

John 3:16-21 [NIV]

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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

About 30 years ago, a fellow by the name of Gary Chapman wrote a book called *"The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate."*

The book has enjoyed quite a lot of staying power, but in case you're unfamiliar with it, Chapman's thesis is that every person is pre-wired...we all have a natural preference to receive love from, and give love to, other people in one of these five specific ways:

- 1) words of affirmation
- 2) quality time
- 3) acts of service
- 4) physical touch
- 5) receiving gifts.

One of those, Chapman says, is the way we prefer that love be expressed to us, and because of that it's also the way we most naturally express love to others. One of them is our "love language."

So...do you know your love language?

Mine is, I'll admit, receiving gifts.

As a kid, I loved birthdays and Christmas, because, honestly, those were the gift holidays. And because my dad was one of twelve children and virtually all my family on both sides lived close by, that meant big parties and lots of gifts. Truly, I didn't really care about the party so much, but you needed the party to get the gifts.

And since I'm being really honest here, let me also say: I'm so glad I grew up *before* the whole way of thinking expressed as, "Oh come to my party, but don't feel the need to bring a gift." May I just say, "I'm so glad my parents never heard of that!" That would have been awful for me.

Now, I know all that might sound quite self-serving and materialistic and worldly even, and about now, you may be thinking, "How'd this guy ever get to be a pastor?"

But I mention all this because I think God's love language is about gifts, too.

I really do. I think gifts – both given and received – speak loudly to God, and I say that because you find God giving and receiving gifts all through Scripture.

What is a gift? It's a tangible expression of care and affection – of love, although with gifts, "tangible" doesn't necessarily mean physical or expensive.

Think of worship. God prescribed the way He wanted His people to worship Him – to show love to Him. He prescribed what He wanted them to bring Him.

And then, just think of all the gifts God has given to our world through the ages – all of the ways He's expressed His love to us through gifts.

Starting with life itself.

And then, the beauty of the earth and creation.

God's given everything we need, not just to exist, but to flourish.

He gave the gift of the Hebrew people to the world – a people who would make God known and through whom the Redeemer would come.

God has given the gift of the Law, to show us right from wrong.

He's given His presence, His guidance, His counsel, His correction, His word – it just goes on and on and on. God is the ultimate giver of gifts – it's how He expresses love to us and our world.

But of course, we know that one of His gifts stands far, far above all the others. We're here tonight to celebrate that gift.

From the very earliest of days, God promised a gift that would be far above and beyond all others – a gift that would be more than pleasant or helpful, even utterly transformative. A gift that would fundamentally change our human condition.

God promised a savior – a deliverer – a redeemer. Jesus, the Christ.

You see this all through the Old Testament. In fact, I love the way Glen Scrivener put it. He says that we see Jesus either patterned, promised or present all through the Old Covenant.

Jesus is the Word through which God created all things.

He's the clothing that God made for Adam and Eve – to cover their shame, and He's their offspring who would crush the head of the serpent.

We see Jesus in Isaac – the son and sacrifice, who even carried the wood on his back.

We see Him in Israel and the Exodus event.

We see Him in King David's heart for God.

Jesus is promised and predicted by prophet after prophet – telling us about God's gift to come.

And then, a little over 2000 years ago, God's greatest gift – long promised – arrived in just the way described in Matthew and Luke.

Another gift from God – the greatest of a long line of them.

So – why?

Why did God give Jesus, or any of His other gifts, for that matter?

Why does anyone give gifts?

Do we give gifts to impress someone? Who would God need to impress?

To keep up with His neighbors or peers? God has no peers.

To spend down his assets to help with next year's taxes? There are no taxes in Heaven.

Why does God give gifts? Why did He give Jesus?

To express love.

Love is God's motive. Love is His purpose.

Because God so loved the world, He gave His one and only Son – not to condemn the world, but to save it through Him.

You see, all of God's gifts are given in love.

But Jesus is God's greatest gift of love – because He's the gift that allows us to, once again, receive and enjoy all the gifts that God has already given – and, all the gifts He has yet to give.

All that humanity has lost in our rejection of God; everything good that we've pushed away; all of God's mercies and favors both past and future: through Jesus, God offers us access to them all over again.

Jesus is the greatest of God's gifts because He's the gift of the second chance. He's the Bridge we needed to reconnect with God and all His goodness.

Jesus is, very literally, the Gift of gifts.

To restore the relationship with us God intended from the beginning – that's what Jesus makes possible.

That's why I think God's love language is gifts – He speaks it perfectly, thoroughly and completely.

No one gives better.

He'd like us to receive His gift of Jesus – and all the other gifts that Jesus unlocks – even tonight, if you haven't already.

Into the craziness and brokenness and confusion that is our world – especially in these days, God carves out this quiet moment. He pushes back the noise and the nuttiness of the world, so that we might not miss the Gift of gifts He offers.

If you haven't already, would you receive God's gift of Jesus tonight?

And if you have already received and if you are following Jesus, would you breathe a prayer of thanks for all of God's gifts in your life, but especially for Jesus, the Gift of gifts, Who comes anew this very evening.

Candle Lighting

Silent Night

Joy to the World

Benediction:

In love, God came to earth to give us the Gift of gifts; to forgive and free us from sin; to return us to relationship with Him; to restore in us His own holy nature, so we might know deep and eternal peace.

In turn, we now go and give the gift of Jesus to a broken world – a world in need of help and healing and hope, a world confused and fearful, a world rich in things but poor in soul.

May God's blessing rest upon us as we speak God's language, offering to others, with joy and love, the Gift of gifts.