

The Waiting Room

Love in the Waiting Room

December 21, 2025

John 3:16

Introduction

(SLIDE - Xmas present) Have you bought all of your Christmas presents yet? I think we're pretty much done at the Tims Family (it was easier this year for reasons that will make more sense to my kids on Christmas Day), but it is not often easy to give the right Christmas present to the right person, is it? I find that there are all these filters running through my head when I find in me a desire or an obligation to provide a gift for someone.

- There is the "Closeness Filter." *"How close are we, really?"* This determines whether the gift is deeply personal or safely generic. So if you are (or think you are) very close, you end up with something thoughtful or specific ... maybe even risky. If you're somewhat close, you get something safe and appropriate. If you're not close, you get a candle.
- There is the "Knowledge Filter." *"Do I actually know what they like?"* This is the difference between a gift that says, "I know you," and one that says, "I hope this applies to humans in general." So if I bought Holly the right kind of dress in the right size for the right moment, I know her. If I include a gift receipt with a gift, I'm acknowledging my uncertainty.
- There is the "Risk Filter." *"How dangerous is this gift?"* Some gifts carry emotional risk. The safer the gift, the less it says. The riskier the gift, the more it reveals confidence in the relationship.
- There is the "Effort vs. Convenience Filter." *"How much effort am I willing to invest?"* A really thoughtful gift often leads to a lot of time spent thinking, searching, planning. An Amazon gift card in their email at 9:30 on Christmas morning ...??? Effort communicates value. Convenience communicates reality. Sometimes both.
- There is the "Expectation Filter." *"What are they expecting from me?"* We all calibrate gifts based on perceived expectations. Gifts can quietly communicate whether we're meeting expectations, avoiding disappointment, or playing defense.
- There is the "Reciprocity Filter." *"What are they getting me?"* We hate to admit this one, but it's real. You don't want to under-gift OR over-gift.
- And then, lastly, there is the "Message Filter" *"What am I saying with this?"* Every gift sends a message, intended or not. Gifts are never just objects. They are messages wrapped in paper.
 - "I saw this and thought of you."
 - "I remembered."
 - "I tried."
 - "I panicked."

- “I care.”
- “I care... but from a distance.”

Every Christmas gift says something about the relationship. But Christmas isn't ultimately about the gifts we give. It's about the gift God chose to give—and what that gift says about His love for us. What we see in our text today is that the coming of Jesus is not a safe gift. Not a generic gift. Not a last-minute gift. But a costly, personal, intentional gift that tells us exactly what God thinks of the relationship.

Body

So, what do we learn about God and His love for us in the gift of Jesus?

Take a look at John 3:16 with me (from the CSB). (SLIDE)

For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

The Manner of God's Love

First, we need to understand that the phrase “SO loved” is not a reference to the amount of love God has for the world. The “so” here doesn't mean an amount of love, but does mean a way or manner of loving. He doesn't mean: God loved sooooo much, but God loved this way. “God so loved” means “God loved us in this manner.” That's why the CSB writes it the way they do – “God loved the world THIS WAY.” God's love has a means or a manner.

- **Illustration – eating pizza at Pizza Inn at a birthday party as a kid**
- It's not about volume or amount, but about MANNER.

So what is the manner in which God loved?

He loved such “that he gave his one and only Son.” That's the kind of love the Father has. It is a giving love. It gives his most precious treasure—his Son. It was a very costly love. A very powerful love. A self-giving love. It's a love that shows just how glorious God really is.

- (SLIDE) Illustration from Lazarus, John 11.
 - *4 When Jesus heard it, he said, “This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” 5 Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two more days in the place where he was.*
- God loved us in this way, that He went to great lengths to show us His glory. THAT is true love. Love that goes to costly lengths to show us the glory of Christ. **That is the manner of God's love for you and me.**

The Object of God's Love

(SLIDE) For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

But there's more to this phrase. "God so loved the WORLD." "God loved the world in this manner."

What does John mean by "world?" All throughout John's gospel and his letters, when John uses the word "world," he is especially drawing out the idea of God's grace. In other words, he's reflecting on the fact that God's love is not only amazing because it is unconditional and self-giving, **but also because of the fact that it is directed at us, who could not be more undeserving.** Paul puts it this way in Romans 5.

