

For God so loved the world

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[0 : 00] Now for a short time seeking God's help we may turn to the portion of scripture which we read, the Gospel of Christ according to John and the third chapter. And we may read again those well-known words of verse 16.

The Gospel of Christ according to John chapter 3 and verse 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Now the words of our text form probably the best known verse in the whole of New Testament scripture. Some writers ascribe them to the writer John himself.

And they say that what we have here is an explanation and a clarification of what Jesus has been saying in the earlier versions of this chapter in his discourse to Nicodemus.

And those commentators that take this view base their argument upon the words his only begotten Son. Because they say that it is only John of all the other New Testament writers, of all New Testament writers that uses this term, his only begotten Son.

[1 : 27] And so they say these words must be the words of John himself, of the writer. On the other hand, there are other commentators who see these words as not the words of John but as the words of Jesus himself.

And they say that what we have here is a continuation of the discourse of our Lord to Nicodemus. And these people that take this view base their argument upon verses 14 and 15.

Because it is clear that verses 14 and 15 are almost certainly the words of the Lord himself speaking. In verse 14 we have the term the Son of Man.

And we know that just as John is the only writer to use the term his only begotten Son. So Jesus himself is the only one that speaks of himself as the Son of Man.

Now that expression the Son of Man is given to us in verse 14. And verses 14 and 15 very clearly go together. So people argue that as verses 14 and 15 are almost certainly the words of Jesus.

[2 : 40] So verse 16 is a re-emphasis of those verses, of what you have in those verses in the Lord's discourse to Nicodemus. But really whatever view you take, whether you look on these words as the words of the writer John himself.

Or whether you see them as the words of Jesus to Nicodemus. At the end of the day it makes very little difference. Because these words are the words of scripture.

And all scripture, whether it's the words of Jesus or the words of John or of Paul or whoever. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable.

And these words are the words of scripture. And therefore they're for our own learning and edification. Now looking at this very rich and very precious verse before us.

There are three thoughts that I would like to centre upon. First of all I would like to look at God's love with respect to its object. God so loved the world.

[3 : 48] And then secondly, God's love with respect to the gift that it provided. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

And then thirdly, God's love with respect to the result. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. That whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Now it's clear that in this verse, God's love is a great theme. God's love is the core, it's the very heart of all that this verse tells us.

And if we were asked to sum up this verse in just two words. I don't think we could sum it up any better than in the two words, God loved. Because these two words tell us just about all that this verse says.

God loved. Now at the very outset of looking at this verse, it must be stated that the love of God that's referred to here is not the love of Godhead, it's not the love of the triune God, but it's the love of God the Father in particular.

[5 : 06] Now that's quite an obvious statement, but it's necessary to make this point. Because there are a lot of people who tend to regard the Lord Jesus Christ as the font of love.

And they tend to regard the Father on the other hand as a God of wrath, a God of justice, a God of anger.

And the picture that so many people have in their minds is of the Lord Jesus Christ coming into this world and dying in order to appease the Father.

And the Father taking cognizance of what the Son has done. And on the basis of what the Son has done, forgiving those that put their trust in the Son almost grudgingly.

This is the view that very many people have of God the Father. And yet no view could be further from the truth.

[6 : 12] Because this verse, among other verses, make it very clear that the love of God originated in the Father himself. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

It's clear that the Father is referred to here because there is only one Father and there is only one Son. Now, notice it says here that God loved the world.

It doesn't say that God loves the world. You see, it's not a case of God the Father taking notice at a certain point of history of what the Lord Jesus Christ, his Son, has done.

God loved the world. It's a past tense that's used here. And this suggests that God began loving the world in a point in history far back from the time of Calvary.

Indeed, if we were to ask, when did the love of God the Father begin? We can only answer it began in the eternal ages. You remember what we're told in the 31st chapter of Jeremiah.

[7 : 28] God says, yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. The love of the Father is an everlasting love. It goes back into eternity. And we know that we cannot get behind such a time as that because it's a point before time itself began.

Well then, God so loved the world. But it's only when we look at the object of God's love that we begin to realize the greatness of this love.

