

“God So Loved the World”

April 21, 2013

Text: John 3:16

The theme of our text this morning is the love of God—one of the most magnificent themes in all of Scripture.

- * This is a theme on which great scholars/theologians can ponder/meditate for hours at a time, like a diamond merchant turning over a priceless diamond in his hand, admiring it, 1 facet at a time.
- * This is a theme on which spiritual newborns can flourish and grow, as an infant thrives on milk.
- * And this is a theme in which those who have been believers for many years can still find a feast for their souls, as the meat of God’s Word.

This is a theme on which the Apostle John loved to dwell, this one who like to call himself=> *“the disciple Jesus loved.”*

John’s Gospel gives special attention to the love-relationships that are seen all throughout the Kingdom of God.

He makes it clear that when a person enters the Kingdom through faith in Jesus, he enters into a whole environment of love=>

- * 3:35 (John the Baptis)=> *“The Father loves the Son.”*
- * 14:31 (Jesus)=> *“I love the Father.”*
- * 11:5=> *“Jesus loved Martha & her sister & Lazarus.”*
- * 14:21 (Jesus)=> *“He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him.”*
- * 13:34 (Jesus)=> *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”*

God is such a God of love, that I Jn 4:8 says=> *“The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”*

But in today’s text we find that God’s love is not restricted to citizens of the Kingdom, but includes the whole world.

Our text is prob. the most familiar/loved verse in the Bible=>

John 3:16—*“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

The “world” Jesus was referring to, is the world of mankind—the whole human race, regardless of nationality.

So think of it like this=>

“For God so love the whole human race, that He gave His only begotten Son....”

It includes every man/woman in this world, even sinners, and even the most vile of sinners—everybody!

This morning, as we examine John 3:16 like a diamond of spiritual truth, we will focus on 4 facets of God’s love=>

- * The Recipients of God’s Love
- * The Measure of God’s Love
- * The Beneficiaries of God’s Love
- * The Blessings (and benefits) of God’s Love

*** The Recipients of God’s Love (“the world” of mankind)**

Some Xn teachers argue that the “world” here refers only to the elect, but Scripture doesn’t support that view.

The Bible sometimes calls the wicked and their evil philosophical system “the world,” but it never refers to believers by this term.

To apply it only to Xns really stretches/strains/tortures the language.

It also creates a narrow/restrictive view of God's love against which this very passage contends.

Other uses of the term “*the world*” which don't apply here, include=>

* The natural world of animals/forests/rivers/galaxies.

They don't/can't believe, as our text says some in the “*world*” do.

* Neither can it mean the evil world system which I Jn 2 forbids us to love, and then

adds=> “*If anyone loves the **world**, the love of the Father is not in him*” (2:15).

God hates that evil system; He certainly doesn't love it.

The “*world*” of which Jesus speaks in Jn 3:16 is the sin-encumbered race of fallen humanity, that is under God's judgment for its rebellion against Him.

It includes a world of unregenerate men/women who don't/can't love God, and who are objects of His wrath (Eph 2:3).

It is fallen mankind, which gropes around in spiritual blindness/darkness, utterly lost, & yet tenaciously avoiding the light of God's truth.

There is nothing about this worldwide mass of rebels that would ever attract God's love.

By all rights, one would fully expect Him to hate them.

Amazingly, our text teaches that God actually loves them.

Not only does He love them, Jesus says He “*so*” loves them.

Some of the best scholars (including Don Carson and William Hendricksen) take the position that, in the context of this verse, the word “*so*” emphasizes the intensity of God’s love a/w/a its nature/manner of expressing itself.

He loves them so much, so greatly, so dearly, so fervently.

God’s love for mankind is so fervent, & out of that love He has made such enormous sacrifices on their behalf, that no one in the world will ever be able to blame the Lord for his/her condemnation in hell.

God predestines no one to hell, but rather sends man the light of His truth, so that men can avoid hell, and He does so out of His love for them.

