

For God So Loved the World

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[0 : 00] Well now with a view to God's blessing if you would turn back with me to that portion of scripture which we read together in the gospel according to John and chapter 3. Most if not all of us. Many of us from our youth. It's been called the golden verse. It was Luther who said that in this verse we have the Bible in miniature.

You have as it were the whole story from Genesis to Revelation told us concisely in a few words. Matthew Henry said here is gospel indeed. Here is all in a little. All that we need to know. All that we need to understand as it were.

Condensed into this one verse. And so I want us to consider it together and to consider particularly the love of which it speaks. And I want to do that under I think five headings. And the first is the source of this love.

For God so loved the world. And it goes on to say that that he gave his son. So the God spoken of here isn't God the son. It is God the father. The father so loved the world.

And the source of the love of the gospel is the love of the father. And it's important that we grasp that and that we understand it. That when the son came into the world and he loved his people and he gave himself for them.

[1 : 44] But when he came into the world he didn't come into the world to change the mind or to change the heart of an angry and of a hateful father. And you sometimes hear the gospel presented in that kind of way.

But that's not what happened. It was that the father in his own love sent the son into the world. And if we want to understand the gospel and if we want to understand the Bible.

Then we have to understand that. That the father's love is central to the story. It is central to our salvation. It is central to the gospel.

Elsewhere in the first epistle of John we read that God, not just that God loves but that God is love. So he doesn't just show love but love is something that he is.

That defines him. That characterizes his very being. God is love. And you know people and I know people and they are lovely people in the most literal sense.

[2 : 47] They are lovely. They are loving. But I don't think that we could say about any man or any woman, any boy or any girl that they are love.

You see for us, for fallen sinners like us, love is always a verb. It is always something that we do rather than something that we are.

It is always a verb. It is always something that we do. But it is always also something in which we fall short. With us it is always imperfect. But God is love.

It is who he is. And God's love is perfect. And God's love is pure. Our love, as lovely as it may be and as good as it may be, and it may rise to wonderful heights.

And yet, our love is always infected, isn't it? It is always infected with things like impatience and with bad motivations. With selfishness and with fickleness.

[3 : 52] God's love isn't like that. It is infected by nothing which isn't in itself consistent with love. It is a love which is patient. It is a love which in many respects is selfless.

Yes, it seeks its own glory. But it manifests itself in giving. It's not fickle. It doesn't change. And you know how important it is for us to understand that.

Our concept of love in our day is flawed, isn't it? Because you hear about love in many different places. You hear about it in the books that you read, in the conversations that you have, in the television that you watch.

And time and again, the concept of love is flawed, isn't it? Today, more and more, you hear of couples falling out of love. Married couples who have committed to one another and not loving each

other anymore.

So often today, love is fickle. Love changes. Love doesn't have that commitment. God's love isn't like that. God doesn't fall out of love.

[4 : 59] His love isn't changing. His love is a love that is unchanging. It is a love that is constant, that is relentless. And it is a love that is eternal.

It didn't have a beginning. And it won't have an end. As God is, as the psalmist tells us, from everlasting to everlasting, then his love is from everlasting to everlasting.

He loved his people from before the foundation of the world, and he continues to love them to all eternity. So when we consider the source of the love of the gospel, we find it in the Father, whose love is perfect, whose love is infinite, whose love is unchanging.

But what about the object of this love? We read that, for God so loved the world, literally the cosmos.

And I suppose today we use that word world in many different ways, and they did also in the New Testament. Even in John himself, he uses that word in various ways.

[6 : 04] So the word world, and we would maybe use it often like this ourselves, it can refer to the material universe. You know, to the land and to the sea and to the plants and to the animals and so on.

Now clearly, that's not what's spoken of here. We're told that whosoever believes, talking about people believing. So the world has to, in some way or other, refer not to inanimate objects or even to plants and animals, but to people.

Now, some will say that this word world refers to everybody, whoever was and is and will be in this world.

So God loves every single person. And of course, there is a sense in which God does love every single person. He calls us even not just to love our neighbors, but to love our enemies.

And God wouldn't do anything that, he wouldn't call us to do anything that he doesn't do himself.

And we see that, of course, manifested in Jesus Christ. It's also the case that God causes the rains to fall and the sun to shine, not just on the righteous, but on the unrighteous as well.

[7 : 12] That every good and perfect gift, whether it comes down to friend or to foe, comes from the Father of lights, comes down from heaven. And yet, although the word can be used in that way, saving love is a love which discriminates, isn't it?

Not everybody is saved. Not everybody is saved. Many are lost. And God didn't send his son to die and to suffer in the place of those who would end up being lost.

His love was so great that he didn't just send the son to die for sinners, to die for his church, but he also sent the Holy Spirit to come and indwell his church and to indwell his people and to change them and to work faith and repentance and hope in their hearts and to make them his own.

