

For God So Loved the World

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to John chapter 3, John chapter 3, and if we could read it, we'll read from verse 14.

We looked at last time the section, verses chapter 3, 1 to 15, but we'll read from verse 14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

God's great love for this world. I'm sure there's been many times, like I have, you've stood outside and you've looked around, particularly on a nice day.

And sometimes you can almost feel overwhelmed with the marvel, with the beauty, with the grandeur of the world that we're living in.

[1 : 23] You look at the creation and it brings your mind to think of the awesome might and the wisdom of God, of how he has made everything beautiful, how he has made everything right.

And you look around and you sometimes think, this really is quite extraordinary, it is quite marvelous. And yet, despite all that, it is still a world that is flawed and a world that is broken. It's not just you and me that's flawed and broken, but even the very creation, this world, so often that we look at and that we admire.

And the Bible tells us that when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, that that sin where they disobeyed God and they brought down God's curse upon them, that that curse didn't just affect themselves, it affected the whole creation.

So that the order that God had made, the perfect order, where this world was working and going to be working perfectly for us, was now in a sense going to be working in opposition to us.

[2 : 45] That's why we have weeds and thorns and the Lord said that. It's going to be part of your struggle. It's by the sweat of your brow that you are going to earn your living.

This is where pain came in. The pain of childbirth. The Lord said that to Eve that it would be in pain that she would bring forth children.

So that when sin entered into this world, it affected, it touched, it broke and destroyed the beautiful order that existed before the fall.

We don't understand just what it was like before the fall. But the world that we live in is post-fall.

And while it's beautiful and wonderful in many ways, everything has been affected.

That's why the creation, we're told in Romans, for instance, when Paul is writing there, it's like he's personifying creation.

[3 : 52] He's making it like a passion. And he's showing how the very creation is groaning. And the word that he uses, this word futility, is the same word that you have in Ecclesiastes that Solomon writes about of vanity, that everything is vanity.

And that's the sense that we have here, that the creation, that there's a groaning in the same way as you and I groan. And if you're a Christian today, one of the things that you groan about is your sin and your longing for the day when you'll be delivered from it.

And the Bible holds out for us the great hope, the great hope that's in our heart of better things, of better days, of a new world. In fact, we're told that this world as we know it is going to be burnt up, that the elements will burn with a fervent heat.

We know that fire doesn't just destroy, fire purifies. That's what you do with silver and gold, you put it into the fire to remove the dross, as it were, to get the pure gold out of it.

And that's in a sense, I don't understand, I'm not fully aware, but what I do know is that we're told that there will be new heavens and a new earth wherein will dwell righteousness.

[5 : 17] And where God's people will dwell. A world where everything will be perfect. The order will be restored. It'll be better than ever.

Well, I don't know, can you better perfection? But the wonderful thing is that that's what's ahead of us. At the moment, you and I long for deliverance.

But even the creation longs for deliverance. That's how Paul is writing in Romans. That the whole creation is groaning. And we see that.

We see the impact, the effect, the tsunamis, the earthquakes, the volcanoes. We see it's a world, it's a creation that's in upheaval. And so, you say to yourself, how is all this going to be restored? The creation? You? Me? How? Well, this is what this verse is all about. This verse, which is at the very center, as it were, of God's great redemptive purposes.

[6 : 23] Of where God is restoring and renewing is this great verse. Probably the verse, one of the best, I would say probably the best known verse in the Bible. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son or begotten son.

And so, the way in which we receive this life is in and through God's Son, Jesus Christ.

There is no other way. The Bible makes it very clear. Supposing there was no other verse given to us by God. There is more than enough in this verse for us to understand, for us to look to Jesus, for us to understand what is required for salvation, and for us to understand what salvation ultimately brings.

It's all tied up in this magnificent little verse here in John 3, 16. And so, we find that in this verse, which is, as we say, so full of God's love and God's grace, we see something of the nature of God's love.