In John 3, X has just told Nicodemus about “heavenly things.”

God’s love for such a world, making it an object of His care, is 1 of the most wonderful heavenly things of all.

And yet, this is not the same special filial love of approval, which God has for believers—members of His own family.

Believers are people who have been chosen out of the world.

Jesus told His disciples (Jn 15)=> “*You are **not** of the world, but I chose you **out of the world**” (15:19).*

They too were once part of the world, & the fact that God chose them from the world proves He hasn't turned His back on the world, but loves mankind in spite of our sin, and has chosen people w/i the world, to save their souls from the sins of the world.

Xns have a special love-relationship w/ God as His own children, a relationship that is different from His love for the world. It's the special/intimate/personal love of adoption.

But still, He loves the world, and He loves it in spite of the fact that it is under His judgment.

It's a love of pity/compassion seen in passages like=>

Psa 145=> *"The LORD is **good to all**, And His mercies are over **all His works**."*

Ezek 33:11=> *"'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take **no pleasure** in the death of the wicked.'"*

I Tim 2=> *"God our Savior, who desires **all men** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2:3-4).*

Someone: How can God possibly love people and yet judge them?

Ans: Because He is both a perfectly loving/merciful God, and yet a perfectly holy/just God.

And there is no internal confusion/conflict among the various attributes of His nature.

That is one of the aspects of His infinite/perfect being that we, in our own human nature, cannot relate to, or fully understand.

And yet it is very real, and we can see it being played out in various passages of Scripture, such as Jeremiah 48. There God pronounces judgment on the nation of Moab, because of their pride, which explains why He is going to punish them=>

“We have heard of the pride of Moab—he is very proud—Of his haughtiness, his pride, his arrogance and his self-exaltation” (48:29).

But far from gloating over the punishment that awaits the Moabites because of their pride, God says=>

*“Therefore I shall **wail for Moab**, Even for all Moab shall **I cry out**; I will **moan** for the men of **Kir-heres** [the Moabite capital]” (48:30-31).*

Why is God crying?

Because He loves the Moabites.

God punishes nations according to His just nature & eternal purposes, but He loves the whole world nonetheless w/ His compassionate love.

*** The Measure of God’s Love**

This is found in the fact that God loved the world so much “that He gave His only begotten Son” (His unique Son) on its behalf.

The lit. wording here is, “*the Son, the only-begotten One.*”

John seems to have put it that way to remind us of the

words in Gen 22:2, where God says to Abraham=>

*“Take now **your son, your only son**, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him*

there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”

Abraham was well over 100 years old, and he had waited/prayed for a son for over 70 years, before Isaac was born.

He adored this son, looked upon him as his connection w/ the future, and as the fulfillment of God’s promise to give Abraham as many descendants as there are stars. Now God had told him to sacrifice that son he loved—his only son—and it must have been a crushing blow.

Because Abraham obeyed the Lord, we have a poignant picture of how it must have grieved God the Father to send His only Son into the world, knowing it would end, in His own Son’s death.

This, then, is the measure of God’s love for the world=> sacrificing His own/only Son to save the world of mankind. It was God’s climactic act of love for the world, demonstrating He loved mankind w/ infinite fervency. He loved us so much that He put our welfare ahead of that of His own Son (and that of Himself).

I Jn 4 describes this as the definitive act of divine love=>

*“By **this** the **love** of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. / In **this** is **love**, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent **His Son** to be the propitiation for our sins” (4:9-10).*

There could be no more convincing proof of Abraham's love for God than the fact that he did not withhold his own beloved son from God.

And there could be no greater display of God's love for us than His giving His Son to die on our behalf.

True love makes sacrifices for those it loves.

It breaks the alabaster bottle and pours out the precious perfume on X's feet to honor this one it loves, when selfishness forgets even to bring water, to wash X's feet.

Ask yourself, would I give my own son, whom I dearly love, to die on behalf of someone else?

What if he were your only son, and what if the people he was to die for, were your enemies?

