

For God so loved the world

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[0 : 00] Thank you Jenny. Good morning. Good morning. Lovely to see you this morning. Do please keep your Bibles open.

! As I've just been introduced, I've been training to be a vicar, training at Ridley Hall in Cambridge. I did used to be a history teacher. It's great isn't it that a former history teacher is encouraging you to keep your Bibles open on page 1066.

If you want to know about the history of 1066, do ask me later on. But more importantly, let's look at these words of John together. It'll be really helpful, so do please keep that open.

As a former history teacher, it will be of little surprise to you that I love the program, Who Do You Think You Are? Have you seen it? Some famous person finds out their family history by going on a journey.

I'd love to do it myself. They look in books and find articles and family history and discover grandparents and great-grandparents and great-great-aunts and uncles and beyond.

[1 : 10] And at the end, they reflect and they see that their character has been shaped by what has gone before. So, Who Do You Think I Am? takes a different meaning.

Who you think you are is often different at the end of the program from the start. Who do you think God is? Here I am, my first time with you today, with this most famous verse, John 3, 16.

Please look down with me. 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.

For God so loved the world. It's a wonderfully encouraging verse. Perhaps the most memorised, most cherished verse in the Bible. It's really well known.

Who do you think God is? This morning, we are going to look back in history. We're going to consider us now. And my prayer is that we'll see hope.

[2 : 14] Hope in the future because of who God is. But things are not all what we might think. You may have this verse in mind when you land on the understanding that God is love.

God is love. He is so loving. And much has happened in recent years to accentuate this God of love. We've developed a view that God is love.

In today's world, sin and condemnation, they've been wiped from our cultural sensitivities. Leaving us to be reliant on God, who is seen to be love in a way which allows us really to do as we please. God is love seems to me we can live how we would like. To read as many self-help books as we can. To hope in food and weird things, as the video said.

To be positive about life. Looking forward, always on the front foot. We have a God of love. We struggle with a God of wrath. And there are parts of the talk this morning that I really don't want to say.

[3 : 23] Look at verse 18. It talks of a God who condemns. We struggle with this. Verse 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.

The God of love of recent times is different from the view they had in the 18th century. It's very different from the God who during the Great Awakening was described by Jonathan Edwards as an angry God.

His sermon famously preached was entitled, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. An exposition of Deuteronomy 32. With a focus on the perilous position of those who do not put their trust in Jesus.

Those who are lost. Those without Christ dangle over the flames of hell. They are like a spider over a flame, he said. His wrath towards you burns like fire, he said.

[4 : 29] So, a God of love or a God of anger? Who do we think God is? We will see that God's love is much deeper than a sentimental grandfather.

We will see that God's wrath is much more than a cosmic bully who has sent his son to die. Because the Bible tells us differently. The Bible sees love and wrath together.

He is both love and anger together. This might not be what we think. So, this morning I'm going to take these verses we have as we continue in John's Gospel.

And show three aspects from this passage which is not what we might think. And my hope is that we'll reach a conclusion that God's love is deeper than we might think.

So, firstly, we might not think that God is love and wrath together as one. We might tend to think of God who is love but then gets angry.

[5 : 30] Where God looks like anger. You know the red face cartoon from inside out. But God's anger is not like that. It's not irrational. Whenever I lose patience and get angry, a few minutes later I'm feeling really guilty.

I feel ashamed. Shamed at losing my temper. Demonstrating for a moment I'm out of control. It feels shameful. It is shameful. We cannot deal with an angry God because we think his anger is like our anger.

But it's not like that. Our view of God is absolutely crucial. We can get it wrong. Two weeks ago we were urged not to think of a dashboard Jesus.

You have to understand who God is. Here's who God is. God is a God of standards. A God of boundaries.

Let me explain. There is a problem in our society. We have as society positioned ourselves as one which exalts individuals. Our world has become self-centred.

[6 : 34] Get the best grades you can. Get the best jobs you can. Look after number one. Do it for me. Gone are the days when you said good morning to somebody else in your community.

You may not even know your next door neighbour very well. Certainly no one can tell you what is right and what is wrong. There are no such things that are right. The one condition in society is the belief that everyone is wrong.

Right for me but not right for everyone else. Particularly when it comes to religion. In history people have got it wrong. There is no absolute morality.

No right course of action. Do what is right for you. No moral absolutes or standards. And that leaves society with a problem doesn't it? There's a problem that our society has now.

If we've removed standards and yet we're asking for good behaviour, where does that leave us? Society seems to cry out for moral standards. I found myself saying, well it's not like in my day.

[7 : 36] I don't know if you've said that. Looking at the young generation acting in a way that seems incomprehensible to us. We ask for our values back. But when asked what values, we shudder at the thought of condemnation.

But at the same time ask for others to be generous, to be kind, respectful. We say universal truths are impossible and demand that people be moral. On what basis?

