

Come to Christ
From the Gospel of John
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Bible Text: John 3:16
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John chapter three beginning with verse 14. I am reading from the New American Standard Version.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.¹

Let's pray together.

Father, we are grateful for your grace which comes to us through Jesus Christ. We acknowledge to you this morning, Father, that there is nothing within us worthy of the reception of such grace. We are wholly dependent upon you. And as this is the case, we cast all of our cares upon you knowing that in Jesus Christ you do care for us. And we pray together now this morning, Father, as we take a look at this particular text, that you would be pleased to open our hearts and that the smile of your love and the sunshine of your grace would be upon us to warm our hearts. We ask this in the good and great and gracious name of Jesus Christ who is the only Lord and king and Savior, Amen.

On such an occasion as this, I would certainly normally, principally, address my comments to the family. However, they have asked me not to particularly address them,

¹ John 3:14-21.

but to address you with the message of the gospel. I therefore direct your attention this morning to John chapter three and that familiar text, verse 16.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”²

In the English versions, the text appropriately begins with God, God who is the Creator, God who in the beginning—as Genesis indicates to you and to me—created the heavens and the earth and all that is therein. And when he in six days, six 24 hour days, created the heavens and the earth and the splendor of the cosmos and the stars and the galaxies whirling through space, and he planted Adam and Eve in the garden, his judgment was very simple. He looked at all that he had created and he said, “It is very good.” And as John 3:16 indicates to you and to me, God loved his creation.

But then something tragic happened. And as you understand the story rightly from the narratives in Genesis, in an act of rebellion at the suggestion of his wife, Adam took of the tree that was forbidden. It was a blatant rebellious act upon his part. And because this was the case, all of creation was plunged into darkness and despair.

And the Bible teaches us that we also sinned in him and fell with him. You and I reaped the results of that sin so long ago in the garden. And we, too, were plunged into sin and misery. And yet John 3:16 tells us, again, “For God so loved the world.”³ The world and the individuals in it, because of the fall, were now at enmity with God. And the world became a place of hostility toward God. It was and is hostile territory. But yet God loved the world which was in opposition to him.

And this word “love,” this word “love” does not refer to the warm fuzzy feeling that you get when you are a young person and your heart palpitates a little bit as you look at that individual who is special to you. It is not puppy love that the Bible is speaking about here. What the Bible is speaking about here is an attitude, an inclination that God had toward his creation although it had fallen into darkness and despair. He looked at that creation and he wondered, “Is this what I created?” And he looked at the individuals who were walking in the world. The image of God was so marred that they looked like Gollum in the *Lord of the Rings*. Gollum was eaten by greed and lust for the ring. He became a shriveled shifty-eyed character resembling only a small insignificant portion of his former self which was created in the image of God. And yet God says in this text he so loved the world.

He had an inclination toward the world. I love—no pun intended—I love the little three word statement that W. G. T. Shedd makes in his three volume *Dogmatic Theology*. Three little words: “Love is inclination.” Love is the inclination that God has toward the world, His inclination to embrace the world, to still call it his own. And because God has an attitude of love and an inclination toward the world, what does he do? The text is very clear, is it not?

² John 3:16.

³ Ibid.

For God so loved the world, that was hostile toward him, that he gave his only begotten Son. And when John speaks of the only begotten Son here, he does not have direct reference to the incarnation. He does not have at first the idea of Christ coming into the world directly before him. The second person of the trinity is eternally begotten of the Father. He is the one who in the beginning was with God and, John says, was also God.⁴ And he abided forever in union with his Father.

And then in the plan and the purpose of God the eternal Son of God was given to the world. And this giving, this giving the Bible tells us in verse 17 was a sending. It was not just a giving in the sense of something to be received or rejected. It was an active sending of the Son into the world. Verse 17 says, “God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”⁵

God purposely *sent* the Son into the world. And so Jesus Christ, the one who was eternally begotten of the Father humbled himself and took to himself human flesh. He took to himself a true body and a reasonable soul. He took to himself a soul and a body just like yours and just like mine. And he entered into this world through the womb of the virgin Mary.

And the Bible tells us that the purpose of this giving and this sending was a necessary act on the part of God. Verses 14 and 15 say: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.”⁶ The little word “must” means, “It was necessary.” That as a consequence of sin, that as a consequence of the world which was fallen, as a consequence of individuals who were fallen and in despair and in misery, the only way that they might be brought out of that despair and misery was that Jesus Christ be sent into the world. It was an absolute necessity as a consequence of sin, your sin and my sin. And so this giving was a necessary sending of the Son to bring about salvation.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,”⁷ the Son of his love. Do you remember the story about Abraham and Isaac? God said to Abraham, “I want you to take your son, your only son, the son whom you love and I want you to take him up on that mountain and put him on an altar and sacrifice him, the son whom you love.”⁸ And what do you think Abraham was feeling at that time? How he was torn! “I have a love for God and yet I love my son.” You get a sense of the heart of God in the giving of his Son when you look at that story.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him *shall not perish, but have eternal life.*”⁹ You see here the two destinations that are

⁴ John 1:1.

