

Holy Ground

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[0 : 00] I ask those of you who are here on Wednesday to pray for me because I thought the week was not going that well.! Last night when John called I knew it was going worse than I thought. So I really need you to pray for me now.

But you know what? The passage that we're going to look at this morning... It's the best. Perfect. A couple of months ago, Pastor asked me to speak this morning so he could go hunting. We talked about my topic and decided that I would just simply do the next passage in John. And looking at the schedule, he told me that would be John 3.16. At first I thought that would be fine. Then I spent the last... Since then... Turning it over and over in my mind and struggling with this message.

In the last week I came across a commentary by A.W. Tozer on the book of John and I turned to 3.16. And I want to read what he said there.

[1 : 13] It's from A.W. Tozer's book and he dwelled amongst us. As far as I can remember, I've never preached a sermon on John 3.16. Nor have I devoted an entire article or essay to it.

It's not that I do not like the text, for I do. It is simply that the text has been too big for me. I've instinctively quoted this, often in times of prayer and testimony and writing and preaching. I was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable about this and confused as to why I could not get a handle on this text. Then I was reading one of Charles Ellicott's noble old commentaries of a hundred or more years ago.

When the wise old saint of God came to John 3.16, he said something to this effect. I don't tend to say much about this text. It's a favorite of young preachers.

But older preachers feel that it's better felt than talked about. So I'm going to confine my comments on this text to the minimum. And he did. I knew exactly what he meant and began understanding my reluctance in tackling this text.

[2 : 23] I believe that more than ever, anyone attempting to deal with John 3.16 undertakes an almost insurmountable task. Requiring a great deal of sympathy and generous love for God and men.

No person should do this hastily. This text should be approached as Moses approached the burning bush in his day. It's a sacred confrontation with God.

As you recall, Moses was required to remove his sandals as he approached this burning bush.

Whatever that act meant, like Moses, we must approach this text with unhurried solicitude.

So I approached this text as one filled with a great fear, great fascination, and an overwhelming sense of inadequacy. Almost a despair.

The thought of the presence of God before me. Let's pray. Let's pray. Almighty God, the message of this text is the comfort and encouragement to all of our souls.

[3 : 35] It's the challenge to the unbeliever. Lord, it's the most wonderful words that we could hear. It's the words of the children's song.

Jesus loves me. This I know. For the Bible tells me so. That's the passage we look at this morning. Lord, help us to grow in our appreciation for your holy, wonderful love for us.

And let that be the comfort that we need today. The view of the events of last week. And what we do not know comes this week.

We ask it in Christ's name. Amen. Turn with me, please, to John 3.16. It's hardly a place in the world to which the gospel of Jesus Christ has gone that this verse has not become almost instantly known.

It's the first verse that translators translate into a new language. And it's been translated into over 1,100 different languages.

[4 : 41] Millions of people have been taught to recite it. It's inscribed in books and buildings. It's reflected in songs. It's been held up on posters at nearly every significant sporting event in recent days.

But is it simply the cover child of Christianity? Is it just a verse to be printed on coffee cups, poster boards?

I almost asked some people to hold up poster boards that said John 3.16 on it. And after I read Tozers, I decided I wasn't going to do that.

Is it a verse that we throw at unbelievers like a Christian hand grenade? Or is it more? Follow along as I read beginning in verse 14.

The demonstration, the extent, and the result of God's love.

[5 : 59] First, the demonstration. It says, As Moses lift up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. For God so loved the world. This passage could have been translated, For this is how God loved the world, or in this way God loved the world.

You see, so often we think about, well, this is the extent of it. But I included the two previous verses because while the word so here is used frequently in the New Testament, and in fact it's used frequently in the Gospel of John, it always, it never refers to the degree or how much, but rather always into the manner or in this way.

If we look at what comes right before then, which it always, this word always refers to what came right before it, we see that pointed back to verse 14, which tells us that the Son of Man must be lifted up.

It speaks of the cross. In other words, the picture, or the demonstration, of God's love is always wrapped up in the cross.