God so loved the world. Now, like so many words in scripture, this word has been the object of misunderstanding by a great deal of people.

There have been those who have looked at this word, world, and they've understood it in the quantitative sense. And what they argue is this, that the writer John or whoever is speaking here is saying that God loved the whole world.

That God loved everybody. That God loved all men. And from such a belief, they draw the conclusion that the Lord Jesus Christ must have died for everyone without exception.

[8 : 50] And so they land in the doctrine of universal atonement. And from there they land in the doctrine of Arminianism. They come to the conclusion that God has done his part and now it's left up to man.

And man has the power in himself to do his part. And of course we know that such a belief is completely erroneous. Now the common reformed argument to this is that this term, the world, does not mean the world in a quantitative sense, but rather in a qualitative sense.

That what's meant here by the world is the world in all its corruption, in all its sinfulness, in all its ungodliness. And that the emphasis here is this, that God loved such a place as this that we live in, such an ungodly place, such an ungodly people, that God so loved the world.

Now, basically, this argument is the correct argument. And yet it does leave one question unanswered. And the question is this, why did the writer then use the term world at all?

Why did John or Jesus not simply say, God loved ungodly wicked man to such an extent that he gave his only begotten son? Why use the term, world at all here?

[10 : 21] Well, I believe that the word, world is used here very deliberately, because it's used in the sense of the fact that God loved not the Jewish people only, that God's love was not confined to the Jews alone.

I believe that this word, world should be understood here in the same sense that it is to be understood in the Great Commission, where we're told, Jesus tells his disciples, go ye into all the world and preach the gospel.

I believe here we have an early hint, and if Jesus is speaking, it's a hint to Nicodemus, that great rabbi, that great Jewish teacher, a hint that the gospel was going to go out beyond the pale of the Jewish nation, even to the Gentile nation itself.

And after all, we have another hint in the following chapter, in the fourth chapter of John. You remember how Jesus there, meets the woman of Samaria at the well.

And you remember how the woman is so ready to enter into an argument with Jesus, and she points to the fact that her people worship in this mountain, in Samaria.

[11 : 40] But Jesus corrects her, and he tells her that the Jews worship at Jerusalem, and he tells her that they did not know whom they worshipped. But then he goes on, and he says that the time is coming, the hour is coming, and now is, when all who worship the Father, should worship neither in Jerusalem nor in this mountain, but the emphasis was to be put on worshipping the Father, in spirit and in truth.

He was making the point to the woman of Samaria, that the time was coming, when no longer had people, to worship God, simply in the one place in Jerusalem, in this one point on earth, that that, throughout the whole world, people could worship God wherever they were placed, and that God would listen to them, if their worship was in spirit, and in truth.

Well then, it was to a world of Gentiles, as well as to a world of Jews, that God sent his Son, that God loved, God so loved the world.

But what exactly does it mean? God loved the world. Well, it's interesting, that in the Greek language, there are no less than four words, for love.

One word has to do with friendship, and it's probably the equivalent, of our own word for friendship. Another word has to do with, the love within families, the love between parents and children, and children and parents, the love between sisters and brothers, and brothers and sisters.

[13 : 23] A third word has to do, with marital love, the love between husband and wife, and wife and husband. Now, the gospel writers, were familiar with all these three words, and yet, wherever in the New Testament, we find the writers, speaking of the love of God to sinners, and, although they were familiar, with all these words, they do not use, any of the three of them.

Instead, they use another word, the word, agape. And, this word, we're told, is a word, that is without history, an empty word, a word, that until that time, was hardly ever used.

But this, special word, this word, that is altogether unique, is the word, that is used, throughout the New Testament, when it, speaks of, God's love to sinners.

Why is it, that such a special word, is used? Well, just for this reason. Because, there is reason, for, every other kind of love, that's been spoken of.

You see, there's reason, for friendship. When we see people, that are of similar beliefs, and similar temperaments, and, similar natures, to ourselves, who become friendly, towards them.

