

# A Gift That Lasts

by John Vissers

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*The sermon emphasizes that Jesus is the gift that lasts, a gift of light, love, and life that brings eternal salvation.*

**Duration:** 22:46

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 31:3, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16-36, Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:10

**Topics:** "Gift"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of God's love and the gift of Jesus Christ. The sermon begins with a description of a scene where people are gathered before God's throne, questioning how God can judge them and understand their suffering. The speaker then reads from John's Gospel, specifically focusing on John 3:16, which emphasizes God's love for the world and the gift of His Son. The sermon concludes by highlighting the lasting nature of God's love and the importance of accepting Jesus as a gift that brings salvation and everlasting life.

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## Transcript

I want to talk tonight about a gift that lasts, and I want to read a few verses from John's Gospel chapter 3. Some very, very familiar words as we look to God's Word tonight. John chapter 3 at verse 16. Not really a Christmas passage in some ways, and yet a very profound Christmas passage in other ways.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. Amen, and may God bless to us this reading from his Word. Let's pray together, shall we? Our Father, we thank you tonight for this season of the year.

We thank you for your presence with us through our risen Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. We thank you for our fellowship together in the gospel of Christ in this place. We pray tonight as we

share together in a few brief moments around your Word that you would teach us and instruct us and guide us so that indeed we might honor and love and glorify Jesus this Christmas Eve 1995.

For to his name we pray, amen. I suppose that nothing characterizes Christmas more for most people than the exchanging of gifts. And gift-giving, of course, has become a very important and an annual part of our Christmas celebrations, of our Christmas experience.

And by tomorrow morning, of course, most of us will have opened our gifts. Some of us will share gifts of food and clothing and money with those less fortunate than ourselves. The children will find out whether they got what they wanted on their list, whether in fact all of their desires were met.

And of course, some of the gifts that will be open tomorrow won't last very long. We have three young children and some of the gifts don't make it through to the end of Christmas Day. In fact, if they last into the new year, sometimes we're quite happy.

They're broken by Boxing Day or worn out by the new year. Lots of gifts. And many of us, of course, make lists of the gifts that we want to receive and also the list of gifts that we want to buy for others.

Not long ago, I came across this poem by Carol Green called The List of Jeremy Quist. Jeremy Quist made a humongous list of the Christmas gifts he hoped to get. It reached to the floor, it curled out the door, but Jeremy wasn't through yet.

There's this and there's that, and a new baseball bat, and a bright shiny something or other. Jeremy Quist did not notice the list had by now slithered over his mother. Pajamas with feet and a green parakeet, a robot, a race car, a clown.

With a dip and a glide, the list slid outside and merrily rolled into town. Licking its chops, it whizzed through the shops and tied up a clerk just for fun. Then it stopped with a lurch in front of a church, and Jeremy saw what he'd done.

All wrong, he cried to the throng of people who stared at that list. Why, where would we be if God were like me? I'm sorry, sobbed Jeremy Quist. God chose to give so people could live.

Well, I'm going to start giving too. My humongous list, said Jeremy Quist. I hereby donate to the Well, our lists can sometimes get out of hand, can't they? They can sometimes get long and perhaps overwhelming, but there's a line in this poem, of course, that is so fitting.

God chose to give so that people could live, and that's what Jeremy Quist had to learn, and that's, of course, what we need to learn year by year every Christmas, that God chose to give the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, so that we could live. It's about the giving of a gift that makes all the difference. It's about the receiving of a gift that lasts forever, and of all of the gifts that we give and receive, most of them will last only for a short time, but Jesus Christ is a gift that lasts, and that's really what this familiar passage of the Gospel in John chapter 3 is saying.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. And then verse 19, light has come into the world, the light of the world, Jesus Christ. And I want very briefly to share what I think is the gift that lasts in Scripture in the New Testament, the gift which is centered in Jesus Christ, and I simply want to do it with the three L's of Christmas.

And first, the gift of God in Jesus Christ is a gift of light. The gift of light. Verses 19 to 21 speak about Jesus as the light of the world.

This is the verdict, John says, light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed, but whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be plainly seen that what he has done has been done through God. One of the themes that is woven throughout the New Testament is that Jesus is the light of the world.

In John chapter 1, as we've already heard read as well this evening, Jesus is described as the light and Him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

And in John chapter 8, Jesus stands up amongst the lights of the temple and the lights all about Him and He points to those lights and He says to the people, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. And in John chapter 9 and verse 5, Jesus said, while I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Christmas is a season of light and it's hard to imagine the celebration of Christmas without lights. We have lights about and festooned about the sanctuary back on the balcony. We have lights on the Christmas tree at the front of the sanctuary.

Lights are an important part of our Christmas celebration. We think about the light of the star that led those wise men to worship and to honor and to glorify Christ. But of course, that light and all of the lights of our Christmas celebration point to an ever greater light.

An eternal light. A light that lasts forever. A light that will not burn out.

Many of the electric companies promise that they'll give us lights and bulbs that will last for a long time, but even they eventually fail. But Jesus is the light that lasts forever. And long after the lights of Christmas 1995 have been dimmed, the light of Jesus Christ glows brightly.

In referring to the star that shone on that first Christmas Eve, the poet W.H. Auden said this, to find out who we are today is why we follow that star. To find out who we are today is why we follow that star. In the midst of the darkness of our lives, in the midst of the darkness of our world, in the midst of the struggles, and in the midst of the overwhelming circumstances, in the darkness that seems to so often close in upon us and around us, Jesus says, I am the light of the world.

And so the first gift or the first part of this gift that lasts forever that I want us to understand and I want us to see this evening is that Jesus is the light of the world. Have you let that light light up your life this Christmas season? And secondly, very briefly and very simply, this text reminds us that the gift of God in Jesus Christ is a gift of love that lasts. For God so loved the world, going back to verse 16, that He gave His only begotten Son.