It's the same idea or connotation was in another one of the books of John, and I won't ask you to turn to it this morning, but in 1 John 4, 9 and 10, it says, In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

[7 : 27] And this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation is an old word, but it's a really good one. It speaks of the fact that Christ took the wrath of God on himself, and by doing so, he became a sin offering that satisfied that wrath of God that should have been poured out on you and me.

In the dictionary, it's cross-referenced with the word atonement, which speaks of the fact that because of Christ's payment, we can be at one with the Father.

It's a solid and comforting support to rely on the death of Christ as the only pledge of God's love. The motivation for this is that he so loved the world.

God never saved the world by his love. He provided the offer of salvation to the world by pouring out all the divine wrath on the Son. Back in my day, there was a song called, All We Need Is Love. It was a lie. What we need is grace. And grace comes to us through the cross, through the work of God that is the picture or the illustration of the love he had for us.

[8 : 52] God so loved the world that he provided the cross. The object of the love is the world. But just what does he mean by this? Well, first of all, it says whoever believes.

So it must be that it has to be people. It can't be rocks and trees and the other things that we would consider part of the world. It also suggests that it refers to man who is sin-laden, exposed to the judgment, and in need of salvation, but still the objects of his care.

By reason of the context and other passages with a similar thought, it is probable that the term indicates fallen man. And it refers to all men, all nations, all peoples, both Jews and Gentiles, men and women, boys and girls.

But it can't be teaching universal salvation because in that same context, it says that the unbelievers will perish in eternal divine judgment.

All this being said, it's important to recognize that during his earthly ministry, Jesus always dealt with individuals.

[10 : 12] And the Christian message reflects that. God does not love the masses. He loves every individual in the masses. He gave his only begotten son that whosoever, and with that we can put our name in that.

I can put my name in that. It's whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. The word believe has the little preposition in.

In. Which means to believe in Christ. That is, we put trust in him as the one who bore the penalty for our sin. It's a personal thing.

We must each believe that he died in our place and in our stead. You must believe that he died for you. The greatest application that comes from this verse is that God loves me.

God loves even me. Would you indulge me this morning? Would you say that with me? God loves even me.

[11:34] That's why this verse is one of the first ones that's translated into a language. Because at some moment in each of our lives comes the feeling deep down inside us of loneliness, of lostness.

It's a thought that can plague our heart and our soul. The thought that nobody really cares about us. That I matter to absolutely nobody.

Nobody cares about me. And people search all over for an answer for that. That lostness. They look to booze. They look to drugs. They look to sex. They look to success.

But all of those things wear off. They all fade away. And when they do, the lostness simply returns. It's only softened by the truth that God loves us.

Even so, God's love is to be admired not because the world is so big, includes so many lost people, but it's to be admired because the world is so bad.

[12:40] And that's the customary idea of the word cosmos, the Greek word here. The world is so wicked that John elsewhere in his writings forbids Christians to love it or have anything to do with it.

This brings forth the depth of the truth that we find in Romans 5.8. But God shows his love for us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The proof or the picture of Christ lifted up on the cross is also a picture of our need. It makes perfectly clear that I'm a sinner. Remember Jesus' answer to Nicodemus?

What must he do? Unless you are born again. And Pastor pointed out very clearly last week that what Jesus was doing was he was ripping apart the works of man and replacing them with the grace of God found in his love demonstrated on the cross.

If there had been any other possible way for us to have obtained heaven other than the cross then the cross is not something glorious it's something that is ridiculous.

[13:58] Why would God do that if we could have made it on our own? The fact that God provided the cross the fact that Jesus said he must suggests that there's nothing else no other options no other way.

You know I read something several years ago written by the Jehovah Witness and they were making the point that they thought it was terrible for people to have crosses because for you to have a cross would be just like carrying an image of a gun that your best friend was shot with. They missed the point. The point is not that my best friend died on the cross the point is that my sin was paid for on the cross.

It's a reminder that the cross is the picture of how much God loves me. So we turn to the extent that he gave his only son we've already addressed the fact that when it speaks of God giving his son it's not speaking like you give away your daughter at her wedding but rather it's pointing back to the lifting up of Jesus which speaks of the cross.