[14 : 52] And, there's a reason, for this friendship, this friendliness. Again, there's a reason, for the love, that exists, within families. There's a reason, for parents, loving their children.

There's a reason, for brothers, loving their sisters, and sisters, loving their brothers. The reason is, because they are related. There's the blood connection, between, the individuals, and the family.

Again, there's reason, for the love, that exists, between husband and wife, and wife and husband.

There's the physical attraction, and so on. But, when we come, to the love, of God, to sinners, we come, to a love, for which, there is absolutely, no reason.

A love, that, we cannot, explain, because, there is no reason, at least, any reason, that we can find. And so, it's necessary.

When, New Testament writers, spoke of the love, of God, to sinners, it was necessary, that they use, this special love. Now, I believe, that, we don't fully, appreciate this, simply because, of sin, that dwells, in each one of us.

[16 : 11] You see, if we could see ourselves, for what we really were, if we could see, the ugliness, of sin, in ourselves, if we could see, the evil, and the, ungodliness, of our own hearts, we would see, that there is nothing, within us, to attract us, to God.

Because, God, on the other hand, is holy, God is beautiful, God is perfect, God is everything, that's to be desired, he's the very opposite, of what we are, and therefore, as far as we can gauge, there is no reason, whatever, why, God should love us.

God so loved the world, but it's only, when we come, to the gift, that God provided, that we begin, to grasp, something of the greatness, of this love. You see, it's a great thing, that God should, love the

world, at all.

It's a greater thing, still, that God, should do anything, about this, that God, should act, on behalf of man, and for man.

But when we, consider, what God did, for man, then we enter, into, an area, that's altogether, beyond our understanding, an area, into which, the very angels, of heaven, desire to look unto, God, gave his only begotten son.

[17 : 35] Now it's a sheer, extravagance, of God's gift, that's to be noted here, the fact that, absolutely, no cost, whatever, was spared. God so loved the world, that he gave his son, literally, he gave his son, the only begotten.

Now can we consider, what God has done, in giving his son, there are two factors, to be borne in mind. The first factor, is this, that God, loved his son.

And the second, factor is this, that God knew, all that was involved, in the giving, of his son. A parallel, has often been drawn, of the, giving, of the son, by the father, and the proposed, offering of Isaac, by Abraham, on Mount Moriah.

And we cannot deny, that there are similarities. When we look at that, account given to us, in Genesis chapter 22, you remember, how Abraham was told, take thy son, thine only, son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go, offer him, as a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains.

Now, when we look, at that verse, we see, that almost, every word in it, was, must have been, like a knife, in the very heart, of Abraham, as he was told, to go, and to sacrifice, his son Isaac.

[19 : 06] Go, and take thy son, whom thou lovest, and go, offer him, as a burnt offering. Every word, must have gone, into Abraham's heart, like a knife, as he was, told, to sacrifice, the son, the only son he had, the son, whom he loved.

And as God, was testing Abraham, there was no, there's no doubt, but that every word, was calculated, to strike at his heart, and to strike at him, in such a way, as to bring anguish, and pain, to Abraham.

There are similarities, and yet, while there are similarities, there are also, many dissimilarities here. You see, the love of Abraham, is only a very faint picture, of the love, of God, for his son.

Because, the love of Abraham, for Isaac, was a temporal love. You see, when Abraham, went to offer up Isaac, Isaac was still, a comparatively young man.

It was only a few years, before this, that Isaac, cheered up his father, in his old age, as he was born, into the family. But, when we consider, the difference, between Isaac, and the Lord Jesus Christ, there is surely, no comparison.

[20 : 32] Isaac was a man, of only a few years, but, Christ had existed, in the bosom, of the father, from all eternity. There was never, a point, in which, the Lord Jesus Christ, was not.

He was there, from all eternity. We have this, brought out so clearly, in the book of Proverbs, in the eighth chapter, where we find, Christ, spoken of, speaking as the eternal wisdom.

And, he tells us, speaking there, that, I was set up, from everlasting, from the beginning, wherever the earth was. And, we find, as, that chapter goes on, a description, of the creation, of the world.

