

The Greatest Gift Ever

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Preacher: Jason Webb

- [0 : 0 0] Well, Bill and Melinda Gates write a letter every year giving an update on their charity, their foundation.
- ! And the letter this year they wrote directly to Warren Buffett, or they addressed it to Warren Buffett. I hope everyone knows who Warren Buffett is.
- Ten years ago, he pledged \$30 billion to the Gates Foundation. And this is how this year's annual letter began.
- Dear Warren, ten years ago, when we first got word of your gift to the Foundation, we were speechless. And then it goes on in bold font.
- It was the biggest single gift anyone ever gave anybody for anything. The biggest single gift anyone ever gave anybody for anything.
- [1 : 0 6] And to that I say, wrong. It may very well be the second biggest gift anyone has ever given anybody for anything.
- It may very well be second. But it is, it's miles. It's light years behind the first.
- And so I say, wrong. Mr. Gates, it is not the biggest single gift anyone has given anybody for anything. 1 John chapter 4, verse 9. And that's where I'd like you to turn.
- 1 John chapter 4 and verse 9. Bill Gates is wrong about that. Because listen to what 1 John 4, verse 9 and 10 says.
- This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.
- [2 : 1 4] This is love. Not that we loved God. But that he loved us. And he sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.
- So I did the math. I think I did it right. It's a lot of zeros in the calculator. It's hard to keep track of all those zeros on the calculator. But if I did it right, based on some research that I did.
- Warren Buffett, when he gave his \$30 billion, or pledged his \$30 billion, gave away 0.025% of the world's wealth.
- 0.025% of all the wealth in the world he gave to the Gates Foundation. He gave away. But God gave his son.
- His son. More precious than everything created. More precious than anything in heaven. More precious than anything on earth.
- [3 : 1 9] More precious than all the angels ever created. More precious than all the men created. More precious than mountains. And suns. And stars. They were all created.
- Actually, Jesus created them. For by him and through him were all things created. So angels, men, mountains, moons.
- They're the work of his hand. They're the work of his hand. And my question is, which do you prize more? Your children or their crafts?

Your children? Or when they go to Boy Scouts and they make something? Or Girl Scouts and they make something and bring it home?

Which do you value more? The best things that they've ever made? Or them? But God gave his son. And Paul says, thanks be to God for that indescribable gift.

[4 : 27] So, no, Mr. Gates, Warren Buffet did a great thing. A good thing. But if you want to see love, you have to turn away from 0.025% of the world's wealth.

And John says, this is what love is. This is love. This is how God shows his love. He sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. And so, this is the question.

How do you see God's love? Now, I hope you've been seeing it in these last few days of beautiful sunshine. The earth is full of God's unfailing love.

But John doesn't point at any of those things. He says, now, do you want to see God's love? This is where it is. This is how you see it.

This is God's revelation. This is his display. And so, this is the uncovering of God's love. And that just teaches us, again, that Jesus didn't come to win God's love for sinners.

[5 : 35] He came to show God's love for sinners. So, Paul, in Ephesians 3, he prayed that the Ephesians might be able to have the spirit of God to help them to understand something that the width and the length and the height and the depth of God's love.

And so, that's exactly what we want to do here this evening. We want to explore some of those heights and some of those depths. We want to see how high and how low it will go.

And tonight, John is our guide. John is going to show us, how do you explore the heights? How do you explore the depths?

And he does it in these two verses. And so, we're going to start in the depths. How low will God's love go?

How deep does it go? How low will God's love go? And that's where we have to begin with us. John says you have to start with knowing yourself.

[6 : 41] You'll never know God's love until you see who he loves. Until you see yourself. You'll never feel the greatness of God's love until you have a good feel for who you are.

And so, what does he say? What does this say about us? It says that God sent his son that we might live through him.

Now, what does that teach us? What can we figure from that logically? Well, what can we see? It says that when he loved us, we weren't alive.

We weren't alive. We were dead. We were spiritually dead. And I'm not talking about prior to your birth. I'm not talking about election.

Although, those things are true. It means that we were spiritually dead when God loved us. And he had to send his son in order that we might live.

[7 : 50] So, Ezekiel saw us. Ezekiel went down into a valley. And there were bones everywhere in this valley.

It was like an ancient battlefield. And that battlefield was a long time ago. This defeat was an ancient defeat. Years and years.

And now there's nothing left but these dead, these dried up, dusty bones. And God says, can these bones live? And Ezekiel says, sovereign Lord, you alone know.

So, Ezekiel's saying, if you don't make them live, they're not going to live. So, when did God love us?

When we were spiritually dead. So, what's a good way that you can look at yourself? Before you were in Jesus Christ. Well, picture that skeleton.