It's such a familiar passage, John 3, verse 16, but it's such a profound truth and such a profound reality. For God so loved the world. In Romans chapter 5, in verse 8, Paul writes, God commends His love toward us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And in the Old Testament, in Jeremiah chapter 31, in verse 3, the prophet reminds us and reminds the people of Israel and through them, God's people today, that I have loved you with what? An everlasting love. You know, in our world, we place so many conditions on our love. And love seems to come and love seems to go.

And we trade our love for other things. But God's love is an everlasting love, a love that never ends. And that love is expressed in Jesus Christ.

You know, we think of God's love sometimes as a kind of vague, general feeling that God has for us. But in the New Testament, the love of God is defined in a very specific way. And it's defined in this text, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

In 1 John chapter 4, and this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us and gave His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin. You see, the love of God is defined and embodied and incarnated in Jesus Christ. And it's not as if there's this general idea of love to which Jesus conforms, but Jesus Himself redefines and radically transforms what love means for all of us.

Christmas, of course, is a season of love and goodwill for many people. But that season of love comes to an end when the new year arrives and the Christmas tree is taken down. We get on with our lives again.

But those who truly know and follow Christ, follow the one who is eternal love and His love lasts forever. The philosopher Kierkegaard created a wonderful parable that portrays the love manifested at Christmas. He said a king was returning from the hunt one day when he saw a beautiful maid at the door of her peasant hut.

And he fell in love with her and so overwhelmed was he by this love that he could not erase the beauty of her image from his mind, nor could he erase the squalor in which she lived. The court advisors reminded the king that he had the power to command any subject to come to him, but the king knew that such an act could never call forth true love. And so Kierkegaard says he dressed this king and he dressed in rags and one night he stole into the village and there he met his love as a lowly servant and he won her heart and he redeemed her from her poverty and took her to be his queen.

And Kierkegaard then concludes the parable in this fragment of his writing and says, so God loved us in giving us His only begotten son. You see it was that truth, that profound truth, which struck at the very heart of the life of Kierkegaard himself that transformed his life. He had come to realize that God is love and that this love is expressed in Jesus Christ.

And so the second L of Christmas so simple and yet so profound and true is the love of God. And then thirdly, the gift of God in Jesus Christ is a gift of life. Whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish, John says, but have everlasting or eternal life, a gift of life that lasts.

The gift that lasts is the gift of everlasting life. And when all is said and done, of course, that's really ultimately what matters, isn't it? It's what is going to happen to me when I face death. Is there life in which I can hope? Is there life? Is there everlasting life that comes through Jesus Christ? And of course, Christmas is a season of life.

It's a season of new life. It's the celebration of the birth of a child. And the birth of the Christ child is the beginning of life for those who accept Him as Christ the Lord.

You see, the celebration of life at Christmas is not just the celebration of the life of the birth of one child, but the life that comes through that one child who is Christ the Lord. He lived the life that we could never live and died the death that we could never die to be raised again to new life, to everlasting life. It's a gift that lasts.

And so by tomorrow at this time, I suspect we'll have already finished our Christmas dinners. We'll have already opened all of our gifts. We'll probably, hopefully, have already cleaned them up.

And some of them may have already been put away. Some of them may already be put aside to be exchanged as soon as you can get to the store. But the question is, will the gift that lasts be a part of your celebration and my celebration this Christmas season? God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

I want to conclude this evening with a wonderful parable or story that I came across a number of years ago, and it's called, God Leads a Pretty Sheltered Life, Doesn't He? And I'd like you just to listen to it as we conclude. At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Some of the groups near the front talked heatedly, not cringing with shame but with belligerence.

How can God judge us? How can God know about suffering, snapped a joking brunette as she jerked back a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp? We endured terror and beatings and torture and death. In another group, a black man lowered his collar. What about this? He demanded, showing an ugly rope burn, lynched for no crime but being black.

We have suffocated in slave ships, been wrenched from loved ones, toiled till only death gave release. Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups, and each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he permitted in his world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping, no fear, no hunger, no hatred.

Indeed, what did God know about what human beings had been forced to endure in this world? After all, God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said. So each group sent out a leader chosen because he or she had suffered the most. There was a Jew, a black, an untouchable from India, an illegitimate, a person from Hiroshima, and one from a Siberian slave camp.

And in the center of the plain, they consulted with each other, and at last they were ready to present their case. It was really rather simple. Before God would be qualified to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured.

Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth as a man. But because he was God, they set certain safeguards to be sure he could not use his divine powers to help himself. Let him be born a Jew, they said.

Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted so that none will know who is really his father. Let him champion a cause so just but so radical that it brings down upon him the hate, condemnation, and eliminating efforts of every major traditional and established religious authority. Let him try to describe what no one has ever seen, tasted, heard, or smelled.

Let him try to communicate God to men and women. Let him be betrayed by his dearest friends. Let him be indicted on false charges, tried before a prejudiced jury, and convicted by a cowardly judge.

And let him see what it is to be so terribly alone and so completely abandoned by every living thing. Let him be tortured and let him die. Let him die the most humiliating death with common thieves.

As each leader announced his or her portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the great throng of people. And when the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered another word.

No one moved. For suddenly all knew God had already served his sentence. The word became flesh and lived for a while among us.

She gave birth to a son and he gave him the name Jesus. She gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Will you receive that gift this evening? For by receiving it, you receive life eternal. Let us pray.

We thank you, our Father, for the glorious gospel, so simple and yet so profound in its truth. Help us to embrace that gospel this Christmas season so that indeed we might experience a gift that lasts forever, a gift that lasts for eternity through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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