And, throughout the creation, Christ is reminding us, in the language, of eternal wisdom, that, as the world, was being created, he was there.

And, he goes on, and he tells us, in verse 29, when he gave to the sea, his decree, that the water, should not pass, his commandment, when he appointed, the foundations, of the earth, then I was, I was by him, as one, brought up with him, and I was, daily his delight, rejoicing, always before him.

[21 : 54] The point, that's been made, is this, that, before anything was, that we see around us, before the worlds, were created at all, Christ was there.

There was never a time, when Christ was not there, for he was, and he is, the eternal, son of God. But then, there are those, who argue, yes they say, that may be so, but, God, surely, because of who he is, cannot suffer, and therefore, it was no, sacrifice, on the part of God, to give his son, in the way that, Abraham gave his son, Isaac.

Now it's true, true, that God, is altogether, different, from what we are, and when we talk, about the most high God, we must talk, with great carefulness, but yet, the fact, of the matter is, that, throughout scripture, God is presented, to us, as a God, who is passionate, a God, who can be jealous, a God, who can be grieved, a God, who can be angry, and a God, who can be provoked, and all these, these, characteristics of God, remind us, that, we ourselves, were made, in the image of God, now it's true, that, we have to a large extent, lost this image, and we cannot compare, our

grief, we cannot compare, our jealousy, we cannot compare, our anger, and, our being provoked, to those, characteristics in God, because in every one of those, characteristics, in every one of those, passions with ourselves, there is sin, and there is no, sin in God, and yet, what I'm trying to say, is this, can we say, that God, gave his son, and that it meant, absolutely nothing, to him giving him, can we say, that, there was no, passion with God, can we say, there was no, feelings with God, when he gave, his only begotten son, well, he gave, his only begotten son, and, remember, he was, his beloved son, from all eternity, he said, on two occasions, this is my beloved son, and he did not just, become his beloved son, at a point in time, he was always, his beloved son, he was his beloved son, in a unique way, because there was never, a time, when this son, ever grieved, or ever hurt his father, there was always, perfect love, pure love, existing, between, these two persons, between, the father, and between the son, it was a love, without intermission, it was a love, without interruption, but then, we notice again, that, that God, knew, all that Calvary, would involve, now this was something, that,

Abraham did not know, when he was told, to offer up, his son, Isaac, Abraham, hoped perhaps, that there would be, intervention, he hoped, that at the last moment, God would speak, from heaven, and tell him, that this sacrifice, was not necessary, that he did not have, to offer his son, and we know, that this is in fact, what did happen, but again, if, if, Abraham had to go through, with it, if Abraham had to kill, his son Isaac, he knew, that it would be, a relatively quick death, and that in a few moments, it would all be over, and again, Abraham knew, we're told on the basis of, of the 11th chapter, to the Hebrews, that even if he had, to put his son, Isaac to death, he believed, that God was able, to raise him, up again from the dead, but oh with God, it was so different, oh yes God knew, that his son, would rise again, from the dead, all this was known to him, that he also knew, that all, he knew of all, that would be involved, in the meantime, he knew that he would, have to be born, into this world, of sin, and darkness, he knew that he, would have to live, for over 30 years, a man of sorrows, unacquainted, with grief, above all, he knew, what would be involved, in his final days, on earth, he knew, that all his friends, would at last, forsaken, he knew, that the prince, of this world, would assault him, and would vex him, and above all, he knew, that he himself, as his beloved father, would have to hide, his face from him, and that,

Christ would have to, cry out to him, as one, who at last, even lost his own identity, when he could say, no longer my father, but my God, my God, why, hast thou forsaken me, God, knew all this, and, he knew it, in every precise detail, can we really say, that with all this knowledge, that God had, that God, could look forward, to all this, that had to take place, in the passion, of his dear son, and can we say, that God was, totally unmoved, by all this, surely, such a picture, is far, from the picture, of God, as the God of love, as we know he is, rather, it's a picture, of one who is cruel, cold, and capricious, well, God, so loved the world, that, he gave, his only begotten son, now, just as, there are those, who would, minimize the cost, of, the giving, of his son, so, there are those, who would, who would argue, that,