For God so loved the world. Now, remember we saw before how Moses had lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, and Jesus was saying in the same way as Moses lifted up that serpent in the wilderness, and whoever was bitten by the snake, that these deadly snakes, all they had to do, they had to look to the snake, that brazen, that snake of brass that Moses had lifted up.

[8 : 05] Of course, this was pointing to Jesus. And Jesus is saying, that's what it was all about.

These lessons in the wilderness, they were pictures, they were symbols of what was to happen to me.

And just as those in the camp who were bitten by the snake, they had a choice. They didn't have to look. Some of them might have said, oh, what's the point?

And look at a snake. There's no point in doing that. I'm going to a doctor. I'm going to try and cut this. Even this is going to be drastic surgery, but I'm going to get a knife, and I'm going to try and get that poison out.

No, that wouldn't work. There was only one way to be cured, and that was to look at this serpent of brass that Moses had lifted up.

That was so God's way, God's appointed way. So the people in the wilderness had the choice of either believing what God said, looking and being healed, or dying.

[9 : 04] And many died. And it's the same today. We have this option. The choice of either accepting and believing what God has said, or else ignoring it.

And we'll come to look at that just in a moment. But here we see the first thing that really hits us is God's great love. Now, we use the word love in many ways in our daily living.

We often use the word love with regard to our senses, about things that we love, things that we love to look at. Maybe you're somebody who's quite artistic in your thinking, and you love to look at a sunset or a sunrise, and straight away you're imagining painting that or photographing it.

There are many things you love, maybe you love to hear, things even sometimes people love to hear the waves lapping by the shore. We often use the word love with regard to the senses of smell. You often hear people when grass has just been cut, that smell of fresh grass. A lot of people say, I love the smell of freshly cut grass. Again, with regard to our taste buds.

[10 : 22] Love the taste of strawberries and cream. We use this expression, I love, with regard to our senses. But God's love is something that goes far beyond that.

Now, again, with regard to our love, we tend to use loving with regard to things that appeal to us, things that we like, things that we're drawn to.

I love with regard to people. I love with regard to things. But there are always things that are attractive. And if you said to somebody, oh, see that tramp over there, that disheveled, broken tramp, that every time I go near, he curses me and he swears at me and he spits at me and he throws stones whenever I go near.

But I love him. People would say, oh, wow. That's quite amazing. Well, you know, that's really what God has done.

Because we're like that tramp. We're broken. We're disheveled. We might not think it looking at ourselves, but that's how we are inside. That's how God sees us. Broken, disheveled.

[11 : 34] And as we are without him, we're enemies. We don't want him. We keep pushing him away. And yet God is saying, for God so loved.

God loved so much that he gave his only son. It really is quite extraordinary. And he didn't just give his son into this world.

He gave his son to die. And that really is the most extraordinary thing. And whenever we think about death and all that it brings, and I don't want to in any way labor the point or hurt people, but those who know the fearful agony of losing a child, the pain that's involved in that, a pain that will never go away.

And yet God is saying, I have given. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. It really is the most extraordinary statement declaring God's love to you and to me.

There couldn't be a greater declaration of love than that. Love isn't measured by what we say. You know, you can say things and it's cheap. And you can say to people, I love you.

[13 : 03] And yet your mouth and your actions may be going in opposite directions. You can say to someone, I love you, but your actions are going in the very opposite direction. Which are almost indicating that your words don't measure up with your actions.

Love speaks by what it does, not by what it says. Yes, of course, love does speak also by what it says.

But its greatest demonstration is by what it does. And that's what God's love is. It's what it's done. He couldn't do more.

And here he takes his only son. And he says to his only son, I'm going to send you into this world. And an amazing thing is going to happen.

You are going to be, yes, the one person, but there's going to be two natures. There's the divine, but you're going to take a human nature. And you're going to grow up just, you're going to be born into this world and grow up taking just the same as all, the humanity.

