

THE PROOF OF LOVE

IT'S CHRISTMAS MORNING! MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL! THIS IS SURELY A DAY OF CELEBRATION, BUT WHY AND WHAT ARE WE CELEBRATING? LAST NIGHT I TALKED ABOUT CHRISTMAS IS IN THE HEART NOT IN THE TREE. WHAT IS AT THE CENTER OF CHRISTMAS, AN EVENT THAT WOULD CHANGE THE WORLD FOREVER? **HAVE WE PAUSED FOR A MOMENT TO THINK ABOUT IT?** LIKE MANY OF US WE PREPARE FOR CHRISTMAS, SOMETIMES, FOR THE ORGANIZED PEOPLE, MONTHS AHEAD, BUYING GIFTS AND MAKING DECISIONS ON THE MEALS AND BAKING GOODIES OF ALL KINDS. IT IS A TIME TO LOOK AHEAD TO "THE DAY" WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

THIS MORNING I WANT US TO PAUSE AND RECALL WHAT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT SO LONG AGO AND "PULL" FROM THAT NIGHT WHAT REALLY TOOK PLACE AND CONTINUES TO THIS VERY DAY – CHRISTMAS 2016!

YOU HAVE HEARD ME SAY NUMEROUS TIMES IN THE MESSAGE THAT RELIGION IS NOT ABOUT RULES AND REGULATIONS, BUT RELATIONSHIPS. **THE BIRTH OF JESUS, CHRISTMAS, IS ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** THE BIBLE IS A BOOK, INSPIRED BY GOD, THAT SHOWS US FROM THE FALL OF ADAM AND EVE, THE REBELLIOUS NATION OF ISRAEL TO THE BIRTH OF JESUS AND HOW GOD HAS KEPT HIS PROMISES. GOD HAS GONE SO FAR AS SENDING HIS SON AMONG US SO WE COULD SEE THE VERY NATURE OF GOD. **IT IS GOD'S DESIRE TO RESTORE THE RELATIONSHIP BROKEN IN THE GARDEN AND DRAW US TO A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.** WHY WOULD GOD EVEN BOTHER? AFTER ALL ISRAEL STRAYED TIME AFTER TIME. PROPHETS SENT MANY TIMES BY GOD WERE IGNORED. **GOD REMAINED FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES BECAUSE IT WAS HIS DESIRE TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS PEOPLE.**

NOW WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP WAS GOD TO HAVE WITH HIS PEOPLE? *A BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP, AN EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIP, A TEMPORARY ONE, A LONG DISTANCE RELATIONSHIP, OR A CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP. IF THESE CHOICES WERE LABELED A, B, C, AND D, THE CORRECT ANSWER WOULD BE – NONE OF THE ABOVE!* GOD'S DESIRE IS TO HAVE A LOVING RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. I JOHN 4:10 *"This is real **love**--not that we loved God, but that **he first loved us** and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."* AND OF COURSE, JOHN 3:16 *"For God **loved the world** so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."* **A MOTHER AND FATHER WHEN THEY HAVE A BABY THERE IS SO MUCH LOVE FOR THAT CHILD - WE ARE HIS CREATION AND HOW MUCH MORE DOES HE LOVE US?** THESE TWO SCRIPTURES SAY IT ALL!

CHRISTMAS AND THE BIRTH OF JESUS IS THE PROOF OF GOD'S LOVE FOR EACH ONE OF US! THIS LOVE IS SO DIFFICULT TO DESCRIBE IN HUMAN TERMS. THERE IS A VERSE, IN PART, FROM JAMES 1:7 *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father"* **WE CAN ALL NOD OUR HEADS IN AGREEMENT THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE "GOOD AND PERFECT" GIFT SENT FROM THE FATHER.** I JOHN 4:9 *"This is how God's love was revealed among us: God sent His one and only Son into the world, so that*

we might live through Him.” JOHN WROTE OF THE PROOF OF GOD'S LOVE BECAUSE HE WITNESSED IT FIRST HAND WHEN JESUS WALKED THE EARTH. FROM THE SCRIPTURES WE CAN GET A DESCRIPTION OF HIS LOVE FOR US.

GOD'S SAVING LOVE SENT HIS ONLY SON INTO THE WORLD SO THAT WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE GRACE AND FORGIVENESS OF THE FATHER.

GOD'S LOVE CALLS US TO HIM, BECAUSE OF HIS DESIRE TO HAVE THAT RELATIONSHIP WITH US. HE “SEALS” THAT RELATIONSHIP WITH A PROMISE TO NEVER LEAVE OR FORSAKE US!