[27 : 56] Calvary, was not really, necessary anyway, that Calvary, was something optional, and that God, if he had so wished, could have passed, by sin, without his own son, suffering, and dying, man, now, such, reasoning, overlooks, two things, it overlooks, first of all, the fact, that God, is a just God, and that, God, could not possibly, pass by sin, he could not possibly, overlook it, you see, sin is something, that cannot be overlooked, we talk about, forgiveness of sin, blessed be God's name, there is forgiveness of sin, but there is a very real, sense in which, sin cannot be forgiven, as such, sin, must be punished, it must be punished, either in Christ, or in hell, God cannot pass, by sin, as if it was something, that could be easily, overlooked,

God is love, but God is also just, and God is holy, and those who say, that God, because with God, all things are possible, could easily have passed by, sin without the cross, these people, overlook the fact, that God, is a just God, and God, is strictly just, in all his dealings, it also overlooks, the heinousness, of sin itself, you see, we have little, appreciation, of how heinous, a thing, sin really is, we sin, fairly lightly, certainly, grievous sins, we would be extremely, careful about, but, we sin, in small things, so easily, so flippantly, that, with God, why there are, some sins, more heinous, in his sight, than others, even the smallest, of sins, is something, totally abhorrent, totally obnoxious, and something, that is altogether, repulsive, to his own nature, so,

God, could not, pass by sin, God, could not, just, act us, if it never happened, God, must deal with it, and the whole, of scripture, makes this, so clear, we're told, even in the old testament, though, hand, join in hand, the wicked, shall not go unpunished, and you remember, how, Jesus himself,

tells us, throughout the gospels, on more than one occasion, the son of man, must suffer, the son of man, must die, and remember, how this is made, particularly clear, when the time, of his end, drew to a close, you remember, how, he was there, in Gethsemane, and how he prayed, to the father, that if it were possible, that this cup, would pass from him, well, we find, that at last, Jesus is perfectly resigned, he realizes, that it was not possible, that this cup, should pass from him, if it were possible, God would have, would have permitted it, but it were not possible, the cup, had to be drunk, because, of the son of man, if man was to be saved, at all,

Christ must suffer, and Christ, must die, the only means, of salvation, for man, is, the death of Christ, or that man, could keep the law, perfectly, and of course, this was impossible, as Paul tells us, in the epistle, to the Romans, the law, was weak, through the flesh, man, because of what he is, man, because of what he has been, since the fall, was in a position, where he could not, possibly keep the law, not, even for a moment, well, God so, loved the world, that he gave, his only begotten son, but that brings us, to the third, and to the final point, God's love, with respect, to the result, he gave his son, that whosoever, believeth in him, should not perish, but have, everlasting life, now, these words, that whosoever, believeth in him, should not perish, but have, everlasting life, they teach us, several, very important lessons, they teach us, first of all, that there are, but two, destinations for man, man, must either, have, eternal life, or he must perish, you see, there's no, middle course, there's no, middle place,