Some of the older translations you'll find it says the only begotten and in fact it's a term that we use often and with the understanding it can be helpful can also be very misleading because the idea is not begottenness but the idea is uniqueness and so some of the newer translations have the one and only and the point is that Jesus Christ is absolutely unique Jesus is unique the unique son of God there's no one like him there's no others there's no equals there's no one that's even close he's absolutely unique in more ways than I can possibly share this morning but I'm going to point out four and have you turn to the passages with me the first one is in John you're in John three it's in John one chapter chapter one verse one Christ was the unique in his eternality in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God verse 14 and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we've seen his glory glory is of the only son from the father full of grace and truth

[16:44] I still remember the first time I held my son in my arms but to say that I understand how God felt when he gave his son because I held my son is blasphemy you see there was never a time when Jesus Christ was not one of the famous and most significant errors heresies of all time that is continually followed by both Jehovah Witnesses and the Mormons is that there was a time before Christ was created and that's a lie he is the eternal son of God there was no time when he was not he's eternal second person of the trinity and so the wrath he endured on the cross was sufficient for

all all people can come to him why because he paid a price that was sufficient for all mankind
second one second Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21

Christ was absolutely unique in his sinlessness second Corinthians 5 21 he made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him to say that Christ well maybe he sinned a little bit you know not a lot but maybe just a little is to say that God has sinned which is both a lie and nonsensical but by his very nature and definition God can have no part in sin and Jesus being fully God is the absolute opposite of sin just as an aside since the passage said that we have become the righteousness of God in him if there was in any sense a flaw in that righteousness where are we same place we would have been before lost third Philippians chapter 2 verses 6 and 7 Christ was unique in his equality with the father who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of man Jesus Christ in his deity is not at all a creature made in the image of God as the rest of us are he is God incarnate and consequently there is a sense in which when God gave Jesus for us he gave himself for us fourth back to John chapter 1 and verse 18 Christ was unique in his revelation of the father

John 1 18 no one has ever seen God the only God who is at the father's right hand speaking of Jesus Christ he has made him known he was absolutely unique in his revelation of the father how do we know what the father's like how do we picture what the father is like Jesus said you've seen me you've seen the father we look to Jesus Christ in the words of the scriptures and we know what God is like and we know how much he loves us what that text what these texts are saying then is that God had only one son and because of his love for humanity he gave him to punishment and wrath in order to make eternal life available to the whole world there is not one answer for Christians and another for Muslims there is not one answer for Christians and another one for Buddhists there's not one answer for Christians and another one for Mormons or even for Roman Catholics there is one Jesus Christ and no one no one comes to the Father except by him there is no other name given under heaven by which men may be saved there's only one son given by the Father as a picture of his love and his uniqueness shows the extent of God's love for us from here we turn to the result of his love that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have ever have eternal life do you remember the purpose of the book of John pastor's been reminding us of it several times in fact

[22 : 15] I think one of the kids even told him what passage it was it was in John chapter 20 and verse 30 and 31 right Ethan Ethan was mouthing as I was saying it John chapter 20 verses 30 and 31 as Perry Harding used to say used to teach in our school taught at Madison long time member here very good teacher he used to say John always leaves his purpose at the back door in other words if you go to the end of the book of John and start backward you'll find the purpose that John has for his writing almost every time and it says there these things have been written that you might believe John had a purpose in telling us how much God loves us that you may believe the phrase believe or the word believe means more than simply recognizing and accepting the claims of the gospel oh yeah

I know all that stuff it means more than just attending a church on a regular basis since you were a child it means more than going forward it means more than being baptized the language of the scripture is it's really interesting it's not actually believes in the word is believes into think about that believes into so believe includes trust and commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior which results in receiving a new nature and that produces a change a change in heart a change in obedience to the Lord a change in our very person says we have eternal life