GOD'S LOVE HAS REDEEMED US THROUGH CHRIST. HIS DESIRE IS FOR US TO BE FREE FROM GUILT AND FEAR THROUGH GRACE AND FORGIVENESS.

GOD'S LOVE HAS MADE US CHILDREN OF GOD AND LOVED MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY. WE CAN CALL HIM FATHER WHEN WE PRAY. IN COLOSSIANS 1:12 IT SAYS “This adoption includes forgiveness, strength, hope, peace, comfort, fellowship and so much more”.

GOD'S LOVE SETS US APART TO BE SEEN AS EXAMPLES OF HIS LOVE. WHEN WE REACH OUT TO OTHERS BY THE POWER OF HIS LOVE GOOD THINGS HAPPEN. **I READ THE OTHER DAY ABOUT A THANK YOU LETTER TO EDITOR OF SOMEONE WHO'S FATHER HAD FALLEN ILL. A YOUNG LADY CALLED 911 AND THE YOUNG LADY GOT OTHERS TO CARRY THE MAN INTO THE HEATED BUILDING. SHE PRAYED WITH THE WOMAN WHOSE FATHER HAD FALLEN ILL. BY THE TIME HELP ARRIVED THE MAN WAS BREATHING AND ON HIS WAY TO THE HOSPITAL. MINISTRY CAN BE ANYWHERE, ANY TIME AND WITH ANYONE.**

GOD'S LOVE FOR US IS MEANT TO CHANGE US! YOU HAVE HEARD THE VERSE MANY TIMES FROM JEREMIAH 29:11 “*For I know the plans I have for you,*” declares the Lord, “*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*” **WE MAY WANT WHAT IS GOOD, BUT GOD LOVES US SO MUCH THAT HE DESIRES WHAT IS BEST FOR US!**

DOES GOD'S LOVE CHANGE YOU? DOES IT AFFECT YOUR BEHAVIOR? DOES IT AFFECT THE WAY YOU TREAT PEOPLE? YOU SEE THAT IS WHAT LOVE IS INTENDED TO DO. **IT CHANGES US INTO LOVING COMPASSIONATE PEOPLE WHO CARE FOR THE NEEDS OF THOSE AROUND US.** GOD WANTS TO LOVE THE WORLD – BUT **HE HAS A DESIRE TO DO IT THROUGH EACH OF US.** **ARE WE WILLING TO LET GOD SHOW HIS LOVE THROUGH US?**

RIGHT NOW WE COULD BE THINKING “I AM NOT WORTHY OF SUCH LOVE”, GOD'S LOVE, BUT THEN YOU HAVE NOT HEARD THE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE THAT TRY TO TELL US IN HUMAN TERMS HOW MUCH GOD LOVES EACH ONE OF US RIGHT WHERE WE ARE THIS MORNING. **ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS MAKE OURSELVES AVAILABLE TO HIM.** GRACE AND FORGIVENESS BROUGHT ABOUT BY JESUS' WORK ON THE CROSS HAS MADE US WORTHY.

LAST NIGHT I TALKED ABOUT THE "CHRISTMAS HEART" AND HOW THE REAL CHRISTMAS IS NOT ABOUT THE SYMBOLS, BUT HOW GOD THROUGH HIS LOVE FOR US SENT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO RESTORE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. **GOD IS LOVE AND CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT LOVE AND KEEPING THAT "CHRISTMAS HEART" ALL YEAR LONG THROUGH WORDS AND ACTIONS.**

THIS CHRISTMAS DAY IT IS SO MEANINGFUL THAT WE ARE CELEBRATING NOT ONLY THE BIRTH OF JESUS, BUT WE ARE CELEBRATING COMMUNION.

AT CERTAIN TIMES IN CHURCH HISTORY AND DURING JOHN WESLEY'S TIME, COMMUNION AND A LOVE FEAST WERE HELD TOGETHER. A MEAL WHERE PEOPLE TOLD OF BLESSINGS AND THINGS GOD WAS DOING IN THEIR LIVES FOLLOWED BY COMMUNION. TOGETHER THESE EVENTS WERE PROOF OF GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS CHILDREN. WHEN WE COME TO COMMUNION THIS MORNING LETS REMEMBER THE PROOF OF GOD'S LOVE IN THE BIRTH OF HIS SON AND JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

THERE IS AN OLD SONG "OH HOW HE LOVES YOU AND ME" . THIS CHRISTMAS DAY REMEMBER THOSE WORDS THIS MORNING AND ALL YEAR YEAR. SHOW HIS LOVE FOR YOU TO ALL THOSE WHO CROSS YOUR PATH. "*Christmas, my child, is love in action.... Every time we love, every time we give, it's Christmas.*" YOU ARE PROOF OF HIS LOVE. AMEN.