

# Gift Our Lord Brought to the World - Part 1

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer's sermon emphasizes the personal nature of God's love and the significance of each individual's worth to Him.*

**Duration:** 35:22

**Scripture:** Exodus 3:5, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, John 3:18, Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:8

**Topics:** "Free Gift"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on a tragic incident in Italy where a train carrying students home for Christmas breaks and results in the death of seventy-eight students. He highlights the contrast between the value placed on the human race as a whole and the disregard for individual lives. The preacher then turns to the scripture from the book of John, emphasizing the profound significance of the message that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son for its salvation. He acknowledges the difficulty of fully comprehending and preaching on such a powerful and concentrated text, but recognizes its importance, especially on the day before Christmas.

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## Transcript

Dear Heavenly Father, we have no doubt of what Thou hast done for us, but we pray that Thou would open our eyes to behold, and our hearts to understand and feel, and our spirits to see and penetrate, and all the glory that Thou hast brought to us, we may receive into our own souls and lives. We pray that Thou help us that we may hear the voice again today, that voice that created all things, that voice that raised the dead, that voice that speaks and men are clean, and that voice that will someday untune the sky. We pray that Thou help us to hear it.

Father, we are both unworthy to speak and to hear, but we come by grace alone through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is Thy gift to us. Will Thou make us, we pray Thee, to speak worthily, enable us to hear worthily, O Lord, this hour, for Christ's sake. Now, in the book of John, the third chapter, I want to take a text and preach on it this morning and tonight.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. We have here a compendium in twenty-five words of the Christian evangel, as the ages have known it, and judged by its value to the race of men. These words, this little compendium of theology, have probably meant more.

I think to take the word probably out and say that it is the most precious cluster of words ever to be assembled by God or man, these words, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Now, if you were to put on one side of the eternal scales this little cluster of shining words, and you were to put on the other side of the scales all of the literature of the world, and those scales were to be held by some watcher or holy one who might stand with one foot in eternity and one in time to weigh the words and writings of man, I believe that you would find that for sheer usefulness and eternal value to the race of mankind, that these words would mean more than all the writings of the world combined. And that is not to speak slightly of the great writers of the world.

I believe that the world is a better place because such men lived as Plato and Shakespeare and Milton and others of that kind, but I believe that all that they wrote, I repeat now, could not compare with this, because these are the very words of God. And these words, this text, is a favorite with gospel preachers. I think even we might say a great favorite with gospel preachers.

And yet, in my now quite long ministry, I can recall preaching on it only probably half a dozen times. And my reason for shying from this great text is not that I do not see the value of it. As I have to explain, I think it to be the most valuable text in the entire scriptures.

But my reason for avoiding preaching on it, it seems so hopeless for a man like me to try to preach on a text like that. My reason, I say, is an overwhelming sense of inadequacy and despair, despair that one as ignorant and inadequate as I am should attempt to preach on anything that would require so much spiritual knowledge and such profound adequacy. To think that the of a man confronting a text like this, and the ignorance of a man confronting a text like this, and the unfeeling hardness of our lives and hearts compared with a text like this, which should require great sympathy and generous love for God and men, I say that I have avoided and shied from this text.

I believe that I've preached the love of God constantly and continuously. But I say this particular text, it is so highly concentrated, so powerful, so replete with God, that as Moses took off his shoes before the burning bush, so I take off my shoes before this text and come crawling on my knees reverently up. And yet I cannot depart from it, I cannot avoid it, and what would be a better day to preach it than this day before Christmas? So I want to talk a little and hope that by pointing to the glory I may get you to see the glory, and that's the best that I can do.

It says, For God so loved the world. Now here is an important part of the New Testament message, worthy of the enunciation by an archangel. But it says, God so loved the world.

And it's very easy for us to think of that world in a big, impersonal way, and not find ourselves in it at all. But I should like to restate this text in personal terms. God so loved the world, and that means in personal terms that I mean something to God, that I matter to God, that God is emotionally concerned about me.

Now that's what it means. Of course God loved the world. He loved that great mass of faceless humanity that as far as history is concerned had not the beginning of days nor end of life, those multitudes that are born and live and die.

But that's not enough. It's not enough for God to so love Canada. It is not enough for God to so love the world and nation or groups of nations.