Roman Catholics, would tell us, that there is, purgatory, for a time, for certain individuals, scripture, knows nothing of this, scripture, makes it clear, that a man, must either, have eternal life, or a man, must perish, it is either, the one, or the other, and these words, remind us also, that, to perish, is not to be, annihilated, it is not to be, snuffed out, as so many, even, who would claim, to be within the, reformed faith, would, claim today, we couldn't certainly, argue the doctrine, of eternal punishment, from this one verse, but, throughout the, New Testament, particularly, throughout the gospels, and particularly, from the words, of Christ himself, it is very clear, that to perish, is not to go out, of existence, it's not to be, snuffed out, in a moment, but to perish, is to be in a state, of constant misery, separate from, and yet, in the presence, of God, whose wrath, must abide upon us forever, that is what it means, to perish, to be in a state, of constant misery, separate from, and yet, in the presence, of a God, whose wrath, must abide upon, the sinner forever, forever, but then, these words, remind us also, that it's not, sufficient, that God, gave his son, in itself, this is not, sufficient for us, that God, gave his son, it's not even, sufficient for us, that we know, this great truth, there must be, a response to it, on our own part, and that response, to it, must be, one in faith, what does it mean, that we must, believe in him, that whosoever, believeth in him, should not perish, well it means, first of all, that we must, hear about him, and that we must, understand, the doctrines, the teachings, of scripture, we must, hear about him, we must know about him, how shall they believe, on him, of whom, they have not heard, we must hear, about Christ, in order to respond, to Christ, that is the first thing, that is brought out, in these words, the second thing is, that we must believe, the historic record, about Christ, we must believe, that almost, two thousand years ago, this man, [35 : 09] Christ Jesus, was born, into this world, and that, for over 30 years, he lived, he was born, in Bethlehem, that he spent, the greater part, of his life, in Nazareth, and that at last, he died, on a cross, outside, the city of Jerusalem, outside the gates, of Jerusalem, we must believe this, and we must believe, that after three days, in the tomb, he rose again, we must believe, the historic record, but we must also, go beyond this, we must trust, personally, on the merits, of Christ's death, and on the merits, of his resurrection, as the only basis, for our own, life and salvation, there has to be, this personal element, in our belief, in Christ, we must trust, personally, on the basis, of his death, and resurrection, as the only basis, for our own life, and salvation, we must believe, that unless our life, is bound up, in his death, that we must, perish forever, we must believe this, and we must act, upon this, we must believe this, and we must, act upon this, well as we draw, to a conclusion, we must acknowledge, that it's not, within, the power of flesh, and blood, to believe this, by oneself, you remember, what Peter, said on one occasion, to Jesus, at Caesarea Philippi, when he was asking, whom do men say, that I, the son of man, am, and you remember, after, the various, conclusions, of man, were given, to the Lord,

Peter himself, spoke, and he said, thou art the Christ, the son, of the living God, and you remember, what Jesus, says to Peter, on the basis, of that confession, flesh, he said, and blood, hath not revealed, it unto thee, but my father, which is in heaven, it was not, within the power, of Peter, to believe this, of himself, it was only, the father, in heaven, who could reveal, this to him, but where,

does this lead us, does this lead us, to despair, or does it lead us, to fold in our hands, and saying, oh well, if that's the case, I'll just have to, wait around, and hope, that one day, the father, will reveal this to me, no, it doesn't mean this at all, it means rather, that, like, Bartimaeus, blind Bartimaeus, of old, we should, cry out to God, even now, if we are still, strangers to this Christ, to this gift, that God has provided, that we should cry out, to God, for this faith, that is his gift, to give, and that he is, so willing to give, and if we do this, we can be sure, of one thing, that he, who spared, not his own son, but who delivered him, up for us all, that he with him, shall freely, give us all things, for God, so loved the world, that he gave, his only begotten son, that whosoever, believeth on him, should not perish, but have, everlasting life, may God grant, that if there are any here, who have not as yet, responded, to this blessed, and sweet invitation, of his word, that they would, by his grace, be enabled to do so, while still in a position, to do so, that they would close in, with Christ, and know him, as the greatest gift, that God has ever given, to the children of men, may he bless his own word, let us pray,

O Lord, we thank thee, for that, great and precious gift, that thou hast given, in the passion of thy son, Christ Jesus, and we thank thee, that we have been, so privileged, as to have heard, of this gift, we thank thee, that we have not been, left in darkness, as so many have been, and are, that we pray, that we would realize, that with such, a great privilege, there goes inevitably, a great responsibility, to act upon, the light that is ours, O Lord, we pray, that if there are any here, this evening, who are still strangers, to that great gift, that thou hast given, to that great love, that is thine, for all, who will close in with thee, we pray, that they would not, give thee rest, until thou wilt answer them, and until thou wilt, bestow faith upon them, Lord, we pray, that thou wouldst, continue with us now, be with us, as we sing our parting psalm, and we pray, that thou wouldst, cleanse us, from all our sin, we ask it in Jesus name, and for his sake,
Amen.