- [8 : 50] That's you. Dead. And we did lose that ancient battle. We lost it in the garden when we sinned. In Adam. And we had been dead.
- We didn't have life. We existed. We exist. But we don't have life. In hell, you exist.
- But it's called the second death. And so, it's eternal death. And it's eternal existence. And so, whatever it was before we were in Jesus Christ.
- John says it wasn't life. It wasn't life. To live separated from God is not to really live. It's to be in a state of death.
- And so, Jesus is teaching. And he takes his cures out into the wilderness. And there we see this lamb. The sheep. And it's lost. And it's confused.
- [9 : 49] And it's terrified. It's not where it's supposed to be. It's not living like it was meant to live. Everywhere around it, there's dangers.
- Nothing looks familiar. The sheep can smell the wolf in the air. And so, whatever. And that was us.
- Lost. Confused. Terrified. Whatever we had, it wasn't life. Jesus goes on teaching.
- And now he takes us to a far away country. And he shows us a teenage boy. A scrawny, dirty, smelly, teenage boy.
- Beating the pigs. Miserable. Alone. Wishing he could eat some of the pigs' food. That's not life.
- [10 : 46] That's not how he was meant to live. And Jesus is saying, that's us. Dead. But the shepherd sought his sheep.
- The father sought his child. And he followed me o'er veil and hill, over deserts, waste and wild. They found me nigh to death, famished and faint and lone.
- They bound me with the bands of love. They saved the wandering one. And so, we're looking at the depths of God's love.
- How deep does it go? Well, it comes down to us. It comes down to where we're at. And John says, you were dead when he loved you. Ephesians 2 talks about that death.
- Paul says, We followed the ways of the world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work and those who are disobedient. All of us lived among them at one time.
- [11 : 50] Not a single one of us was better than this. Following the devil. Following the one who holds the power of death. And obeying him.
- Following him. He says, All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh. None of us were better than that. We gratified the cravings of our flesh.
- And like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. That is, we just naturally deserved to die. To receive God's wrath.
- That's what was fitting us. That's what we had coming. That was a matter of course. That was just a matter of time. And so we deserved God's wrath. We were dead in our sins.
- We were on death row. The sentence had been passed. And the question was, Were we sorry? Were we like some of those prisoners who, now they regret what they've done.
- [12 : 52] And they're trying to make peace with God before they go to die. No, we followed the ways of this world. We willingly followed the devil.
- We were unresponsive to God. We weren't like those prisoners who were trying to make peace with God. We were like those prisoners who were going out with our fist in God's face.

We were hostile to God. Romans 8, 7 talks about the flesh, the fleshly mind is hostility to God. It's the very enmity, the very hatred. And that was us.

We disagreed with God on principle. Whatever he said, it didn't matter how mad or insane it made us look. And it didn't matter how insane we were.

Or it was. We were going to oppose God. And so that's the question. Do you remember that? Do you remember what it was like before Jesus came and saved you?

[14 : 00] You were dead. But because of God's great love, because of God who is rich in mercy, he made us alive with Christ.

And that's why John says, this is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us. Because there was no love for us towards God.

The one we should have loved, we didn't love. The one we should have delighted in and rejoiced in was the one that we didn't find any delight in. So the Bible picture is man not looking for God.

The Bible picture is not that God finds man loving and moving toward him. Hoping to know him. Looking for him. Loving him.

We don't love God. We didn't respond to God's love. We were dead to him. Have you ever been sitting in these seats and the gospel comes across so powerfully, so clear, so sweet, and there is this almost sense, maybe it's not just an almost sense, Jesus comes and he is making, he's pleading with sinners.

[15 : 29] And the gospel comes across so clearly and so near. It's like if you wish you could be saved all over again.

The gospel is preached and it comes powerfully and Jesus draws near and people don't respond. they're not moved.

Do you ever scratch your head and say, how can that be? How, how can they just sit there? How can they just sit there?

And the answer is 1 John 4 and 9 were dead. they're dead. They have no ears to hear his voice. And we need to remember that again.

It is no wonder they don't respond. We didn't respond first either. God loved us when we were dead and he loved us in order to make us alive.

[16 : 37] Now, there's something of the depths of his love. It reached down to us. Reached down to where we were. the shepherd sought his sheep. The father sought his child and the spirit came upon those dry bones and we had life.

So, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Christ came that his enemies might have, might live through him. So, we're looking at this great love and we've seen something of, of how deep it goes.

And now, again, we want to see how high it goes. the heights of it. And John is our guide and he takes us down to where we are and now he's going up.

He's ascending into the heights. And this is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son. And so, here we are.

Now, we're not on earth where the dead sinners are. Now, we're up in heaven and God the Father is here and the son is here. and in love the Father sends his son, his one and only son.