But we must rethink it in personal terms. I mean something to God. Now I'd like to have you get hold of that.

This is the gift Jesus brought to the world. He brought to us the knowledge that we as individuals mean something to God, that we matter to God, that I matter to God. Let's personalize it, for the human heart is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things.

And if you even allow the word we there, even the plural we, even if it could only be two, so strong is unbelief that very shortly I will be saying, well God meant the other man but didn't mean me. But I want you to personalize it to the singular and say that God is emotionally concerned about me, that I mean something, I have a value in the eyes of God, that I matter to him, that God looks upon me individually by myself as though nobody else in the world existed, that I matter to God, you matter to God. So let's think about it like that.

Now it's a strange paradox in human nature that a man may be proud and arrogant, that he may reek with human pride and be swollen with egotism, and yet at the same time be filled with a great loneliness, a heavy sense of orphanage, as though he lived in the world and nobody cared. But you say everybody's people cares, the wife for the husband, the children for the parents, the parents for the children. Yes, we know that's true.

But we also know that sin has done something to the human heart and that we often find ourselves filled with a great loneliness, a feeling of cosmic desertion, as though nobody cared, nobody in the universe cared. Summed up like this, for me as a person no one cares. In the vast universe there's no one to whom I as a person mean anything.

Remember that Tennyson wrote in his great in memoriam these words, "'So careful of the type nature seems, so careless of the single life.' So careful of the type, but so careless of the single life. The train breaks, car breaks loose in Italy yesterday from a Christmas train carrying students home, and the rear car breaks off and plunges over a precipice and seventy-eight students die in one crash like this. Well now, those individuals each meant something individually to God, and yet here these seventy-eight individuals suddenly perish.

But the human race goes on. So careful of the type, the human race, but so careless of the individual. This seems to be the way nature tells us, that nature is concerned only with the species, not with the individual.

And she plants a deep instinct for self-propagation in every individual, and then that individual dies, and in a short time we're all forgotten. I suppose there isn't any heavier, sadder thing to do than to go through an old cemetery that's no longer cared for. I've done it, dating back maybe into the 1700s.

The stone's either lying flat on their backs or turned at crazy angles every way. And you get through the greenbrier and the heavy grass, and you see lovingly engraved by someone long gone, our darling, born May 1st, 1782, died June 1st, just a month old. So careless of the individual, but so careful of the type.

And so we say, well who cares? Here they lie, and those who laid them away have been laid away in their turn, and those who laid them, others laid away, those who laid away. And so the human individual passes on, and the human race continues to grow. So we say, God is thinking about the human race.

He's thinking about the masses. Yes, but you can't love masses without loving individuals. You can't love a nursery without loving a baby.

You can't love a family without loving its members. And so God can't love the world without loving the members that make up the world. And so this is a personal text.

This belongs to me this morning. This is God's gift to me, and this is the gift Jesus brought to me to tell me, you can know that you count in the cosmic vastness, that you're not alone, but that you count. Now that's the Christian evangelist, I say.

You matter to God, and we can be assured of this, and we can assure others of this, that we matter, that I matter. It's kind of touching, it seems to me, that when we get older, particularly when people retire and are not in public life anymore, the world pretty promptly forgets them. But you can go to everybody, no matter how old they are, or how long they've been in nursing homes, or how long they've been shut off and cut off from the companionship of the masses of mankind, and you can say and mean it individually, you matter to God.

Weariness doesn't change anything, and age doesn't change anything, and nothing that's happened to you in the passing of the years has changed anything. You're individually valuable. God sets a prize upon you.

You matter to God. You can go to thee where the tramp sits, weary, bleary-eyed, and bewhiskered and smelly. You can go and sit down beside him, and if he's capable of listening to you, you can talk to him.

Maybe his past is just now to him a hazy memory. Once he lived in a home, and was called by his first name and by loving nicknames, and his parents brought him up and cared for him. Later he went to school and got into business, and then he married and perhaps had children of his own.

Perhaps his wife died, or he left her. Drink maybe got hold of him, or dope. And now there he sits, hardly able to remember his own name, a weary, bleary-eyed, tired, saggy-featured old fellow.

And if you can get him to listen, I say, you can say to him, now listen, you haven't any pride left in you, and nobody, nobody can make you believe that anybody loves you. But I have a message for you, and I hope it can penetrate to you, that you matter to God. That God is emotionally concerned about you.