What values are we basing the values that we want? Do you see that? In C.S. Lewis's words, we remove the organ but demand the function. We remove truth but want to uphold values.

Christianity talks about a God who has values. This means that we understand a God of wrath. It is not a God who is short-tempered. It is a God who loves truth and therefore loves us by keeping true to his standards.

You know, if I ask my children to do something, it's because it's good for them. Brush your teeth, put your coat on, don't be late. So if they don't do it, it's because it's bad for them. And once my command is there, there's a standard.

[8 : 49] They can obey or they can choose not to obey. It puts me and my children in a place of opposition until they do what I've told them to do. And we are in a place of opposition to God.

Look at verse 36. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever disobeys the Son will not see life. They are in opposition to God.

They must endure God's wrath. Who do you think you are? It looks back in history. It helps the individual to see who they are by looking at generations earlier.

The more information they have, the more sense they make of who they are. And if we look back in the Bible, we will see people since the fall in Genesis 3 who are disobedient to God.

Who live in a place of opposition to him. Perhaps you're here this morning and think God is love. I can't be in opposition to him. God so loved the world.

[9 : 51] Well, let's look at the world then. This is my second point. The world, it's not what we think. We need to examine the world. This will help us to know the depth of his love.

And we need the right view of the world. Verse 16. For God so loved the world. The world in verse 16 is not just the chosen people of God, the Israelites.

This world is a reference to all humanity. The world is the created order. And where humanity is in relation to God has enormous implications for our understanding of love.

Some people think that the world here in verse 16 is divided. Divided into two groups, maybe.

Those who believe and those who do not. But the world John is talking about has no believers at all. This world has everyone in the same position. What is this position? Who do we think we are? I'll tell you who I am. I'm the driver on the motorway who gets it right.

[10 : 53] All the time. There are people in the slow lane. They go too slow. There are people in the fast lane. They go too fast. And I've got it just right. I am metaphorically the right driver.

It is though I'm so neutral. I don't need saving. God is love so it's all okay. It's all fine. But the Bible tells us the world is not in this neutral position.

John here looks at the world differently. John tells us in verse 17. If you have a look at verse 17. It tells us that we need saving. There is a marker, a standard. And all have fallen short.

Romans 3 verse 23 tells us all have fallen short of the glory of God. Every single one. And we are perishing. Can you see that in verse 16?

When John tells us that God loves the world. It tells us about his character. We see his love more deeply. Not because the world is so big.

[11 : 54] But because the world is so bad. It's perishing and it needs rescuing. If we really look at the world. If we really look at the world. If we really look at ourselves.

We will see that all is not well. The world is not the world of beautiful adverts and Instagram profiles. The world is self-centered. And in hostility to God. We are created order in rebellion against its maker.

The world is so wicked. The world is so wicked. That John elsewhere forbids Christians to love it. Or anything in it. Verse 17 tells us therefore. We need rescuing. It's not what we think.

But once we see it. We can see his love more deeply. We can see his wrath more beautifully.

Because it shows how deep his love is. Miroslav Volf.

A Croatian theologian. Writes in a way that helps us to shake this view of a sentimental God. He said this.

[12 : 56] I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath? God is love. And God loves every person and every creature. That's exactly why God is wrathful against some of them.

My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath. Was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia. The region from which I came. According to some estimates. 200,000 people were killed.

And over 3 million were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed. My people shelled day in and day out. Some of them brutalized beyond imagination.

And I could not imagine God not being angry. Wasn't God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's anger.

I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't angry at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't angry in spite of being love. God is angry because God is love.

[13 : 57] God is angry with the world. God is angry with the world. You see. In our hearts we know the world is not right. In our hearts we know we're not that perfect driver on the motorway. Who can do no wrong.

In our hearts we know that we need a God who is angry with the world. For love to be truly loved. For justice. In our hearts we know we need saving. We're perishing. Of course it's easier to downplay it altogether.

To be concerned more for our friendship than for our friends. But God's wrath remains on those who do not turn to Christ. This is certainly a challenge isn't it? A challenge this morning.

To be reminded of the position we're in. It makes God's love all the more deeper. Do we know this for ourselves enough to warn others? Because it's what we believe for others I think.

That's what we really believe. Do we warn the speeding car knowing that there's fog up ahead? Now you may be asking the question, why then, why is not everybody convinced by this? [14:59] If we're in such a desperate position, then why does not everyone respond and believe in Jesus? Well look with me at verse 19. It says a light has come into the world.

And people love darkness rather than light. There is a light and we don't want to come into the light. Everyone who does evil hates the light.

And will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. Why does not everyone believe? Well, it's for fear of being exposed. It's true, isn't it?

If I showed you my house in the middle of the day where I hoovered and prepared and got myself ready for you, I could show you in a good light. But if I was to show you all I think and I do, if I was to see all you think and do, we'd be exposed.

We prefer darkness. Now this isn't a case of light versus darkness. They're not opposed to each other. We've established that darkness is already reigning. All have sinned.