[14 : 16] But the thing is this, although you are going to be beautiful and sinless and perfect, and you're going to be living in total dependence of me through the fullness of the Holy Spirit which will be in your heart, yet you're going to be hated.

Everywhere you go, people are going to mock you. People are going to put vicious stories around about you. You're going to be the subject of gossip that's completely untrue.

You're going to have to live with that weight around your neck. Imagine what that is like. That stories are circulating about you all the time and there's not a grain of truth in it.

And people are believing it. Everywhere Jesus went, that's how it was for them. They were saying, they were spreading lies and rumors about him that were completely untrue.

And right throughout his ministry, he had to live with that. And then, those who are supposed to give you the greatest support, the religious leaders, they're going to hate you because they're going to be filled with envy against you.

[15 : 33] We know that, that it was because of envy they delivered him up. But those who ought to give you the greatest support, they're going to be your greatest enemies. They're going to hate you.

And even your closest friends that you have, they're all going to forsake you. Some will deny you. You will see sin as it really is in all its ugliness.

And it will cut like a knife into your heart every single day. It's no wonder Jesus was termed a man of sorrows. Because he saw sin for all that it is, in all its ugliness.

You see, it's different for us because we side with sin. Because we're sinners, we're drawn to sin. And often we don't see the ugliness of it.

And the viciousness of it. And the corruption of it. And the destructiveness of it. But Jesus saw that all the time. And there's going like a knife into his heart. And the Father says to him, but there's going to be more than that.

[16 : 44] At the end of your public ministry, you're going to be taken. And you're going to be dealt with in the most inhumane way. You're going to be so beaten that it's nearly going to kill you.

But then you're going to be hung up on high. Crucified in the worst conceivable way possible.

Dying, as they say, a thousand deaths. But the worst of all is, I'm going to abandon you.

And forsake you. And I'm going to pour out my wrath upon you. In the place of sinners.

And Jesus says, to do your will, I take delight. And that really is quite extraordinary. Because that's what Jesus did.

He came into this world knowing full well what he was going to do, whatever he stepped involved.

And there was no, you see, this is the amazing thing.

[17 : 44] There was no letting up of the commitment and the faithfulness of the father or the son at any point along the way. If you knew that a loved one was going to die on a particular date, you would do everything in your power to try and prevent that happening.

You would pull out every stop. As the days would be approaching, you would be trying to change circumstances. But the father, at no point, even though he knew the hour was coming, he was giving his son up all the time.

Even although the son knew that the agonies were approaching, it tells us he set his face to go to Jerusalem. He wasn't going to turn aside.

The only moment we see him being overwhelmed with what was ahead was when he was in Gethsemane. And he said at that moment, Oh, father, if it be possible, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Then he says, not as I will, but as you will. Remember how an angel came and strengthened him.

So we see here this amazing commitment from father and from son.

[19 : 06] This is God's great love. God so loved the world that he gave. He gave in the past and he's still giving in the present.

Today, the offer, this offer is as real and as powerful and as meaningful as ever it was. Imagine if we were talking in the past. Yes?

The sacrifice of Christ took place in the past. But the efficacy, the reality of it, the power of it is as real today as ever it was. But imagine how awful it would be if we were only talking historically about an offer that was there in the past but that it was no longer extended to us today.

We'd be here in despair. But no, it's as fresh and it's as new and it's as real today as ever it was.

God so loved the world that he gave and he's giving today the impact, the power, the efficacy of the saving work of Jesus for you today.

Isn't that amazing? But you see, along with all that it tells us for God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

[20 : 22] But it shows us that there are qualifications. It's not for everyone. Yes, the scope, the scope, the offer is to everyone.

The offer is to everyone. But we see here that only those who will receive the benefit of it are those who believe. Right?

The offer is for everyone. But will everyone take it? Will they? Will you take it? Is it possible that there are people here today who are saying no?

Or, I don't think anybody in here today would say no, no way. I would say there might be people in here today who would say later on. You intend to.