That God is unhappy about your unhappiness, and God is concerned, as the young man said from this book a few weeks back, because you're not concerned. God is concerned because you're not concerned, and God is unhappy because you're not happy. And you matter to God.

You can say this to the tramp. You can say this to the wounded soldier lying on the field of battle, perhaps sobbing out his emotions as he knows the end is coming. You can say to him, God cares for you.

You matter. God's concerned. You can say to the prisoner, I've seen them, I've visited the prisons, I've sat in the chair where men die and been strapped in, and I've seen in the death rows young men tossing a ball against a brick wall and catching it again, trying to pass away the time until their time came to sit in that chair.

And you can go to these young men, however deep died they have been and however far they have been down into the mire of sin, and you can say, now listen, let's get one thing straight. God loves you now. God's concerned about you as an individual.

And if he tries to counter my words and says, but you don't know, I've violated and forfeited every law, I've violated every law and forfeited every right to the love of God. And I remind him, my young friend, your right to the love of God never existed in the first place. God loves you not because you have a right to his love.

God loves you because he is God. He loves you because God is like that. God so loved and God so loved you because he is God, not because you're who you are, but because he is who he is.

And so that takes the pressure off the prisoner. You can say to that man who's a chronic failure. Some people have been chronic failure.

I knew in a certain city where I stayed for a while, I knew a man, known him quite a long while, who was a chronic failure. He never could do anything right, never. He had some education.

He graduated from one of the better-known Bible schools, and everything he tried, he failed in. I watched him over the years. We were good personal friends.

He meant so well, but he was a failure, a complete failure. He tried to sell something, and in a short time he found he couldn't sell it, and he was over selling something else. He tried on that a while, and he failed on that.

He tried to preach, and nobody wanted him. He ran a rescue mission for a while, let that go into the ground, and he had to quit that. He took over the publicity work for a college, and that blew up in his face in a short time.

So one thing followed another thing, and he died a failure, died a failure. I preached his funeral sermon, my friend. A failure.

He'd never done anything right. It seemed as if the chronic failure dog distracts, and the worm ate at the root of every plant that he planted. Nothing could live that he put his hand to.

Yet he was a Christian man. You can say to that man, Listen, maybe when Mother Nature threw you together, she wasn't exactly in a careful mood, and you may have got some hormones and genes that made you like you are. I could never say this to him, of course, but somebody might have said it, and it was true nevertheless, that your chronic failure.

He used to say to me, I had a church and I had some invitations here and there, and he'd say, You're sitting pretty. Well, he didn't know what it cost me to sit pretty. He didn't know the long hours of tearful prayers and the study and the selling out to God and the giving up to him and all the rest.

But he called it sitting pretty. He'd say, You're sitting pretty. Well, I never sat pretty in my life.

I couldn't. I wouldn't know how to go about it. I never studied it.

But he couldn't sit pretty anywhere. He was just a chronic failure, and he died a chronic failure. And we took money to him when he was in his last sickness in the hospital and put it in his hand under the oxygen tent and said, Here, this is for you.

The church sent me with money to him. So that's the way he passed out of the world. And yet, if he had only known it and would only listen, you can say to this chronic failure, as you can say to every other

chronic failure in the world, Now, you are just not put together to succeed in this highly complex and competitive world in which we live.

But that is simply an accident. The fact is, you as a person, you matter to God. You as a person, you matter.

And whether you can succeed in this modern, high-pressure civilization or not, that doesn't matter. But you matter. You matter to God.

Now, we can say that, I say, to the chronic failure. You can say it to the shipwrecked You can say it to everybody everywhere. God so loved the world, and you as an individual part of the world, God so loved you.

Now, Jesus brought this knowledge of God's love to the world. My brothers and sisters, I hope you're big enough inside. I hope that you're big enough in your hearts and keen enough in your minds to see through all the colored tinsels of modern bourgeois Christianity and see that this is what we're celebrating, that a man came from God above, God's own Son, co-eternal with the Father, took upon him the form of a man, and was born in a manger and wept in the arms of his virgin mother, and that he came to bring us this message that we matter to God, that the great God who runs his universe cares for us as individuals, that we, with our failures and weaknesses and propensities towards sin, that we matter nevertheless to God.