In a sense, when a father/mother send their son to Iraq as a soldier, they face the real possibility that he might lose his life in a good cause for people neither he/they even know.

If he did die, they might learn to live with his death, if they truly believed he died honorably in his country's service for a just cause.

But what if the people he was trying to help, & for whom he died, not only failed to respect him for his sacrifice, but actually despised him, arrested him, and hanged him as a criminal? Wouldn't you say, "I would never part with my beloved son for such ungrateful wretches"?

And yet, those were exactly the conditions under which God sent His own Son into the “world,” the enemy territory of fallen/sinful mankind.

God sent His Son to live among scribes/Pharisees, whose hatred/jealousy would stalk Him thru-out the 3 years of His ministry, doing all they could to discredit/stop Him.

He sent Jesus to earth, knowing how few people would receive Him, and that His life would end w/ scourging/crucifixion. W/ thorns being maliciously driven into His scalp, w/ blows to His cheeks, w/ hecklers pulling out His beard, and w/ agony, as onlookers wagged their heads & mocked Him. And finally w/ a spear-thrust to His side, insuring His death.

Would you send your son into a situation like that?

Probably not—but God did, & He did it for you.

He did it because He loved you, when you were one of those enemies who might have howled “Crucify Him!” if you had been there.

He did it for you even if you’re not a believer.

Because He did it for the whole world of mankind.

That is the measure of God’s love for the world=> He gave His Son unto death, as an offering for their sin.

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Rom 8:32).

*** The Beneficiaries of God’s Love**

The cast of beneficiaries of God’s love-gift in Jn 3:16 is as broad as the word “*whoever*,” but as narrow/limited as the words “*believes in Him*.”

For a Jew like Nicodemus, it was unthinkable that Messiah would come for “whoever”—even including Gentiles/Samaritans. In most Jews’ minds, Messiah was going to come to bless the Jews, but to destroy such enemies.

Jesus said He had come for “*whoever*” (regardless of race) if they would only believe in Him.

God’s wide-ranging offer of salvation includes “*whoever*”—even the vilest, most despicable/undeserving of sinners.

Anyone who comes to X, He will certainly not cast out (6:36).

On the other hand, God’s offer of salvation is so narrow that it excludes anyone/everyone who refuses to believe in Jesus. Universal salvation is a very popular idea among men, who think God should save all mankind.

But it is an idea God Himself find unacceptable.

God did not so love the world that He would save people who rejected His Son, or even refused to believe in Him.

But while nonbelievers are excluded, all believers are included.

* In this pornographic culture of ours, where lust is constantly stirred up.

In the privacy of the internet, a man can easily enslave his own mind to provocative sexual images/videos.

But even such a pathetic slave of his passions is included in the “*whosoever*” God loves, & will save thru faith in X. If he believes in Jesus, he will instantly be made clean from defilement, and he will receive eternal life.

* A wretched person who has maliciously/mercilessly hurt others, grinding them into the dirt, can still be included in God’s ‘whoever.’

If he believes in Jesus, he will receive eternal life, his character will be changed, and the Spirit will prompt him to make restitution to those he has wounded.

* “*Whoever*” can include the old/grizzled/inveterate sinner, whom everyone else has long since given up on, as hopeless.

* It can include the teenage boy/girl who is starting out in life, making lifetime decisions, & drawn in both directions—to the lust of the flesh and evil of this world on the one hand, & to the righteousness of X on the other.

* It can include those whose faith is true but small, & those who don’t know for sure if they’re really even saved.

Satan may argue that certain people shouldn’t be included in God’s “*whoever*”=>

* “So/So has known the truth a long time, but has played the church for a fool, never really getting serious about the gospel.”

Our Lord answers, “Even now, if he at last truly believes in Me, I will not cast him out.”

* “Lord, So/So declared himself a Xn once, but then he went back on his faith—back to the world.”

X responds, “Has he believed in Me now? Then get out the robe, put a ring on his finger, & let’s have a feast. My prodigal son has come home to me.”

