

One word- Christmas 2015

“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.” (John 3:16)

Beloved in The Lord,

There is one word that sets Christianity apart from all other world religions and that word is love.

We read in John’s first epistle: ***“God is love.” (1.John 4:8b)***

No other religion in the world reveals this truth to us. Much is written, much is spoken about love, but true love cannot be found outside of the one true God, who is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ His Son, whose birthday we are celebrating.

Many people have rejected religion, because many bad things have happened and are happening under religious banners. Yes, and also in the name of Christianity many wrongs have been committed in the past, and are still being committed today. What we need to understand however, is that not all who act in the name of Christ are part of His body. There is a vast gap between institutionalised Christian religion and true Christian living. A person can consider themselves to be a Christian, belong to a church, go through all the rites and rituals and yet not know Christ the Lord.

There is one powerful test of Christianity and that is love. Jesus taught His disciples:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

The word Jesus used here is “Agape” which is God’s love. This is sacrificial love, that places others before self. This is love that gives. This is love that does not seek its own good.

Christmas is a powerful demonstration of God’s love for us. John writes:

“By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:9-10)

Not only did God state His love for us, He demonstrated it. Christmas was the beginning of this demonstration. God showed His love for us by sending His Son into the world as a man. Jesus came to reveal His loving Father to us. He came to rescue us from eternal death and to reconcile us to the Father. The good news of Christmas, the Good News – the Gospel is clearly stated by Jesus Himself:

“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. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 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.” (John 3:16-18)

For God so loved us, that He gave His only begotten Son. You see love gives. Love gives sacrificially. God gave and sacrificed His only Son for us. Jesus was born with a mission. That mission was Calvary. That mission was to die as the perfect lamb of God upon the cross, so that by His shed blood our sin debt could be paid in full. He was perfect, sinless, without spot or blemish. He was totally obedient, yet He died as a criminal. He took our place. He substituted Himself, dying for us so that we would not have to be lost for all eternity. It wasn't that we deserve it, no it was because God so loved us.

Paul writes: ***"The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.⁶ For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:5b-8)**

You see, God demonstrates His love toward us. Christ died for us while we were still in a state of sin, and thereby enemies of God. We were rebels.

This is what separates Christianity apart from other religions. Not long ago I heard the testimony of a Muslim woman who converted to Christianity after reading that the Bible said to love your enemies. Her own religion taught to kill your enemies. It was love that brought her to Jesus.

God is love. Oh, how the whole world needs to hear and understand this truth. God loves you, whoever you are. God loves you very much. That is why we have Christmas. That is why the angel proclaimed to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born:

***"Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."* (Luke 2:10-11)**

You see how great the love of God is? He gave us His own Son. We do not have to live in fear, but we can be joyful because God is love.

We do not have to live as slaves to a religion, trying and striving to appease an angry God. No. We do not have to fear. God loves us and He accepts everyone who turns to Him in faith. He loves us and it is His desire for us to call upon Him in faith. When we do, we are set free. Jesus put it like this:

***"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."* (John 8:31-32)**

These words were originally spoken to some Jews who had begun to believe in Him. They did not really understand. We read further:

³³ They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"

***³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever.³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."* (John 8:33-36)**

You may be thinking what does this have to do with Christmas? A great deal. These words spoken by Jesus to the Jews are relevant to all people.

We are born in sin because we are descendants of Adam. We are born with a sinful, rebellious nature. We are born slaves to a fallen and corrupt nature. The wages of sin is death. As in the world, so in God's Kingdom, a slave does not inherit the masters property, that is reserved for his children.

God being love, wanted us to inherit His Kingdom, but in order to make that possible, He needed to free us from slavery and adopt us as children.

Loving us, God shed Jesus blood, to pay our debt, to free us from slavery and to give us the chance to be reborn into His family.

We read in John chapter 1:

"He (Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."
(John 1:10-14)

So then, when we receive Jesus into our hearts in faith, we become children of God, and as children we inherit eternal life. When we believe in Jesus, when we surrender our lives to Him in faith, when we receive God's gift of eternal love, our life changes completely. We are no longer slaves to sin, but we are children of God.

Our lives are no longer dominated by our sinful nature, our lusts and desires, but we seek to fulfil God's will. The Holy Spirit of God resides in our heart, and His presence guides us in a life of love.

When we receive God's gift of love and live as His children, then our lives are less worldly and we reflect God's love. The Holy Spirit causes us to bear the fruit of the Spirit. This is described by Paul:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." ***(Gal.5:22-23)***

What would the world look like if the majority of people accepted God's gift of love? Have you received it? Are you His child?

If not, come to Him today and open up your heart.

Amen.

Pastor Colvin MacPherson Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sydney.
All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.