. Oh no! God could not stop yearning and longing in love to bring us as wandering sheep to Him as our Shepherd. He refuses to smash us into submission. God patiently, lovingly, continually yearns over us. He woos us to receive His love.

Oh, the depth of the love of God. It was not a few of us He loved. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." It was not just a city, a county, a state, or a nation. For God so loved the world. It was not just the good people, or the people who loved Him. This love includes the unlovely, like you and me, the unlovable, the lonely, who have no one else to love them, the hopeless, who have no one else to believe in them, the ruined lives, whom God specializes in transforming, the sin-sick transgressors, who are without hope and without God in this world. and the souls addicted to substances and lust. No, "For God so loved the world, including those who do not believe in God, those who hate and spurn God, those who refuse to love their brothers or others, those who love the world so much, they never think or dream of God—all these and more are included in God's love. Augustine said it best. "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love." Perhaps today, you have never responded in faith to this tender, sacrificial love of God given by the Father in sending Jesus. Will you come today?