He didn't just give his son, he gave his Holy Spirit. So we cannot say that God gave his son to die for every single person, even if they end up being lost and going to hell.

The key to understanding this word and the way it is used is to understand the way that John uses it elsewhere. And actually, across John's writings, across the gospel and his three epistles, he uses this word world 79 times, 79 times.

[8 : 37] And he doesn't tend to use it universally for all people. Sometimes he uses it for all peoples, all nations and all people groups, as opposed to just Jews. But mostly, he uses it for that world which lies in wickedness.

The world that hated Jesus Christ and that crucified him. If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you, Jesus says.

That world, the present evil world, marvel not if the world hate you. And so it's speaking of the world which is characterized by unbelief, characterized by enmity to God himself.

And that, most commentators agree today, is the best fit here. That when we read this word world, God so loved the world, it's not being used quantitatively, but qualitatively.

Not of the quantity of the people that God loves, but of the quality of the people that he loves, or the lack thereof. It is used intensively, rather than extensively.

[9 : 50] So, B.B. Warfield, who was a professor in Princeton at the beginning of the last century, he said that he uses this word world not to suggest that the world is so big that it takes a great deal of love to embrace it all, but rather that the world is so big that it takes a great kind of love to love it at all.

Not that his love is so broad that it covers every single person, and that that is his saving love, but that it is so deep that it can cover even the worst of people. And friends, that is the wonder of God's love.

That it is a love which doesn't just love those who are lovable. As the theologians would say, it's not just a love of complacency. He loved his son with a love of complacency, because his son deserved to be loved.

But it isn't just a love of complacency that he has. He loves sinners. He loves this present evil world. Those who are rebellious. Those who are unlovely.

Those who by nature are his enemies, and who are condemned because of their sin. You know, there is nothing in the world, friends, that attracted God to it.

[11:09] There isn't a single thing in you, though you may be a Christian today and have been a Christian for 50 years. There isn't a single thing in you that drew God to you. Nothing that was worthy.

Nothing that was lovely. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Even our righteousnesses, the good things that we do.

Before him there are filthy rags, because they're imperfect and characterized by unbelief. And yet the beauty of the gospel is this. That God loves the worst of sinners.

He loves the most unholy of sinners. That his love is completely unmerited. Completely unmerited. Can you say that of anyone who you love today?

That your love for them is completely unmerited. That there is nothing in them. Not a family bond. Not a character trait. That there is nothing in them at all that makes them lovely to you, and yet you love them.

[12:10] Probably not. Probably not. And yet, friends, that's how we stood before God. There is nothing in you that is lovable. There is nothing in me that is lovable or that is worthy.

But Paul tells us that God commends his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. While we were yet sinners. While we were yet enemies.

While we were yet rebelling against him. While we were yet living in unbelief and despising him.

Christ died for us. Here in his love, John says elsewhere, Not that we loved God.

But that he loved us. And sent his son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins. Friend, are you of the world today?

Or have you been of the world? Are you a sinner? Do you see yourself as unworthy of the love of God? Well, you are. And I am. And each of us are.

[13:11] But let this encourage you. That God sent his son into the world for sinners. His love was for this present evil world.

His love wasn't for those who went to church often enough. Or prayed often enough. Or lived well enough. These things are good things. And I don't mean in any way to demean them.

But that's not why God loved his people. And that's not why he sent his son into the world. He loved the world, friends, because of the depth of love within his own being.

That had to pour out to sinners such as we are. A love which will go so deep that it will reach even you. And reach even me. Regardless of the life that you have lived up until this point.

Regardless of the things that you have done in your past. Regardless of the unbelief that has characterized you. Even despite the sins that you cannot even forgive yourself for.

[14:12] God's love goes so deep that it reaches even sinners like you. Let that be an encouragement to you, friend. And so we have the source of love and the object of love.

Thirdly, we have the gift of love. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. Now, I suppose it's no surprise that his love is a giving love.

Because all love is giving, isn't it? All love is sacrificial. And if you say you love somebody and you don't give anything to them. If you don't give them any of your time, any of your attention, any of your love.

You don't love them. If you won't make any sacrifices for somebody. You don't love them. So, it's no surprise that this love is a love that gives. All love gives.

But the problem with our giving love is just this. That our willingness to give is always limited. Our willingness to sacrifice is always limited. We will give so much.

[15:15] And if we get our return on our investment, then we'll give a bit more. If we are loved back, and if the object of our love is worthy, then we will give even more still.

And the greater the love, the more we will give. And you know that yourselves. When you give gifts to people, you give the best gifts to those who are nearest to you.

To those who you love the most. To husbands and wives. To sons and daughters. To fathers and mothers. You don't spend hundreds of pounds on gifts for people that you hardly know.

Those you love the most. For them, you give the most. Now, here we're told of God's giving love. That he so loved the world that he gave.