* “Lord, now You’ve really gone too far. So/So is the most foul-mouthed, wicked wretch alive. Your own justice demands that he be sent to hell for his vile/sinful life.”

Jesus says, “That’s true, Satan. But if he repents & believes in Me, he will not be sent there. His character will be changed, & he’ll have eternal life.”

Q: What exactly did Jesus mean by “believing on Him”?

Jesus answered that in last week’s text, when He said=>

*“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; / that **whoever believes** shall in Him have eternal life” (3:14-15).*

The Israelites who had been bitten by snakes, only had to look at the bronze serpent Moses had attached to the top of a pole, in order to receive their healing and save their lives.

It was a simple act of faith in God’s provision for their healing.

When they simply looked at that bronze snake, having no hope of healing in any other way, but trusting that the remedy God had provided would indeed heal them, they were instantly cured from the effects of the venom in their bloodstream.

Believing in Jesus is looking to Him by faith, having no other hope of healing from sin (the deadly disease of the soul), trusting in Him alone as God's remedy from the spiritual sickness in one's soul.

1st it's believing that what God said about X's death having the power to atone for sin is true, on a factual level.

Your believing/not-believing it has nothing to do with its inherent/objective truthfulness.

2nd, it is accepting this truth w/ regard to yourself—that you have sinned & are under condemnation because of it, so you need Jesus' atonement to save your soul.

I.e., that the general truth applies to you too;

That you are not an exception to the rule.

3rd, it is simply entrusting yourself wholly to X to save you.

It's doing what those snake-bitten Israelites did, but trusting X for eternal life, not just a longer life in this world.

May the Spirit lead you in doing that, even right now.

Who are the beneficiaries of God's love?

Whoever places his faith/trust in the Lord Jesus X.

- * Not those who give away all their goods to feed the poor or give their bodies to be burned on behalf of the gospel.
- * Not those who live perfectly righteous lives, are actively involved in their religion, or never miss communion.
- * Not those who were baptized either as infants or adults.

But those who simply believe in Jesus X are the ones who will be saved by God's love/grace.

If we come to Him as guilty, spiritually-dead sinners & believe on Him for our salvation, we will receive eternal life.

We will become the beneficiaries of God's love.

Refusing to do so, we will continue in the spiritual death which has been our lot from the beginning.

The key to it all, is our faith in the gracious love-gift of God to the world of man.

* The Blessings of God's Love

John 3:16 ends w/ the words=> "...*shall not perish, but have eternal life.*"

The 1st blessing is negative—believers in X will not perish;

The 2nd is positive—they will have eternal life.

By "perish" Jesus means to destroy/ruin.

Those who believe in Him will not be brought to the eternal ruin/destruction—of both their bodies/souls.

They were once a heartbeat away from perishing, and they would have perished had they not believed.

But now they will never perish (there's no possibility of their ever perishing).

By contrast, those who do not believe in Jesus, will perish.

They will lose all possibility of hope, all peace, all joy, all light as they lose whatever trust in X they may have ever had.

Jesus said=> *“If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body **perish** [here on earth], than for your **whole body** to be thrown into **hell**”* [and perish eternally there] (Matt 5:29).

Jesus isn't talking about annihilation, but about ruin.

He is talking about the eternal/never-ending

destruction of the body/soul in hell, where the worm never dies because it never runs out of food, and the fire is never quenched because it never runs out of human fuel.

Not only is both the believer's body/soul saved from perishing, his faith is preserved from perishing as well, in this life.

Jesus said (Jn 10)=> *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; / and I give eternal life to them, and they shall **never perish**; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. / My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand”* (27-29).

The true believer in X will never return to his former state, but will persevere in the faith until the day he dies.

He can never sin away his salvation, because even he
cannot snatch himself out of the Father's hand.

From the view of God's sovereignty, the Lord will never
allow him to perish.