And all everything else that Jesus brought us grows out of this. If this hadn't been true, then nothing else would have mattered, nothing else would have mattered. But this was true.

So Jesus said to the people, you see, God so loved you, that's why I'm here. God so loved you, that's why I came. God loved you as an individual, that's why I sit down and talk to the woman at the well.

God so loved you as a mass of people, that's why I speak to the many. God so loved you, said Jesus, and I want you to get a hold of this knowledge. I tell you to take a lot of gloom out of the hearts of the people if we get a hold of this, that we matter to God, that God cares for us.

There's nothing so sad as a child that's been forsaken or thinks he's been forsaken. Many of you can remember the time when you left your home and went out around the corner and sat out on the curb. You'd been rebuked.

Maybe you were even chastised a bit and probably needed it. And in your little heart there came the awful feeling, the awful feeling, nobody loves me. Nobody cares.

Daddy doesn't love me because he approved what mother did, and mother doesn't love me because she did what she did. And the teacher doesn't love me because the teacher made me do this over. And so we can build up and the child can build up in its heart a sense of forlornness, a sense of being absolutely forsaken in the universe.

Now thank God they get over it before very long, but it's a terrible pain. It's an awful thing to feel it. Nobody cares whether I live or die.

Jesus Christ, when he came to the world, said, now your sin has done this to you, and it made you wonder. If anybody cares, it made you doubt that you mean anything, that you register any place, there's any value on you. You're just a cinder instead of a diamond.

It made you wonder whether you're simply not something to be burned instead of something to be saved. And now I've come to tell you, and this is my gift to you, that God so loved the world that he gave me. And he gave me for you.

And in a short time I'm going to die for you. It'll be one for another. I am one.

I'm an individual, and you're an individual, and I'm dying for you because God so loved you, and he sent me. This is the message, and the one who is from above told us, and he reported what he had seen and what he had heard. Now, faith comes by hearing the word, says the scriptures, and faith comes by hearing this word that I'm giving you this morning.

Faith begins to work as we begin to affirm. Now, faith doesn't make a thing true if it isn't true. You see, I can't get up in the morning and say, in every day, in every way, I'm getting younger and younger, because it just doesn't work, you know.

That won't work. In every day, in every way, I'm getting handsomer and handsomer. That won't work either.

That won't work. And yet there's a lot of silly religion these days, all mixed up with sentimentality and nonsense and poetry, where I just affirm, I say, it's true, all is well, and all will be well. No, all will not be well unless you know why it's going to be well, unless you know it.

It never pays to affirm anything you're doubtful about, but it pays to affirm it when you know it's true. And so God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believed on him should not perish but have everlasting life. Now, you can affirm that.

And I tell you that affirmation means a great deal. Just to affirm it, just to state it, just to begin to state it. That's why the Bible says that we are saved by faith and by testimony.

We believe in our hearts and we affirm it with our mouths. And what we affirm with our mouths becomes part of us. So I recommend, affirm it.

Begin to affirm it when you pray the next time and hope it won't be long. Why, get on your knees and say, thank thee, Father, I matter to thee. Thou art concerned about me, that I mean everything to thee.

Say that to God, and say not only the race of man, but I personally mean everything to God. Faith begins, I say, when we affirm, and it finishes its work when we begin to see that we do matter to God. There's a song we used to sing often, O Love Divine.

Do you remember it? O Love Divine, that stooped to share our sharpest pang, our bitterest tear. On thee we cast each earth-born care, we smile at pain while thou art near. Though long the weary way we tread, though long the weary way we tread.

Our dear old sister, the mother of a missionary, one of you here is gone, Mrs. Grodd. They tell me, the pastor, this morning, you heard him announce it. She's gone.

My wife and I have often talked about her. My wife's visited her, and we knew she wouldn't be around long. It was a long way.

When you've been around 80 years, you've been around a long time. She was here over 80 years, I understand. Though long the weary way we tread, and sorrow crown each lingering year, every new year we vow this is going to be our best year, but it isn't long until our vow has tarnished and some sorrow comes to crown each lingering year.

But even though that's true, no path we shun, no darkness dread, our hearts still whispering thou art near. On thee we fling our burdening woe, and I would recommend this hour, on thee we fling our burdening woe, fling it, O love divine forever dear, content to suffer while we know living and dying, thou art near. This is God's gift to man.