He so loved the world. That word, so, is a very small word. But a very precious word. Because it speaks to us of the extent of God's love. How much, God, did you love this world?

[16:14] Well, he so loved the world that this is how much he was willing to give for it. That he gave his only begotten son. That he gave his eternal companion in love.

The one who was in the form, who thought it not robbery to be in the form of God. The one who was equal in power and glory. And the same in substance with the Father.

He gave him. How did he give him? Well, he gave him, of course, in the incarnation. He sent him into this world to be made of no reputation.

To take the form, not of a king, but of a bond servant. To be made in the likeness of men. He gave him in the incarnation. Verse 17 says that to us, doesn't it? For God did not send his son into the world.

He has sent him into the world. But more than that, friends. The incarnation is a wonderful truth. A glorious truth. But it points beyond itself. And it always does.

[17:21] We read in verse 14 here. That as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. So must the son of man be lifted up. And it's referring to the death by which the Savior would die.

It's referring to his being lifted up on a cross. Suffering and dying for sinners. Being wounded for their transgressions. Bruised for their iniquities.

That's what it's referring to. He didn't just give him into this world to walk and to teach in this world. But he gave him to the shame that this world would heap upon him. The suffering which this world would bring into experience.

Isn't his experience. He gave him even unto death. That's what it means that God so loved the world that he gave. He gave him to the darkness.

The abandonment. The forsakenness of the cross. Thus in Paul's companion verse in Romans 8 verse 32. We're told that he spared not his own son.

[18:25] But delivered him up for us all. He spared him from. He didn't spare him from what? Well he didn't spare him from that suffering. The awfulness of that abandonment.

The agony of soul which he experienced. Being forsaken by friends and by disciples. Being condemned in the sight of all of the legal authorities.

Having his own people who he came to save. He came unto his own. Having them receive him not but cry out. Crucify him. Crucify him. He didn't spare him from that.

But he delivered him up. He actually gave him into that agony. Into that sorrow. Into that sadness. And to that cruel death he gave him.

Why? To be a substitute. To suffer for our sins. The just for the unjust. He's the just. We're the unjust. He's the sinless.

[19:26] We are the sinful. Do we not read elsewhere that though he knew no sin yet he was made to be sin for us and treated like a sinner in our place.

That we might become the righteousness of God in him. He was wounded. Why? For our transgressions. Bruised. Why? For our iniquities.

He was chastised. Why? For our peace. Stripes where he was whipped upon his back. Why? That we might be healed.

That we might be forgiven. Was there ever friends a sacrifice? Was there ever a gift given that was so costly? Was there ever a price paid that was as high as this?

The giving of one's son to death. A perfect sinless son. For rebellious sinful people. Who would love sinners to this extent?

[20:23] Who would give a gift so costly to an enemy? Surely only a God who is love. That he sent his son into the world to be a substitute.

A substitute. To who? Well that brings us on to our fourth point. And it's the response to this love. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

That whosoever believes in him. Whoever believes in him. This is literally a marvelous and an admirable love.

A love that makes us marvel. And a love that makes us admire. Does it not? Does it not make you? But you know. We're called to more than that.

We're called not just to recognize how marvelous it is. But we're called to respond to it. And such love requires a response. Doesn't it? We must not only wonder at this gift.

[21 : 27] But we must receive it. And we must accept it. God gave the gift of his son. That we might receive that gift. By believing upon him.

That whosoever believes in him. And that word believe. Is here used. As it often is in scripture. Holistically. It speaks of faith.

Of saving faith. And say what is saving faith? Well saving faith involves the understanding. It involves you knowing and acknowledging certain things. About yourself.

And about God. That you are a sinner. That God is holy and just. And that he must punish sin. That you are guilty. And that you are in great need of being saved. Lest you be lost when you die.

We must know ourselves. We must know our God. And we must know his son. We must know that Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved. He is the way, the truth and the life.

[22 : 26] And that no man comes to the father. But by him. We must know these things. And to know that he is not merely the savior of the world. But to know through faith.

That he is my savior. Job said I know that my redeemer lives. Thomas said my Lord and my God. Martin Luther said that through religion.

Is in the pronouns. Being able to say. He is mine. My beloved is mine. And I am his. So faith involves the understanding.

But it involves more than that. It involves our will. Our will. The things that we do. The things that we choose to do. And when we have faith. When we believe.

We make certain decisions. Don't we? Decisions that affect the way that we think. And decisions that affect the way that we live. There are choices to be made.

[23 : 24] Where there is faith. There is repentance. There is a turning from sin. There is a trusting of our lives to him. Of our eternity to him. In ways that are practical.

In ways that are real and meaningful. In ways that are public. Friends. Yes we believe in our hearts. That Christ is risen from the dead. But we also confess. With our mouths.

