

Why Christmas? Sin-Bearing, Destroying, Loving, Life-Giving, Atoning Savior
1 John 3:5, 8; 4:9-10
ABC 12/17/23

In Charles Dickens Christmas Classic, *A Christmas Carol*, Mr. Scrooge says, *Humbug! Merry Christmas? What right have you to be merry? What reason do you have to be merry?* There's an answer for Scrooge & there's an answer for *Scrooges* everywhere this Advent season because believers have every right to be merry at Christmas. Why? Not simply because Jesus has appeared, but why He has appeared. This advent we're looking at *Why Christmas?* So far we've looked at Mk 10:45: **the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, & to give His life a ransom for many.** Last week we saw that **the Son of Man has come to seek & to save that which was lost** (Lk 19:10). This morning we'll be turning to the little letter of 1 John to see several answers to the question, *Why Christmas?* 1 Jn isn't typically thought of as a Christmas passage but if you listen carefully, you find it truly says much about Christmas. John refers to Christmas 5x & gives 6 reasons for the why of Christmas.

1. He Came To Be Our Sin-bearer & Was Sinless 3:5

Why did Jesus come? **To take away sins**, to deal with sin once & for all. The dark & ugly side of Christmas is sin. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The real beauty of Christmas is to know & understand the ugliness that it cures. If there were no sin, there would be no need for Christmas. The Bible says, **all have sinned** (Rom 3:23) & **if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves & the truth is not in us** (1 Jn 1:8). What's the result of sin? **The wages of sin is death** (Rom 6:23). Every person will die because they're sinners. But the Bible says that Jesus came into the world to save us from sin. That's the reason for His coming we see here. What is sin? If you back up one verse, you see that **sin is lawlessness** (1 Jn 3:4). Sin is breaking God's law. It's any violation of God's holy standards. Sin is the spirit of lawlessness itself, the desire to have my own way no matter what. Our God is holy, all holy, only holy, altogether holy, & always holy. We are sinful, all sinful, only sinful, altogether sinful, & always sinful. Holy God & sinful man can only be brought together when sin is dealt with. That's what Jesus came for. The purpose of the incarnation, the why of Christmas, wasn't that Jesus might just be our example or teacher, but that He would

be our Sin-bearer. He could only do this if He was sinless. If He had any sin He'd have to pay for that sin Himself. But since He didn't have any sin, He was able to step in & be our Substitute. Jesus appeared, Christmas happened, to carry away & remove our sins, to give us forgiveness. To provide for us escape from the wrath of God, the judgment of God upon our sins. Jesus appeared in order to take away, to remove sins & **in Him there is no sin**. He's the perfect One. The taking away of our sins can only be accomplished by One who is Himself sinless.¹ Jesus is holy, He is pure & without sin of any kind. Those who trust Him for the forgiveness of their sins are called to stand against sin & hate it with the kind of holy hatred that God has for sin.

Billy Sunday was an evangelist in the early part of the last century. He said, *I am against sin. I'll kick it as long as I have a foot. I'll fight it as long as I have a fist. I'll bite it as long as I have a tooth. & when I'm old & footless, & fistless & toothless, I'll gum it until I go home to glory.*²

That's hatred of sin. Jesus appeared to take away our sins & He stands against sin. & those who name His Name are called to stand with Him in a holy hatred of sin. The reality of sin & Jesus having taken away sins is at the heart of Christmas. He appeared to dispel your sins. Because He did that, John says to us, don't compromise with sin. Don't see how close you can get to it. Stand against it. Don't continue in it without any sensitivity to God. He came to deliver us from sin. In fact, He was made to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21). Jesus has appeared, He came to take away your sins.

2. He Came To Destroy The Works Of The Devil 3:8

Jesus was born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:18, 20), & **kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men** (Lk 2:52) & was perfectly obedient & sinless in all His life & ministry, all the way to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:5-8; Heb 4:15). Why? **To destroy the works of the devil**. Sin brings us under the dominance of Satan. A sinner isn't free. Paul tells us, **you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience** (Eph 2:2). In 2 Cor 4 he writes, **the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see**