[17 : 48] And we talked about this already. What in heaven was more precious to God the Father than his son? What on earth was more precious than his son?

not the angels. Hebrews says the angels worship the son and not man who's made in the son's image and not mountains and hills and cedars and rivers and everything else.

They're the work of his hands. There's nothing more precious to God, more valuable, more treasured, more delighted in than his one and only son.

And so, how do you see God's love? You see who he sent. You see who he sent for you. Now, the Bible says that God has many sons.

The angels are called the sons of God. Adam was called the son of God. Men, generically, in the Bible are called the sons of God. Christians are called the sons of God.

[18 : 58] So, God has many sons, but God only has one son. Both of those things are true. God has many of these lesser sons, but God has only one son, a son like no other.

There's no other son like him. Here's all the rest. Angels, men, Christians, I mean, everyone's down here and this one stands alone. So, let's think about him.

There was only one son that shared in the glory of the Father. That means all of the glory of God the Father he shared in. It was his glory. John 17 talks about it.

Jesus says, Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. So, think about that. Before the world began, before there was time or space or those first words of let there be light were spoken.

The Father and the Son shared this glory. Only one son, only one son rejoiced by the Father's side as they together made a world.

[20 : 15] And only one son sat at the table face to face with the Father as they planned redemption, as they planned salvation.

And only one son can say, no one knows the Son except the Father. Jesus is saying, no one knows me except for him.

And no one knows the Father except the Son. And on earth, Jesus never confused who he was with who the disciples were.

the disciples asked him how to pray and he said, this is how you should pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. We call it the Lord's Prayer.

But Jesus was giving that prayer to his disciples. He never joined them in saying our Father. Jesus never actually uses the word our Father, our, to identify his relationship with God and the disciples' relationship with God.

[21 : 24] After his resurrection, he calls his brothers. Hebrews talks about that. And yet, he still says, I'm returning to my Father and your Father, my God, and your God.

God. So even then, he's careful for us to understand who he is. Yes, we are the sons of God, God.

But John 1.12 tells us how we became the sons of God. He gave authority to men to become the sons of God. Our sonship comes because he makes it so.

His sonship is before ours. Now, why am I saying all that? It's just simply this, that if we don't understand who that son is, who the son is, we can't understand the love of God because God is showing us the greatness of his love and he does it by sending his son.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones says, you know nothing about the love of God unless you believe the doctrine of the incarnation. Believe me, you cannot talk of the love of God indwelling in your heart unless you know that Jesus of Nazareth is the unique and only begotten son of God.

[22 : 58] And so here we are, we're in the heights. We're talking about love. How do you see this love that surpasses understanding? How do you measure the immeasurable?

Well, you look at who he sent for you. Look at who he sent for you. his one and only son. How much does God love you?

How much does God love me? When I was dead, when I was hopelessly lost, when I had rebelled and was in the faraway country, he reached and he sent the highest, the best thing that he could.

He didn't give you anything less than the most he could give you. He didn't give you anything less than the best.

he couldn't give you anything better than his son. And so do you know someone's loved by how much they're willing to help you.

[24 : 23] You know someone's loved by the help they send to you. If I give somebody a \$25 Walmart gift card when they're poor and they need help, well that says something.

I love them that much. But if I were to give them thousands of dollars, and I were to get them a job, and get them a house, and help them year after year after year, that is greater love.

So we measure a person's love by the help they send, the help they give. How much does God love us?

he sends his one and only son. He couldn't send anything better. He couldn't do anything more than that.

Do you see the fierceness and the magnitude of God's love? He sends his son. That's the heights.

[25 : 33] We have to go back down because we have to talk about where he sent his son. And he sent his son, 1 John 4 says, he sent his son, 1 John 4 9, into the world.

Into this world. So now we're back in the depths. where did God send him?

To a place under the curse, a place of dying, lying, cheating, a place of death, disobedience.

Those sitting in darkness have seen a great light. he sent him to a cruel world, a heartless world, a ruthless world.

So when he was born, he was born in a stable because no one had the heart to give a nine-month, a long, pregnant woman, close to delivery, a bed.

[26 : 49] there's no room for them in the inn. There was only no room because no one made room. And that's the world he came to.

It was a cruel world. It was a hateful, destructive world. Herod sent his army to kill babies, two months and under, and he had to flee for his life.

That was the kind of world God sent his son to. It was a poor world. Though he was rich for our sakes, he became poor. All of you have a nicer house than Jesus ever did.

It was a deceitful world. Pharisees would smile and ask him the questions, hoping to trick him, hoping to trip him up.

It was a traitorous world. Judas, the one who broke bread with him, turned him over. And it was a cowardly, fickle world.

[28 : 02] There's no cowards in heaven. No cowards in heaven. Jesus had never personally seen that kind of cowardness and fickleness until he came to this world.

