

¹⁶ For God loved the world in this way:^[a] He gave^[b] his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Why would God love?

Kid's its almost time. In our house the countdown began months ago. Over the past six months to a year I've heard the question, "Dad, when's it going to be Christmas?" And now that it is almost Christmas, I'm hearing another question of the same sort, "When is it going to be my birthday?" The kids are excited. They're eager to open up presents, eat candy, gather with friends and family. But most importantly they know that on Christmas and birthdays they get presents.

There's another question the kids often ask, "Why?" Why do we give gifts on Christmas? That's easy it's because we love them – we want to. The TV will tell you that this is the true meaning of Christmas that it is about giving and the joy we receive in watching our children open gifts but have you ever stopped to ask why? We give gifts on a day named, "Christmas"? Why wait till a Christmas to give gifts at all?

Our theme is God so loved the world it comes from the familiar passage John 3:16 and ultimately Christmas comes down to this – God loved the world so much he gave us the best gift ever: his only Son. Why? Because God loved the world. Why? Hasn't God seen the world lately? Doesn't he know of all the hate, extortion? Why would God love the world? Are we even sure he still does. We might even ask the same question of ourselves, Why would God love me?

We could quickly jump to something that distinguishes me from the rest of the world. Caring heart, Love for humanity, Good looks, maybe it's the things I do but whatever it is (we'll tell ourselves) there has to be something, some choice, some decisions, some action that sets me apart and makes me loveable. Why? Because it's in our nature to see ourselves as good, better, and others bad. Whatever our qualities, decisions or abilities... these are all reasons why other people love me and not why God loves me.

God's love is entirely different. He doesn't love me for who I am. The passage says, "*God so loved the world.*" The cosmos – every ugly part. When the Bible talks about this world, it's talking about every broken bit of our fallen world. There is nothing in it that is attractive and looks good. We've earned God's anger. We've broken his commands. We've thought little of his gifts. Openly mocked them, ignored them and his gifts, doubted his promises, and failed to love others as ourselves. It's said there has only ever been one Christian in this world and we killed him. That's what the world thought of God's gift.

It's easy to see why God would give up, walk away from this world, abandon it. And many assume that because of the horrible things that happen, either by nature or by humanity – God either doesn't exist, or isn't good. This is what we deserve and yet In spite of this we have these Words.

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. No conditions, pre-requisites. His love unearned, undeserved, unasked for. Why does God love me? Not because of me but because of who he is. The God of grace and mercy. And when he says he loves the world, because God is love. That includes you, no matter what you've done. God loves you *not because of who you are but because of who he is.* We confess that God created this world and all that exists. He gave us a perfect place but even after our first parents ruined it he made a promise to restore. He then continues to support us in this ruined world with all that we need to support this body and life. James says that every good and perfect gift is from above - Look how much God has given us.

And if we are wondering what God has done about the evil, violence, and hatred of this world – look to the pages of Scripture because here he tells us what he has done about the evil in this world and in each one of us. God

came down to earth. He entered into this world of suffering and sin. And he suffered along with us. He came in a manger into our darkness to die for us

That's his Christmas gift that is far too often thrown out by a culture that appropriates all things for commercial purposes. Jesus was born to save us from death by dying in our place. He was born to bring eternal life to all who believe. To believe means to trust in, to rely upon. If we turn this belief into something it isn't it becomes an "if/then" statement saying, "If you accept Jesus, God will save you. If you obey God then God will love you." If we do that – we turn John 3:16 upside down as well as the history of salvation from Genesis to Revelation. **God is the one who acted first in order to save, after that, we respond. John 3:16 is a because/therefore statement.**

Because God loved the world, because God sent his Son, because he died on the cross, rose the third day – we are saved. Therefore we love just as he loved us. We give good gifts to our children on Christmas and then we feed them and keep them alive throughout the year. We share the same gift we have received because we are saved and we want others to be too.

When? 2000 years ago on a cross outside of Jerusalem, but I only found out about it a number of years ago. God loved the world, the cosmos, the universe, all of it that he did something about it.

That's what God did. What Christmas is all about is God's love, God's gift and we give gifts for the same reason God gave his son to us – love.

Christmas isn't about our giving. It is about God giving. And yes – the kids can still get presents because God gives good things to us so we can give to others. Christmas is much more than what we give, it's what we've received. God's gift to this world. His son. Salvation, eternal life without all the atrocities, pain, or problems. Christmas is proof that God loves you, more than just you, the world. So when you wonder if there is a God or if he is good – remember the cradle and see his journey to the cross for his love of the world.