And how do we get the benefit of this salvation? Well, we're told very simply it's by believing.

Whoever believes.

[21 : 28] There's nothing we can do. We can't do the doing. If we could, there would be no need for God to send a son. It's because we're totally incapable of doing anything.

There's nothing we can bring, nothing we can achieve that will say to God, right, wipe the slate clean, accept me. You say, no, I can't. Oh, your sin is disqualifying you from my accepting you.

The only way is by accepting what Jesus has done for us. It's believing. And will you today believe in Jesus, in his passion, who he is, in his work, what he has done?

It's for you. So please, nobody here turn away and say, oh, no, I cannot think of a greater insult to the living and through God.

And when we've just considered what the Father and the Son have done, it's to turn away and say, oh, no, thanks. That is the greatest insult to God's love.

[22 : 42] And you see, the outcome is very simple. It's tragic, but it's very simple. Not everybody will, as we say, not everybody is going to derive the benefit of this salvation because there are people who won't believe.

There are people who don't want to believe. And that means very simply and very tragically, it says that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

So logic will tell us very simply that if we don't believe, we'll perish. All a person has to do in order to perish, in order to be lost, is just to carry on, to carry on as they always did.

Just saying, it's all right. But the thing is, it's not all right. And God has revealed this to us. It's not all right. And it's because of my love that I've sent my son.

I want to save. Well, will you today turn to the Lord and ask him to help you? See, God, this is one of the wonderful things here.

[23 : 57] See verse 17, for God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world. That's not why Jesus came to condemn the world. Why? Because the world is already condemned.

You and I were already condemned. The whole creation is condemned. Everything is condemned. It's because, because it's condemned, that God sent his son into the world to deliver from that condemnation.

And today he's asking you that you would believe. Because as we said, the alternative is to perish. Because you see, what we receive, whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

It's to have this life forever. And you know, it's an amazing thing when you come to faith in Jesus Christ. There's an awareness within your heart that things are right between you and God.

And this is part of what the Holy Spirit does. He convinces you that you and God are one together. It's a wonderful thing.

[25 : 18] And you know, it takes away so much of the pressure and burden that lie in people's hearts. But this is the beginning of eternal life.

And you know it's true. You know where you're going. There's a glow in your heart that tells you, I am one day when I leave this world, I'm going home to be with my Father in heaven.

because of what Jesus has done for me. And you know that changes everything about how we live in this world. And we know that this life, it's eternal life, it's forever.

But you know the sad thing is, the solemn thing is the perishing, the lostness is also forever. It's forever and ever. And that is why it is so important that people hear this gospel.

gospel. Now I know all of you in here know this verse. God, so everybody, I'm sure I don't believe there's anybody in here who couldn't, or I'd be very surprised who couldn't quote John 3, 16.

[26 : 29] But you know you can know the words inside out. You might even be able, if you're that way inclined, where you can sometimes play with words, to be able to actually quote it backwards.

Quote it forwards in a correct way, even backwards. Your ability might be such. You might have great knowledge and great understanding and great learning, but you've never actually come to believe.

As Paul said to the jailer, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. saved. And that's exactly what this is saying.

Believe. God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whosoever, couldn't be larger, whoever.

I love that. You might be here today and say, oh, if you knew what I did, if you knew who I really am, that doesn't matter. God doesn't put, there are no sort of saying, whoever, with a few exceptions.

[27 : 39] There are no exceptions. Whoever, can't get bigger than that, can't get wider than that, larger than that. It's like from east to west. There's no end to it.

Whoever, that's for you today. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Let us pray.

O gracious God, we pray that this gospel, this wonderful gospel, may indeed burn into our hearts.

We pray that none of us will go away from here today, refusing to believe and to accept and to receive Jesus as Lord, as King of our life. O Lord, help us to trust in you.

Help us to put all our trust in you. And we pray then to be with us, to guide us and to keep us and take us to our home safely. Wash away from us our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen.