

## Advent | Love | December 23, 2018 | Matthew McNutt

We are in the **fourth week** of our Advent series; we've been using **1 Peter 1:10-12** as a launching point as we explore our expectant waiting for Christ's arrival.

[SLIDE] **1 Peter 1:10-12 (NIV)** <sup>10</sup> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care,<sup>11</sup> trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

The prophets spoke of the grace that was to come to us. Each week we've looked at prophecies and how they connect to the different weeks of advent; [SLIDE] **ADVENT: Hope/Peace/Joy**. Last week, Pastor Nate gave me the greatest gift; for ten years I've waited for evidence that I'm not the strangest pastor at this place, and then he shared his video while talking about JOY.

**This week, we're looking at love.** [SLIDE] **ADVENT: Love**. The culmination of our weeks preparing for Christmas.

**What is love?** [SLIDE] **What is love (Roxbury photo)**. Does the word even make sense? I love my wife. I love Doritos. Is that really the same word? The same meaning?

[SLIDE] **ADVENT: Love**. You know, in many languages, there are multiple words for love; to differentiate between the uses. When we speak of love, the love of advent, the love of God – we are not talking about a Disney fantasy movie ending where there is a magical kiss and they live happily ever after!

[SLIDE] **Bob Goff, Love Does**, "The world can make you think that love can be picked up at a garage sale or enveloped in a Hallmark card. But the kind of love that God created and demonstrated is a costly one because it involves sacrifice and presence."

Love, real love, can be hard. It motivates us to do things we wouldn't do normally. Love sacrifices, love endures, love hurts. When my kids were younger, I changed their **diapers** – but here's the thing, those are the only diapers I have ever changed. And I will never do it again. Those are apparently the only four humans I love enough to do that rather than let them get a rash. **I feel bad when others suffer or are sick; when it's my children, I wish it was me instead.** We are moved when we see those who stay at the side of their loved ones going through horrible circumstances, health battles, or more – there is something in us that sees that happen and realize we are getting a glimpse of a love that is holy.

[SLIDE] 1. God has had a magnificent, sacrificial love for us from the beginning! I love the reading Katherine and Rebekah did; how it's description of God's love spanned history. From **Genesis 3**, moments after sin entered the equation, God promised that he would give us a way back to Him. Our sin, the wrong things we do, disrupt our connection to God. But unlike humans, when these wrongs have happened against Him, God continues to reach out to us, to love us.

[SLIDE] **Isaiah 7:14** (NIV) Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Immanuel means “**God with us.**” Do these words register? Or have we become so used to them that we don't stop to consider what they mean? **God WITH us. WITH US.** Genesis was written 3500 years ago; it was given to a world where every other religion of the day believed the gods viewed humanity as a nuisance, an annoyance to let suffer, or wipe out. In fact, when we read of other religious groups hurting themselves, sacrificing children – all of these extreme measures were done out of the belief that maybe if they're loud enough, the gods will feel bad for them, or maybe just want them to be quiet. Historians cannot explain how in that world, a religion came to be that described a God who loved humanity, who was willing to suffer on behalf of humanity – it just didn't make sense. A God who wanted to be WITH us? A God with sacrificial love?

In **Matthew**, we read that Jesus is the fulfillment of that ancient prophecy given centuries before His birth.

[SLIDE] **Matthew 1:20b-23** (NIV) “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

This idea of God with us has existed from the beginning when God was with Adam and Eve, in Isaiah, when God promised explicitly to be with us, and fulfilled in Christ's birth!

[SLIDE] 2. The greatest story ever told includes you!

This is not just an exciting story in ancient documents! Each of us are meant to have God with us!

[SLIDE] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

God's love is meant for each one of us; the longing we see in so many out there for some intangible thing that's missing is the result of us being made for another world! We are incomplete without God with us.

[SLIDE] **John 3:16 (NIV) 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.**

Such a famous verse; it's easy to forget the depth of what we are reading. Why do we make God's salvation plan so big and ambiguous when God always intended it to be personal for each one of us? When we speak of sacrificial love, the incredible love God has for us, for you, this is what we are talking about!

Some of you have heard me share this before, but when our son **Noah was four years old**, he was diagnosed with **Localized Scleroderma**. Here's the thing; there are two types of Scleroderma. Localized, which is not life threatening – and is what my son has, and Systemic Scleroderma, which attacks internal organs, and is fatal. Both are incredibly rare; there's little known about it. My grandmother died of Systemic Scleroderma just a couple years before Noah was born. And up until the day Noah was diagnosed, I didn't know there were two types; all I heard was the word Scleroderma, and I went white as a sheet. The world fell out. It was perhaps the worst moment of my life. Thankfully, it wasn't that; and while it took years of treatments, his case is dormant now.

**I wish I could have had it instead of him.** Every time my kids have suffered, I would have preferred it was me instead. Here's the thing; I can imagine scenarios where I would be willing to lose my life for others ... but **I cannot think of a scenario where I would sacrifice one of my children for others.** If that's the choice, I'm sorry, that is a cost beyond my ability to pay.

Which is why John 3:16 is so incredibly powerful; **we rejected God and yet His love is so great, He sent His son to suffer and die for us.** This birth we celebrate at Christmas, the moment God arrived to be with us, with the intent to die in our place, **this birth represents the most amazing, powerful, inexplicable act of love in all of history – and this story includes us!** This wasn't God just loving those recorded in scripture, this is God's love for YOU, going to impossible lengths, lengths beyond our understanding, to provide a way for YOU to be with Him!

[SLIDE] **3. We are called to make God's love visible today!** God with us means not only that we are restored to God; it means that we reflect God to the world around us. It means that in the same way that God is ultimately known for His love, we are to be known for His love. This is the greatest story ever told; you are a part of it – you can't just sit on this, you need to act.

[SLIDE] **1 John 3:16 (NIV) This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.**

This isn't just about physically dying for others; it's dying to our own preferences, our desires. St. Clare of Assisi, a follower of St. Francis of Assisi in the 1200's and founder of the monastic religious order, Order of the Poor Ladies, once said:

[SLIDE] "We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. If we love things, we become a thing. If we love nothing, we become nothing. Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ; rather, it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation."

What are you known for? A social media warrior ready to go to the mat for your political party? An employee who will put ethics on hold to get the deal done? Selfish in relationships? How would those who know you during the week describe you? What are you known for?

The goal is be a tangible, visible demonstration of God's love; laying down our lives in love for others at work, in our family, at school, in sports, clubs, social media, every aspect of life.

As we celebrate the greatest demonstration of love, let us be challenged to reflect God's love wherever we are.

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- 2. The greatest story ever told includes you!**
- 3. We are called to make God's love visible today!**