He was never lied to until he came into this world. The crowds went from Hosanna to crucify. And Peter went from I, maybe everyone else will leave you, but I won't, to I don't even know that man.

And the disciples said the very same thing. We'll stand by you, and they're running away. And that's the world God sent his son into.

That's the world that God sent his son for. Those kinds of people. And so do you see the depths of it? Look at where he sent him. But we have to go further.

Because he didn't just send him. He didn't just send him to be here. He just didn't send him to be a king. He didn't send him here to be a policeman or a fireman. He didn't come here to be a lifeguard.

[29 : 10] He didn't send him to be a nice guy, to be a great philanthropist like Warren Buffett and the Gates. He didn't send him to do any of that. What did he send him as?

He sent him as an atoning sacrifice. He packaged him up, so to speak, as a sacrifice.

And he sent him here. Abraham tied up Isaac, laid him on the altar.

God bound up his son as a sacrifice. And he sent him into our world to die. So that is the true depth of his love.

Yes, he sent his son. Yes, he sent his son into a terrible place. And Jesus had to endure it all.

[30 : 17] But Jesus didn't just come. God didn't just send him to be here. He sent him as a sacrifice. He sent him knowing that every day, every minute, every second was ticking closer and closer to that appointment when death would come.

God sent him knowing what would happen. God sent planning what would happen. He sent him as a sin offering. And he sent him to suffer. And he sent him to die.

And he sent him to take away sins. And sins can only be taken away with blood. And so that's love.

Sent him here as a substitute. He was innocent. But the innocent for the guilty. for the guilty, the innocent would die.

He was innocent. But for the guilty, he would suffer. And the innocent one would cry bloody tears.

[31 : 36] Spiritual agony. the innocent was stricken. The innocent was smitten and afflicted and pierced and crushed and punished and wounded and oppressed and judged.

for the wicked, the innocent one was cut off from the land of the living. And he was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death.

And it was the Lord's will to crush him. To crush him in order to save us.

To save us. So, do you see the depths? How far will God go in order to love? He'll go that far.

He'll be that raw. He'll be that real. He'll be that completely. He'll go the whole way. But you know what? Thank God it doesn't end there.

[32 : 50] That's the depths. Now we can go back to the heights. it was the Lord's will to crush him yet he will see the light of life Isaiah 53 says. And that's where 1 John really takes us.

He died as a sacrifice in order that we might live. In order that we might have life. And so whatever that was before that existence it was death.

But now Jesus gives us life. And so it's not just death. It's resurrection. It's not just death. It's ascension into glory. And he raises us up with him.

And so in him and for his son's sake we're pardoned. We're forgiven. The death is taken away. We're restored. We sing it.

Death is crushed to death. Life is mine to live. One through his selfless love. So how do you measure the immeasurable?

[33 : 52] How do you begin to explore the heights and the depths? And when you pray Lord show me that great love you know how God is going to answer?

He's going to take you to the cross. He's going to take you to Jesus. And you study him and your ceiling gets higher and your basement gets lower and your world gets wider and longer.

God's love expands as you study the cross. So how do you measure the immeasurable? Well, this is how God showed us his love. He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.

Remember 1 John 3:1 Behold that love. Behold that love. Brother, behold that love, sister.

There's nothing greater. There's nothing better than this love. There's nothing better than this love.

[35 : 09] So what has the world ever done for you? What has money ever done for you? Who has your heart?

What has your heart? How can we live for anything or anyone other than for him?

That's a question I have to ask myself and that's a question I have to ask you. If God loves me, love me, and this isn't past tense love, this is showing us present tense love.

This is how God shows his love, how God demonstrates his love. This is the standing reminder of this is the quality, this is the nature, this is the quantity of God's love. It hasn't changed.

If this is how God loves me, then how can I do anything less than love him in return?

[36 : 17] I didn't love him first, but I can love him second. He loved me first, but I sure can love him in return.

Can't you? Shouldn't you? you didn't love him first, but you sure can love him now, and you should.

And this is where I'll end, just with the sort of broader context of what 1 John 4 is all about, and it's saying this, you should love your brothers and sisters.

This is how you know if you have God's love in you, that you're going to love those people that you're sitting with. So you want to show God how much you love him, well, say thank you, worship, praise, sing, rejoice, trust, and love these people.

Love your brothers and sisters. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for that great love. Thank you for sustaining grace.

[37 : 29] Thank you for your great mercy. For your great mercy to a sinner like me. Thank you for your great love for us. That's deeper than the deepest ocean and higher than the heavens.

And we do find that we love. And we do love you. But we know it was because you first loved us.

so I pray that you would help us and elevate our hearts and our souls to have more fervor, zeal, life, joy in you.

That our love for you might expand and grow. And Father, please save sinners here tonight with this message, weak as it is.

But for Jesus Christ's sake, have mercy, find the wandering one. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.