This is what it means, brothers and sisters. This is what it means to you and me. It doesn't mean a spasmodic, almost convulsive, emotional upheaval once a year.

It means God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, and that we can be now content to suffer while we know living or dying, he is near. Sick or well, he is near. Always he is near.

I want to close with a little true story. Now, this concerns an American, but I don't want you to feel that I'm throwing in Americans at you, because this man belongs to the whole world. This man belongs to Canada, for I've heard Canadians speak tenderly of him.

This man belongs to England, for some of his works hang framed in the halls of Oxford College. He belongs to the world. He was born in the States, but he belongs to the world.

He was a great, tall, homely man, about six foot six, gangling and awkward and as powerful as a buffalo, and as tender-hearted as a brooding dove. He signed himself A. Lincoln. And when they said to him, Abe, why do you sign your name A. Lincoln? His great, homely face broke into a smile and said, you wouldn't want me to sign it THE Lincoln, would you? Well, that was Abraham Lincoln.

He was, of course, President during the awful war between the North and the South. And Abraham Lincoln used to sit sometimes, staring out the window with what they said was a look of unutterable sadness. And they would say to him, what's wrong, Mr. President? And he would turn and say, my boys are dying.

My boys are all his boys, redheads and brunettes and blondes and descendants of German and Irish and English and Welsh and all the rest, but every one of them, they were his boys. One time they came in and they saw him sitting sorting through some cards. And they said, what are you doing, Mr. Lincoln? Oh, he said, tomorrow's butcher day, they're going to shoot my boys.

He said, some of the young lads were taken off of the farm and under fire, they deserted. He said, they didn't desert, their legs ran away with them, that's all. And he said, we've got to have discipline, but I'm going to pardon everyone I can.

And he examined every card, and wherever he could, he wrote, Pardon A. Lincoln. And the tough sergeants and tough officers who wanted to shoot these boys when they saw, Pardon A. Lincoln, let them go. Well, one day Lincoln was in a hospital, soldiers.

They were there, very sick, shot to pieces, and he was going about, great tall fellow, would have to bend way down like a jackknife and double himself to get down, whisper in their ears, talk to them, pat their head, shake their hands. And finally a nurse came to him and said, Mr. Lincoln, there is a young Irish boy named McMahan, a lieutenant, and he's had it, he can't live, and I wonder if you would come in and see

him. He said, I'll be glad to.

She said, we have him in a private ward here, come on in. So Lincoln went in, almost stooped to get under the door. Ganglingly he walked in, walked up to the bedside, and here lay the lad.

Whether he was conscious or not, scarce anybody knew, Lincoln put his great rough woodman's hand on his young head, held it a while, and then he saw his eyelids flutter, and he knew the boy was awake. And he said, Son, I'm Abe Lincoln. I've come to see you.

And there was a faint smile. And he said, I want you to know your country's proud of you, boy. He called him his boy, he always said, the country's proud of you, boy.

And the boy nodded a thank you to the President. And then Lincoln's face went all tender, and he stooped down and said, Will you do something for me, boy? And he fluttered his eyes again and said, If I can, Mr. Lincoln. He said, Get well for me, will you, boy? And the young Irish jaw set.

And Lieutenant McMahan said, I'll do it, sir. And they said the turning point was there. From that hour on, he began to improve.

He soon was out walking up and down the aisles, back into uniform. He had been brought from the edge of the grave by love. He had seen it.

He had felt it. And love had literally caught him when he was going over the edge and brought him back. Lincoln had never seen him before, and maybe never saw him again.

But there was something there bigger than America, something there bigger than the white race, something there bigger than the England from which he descended, something there so big that it came from God. It was love. It was love that sympathized with everybody.

I believe that this lad lived because Lincoln loved. And I say to you that this is the message, God so loved. And it hasn't been a failure.

They're there in shining rank upon rank, waiting the consummation of all things, black and white and red and yellow from all around the world, harlots and publicans and sinners, moral people and good people and bad people. They're there in shining, seared ranks, waiting the coming of Christ. There, I say, and a new one from our church joined them this morning, little Mrs. Brock.

They're there, pulled back from the edge of hell because he loved. Amen.

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