From his own p.o.v., he can no longer live in sin, & enjoy it.
God's love is experienced by the believer, in the assurance that
he will never perish, having once believed in Jesus X.

**The positive blessing is that those who believe in Jesus have
*"eternal life."***

Whereas those who perish will be banished from God's love/life,
to forever dwell in His wrath, those who receive eternal life
through faith in X, will forever live in communion with
Him, enjoying the presence/awareness of His love.

Eternal life is the life of the future age—an abundant life of
love/peace/joy/hope in constant fellowship w/ God.

Jn 17:3 says that eternal life is knowing God, having
a personal/loving relationship w/ Him.

It is not something a believer must wait for, until he dies.

He receives eternal life the moment he places his
faith in Jesus.

Eternal life grips your soul & brings God's power into your life.

As its influence permeates your heart/life, you can say with

Paul=>

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21).

Eternal life is having X living with you and in you and the truth of God having become a part of you, written on your heart.

This is the life that belongs to everyone who is born again. Once you have received eternal life, it will be yours from then on eternally.

- * As you lie at death's door, you will still possess eternal life, giving you the confidence that whatever lies ahead of you out there in the unknowns of eternity, it will all be good, and it will all be gain.
- * Eternal life will still be yours as you stand looking into the face of your beloved Redeemer in heaven.
- * It will be yours when your body is resurrected, and you return from heaven in X's glory to take up residence in that new/imperishable spiritual body.
- * You will continue to possess eternal life when you stand before the Judgment Seat of X to receive rewards for the deeds you have done in this present life/body.

If you have believed in X, eternal life is God's love-gift to you now, and it is a gift you will enjoy forever.

As you wait to cast your crowns at your Savior's feet,
you can confidently/gratefully sing of Your love for
God, no matter what happens in this life=>

Heav'n and earth may fade & flee, First born light in gloom decline;
But while God and I shall be, I am His, and He is mine.

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Text: John 3:16

1. The theme of our text this morning is the [10 love] of God.

John 3:35; 14:31; 11:5; 14:21; 13:34; I Jn 4:8

2. In today’s text we find that God’s love is not restricted to citizens of the Kingdom but includes the whole [12 world].

John 3:16

This morning as we examine John 3:16, we will focus on four facets of God’s love...

*** The Recipients of God’s Love**

I Jn 2:15

3. The “*world*” of which Jesus speaks in Jn 3:16 is the sin encumbered race of fallen [18 humanity].

Eph 2:3; Jn 15:19

4. Christians have a special love-relationship with God as His own children, a relationship that is [20 different] from His love for the world.

Psa 145:9; Ezek 33:11; I Tim 2:3-4; Jer 48:29, 30-31

5. God punishes nations according to His just nature and eternal purposes, but He [12 loves] the whole world nonetheless.

*** The Measure of God’s Love**

Gen 22:2; I Jn 4:9-10

6. There could be no greater display of God’s love for us than His giving His [8 Son] to die on our behalf.

Rom 8:32

*** The Beneficiaries of God’s Love**

7. The cast of beneficiaries of God’s love-gift in Jn 3:16 is as broad as the word “*whoever,*” but as narrow and limited as the words “[18 *believes*] in Him.”

8. A wretched person who has maliciously, mercilessly hurt others can still be [18 included] in “whoever.”

Jn 3:14-15

9. Believing in Jesus is looking to Him by faith, having no other hope of healing from sin (the deadly disease of the soul), [18 trusting] in Him alone.

10. If we come to Him as guilty, spiritually-dead sinners, and believe on Him for our salvation, we [10 will] receive eternal life.

* **The Blessings of God's Love**

Matt 5:29

11. Not only is both the believer's body and soul saved from perishing, his [12 faith] is preserved from perishing as well.

Jn 10:27-29

12. Eternal life grips your soul and brings [12 God's] power into your life.

Phil 1:21

13. If you have believed in Christ, eternal life is God's love-gift to you now, and it is a gift you will enjoy [16 forever].