**GOD SO LOVED US**

1 John 4:7-12 (key verses 4:9)

*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.*

Praise and glory be to our God, for granting us yet another Christmas this year. Merry Christmas to you all! Most of the people in the world and even us here is South Africa, are celebrating Christmas. This is a season characterised with buying and receiving gifts, spending time with family and friends. This is also a time of going to parties as people socialise in this set up; excessively drinking like there is no tomorrow. Many people are expecting to receive some sort of a gift. I was driving out from a parking lot, and the security man asked as he was signing me out; “I am short of R5, please can you help me”? Of course I have heard him the first time, but so that he earnestly hears himself for using this season as a means to receive extra money, I repeatedly asked him as though I didn’t hear him, “sorry, what are you saying”? He repeated his request, but much more humble this time. And yes, I gave him the R5 and drove out. Our gardener was so grateful when I paid him a bonus this past Friday. While people might dress up in newly bought clothes, a few would go to their local church on Christmas day; listen to the message and return back home.

Is this how we should celebrate Christmas? In today’s message, we will learn that there is no better way to celebrate Christmas than this: Remembering God who sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. Yes, Christmas is all about the love of God; how God loved us through Jesus Christ and how we also ought to love one another. I pray that as we listen to this message, we might receive afresh the love of God, and most importantly, to love one another. Amen!

**Part one: Christmas is about the love of God.**

Apostle John begins this part of the letter by reminding the church; his dear friends, to love one another. Let us read verses 7, 8. **7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love**. In order to love one another, the church must first understand where love comes from. Love comes from God, because God is love. Yes, love is a godly thing. As believers, we ought to love one another because God is love. Our ability to love is proof that we are born of God; that indeed we are the children of God. Everyone one who loves also knows God, and conversely so; everyone who does not love does not know God. So then, Apostle John pleads with the believers to love one another. Indeed, we must love one another because that is a mark of those who believes and belong to God.

However, we should understand what this love is, and how we must love one another.

Let us read today’s key verse all together. **9 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**. Yes, Christmas is reminding ourselves about the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Moreso in today’s passage, Christmas is about how God loved us by sending Jesus Christ that those who believe in Him might live through Him.

The whole world was filled with sin, as it is the case today, and God as a holy and just God, needed to punish sin as His nature commands. Not only that, God needed to save all sinful people like you and I because of His nature to love. So, what did He do? God sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. So much emphasis is put on the cute little baby Jesus in a manger as though we are saved by His cuteness. No. It was not cute at all. It was gruesome, it was dark. God sent His one and only Son Jesus to suffer much for our sins, rejected by many including those close to Him, in our stead, and eventually died when He was hung on the cross like a criminal, for our sins. Even though Jesus was blameless, without sin, yet He received the due punishment of our sins. Yes, this is how God sent His one and only Son Jesus. God sent Jesus to die for us. Now, the death of Jesus is indeed life for us. The sufferings of Jesus are indeed healing of our sin infested souls. The gruesome pains He endured were indeed healing for our sin wounded hearts. Indeed, **for God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life [John 3:16]**. This is the message of Christmas; the God who so much loved us that we do not die in our sins, rather that we live at the cost of His dear Son’s life. Yes, Christmas is about how God loves us.

Have you ever imagined what it means to give away something so precious to you for someone else? That would say that indeed that someone is dearly loved. Do you need proof that you are loved? Please, fix your eyes on God who sent His one and only Son Jesus to die for us. Do you need conviction that you are loved by God? The cross of Jesus where He died for us is all the conviction one needs to know that indeed they are loved. This love of God is not just about feelings, but God has demonstrated it and has shown us that indeed He loves us.

You know, this part of the year can be extremely toxic. For some people like me, we always feel like we should have done more; if I had worked harder so that I get an excellent performance rating, if I had been more faithful in my spiritual work to grow more, if only I was earning a bigger salary I would be having an wonderful Christmas. If only I had studied so hard and things went accordingly that I get my PhD, I would be having a Christmas to remember. Indeed, we should accept these challenges. Also we should welcome and appreciate any victories achieved in the year. Yes, we give praise to God for providing permanent jobs to those who were tirelessly seeking. We glorify His name and give Him thanks for allowing us to keep our jobs, and also to graduate for our studies & PhDs. But we cannot be comforted by these. We cannot put our hope in them. Our hope and confidence is in the love of God shown to us through Jesus Christ. It should have been us receiving the due punishment of our sins, however, God so loved us that He made Jesus an atonement for our sins. In whatever area of confusion and doubt, in any challenge and discontent, we have Jesus, and the love of God to forever warm our hearts, and expel all sorts of despair, hopelessness and anxieties.

Let us then take this time as an opportunity to thank God for sending His son Jesus. Let us fill our lips and hearts with praises to our loving Father and God who has saved us from sin through the atoning life of His son Jesus. Yes, I might not have received a desired performance rating from work, whoever the salvation of my soul, which is more precious than silver or gold, is sealed in Jesus Christ. Yes, there are many reasons to thank God for this year, however, we have an eternal thanksgiving topic which is the salvation of our souls through the death of Jesus. It is so easy to be distracted by many things, being fed lies about the perverse way of the world that have degraded the true meaning of Christmas. Today, we are reminded by the Holy Sprit and the power of His word that we are given a sure sign, a sure proof from God: We are so much loved by God through Jesus who was sent to die for us.