¹ FF Bruce, *Epistles of John*, p 89

² <http://christian-quotes.ochristian.com/>

the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (4). Satan is at work. Sin brings us under the control of Satan. We have a deadly disease & a dangerous enemy. Every one of us will die of that disease & will be destroyed & devoured by that enemy if we don't have Someone who has defeated & destroyed the works of the devil on our side. Jesus came in order that we could be rescued from our enemy, **the devil**. At the cross, Satan, sin, & death were judged. Now, we're just waiting for his execution to take place. In the meantime, Satan has been granted limited freedom for a while, but he can only have victory over us when we submit to him instead of to the Holy Spirit. We're no longer bound to do what he says. We've been set free from his dominion over us because of the power of Jesus Christ. How was He to do this? By His death on the cross in our place. There, once & for all, Satan was defeated (Rev 20:10). Jesus bound the strong man (Mk 3:27). One day Jesus will destroy the devil but He came the 1st time to destroy his works. What are the works of the devil? Sin of every kind. Since Jesus died on the cross to destroy sin, righteousness has replaced sin in the life of Christians. Satan, as a thief, comes to rob, spoil, & destroy, but Jesus comes to reverse the whole process & to overthrow & remove all Satan's works. We see the same thing in Heb 2:14. **Therefore, since the children share in flesh & blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.** Jesus took on flesh to release us from our captivity. What a great thing it is to be on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a horrible thing to be on the Devil's side (Mt 12:30). Satan is doing everything he can to keep people in the dark concerning the Person & the work of Jesus (2 Cor 4:4). He's also intent on attacking & accusing God's children but thank God he is a defeated foe (Rom 16:20). As Christians, we can rest in the truth that Satan is a defeated enemy. Why Christmas? **To destroy the works of the devil**, to render Satan ineffective.

When Jesus came He dealt Satan a death blow. Think of it this way:

Once a missionary in Africa returned to his house. When he got inside, he discovered a huge python. He quickly ran outside to his truck & got his pistol, came back in the house. He was careful, he was quiet, but he got close enough to fire a shot & that bullet hit its mark, & that python was dealt a mortal wound. A bullet right in its head. But the snake didn't die instantly. It began to thrash around. Crashing around that house, knocking things off tables & counters, wreaking havoc. The missionary had gone outside to stay away. & finally, after a while, the noise died down & he came in & found that python dead. But, in its death throes it had done a lot of damage.

When Jesus came & died on the cross, He put a bullet in the head of the devil. Satan is defeated, but he's still thrashing around. He's still wreaking havoc. But he's defeated & there's no reason to fall for the devil's lies. He is defeated & God calls us to follow the One who is victorious, the One who came **to destroy the works of the devil**.

3. He Came To Show Us The Love Of God Turn to chpt 4. You've all seen the creeds that people put in their front yards, statements of what a person believes. They always start off by saying *In this house, we believe...* & go on to say things like *black lives matter, women rights are human rights, science is real, & love is love*. What does that mean? Do we get to define love? The purest & most perfect place we can look to see what love is is to look to God. When we look to Him we get a clear picture of what love truly is. **4:7-9a**

Because God is love He must communicate that love, not only in words but also in deeds. The love of God isn't left to our own interpretation. God has **manifested** His love. He's displayed it for us. How? By sending Jesus. God's love has been made known through Jesus' incarnation. This echoes John's gospel where Jesus says, **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son** (Jn 3:16). God loved the world & still loves the world. He loves people from every continent, language, color, & shape. He loves women & men, young & old, rich & poor. God made us in His image & He loves us. How? By sending us His Son, Jesus. What's the big deal about that? God didn't have to send Jesus. He doesn't need us. He isn't incomplete. He was never lacking in anything. He was & still is perfect. He could have let humanity die the moment Adam & Eve rebelled against Him. Maybe you've wondered, *Could God have sent someone else? No. Couldn't He have sent an angel?* No. An angel would be a poor substitute because they aren't human. *What about another son or of God?* Read the Bible cover to cover & you won't find another Son of God. Jesus is the only One. John refers to Jesus as God's **only begotten Son**. By saying this, he's emphasizing the fact that Jesus holds a unique place in the Father's love. He is the dearest & most precious to His heart. It was this **only begotten Son** that God sent from heavenly glory to take human nature to Himself, to be conceived in the womb of Mary, & to be born into this fallen & dark world of sin. Why did God do this? To show us His love for us. But that's not all.

4. He Came To Give Us Eternal Life 4:9

He sent His only begotten Son into the world **so that we might live through Him**. He sent His Son into the world of fallen humanity to take the guilt of our sins upon Himself & pay the penalty for them on the cross so **that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life** (Jn 3:16). Nothing could be greater than this. Nothing can exceed this gift because it's the **indescribable gift** that Paul can only give thanks as he writes to the Corinthians (2 Cor 9:15).³ Jesus came to give us life, eternal life. This was our greatest need, because our sin brings death, physical & spiritual death, which is separation from God (Rom 5:12; Eph 2:1; cf Jn 5:40). We can't remove the stain of sin through religious practices or trying harder. We were spiritually dead but God loves us & sent His one & only Son into the world that we might have life. This is the good news of the gospel. How do we get this life? John says in the 5th chapter, **God has given us eternal life, & this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life** (1 Jn 5:11-12). Jesus came so that we might live. Jesus appeared to deliver life to you. He appeared to give life. God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him; that we might have life now & life in eternity to come. He appeared to deliver His life for you. Why Christmas? To take away our sin, to destroy the works of the devil, to show us God's love, & to give us life. But that's not all...