That is a result of faith. It involves in our understanding. Our will. And also our affections. We are told towards the end of this chapter. That the father loves the son.

Has committed all things into his hand. But you know. Where there is true faith in your life. Towards Christ. There is love. Towards Christ as well. We love him.

For he first loved us. There is love. There is a moving of the affections. There is a moving towards gratitude.

[24 : 21] And praise. And worship. Is there such a thing as a Christian who doesn't worship? A Christian who doesn't praise? Your affections are moved. You are a new creature.

A new man. A new creation. A new woman. That is what you are. You are changed. And so. Saving faith. Involves these three things. The understanding.

The will. The affections. These are the natural companions of faith. And yet it is faith alone that justifies. These things will always be where faith is.

But it is faith that justifies. Not what we do. But who we receive. And works are good and well. And works must be there. Accompanying faith.

Faith without works is dead. And yet it is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believing upon him.

Receiving him. Trusting him. That's what saves you.

[25 : 16] Works are good and well. But as Paul said. Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor. Though you give every single penny in your bank today. To those who have less than you are.

And though I give my body to be burned. Though you die for Christianity. For the church. Though I do these things, he says. And have not love.

Love to the Savior. Faith in the Lord. It profits me nothing. Salvation, friends, is to receive the Son of God. It is to receive the Savior as a gift.

That's what it is. That's what it is. You are a drowning man or a woman. And it is to receive the hand of relief that is extended to you.

And the gospel invites you to do that. To freely receive the gift of the Son of God by faith. That whosoever believes. This is an offer, friends, that isn't restrictive.

[26 : 16] That isn't exclusive. It is for whosoever. Whosoever. It's not defined. You can't get broader than that. If you wanted to use the broadest word that you could possibly find.

For anyone and everyone. You would say whoever. Whoever. There are none excluded. Whatever you are. Whatever you have done. It's a gift that is offered to you.

To receive. And friends, by the power that God in his word has given me. And the authority that he has given me today. I extend that gift to you.

In his name. To receive the Son of God for yourself. To have your sins forgiven. To have your guilt removed. To change your path.

From a path to a lost eternity. To a path to heaven. It is offered to you. But finally. We have the result of this love. That whosoever believes in him.

[27 : 15] Should not perish. But have everlasting life. And it's twofold, isn't it? It's a twofold result. Those who believe. Will not perish.

So this is what believers will be saved from. It's what they will be rescued from. And to perish here is again used holistically. It's not just speaking of the death of the body.

It is speaking of the death of the soul. Spiritual death. Eternal death. As the wages of sin. To perish, friends, is to spend eternity.

To spend everlasting days in the conscious torment of hell. A place that is described to us as the lake of fire. It is to drink the wine of the wrath of God.

In a place which is described as a place of weeping. And gnashing of teeth. Of sorrow, of regret. Of anger, of fury. Which is described as a place of outer darkness.

[28 : 19] A place of loneliness and of brokenness. A place where the worm dies not. A place where the conscience is always gnawing away at you. And reminding you of what you did.

And of what you didn't do. What a terrible thought. What an awful reality. But a reality it is. And hence the urgency of the message.

And you wonder why week by week there are people pleading with you from a pulpit. You wonder week by week why some preachers get passionate. And why they are so zealous. And why they raise their voices.

Do you not see why? We're talking about eternity in hell here. That's why the message is urgent. Because you're going there. If you die outside of Christ.

But God's love in Christ can rescue you from that love. So that whosoever believes in him should not perish. But secondly shall have everlasting life.

[29 : 18] You were saved from perishing. Saved to everlasting life. And this speaks of two things. It speaks firstly of the quality of life. You remember what Jesus said in his high priestly prayer.

John 17 verse 3. This is life eternal. That they might know thee the only true God. And Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. Life eternal is to know Jesus.

It is to know God. That's what it is. And you can know that now. You can have that now. It speaks of the quality of life. Life that is abundant.

Life that is filled. Yes with sorrow and sadness. And all the other things. That this world will bring into your experience. But also with joy unspeakable and full of glory. And a peace that passes understanding.

And that will keep your heart and your mind. It is a quality of life. But it is also quantitative. It speaks of the quantity of life. And if hell speaks to us of eternal death.

[30 : 21] Then heaven speaks to us of everlasting eternal life. Endless days in the presence of the Savior. To be with Christ which is far better.

To go to a place where sorrow and sighing have fled away. Where there is no anxiety. Where there is no fear. Where there is no sin. Where the inhabitants thereof shall not say I am sick.

And where there shall be no death. But where you shall worship in the presence of the Lamb. And know that joy which is endless and eternal.

Throughout the endless ages of eternity. Where more than ever you shall glorify God. And enjoy him forever. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us friends.

See that as we consider this gift. And as you go home and as you think about this love. That you receive it. And that you receive the Savior who is given to sinners.