**10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins**. This love of God is unconditional and unmerited. It is not that we have done something to earn to be loved by God. The complete opposite is true: God has loved us because we have done absolutely nothing to be deserving of His grace. The nature of God’s love is also sacrificial in order to promote the holiness of God. And this is exactly what God did in order to save us from sin thus making us holy in His sight: He has sent Jesus that we might be presented holy in His sight.

**Part Two : We also ought to love one another**

Look at verse 11. **Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another**. We have come to understand how much God so loved us, and what we mean by love. Apostle John now commands us to love one another. Yes, we all need to love one another by following the example of God’s love shown to us. Of course we might not die for someone as Christ died for us, yet we can emulate the sacrificial love of Jesus amongst each other. Yes, we might not have the only Son to give away, however we can give something precious to us as a way to love one another. Here are some of the principles we can adopt on how to love one another:

Firstly, we should preach and encourage each other with the cross of Jesus. The holy prophets of God, by the Holy Spirit of God, saw the coming of Jesus and couldn’t help it but write and preach about His coming. Even when Jesus came to the world, He also preached and taught about God who so loved the world that He had sent Him. He didn’t stop there. Jesus continued to preach about the kingdom of God. This is what the apostles did, as it is today in this letter. Yes, it is commendable to give each other gifts, paying some bonuses, visiting the sick and orphans and showering them with gifts. Yes, it is good to spend quality time with family, eating and drinking and exchanging gifts. But there is no other way to love one another than preaching Christ Jesus who was sent to the world to die for our sins. This is the message of love that we should all spread even during this period. Preaching about Jesus who was sent to us must not only be in word, but also in deeds. How we live our lives before God and with His fear is also a powerful testimony about how God so loved us. The love of God is so much, boundless that it could take pages upon pages to write about. Once struck by this love of God in our hearts, we are left without any excuse but to preach about Jesus who has come to the world to save us from sin. The love of God compels us not to remain silent when we are in sin, or seeing someone perishing in their sins. Rather, the love of God compels us to preach a message of hope; a message of Jesus who saves from all sin. The love of God takes no joy in one who is suffering and living hopeless, rather, it compels us to preach about Jesus who is our true peace and our living hope. So, let us take some time shall we to encourage each other with the love of God that is seen on the cross of Jesus. Is any of your brothers and sisters discontent? Let us fill each other with the love of God. Any of us needing encouragement? Let them me strengthened by the word of Jesus Christ who takes away the sin of the world for us to have eternal life through Him.

Secondly, we love one another sacrificially so. God sacrificed the life of His Son Jesus in order to save us. For God to show His love for us, it cost the life of Jesus. We ought to love one another by sacrificially serving one another. Do you have any talents or resources? We learn from the love of God who gave Jesus’ life for us, that we ought to use our talents and resources as a means of loving each other. What do you have? What can you do? You give them something to eat. Even though we might be poor, there is always something to give. If it does not cost us anything, then it is not love. So then, let us not be discouraged to serve one another because of the cost. Rather, when the cost is that evident to us, It is a sign that we give.

Some month ago we travelled to Lesotho for Shp Dr Rapelang’s PhD graduation ceremony. The joy on Rapelang’s parents, and everyone else who came to celebrate, was as clear as the sun on a clear blue sky. When Shp Raps had issues with paying off a debt from his tuition account, the brothers in our church came and contributed. I am sure most of the brothers had other places where to use the money to, some under serious financial strains. However, compelled by the love of God, they contributed and Shp Raps could not only graduate but also get the confirmation letter to get employment. Only shp Raps could tell what this sacrificial gesture truly meant to him. We can also see how meaningful this was to him. So then, how much more can we also love one another by sacrificially using our talents and resources in preaching about Jesus Christ? It cost us time, airtime/data, groceries and money to serve one another with the word of God. Let us be encouraged to do so all the more, because the love of God to us is immeasurable.

In conclusion, because of God’s love shown by Jesus on the cross, let us be encouraged to love one another all the more. 12 **No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us**. We can be encouraged all the more to love one another because through this love, God’s presence is seen and felt in us. God lives in us through loving one another. Sometimes we might feel unqualified to love, that we are too sinful to even love someone genuinely. However, we are encouraged by this word that even in our weaknesses we can still love one another, and His love is made complete in us. Because I love by faith in the love of God shown on the cross, the love of God is made complete in me that now I am able to love genuinely. Where my love was smouldering, now I am able to love with the real love of God that yield God glorifying fruits.

I thank God for showing how much He so loves me, that He has sent Jesus to die for my sins. I thank God for the opportunity of seeing this love of God especially in a time and year where I would say was filled with all sorts of frustrations. I had plans for this year, what to achieve. Even though I might have achieved a few, there is still a whole lot that I haven’t achieved. But I thank God for this message about His love that is unconditional; that is not due to my performance, but the love that is given me even when I am in my sins, to send Jesus to die for my sins that I might have life through Him. There is no greater sign than the cross of Jesus. Yes, I matter that much that It took God to send His son to save me. I also pray to burn with the love of God that I can preach Christ, and love my future wife with this kind of love.

We are so loved by God, and He has shown us the evidence of His love. So then, let us be reminded this Christmas and beyond, on how much God so loved us through sending Jesus. Let us then be encouraged to love all the more. Merry Christmas to you all. Amen.