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Sunday School Lesson

A MESSAGE OF LOVE (Christmas Lesson)
LESSON: Luke 2:8-20; John 3:16; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 3:14-21

There is one season of the year when the world takes off its mask of sophisticated incredulity, and shows how thin is the veneer of rationalism it assumes the rest of the year. It is then one sees how much of modern life is based on superstition and mythology, for example the myth of Santa Claus. And there are also the myths of nationality and racial superiority (or inferiority as the case may be; of inevitable progress); and the myth that "money talks." The modern world, the adult denials to the contrary, does believe in Santa Claus, and for the majority the season preceding December 25th, is the season of Santa Claus, not of the Advent of Jesus Christ.

Christianity does not know Santa Claus, or what he stands for; it knows Jesus Christ and what HE stands for. Christianity does not proclaim Santa Claus; it proclaims the Word of God made flesh for the redemption of mankind. It proclaims no beneficent mythological white-bearded being who gives gifts to those who have been "good." It proclaims a God who freely "gives" on the basis of his unearned love — a God who gave His Son as a sacrifice for the salvation of those who would receive Him and believe in Him. The meaning of the love revealed in Jesus Christ is very different from the love revealed in Santa Claus and Christmas-gift giving. The latter is a love that is earned by being "good" or "friendly." We give gifts to those who love us or are our friends, or to those from whom we seek a gift in return. In Christ, however, God reveals his love for the unlovely, the unloving, the sinful, the "bad." He loves those who do not love Him. The love of God in Christ, which culminated in the Crucifixion, was not a reciprocal affair, on an equal "give-and-take" basis. The love was all given, and nothing was demanded in return. It is man's nature to respond to such love; but that is all. It is not man's nature so to love, except he becomes "a new creature in Christ Jesus."

This kind of love is not an ideal discovered by man. It is not the final stage in man's search for God. It is the result of God's search for man. It is a gift of God. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." (2 Cor. 9:15). No one was looking for such a person as Jesus Christ turned out to be. No one was envisaging an ideal, which was finally achieved in Christ's death. The religious thought of the age in which Jesus lived was quite different. The Jews were looking for a Messiah; but he was thought of as a Messiah of power and glory who would establish an earthly kingdom and lead the Jewish people to prosperity and world dominion. That God should reveal himself not in power and glory, but in a Babe born in a lowly stable, in a humble peasant who had nowhere to lay his head, in the death of His Son for the sins of the world, was a conception which originated nowhere but in the mind of God. Men did not go searching among the stars to find divine love. Love was thrust down to earth, and even then men did not recognize it. John the Evangelist says "He came to His own and His own designed to embrace the unworthy and the unloving, could spring only from the divine mind. Flesh and blood could not conceive it; flesh and blood were unprepared for it when it took place, and flesh and blood do not believe it today.

For the modern world does not know this Love. The modern man loves those who love him, and if love is unreciprocated, he wants none of it. The increasing number of divorces in the marriage relationship is an illustration of this. When one member to a marriage is no longer satisfied by the emotional satisfaction he gets from his partner, his (or her) inclination is to make an end of the partnership. Our whole idea of love is based on what is received, and is only willing to give in so far as something is given in return.

The goal and standard of living today is what you can get out of life. The individual stands on his rights over against other individuals, classes in society and nations in the international sphere, are prepared to work with one another only in so far as they receive concessions equal to what they give. And they are unwilling to give until they have first received. Christian love gives first, and receives (if there be a return of gratitude) second.

Now there is such a thing as justice in human relationships wherein the rights of individuals and classes and nations are guaranteed. And there is such a thing as human affection. But these must not be confused with Christian love. The Christian loves not because of a natural affection for somebody else, or because of a natural desire to secure social justice; he loves because he has first been loved by God. The Christian, knowing how he has been embraced in his loneliness and unloveliness, by a divine love gives to others — without demanding and without necessarily expecting return — what was freely given him by Jesus Christ. This is the love which alone truly softens the hardness of hu-

man society. This is the love which transfigures and creates, and brings its own reward.

There may be cases where action has to be taken against individuals or nations IN LOVE, because their deeds are evil and dangerous and unjust. It is of the very nature of love that it seeks to deal effectively with evil. Sometimes we must demand and enforce social justice out of motives of love. During the war we hold ourselves we were so acting against injustice, and that it was for the good of the German people themselves that Hitler should be smashed. And we were right! But how difficult it is to think this, without self-righteousness and without vindictiveness! And how easy it is to try to justify ourselves before the Judge of the World with such arguments! Any love we have is not enough to justify us, and there is nothing in us or in our record at any time, to furnish occasion for self-righteousness. We must seek the justification of our actions, not in ourselves, not even in our "right" motives, but in the mercy and righteousness of Jesus Christ who, "as a Lamb without blemish and without spot," covers our sins.

1946 CANADA YEAR BOOK CAN NOW BE PURCHASED

The 1946 edition of the Canada Year Book is announced by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics and will be supplied to the public at the price of \$2.00 a copy. By a special concession, a limited number of paper-bound copies has been set aside for ministers of religion, students and school teachers who may obtain such copies at the price of \$1.00. Application with remittance should be made to the Dominion Statistician, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Ottawa.

Among special articles in the book are "The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan," "Canadian Agriculture during the Transition Period" and "Report of the Royal Commission on Cooperatives." A summary of Discharge Gratuities and Rehabilitation Allowances with a synopsis of the Pension System will be of interest to veterans, as will a section on Vocational Training. Another interesting chapter deals with the fight against inflation.

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