[16:01] And the wages of sin are death. The light is life. The light is life. Jesus came as the light. The light is a person. And this forces a choice on every one of us.

We have to open up our lives and come to the light. For God to see us as we are. This means knowing our position, knowing God's wrath and love are wrapped together in judgment, knowing we need saving.

We need to see that. Miroslav Volf saw that. But God does not offer condemnation. He offers rescue. And that rescue comes in the form of a gift.

So this is my final point. Not what we think a gift is. We've had God's love is not what we think it is. His world is not what we think it is. Finally, his gift is not what we think it is.

When we think of a gift, I think we think of giving something because we like that person. I often think a gift is a good demonstration of how much someone likes me. Certainly as a teacher, my favorite gift was a written note.

[17:07] It meant something. It was thoughtful. It was really considerate. It had value. It seemed genuinely grateful. Maybe you like to give gifts. But I think we'd all agree that we generally give gifts to those we like, to our family or those we wish to thank.

Or even we would like to win favor with. But would we give the best gift to our enemy? God gave his best to the worst.

That is the extent of his love. He gave his son. His one and only son. So that everyone who believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.

We've established that our position before God is in opposition to him. God is a God of standards. And we have not met those standards. And yet, God loves the world.

He has not come to condemn it, but to save it. God loves the world so much that he gave his one and only son. We're blessed as a family with two sons and a daughter, Ella.

[18:16] And I can't imagine giving them up for anyone, she'll be relieved to hear. God gave his one and only son for a world that hated him. This extraordinary love.

This is a rescue mission propelled by love. The most costly love imaginable. To give the son is to give everything. Jesus is everything to his father.

The father is the father because he has his son. God giving his son means God giving his very self. He's giving all that he has and all that he is.

Look down at verse 35 with me. The father loves the son and has placed everything in his hands. To give the son is to give everything.

And who does God give the very best to? The world has failed to receive Jesus. At the start of John 1, it tells us that he was in the world, but the world did not receive him.

[19:20] Yet it is the world that the father loves. He loves the world before the resurrection and after. This gift given to the world, the gift of his son, remains the only hope for the world.

It's been said that an atheist thinks nothing of this love. That God didn't give his son so much as to lend him for three days. This is miles from the truth.

God is an eternally generous father. And the son has always been the personal gift, who became flesh for all time. Jesus is the light for us now.

He has been given to us unconditionally, irreversibly, not because what we are like, but because of what he is like. The deepest love of God can only be understood if you understand the cross.

If you only see an angry God who only says no, well then you are condemned. You don't understand the depth of his love. If you only know a loving God who never says no, then you are indulged.

[20 : 24] You don't understand the depth of his love. On the cross, the wrath of God and the love of God are satisfied. God gave us his son.

He is the substitute for us. God's wrath is satisfied because on the cross the wrath is poured out. And at the same time, love is satisfied.

Because if we believe in him, our relationship with God is restored. Because all has been paid for. We are no longer set in opposition. How do we respond to this?

What's our response? Well, all we need to do is believe. If you look back to verse 14. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him shall have eternal life.

Just look up. Just look up to the cross and believe. This has been the message throughout John for us. Believe. What counts is not comparing ourselves to others as we walk out of here and think, oh, I'm better or I'm worse.

[21 : 34] I'm higher or I'm lower. I'm faster or I'm slower. That was a problem for Nicodemus, a man of stature in society, in the context in which this passage takes place. What counts is simply following Jesus.

He is the one who comes from above and is above all. Believe in him. So come into the light, not because you're superior, but so that it may be seen that what has been done has been done through God.

All that has been done on the cross has been done through God in his power, in his strength, in union with him. For this there is no shame. Come into the light.

Whether you're hearing this for the first time or whether you've heard this a thousand times, know this. There is no condemnation. Whoever believes in him is not condemned. There's no condemnation.

I hope you get that. The more we sin, the more we're pulled closer to God. You don't run away. You don't stay in the darkness. There's no condemnation. You don't run away.

[22 : 44] If you sin and make excuses, well, I'm normally better than everyone else or I've had a bad day, you misunderstand the cross. You don't see the need for rescue. And God leaves no doubt.

If we stay in the dark where we're comfortable, you will not see life. Who do you think God is? God is love and wrath together, who gives us life.

To whoever believes in him, there is no condemnation because of the cross. The gift given to us. An old hymn says this, His love has no limit.

His grace has no measure. His power no boundary known unto men. For out of his infinite riches in Jesus, he giveth and giveth and giveth again.

So my encouragement this morning is come to Jesus. Believe in him. You shall have eternal life. Not in the future, but now. Jesus is the life. It's a life that begins now and stretches into the future.

[23 : 54] So believe in him. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your son.

Thank you that you loved us so much that despite our disobedience, your love and wrath was poured out for us on the cross. Help us to believe.

Help us this morning to look up and believe in you. Amen. Amen.