Jesus defined eternal life for us turn with me to John chapter 17 in his high priestly prayer the Lord's prayer if you will Jesus says this is eternal life that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent it is the life of the age to come and believers will more fully experience it in perfect unending glory and joy when we get to heaven but also since to have eternal life is to know God that is to have a personal individual relationship with him and then we experience all the blessings which flow from that personal relationship it points both to the present age and to the age to come and one of the things that we hope in that we trust in is not only not only will someday John and Kristen have a better picture of why all this stuff happened not only will pastor have a better understanding of the process that his dad has been through but more importantly today the personal relationship with Jesus Christ gives comfort gives encouragement where there is nothing worldly comfort there gives us a hope because life doesn't start when we get to heaven it starts the

moment we put our trust in Jesus Christ the idea of eternal refers not solely to the duration of existence but to the quality of life as contrasted with the futility that the rest of the world faces it's a deepening growing experience it's never exhausted in any measurable span of time that's why it takes all eternity to come to that full recognition full realization of what that relationship with Christ really means it'll take us all eternity to figure that out it introduces a totally new quality of life the believer becomes imperishable he's free from all condemnation he's absolutely approved by God the word perish is the opposite of salvation it's used of death as opposed to life it's used to destroy as opposed to preserve to loss as opposed to win or gain and it's used here implies that those without God are hopelessly confused in their purpose they're alienated from him in their affections and they're futile in their efforts positive belief in

[28 : 14] Christ is necessary all one has to do to perish is nothing to perish is to fail completely of fulfilling God's purpose and consequently to be excluded forever from his fellowship one final aspect especially significant today as I said eternal refers to both quality as well as quantity that God gave his own son to wrath as a result of his love means that God has already done the greatest deed and the natural argument from there is that if he loved us that much then the cares the concerns the troubles of this day or this coming week are not too much for him

Romans 8 32 pastor referred to it in his prayer earlier he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things where can I turn for the difficulties of this coming week where can I turn from the heartaches of this past week only one place that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him shall have eternal life the presentation of the good news offers people only two options to believe or to perish eternal life or eternal lostness eternal life which is accepted by believing is the gift of

God and it brings with us the fullest blessings that God can bestow on us unlike many today the Bible does not teach and I do not believe that to perish means to cease to exist means to experience torment utter failure futility and loss of everything that makes existence worthwhile Jesus said in John 10 10 I come that they may have life and have it abundantly John 3 16 it's a picture of my sin picture of God's love image in the cross the extent of God's love in that provision of a unique son for the purpose of life rather than ruin much more than a

Christian slogan much more than a Christian grenade to be thrown at unbelievers rather it is the very truth of the truth of God it's the very foundation of the gospel it's the thing that encourages and helps us through not only the challenges but provides us with everlasting life for those of us who know God who love him it makes Romans 8 32 answer the needs that we have for the non-believer it provides a clear explanation of what God's love did for them and what he expects of them let's pray without anyone looking around with all of our eyes closed if you're here this morning and you do not know

Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior you've not come to that personal relationship with him have not come to the place of understanding fully that God so loved you that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him has eternal life if you've not come to that place before I would encourage you to come before God to say I understand I believe that I'm a sinner and the only possible option for me was the provision of the cross and today I accept the truth of Jesus Christ the eternal son of the father that all my sins may be cared for may be paid for and that I may receive today is the day that

[33 : 45] I believe you do not need to raise your hand God does not see a raised hand any more than he sees a raised heart but in a little while I'm going to give an invitation for you to come forward and if you've done that today it would be appropriate and an encouragement to us that you would acknowledge that it will also put you on record that something has changed something has taken place maybe today you're here and you know the truths of Christ you've accepted them you've prayed the prayer you've been baptized maybe you've even been a church member but the truth is that you don't really act much like

God loves you if that's the case I pray that you would cry out to God that you would ask him to melt your heart of stone to give you a heart of flesh when I give the invitation if you would like prayer for that or you would simply like to say I am today rededicating my life to Christ it will be an opportunity for you to do that our father we thank you so much that you loved us and that you love us still the fact that you loved us and gave your son not simply to give him to serve us but rather you gave him to die for us gracious God we thank you for your gift of love we accept it with joyful hearts

Lord help us this week to often remember the words Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so in Christ's name we pray Amen