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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THE BIRTH OF LOVE”

Luke 1:46-55

Does God love us?

Scripture says that {1 Jn 4:16} “**God is love.**” This is easy to affirm in the abstract, as a general principle.

? *But does God love us?* Does God love us even at our worst? Does God love us when we are unworthy? Does God love us in spite of our frailty, our weakness, our errors in judgment, our badness?

Consider that last one.

☞ We are tempted to *underrate* our sins by calling them “mistakes.” Yet the lies we tell, the lusts we indulge, and the small cruelties we inflict upon others are sins.

☞ We are tempted to *rationalize* our sins by blaming them on our DNA, our parents, our situation. Yet though these factors do contribute to sin, they do not justify it.

☞ We are tempted to *relativize* our sins by saying, “At least I am not a drug dealer or human trafficker or school shooter.” Yet we are not measured against the blatantly evil; we are measured against Holy God.

○ {1 Jn 1:8, 10} “**If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we claim we have not sinned, we make [God] out to be a liar.**” {Ro 3:23} “**For all have sinned and fall short of [his] glory.**” {Ps 143:2} No one alive is, in and of themselves, “**righteous before**” God.

Of course we are not at our worst 24/7. Even the arrogant have occasional moments of humility. Even the

self-centered think of others now and then. Even the violent frequently restrain their impulses.

Better than that, we have our shining moments. The most hardened criminals have redeeming qualities. Many people, including the most ardent atheists and pagans, succeed at doing good works.

Still, our “good” is not good enough.

○ {Is 6:3} “**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty.**” {1 Jn 5} “**God is light,**” he is morally pure and ethically incorruptible; “**in him there is no darkness at all.**” The LORD’s thoughts, Word and deeds are perfectly right without exception.

○ In contrast, we are flawed. Compared to what God does, even {Is 64:6} “**our righteous acts are like filthy rags,**” tainted by pride and self-interest.

Let’s face it. Once we get past the tiny baby stage, we are not completely lovable.

Does God love us – not only the species but individuals, not only in theory but in practice, not only at our best but also at our worst?

? *Does God love us?*

● Please turn to Luke 1. In verses 26-38 God sends an angel to the Virgin Mary. He declares: “**You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his [ancestor] David, and he will reign... forever; his kingdom will never end.**”

● {Mt 1:18-21} The angel reveals to her fiancé Joseph that “**what is conceived in [Mary] is from the**

Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and [Joseph is] to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (The name Jesus means “*The LORD saves.*”)

- Why Mary? In Luke 1:30 Gabriel explains: “**you have found favor with God.**” She is uniquely favored, insofar as she is entrusted with a unique task.

- Mary’s pregnancy is evidence of God’s favor to us as well. What does John 3:16 say? “**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.**”

Substitute any individual or group name for “**the world**” and it is just as true: “**God so loved [Don Nelson] that he gave.**” “**God so loved [your mother, your spouse, child, your friend] that he gave.**” “**God so loved [that school bully, your ex-, Moslem extremists, and even Adam Lanza] that he gave his one and only Son.**”

- It was love that prompted the {Rev 19:6} “**King of kings**” to make {Php 2:7} “**himself nothing,**” being born as a helpless infant who suffered hunger pains and dirty diapers and immobility, and who could only communicate through wailing and tears.

- It was love that inspired {Jn 1:1-3, 14, 10-11} “**the Word**” who “**was God**” and “**through [whom] all things were made,**” to become “**flesh and [dwell] among us**” – knowing that “**the world**” he created would “**not recognize him**” and many of “**his own [people would] not receive him.**”

- It was love that inspired eternal Christ to submit to a humble birth by a humble mother in a humble stable in a

humble village with humble visitors –knowing that it was the first step on the road to Calvary, where he would die the most humiliating and excruciating death imaginable.

- ✍ God loves us despite our frailties, weaknesses, errors, and badness. We do not have to change ourselves to earn his love. Christmas proves it.

- ✍ Christmas also proves that God loves us too well not to change us.

- ☑ {Tullian Tchividjian} “**Legalism says that God will love us if we change.**” Licentiousness says that because God’s love is unconditional we do not have to change. But {Tullian Tchividjian} “**The gospel says God will change us because He loves us.**” This is the truth of Christmas.

- ☐ Please turn with me to **Luke 1:46-55**. This is the poem, inspired by the Holy Spirit and spoken by Mary, that we call “The Magnificat.”

- In verses 46-50 Mary praises the LORD God for the love he has shown personally to her:

**“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my
Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me
blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great
things for me – holy is his name.**”

**His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.**

■ Then, in verses 51-55 Mary portrays the social impact of God's love. She speaks prophetically, as though her son has already achieved his mission:

**He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud
in their inmost thoughts.**

**He has brought down rulers from
their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.**

**He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.**

**He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our [ancestors].”**

Theological conservatives are inclined to over-spiritualize this text, making it all about inward attitudes and individual relationships with God. Theological liberals tend to over-materialize it, making it all about economics and politics and power relationships between people.

Mary fits neither category. In keeping with Scriptures she anticipates a work of God that will transform the spiritual and material, the moral and political, the individual and corporate, for they are inextricably intertwined.

Jesus will “scatter” individuals *and* groups that are prideful toward him and other people.

Jesus will dethrone evil spiritual rulers (Satan and his demons) *and* wicked human monarchs. Likewise, he will raise up the humble in heart *and* those who are of low socio-economic status.

Jesus will satisfy the spiritually starved *and* the physically hungry. At the same time he will judge those who are rich in money and things but spiritually poor.

Jesus will be merciful to the children of Abraham by forgiving their sins *and* healing their diseases *and* unseating their rich oppressors.

This is all about real love. ① The Son became human because his Father loves us: “**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...to save the world through him.**” ② The salvation he brings is spiritual and material, moral and political, individual and corporate. His love is holistic, and so his ministry. And ③ the love of God is a force for our change.

It is because God is love that Messiah has begun to “[scatter] **those who are proud.**” His love calls us to abandon pride for humility.

It is because God is love that Messiah has begun to “[bring] **down rulers from their thrones but... [lift] up the humble.**” His love calls us to abandon power for service.

It is because God is love that Messiah has begun to “[fill] **the hungry... but [send] the rich away empty.**” His love calls us to abandon worldly wealth for heavenly treasures.

It is because God is love that Messiah has begun to “[help] **his servant...remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants.**” His love calls us to abandon self-rule for surrender to God, and to make sure we are part of his family of faith.

I am grateful that the Lord is not leaving me unchanged! I am sick of who I am apart from Jesus. What kind of love would it be if God put his stamp of approval on the status quo? What kind of love would it be if God permitted his people to continue in the ugly destruction of immorality, injustice, and idolatry?

✎ Christmas reveals that God’s love is universal: **“For God so loved *the world* that he gave...”**

✎ Christmas reveals that God’s love is unconditional: {Ro 5:8} **“While we were *still sinners*, Christ”** was born, lived, and **“died for us.”**

✎ Christmas reveals that God’s love is proactive: He did not wait for us to come to him, he {Jn 3:17} **“[sent] his son into the world.”**

✎ Christmas reveals that God’s love is sacrificial: Christ {Php 2:6} **“made himself nothing”** for us, and his humble birth led inevitably to his humiliating death on the cross.

✎ And Christmas reveals that God’s love is transformational: {Jn 1:14, 12-13; Ro 8:29} **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** And **“to all who [receive] him... who [believe] in his name, he [gives] the right to become children of God”** who are **“conformed to the likeness of [the] Son, that he might be the firstborn within a large family.”**

The next time you question God’s love, remember Christmas. It is all the proof we need!