5. He Came To Be The Atoning Sacrifice For Our Sins 4:10

When was the last time you used the word *propitiation* in conversation? It simply means an atoning sacrifice. Jesus wasn't just a sacrifice for our sins He also appeased God's wrath against our sins. Sin is the thing that separates us from God & a price must be paid. God gave His Son as an offering for our sin, to satisfy His own wrath & justice in order to save us. Christ's death satisfied God's requirements for dealing with sin. This is the heart of the gospel. The good news isn't that God is willing to overlook sin & forgive sinners. No, that would compromise God's holiness. That would leave justice unfulfilled. That would trample on true righteousness. Furthermore, that wouldn't be love on God's part, but apathy. The real good news is that God Himself, through the sacrifice of

³ James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 115.

His Son, paid the price of our sin. Jesus' death wasn't an accident; it was an appointment. He didn't die as a weak martyr, but as a mighty Conqueror. A Victor not a victim. God took the initiative, **not that we loved God, but that He loved us**. He wasn't responding to anything in us that made us worthy of His love. Just the opposite, His love is altogether undeserved by sinful humanity. The sinners for whom Christ died, that's us, were worthy of nothing but His wrath. As Paul wrote, **For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us** (Rom 5:7-8). Because God is righteous, He must punish sin; He can't simply excuse guilt & leave justice unsatisfied. The death of Jesus totally satisfied God's justice, His righteousness, & His holy hatred of sin. Some people wince at the thought of an innocent Victim making atonement for guilty sinners. They like the idea that people should pay for their own sins. But take away the doctrine of substitutionary atonement & you have no gospel at all. If the death of Jesus was anything less than a guilt offering for sinners, no one could ever be saved. But in His death on the cross, we have the highest possible expression of God's love. He, who is love, sent His only Son to die as an atonement for our sin. If your sense of fair play is outraged by that, GOOD! It ought to be shocking. It ought to be astonishing. It ought to stagger you. Think it through & you'll begin to get a picture of the huge & costly price God paid to show us His love. The cross also gives the most complete & accurate perspective on the balance between God's love & His wrath. At the cross God's love is shown to sinful creatures who have no rightful claim to His goodness, His mercy, or His love. & His wrath is poured out on His beloved Son, who had done nothing worthy of any kind of punishment. If you're not awestruck by that, then you don't understand it. If you do catch a glimpse of this truth, however, your thoughts of God as a loving Father will take on a whole new depth & richness. As God, He couldn't die for sinners. But as man He could. Therefore, He had to be born human. He was born to die. Good Friday is the reason for Christmas. In dying, Jesus defanged the devil. How? By covering our sin. This means that Satan has no legitimate grounds to accuse us before God. **Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies** (Rom 8:33). On what grounds does He justify? Through the blood of Jesus (Rom 5:9). Jesus is that

which satisfies the righteous anger of God for our sins. Even if we were to have made the 1st move & reached out to God in love, there wouldn't have been anything that we could do to placate or appease God's just anger for our own sins. In fact, we couldn't have even made the 1st move at all. We were dead in our sins & unable to do anything to make ourselves alive. But that's where the love of God was demonstrated in action. He gave His only begotten Son to come into this world & become the **propitiation** for our sins, to be the atoning sacrifice on our behalf. Jesus not only came to **take away** our **sins**, but that because He did that by offering Himself as the sacrifice for sin, He vindicated the holy & righteous character of God, & satisfied all the demands of His holiness & justice, enabling Him to be merciful to us as sinners. God is righteously angry with our sinfulness (Ps 7:11). His holy & righteous nature demands this. Sin must be punished. But sin has been punished in the Person of our Substitute, who bore our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pt 2:24). The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: **He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself** (9:26). Thus, we can say with the psalmist, **He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities** (Ps 103:10). Jesus has once & for all dealt with our sin & when our trust is in Him we are safe & secure. God loves you so much that He paid out of His own pocket for your sins. He sent His only Son for you because He loves you. Did God send His son? Yes! Did Jesus do this willingly for us? Yes. Jesus says, **This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends** (Jn 15:12-13). This morning, do you know that God loves you? God's love has been made manifest to us, not only in Jesus' coming, but in why He came, to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Out of God's nature, He expressed His love to you by sending His only Son, Jesus. He did that to take your sins. He did that to save you & give you eternal life. Look back at 1 Jn 2:1. **My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. & if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.** Why is Jesus in heaven explicitly called **the righteous** when He's described as the Advocate we need because of our sin? It's because what He pleads before the Father isn't just His death in our place, but also His righteousness. Which is why 1 Jn 3:5 says, **In Him there is no sin.** The perfection we don't have, Jesus provided.