(SLIDE) Romans 5:7-8 -- For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

So the manner of God's love is that He gave His Son, and us fallen, broken, rebellious, immoral people are the object of His love.

The Experience of God's Love

But how do these two things – our sinful state (dead, slave, perishing) and God's unconditional self-giving love – come together? What's the link between these things? How do we receive or experience God's love?

(SLIDE) Well, read the verse! For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

BELIEVING is the vital link between our deadness in sin and God's unconditional self-giving love made manifest in His Son on the cross and in the resurrection.

- If we believe, we have eternal life. If we don't believe, we perish (3:16).
- John 3:18 – Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.
- John 3:36 – The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.

So believing is the exclusive means by which we experience God's love. The world divides into two groups as the gospel moves through it: those who believe and those who don't. Those who believe are vitally linked to the love of God and are rescued from perishing. Those who don't believe remain under the wrath of God. Believing is the vital link with the rescuing love of God.

Let me illustrate this. The vital link ...

- isn't your race
- it isn't your IQ
- it isn't your church attendance
- or religious background
- or how many mortal sins you've avoided.
- it isn't your political party affiliation.

The vital link is whether you believe in the Son of God. Believing links you savingly to the love of God.

Now, we need to be very clear what the Bible means when it says, “believe.” Let me share with you a few things about BELIEVING because it is so vital. When Jesus says “believe,” this is what He means. (5 SLIDES as I say them)

1. Believing is an ongoing condition of your mind and heart, not just a one-time act. The Greek is very clear in this passage (“keeps on believing”) and all throughout John’s Gospel. Biblical belief is an ongoing condition of your heart and mind, not a single act at point and time in your life.

2. Believing specifically has Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as its focus. You can have all the faith you can imagine in a different God, and live very piously/faithfully according to that faith, but it doesn’t link you to the love of God for you. The vital link between your being dead in sin and God’s unconditional, self-giving love must be directed specifically at His Son, Jesus.

3. Believing also includes believing in your mind specific things about Jesus as historically true. To believe is to agree in your mind with objective truth about Him. We reject relativism (“That may be true and good for you, but you can’t say that all that is true for me.”). YES WE CAN because Jesus did. So when He says “believe in me,” He is also referring to objective truth about him. Truth is truth whether we believe it or not. And genuine believing in Jesus agrees with the objective truth about Jesus.

4. But it’s not just facts. Believing also means being satisfied with Him in your heart. The devil “believes” all the right things about Jesus (James 2:19). But check out these verses that illustrate how believing is about more than facts.

- *John 6:35 -- Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*
- *John 14:1 -- “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.*

Do you see how, in these passages, believing is equated with being satisfied in your heart or soul with Jesus? It’s not just facts. It goes to the heart.

5. But the last thing I want you to see from Scripture is that **believing is a human act in response to God's gracious work.**

- Remember, we are dead/slave/perishing. We cannot create the vital link of belief. Our ability to believe in Christ for salvation is granted to us, and some will choose to believe while others will resist and harden their hearts.
- Consider the Scriptures!
 - *John 6:37 – Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out.*
 - *John 6:44 – No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.*
 - *Philippians 1:29 – For it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.*
 - *Ephesians 2:8-9 – For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast.*
- So biblical "believing" in Jesus is an ongoing condition of our mind and heart. He is our Truth and our Treasure. And it is only possible because God draws. Jesus causes belief, we DO the believing.

Conclusion

(SLIDE) Spurgeon's Conversion

When Charles Spurgeon, the great London preacher from the 1800's, was 16 years old and unconverted, he happened into a small Methodist Chapel with 15 people in a snowstorm. The preacher was a layman. He took his text from Isaiah 45:22, "Look to me and be saved all the ends of the earth." At one point he looked right at the boy and said, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look. Look. Look." Spurgeon said, "*I saw at once the way of salvation . . . Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, Look! What a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun.*"

(SLIDE) C. S. Lewis' Conversion

On an evening in September, 1931, Lewis discussed Christianity with J. R. R. Tolkien (author of The Lord of the Rings) and Hugo Dyson. The conversion was unemotional and without manifest struggle. All the struggle had gone before. Here is how he tells the story of his saving bus ride to the zoo:

I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven into Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and

when we reached the zoo I did. And yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion. "Emotional" is perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake. And it was, like that moment on top of the bus, ambiguous. Freedom, or necessity? Or do they differ at their maximum?

Title Slide