The judgment we do not want, Jesus bore. Jesus removes our sins & gives us His perfect record. God considers us right with Him through faith in Jesus & what He's done. We no longer have to fear the wrath of God. Satan can do all his accusing. But Jesus paid for every sin we've committed, are committing, & will commit. What a fantastic gift. It wouldn't have happened if we didn't have Christmas. Again, Rom 5:8 says, **God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** That's the best news you'll ever hear. His love will never run dry or waver. There are no strings attached. He won't change His mind or forget. He isn't manipulative or stingy. Instead, He's generous, patient, kind, humble, & persistent. Christmas is the story of God's love demonstrated in an action that meets our greatest need. Finally...

6. He Came To Be The Savior Of The World 4:14

This is the glorious note we end on this morning. This is the focal point of His mission: to be the Savior of the world. It was for this that God sent Him. The message given to the shepherds on the 1st Christmas Day is still true. **Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord** (Lk 2:10-11; cf Jn 4:39-42). Jesus is the only Savior (Acts 4:12). The why of Christmas is that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. God sent His Son into the world, the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person, to die for us & be our Savior. That's Christmas. That's the meaning of Christmas. Christmas is Jesus enduring a human birth so we can have a spiritual birth. Christmas is Jesus coming to a stable so one day we can live in a place in heaven prepared for us. Christmas is Jesus having an earthly mother so we can have a heavenly Father. Christmas is Jesus becoming poor so we can be made rich. Christmas is Jesus being welcomed at His birth by some shepherds. When we're saved by Jesus, we're welcomed by the angels who rejoice in heaven (Lk 15:10). Jesus is the only One who could do what we've seen today. For Jesus to meet our need, He had to be both God & man. At Christmastime, we celebrate the coming together of Deity & humanity, God becoming flesh. In His earthly life, He lived & suffered & experienced all that we experience, but without sin so that one day He went to a Roman cross as the sinless Son of God; **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!** (Jn 1:29).

He made it possible for us to know God so that we can come boldly before Him. We don't have to fear God. We find out that our God is a God of love, a love so great that it wouldn't even withhold His own Son. Emmanuel is God with us, but Christianity is God in us.

John goes out of his way to mention the appearance of Jesus multiple times in this little letter. Jesus appeared to take away your sins, to destroy the works of the devil, to show us the love of God so that we might have life. Not only that, but He came to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In other words, the why of Christmas is that God sent His **son to be the Savior of the world.**

One December a father gathered his family together. He gave them a speech saying, *This Christmas I want you to manage your time better. I want you to watch your spending on gifts. I want you to make up your mind to get along with the relatives when they come. & I want our home to be more congenial this Christmas.* After he'd given his speech, he ended it by saying, *Let's make this the best Christmas ever!* One of his boys piped up, *But, dad, do you think we could ever improve on the first Christmas?*

He has a point. You can't improve on the 1st Christmas. We might be able to improve on our ways of celebrating it, but you can't improve on it because of this fact: Jesus Christ has appeared! Does His appearing make the difference in your life today? Many of us know, & have heard, these truths repeatedly. But we need to hear it again & again because we fall into the trap that things are based on how good we are. We begin to depend on our performance. Or we get depressed by our lack of change & maturity. That isn't how God works. Our standing is based on what God has done, not on what we've done or are doing. He is the Initiator. He loved 1st. He died for us. He is the only Savior. Unless you understand the ugliness of your own sin & embrace Jesus by faith, who alone by His death & resurrection can save you from that sin, you don't have any connection with the why of Christmas. The gospel isn't that Jesus comes to earth to tell us how to live, we live a good life, & then God owes us His blessing. No. The gospel is that Jesus came to earth, lived the life we should have lived, & died the death we should have died, so when we believe in Him we're accepted by God & live a life of grateful joy & obedience to Him. My prayer for you today is that you'll know God's great love for you, in sending His Son to ransom you, to seek & to save you, to be your sinless sin-bearer, the destroyer of Satan's works, to give eternal life & show you the love of God. He became the atoning sacrifice for your sins. In a word, He is your Savior if you've placed your faith in Him.