⁵ John 3:17.

⁶ John 3:14-15.

⁷ John 3:16.

⁸ See Genesis 22:2.

⁹ Ibid.

possible in the afterlife. And there is only one way, as long as Jesus Christ remains on his throne, there is only one way for you to enter the afterlife. It is through the doorway of death. And on the other side of that doorway of death there will be either eternal life or eternal death.

Perishing. What does it mean to perish? There are some who walk around this world and say, "I'd just as soon go to hell and be with my friends." Let it be known to you, dear friends, that there is no friendship in hell. Those who make such statements are in great error. In that awful place there will only be unmitigated hatred for one another for all eternity. And because everyone in that place will hate one another with a growing hatred, as well as shaking their fist at God, there will not only be no friendship in that place, there will be loneliness that is inconceivable in this life. The Bible calls hell "outer darkness."¹⁰ And because it is outer darkness it will be like being in solitary confinement forever. There will be no friendship there.

The Bible also says it is a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.¹¹ The worm of conscience will continue to gnaw away forever and ever. There will be no relief from the fire of guilt. That fire will only become more intense. No release from guilt and shame! No friendship! Loneliness forever! This is what it means to perish. This is the one alternative.

And the other alternative is life. It is life with Jesus. When you die your soul is separated from your body and passes immediately into the presence of Jesus Christ. It is made perfectly blessed forever. All shame and all guilt is finally and permanently removed.

And even this is not the end of the story. When Christ comes a second time in glory the dead will be raised incorruptible. With a great shout and with the trumpet of God, Jesus Christ will come the second time. He will call his children out of their graves. Their souls and bodies will be reunited. And all of his people will be caught up together with him in the clouds. And the Bible says, "So shall we always be with the Lord."¹² And the book of Revelation says there will be no more crying. There will be no mourning or tears because all things will be made new.¹³

Everything that we experience that smacks of death because of sin in this world will be wiped away. Every sniffle, every cough, every clogged artery, you name it. No tumor will exist. Everything will be made new. And this is the other alternative. And the reason for the coming of Jesus Christ is so that men and women would enjoy, men and women like you, men like our dear brother Bob, would enjoy life eternal with Jesus. This is why he came. And the text says, again, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."¹⁴

¹⁰ See Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30.

¹¹ See Isaiah 66:24, Mark 9:44, 9:46, 9:48.

¹² 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

¹³ See Revelation 21:4.

¹⁴ John 3:16.

Let me add a little caveat regarding this idea of faith, “That whoever believes in him shall not perish.” Do you realize what this teaches us, friends? This teaches us, this teaches you and me, that Jesus Christ came specifically for individuals whom he knew would believe in him.

Now let me say this a little bit differently. Jesus Christ did not come, Jesus Christ did not shed his blood and die on the cross, to pay the penalty for the sins of people who reject him and languish or would languish in hell forever. Christ came specifically for individuals whom he knew would believe in him. This is particular atonement for particular people. I say this quite vehemently because God is not the God of double jeopardy. God would not have people suffer the penalty for their own sins in the awful place which we just described and at the same time pay the penalty of those sins. He is not the God of double jeopardy. Either he has paid for your sins or he has not. This is the teaching of the Bible. This means everything in your salvation depends upon Jesus Christ.

And when John 3:16 says to you and me that, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life,”¹⁵ Jesus in uttering these words knowing that he came for a particular people. And the way you know whether or not Jesus Christ came into the world and actually paid for your sins is to believe in him. Your faith is an evidence of the fact that the great God of all sent Jesus Christ into the world to die on a cross, to pay the penalty for *your* sins, not just to generically pay for sins, but to pay for your personal sins. You can therefore say with the apostle Paul, “He loved *me* and he gave himself up for *me*.”¹⁶ You see, this is very personal. Your faith becomes an evidence of what Christ has done.

This faith, now, let’s examine it for just a moment. If everything depends upon Christ, what is this faith? This faith, friends, is an acknowledgement, on one hand, that you are empty and that I am empty, that you have nothing to present to God, that you have no resources, you have no wisdom, you have no understanding, you have no capabilities, you have no works, you have nothing to present to God.

I had a student in class a few years ago who raised his hand and said, “Professor, if I do all of my assignments properly, will you give me extra credit?” I reminded him of the words of Jesus that it is no great thing if an individual does his or her duty. You don’t get credit for doing your duty. Ask people in the military. They will tell you that this is the case. When you get an award it is for doing something above and beyond the call to duty. But in God’s sight this is not a possibility. We do not come close to accomplishing all of our actual duty before God. And so your faith is an acknowledgment of your emptiness.

On the other hand, your faith is an acknowledgment of the fullness and the sufficiency of Christ, that Jesus Christ lived the perfect life which you could not live, that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin which you could not pay. You therefore cast yourself on Christ.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Galatians 2:20.

And so this is the point to which we have been driving this morning. You need to come to Christ. Hence the title of the sermon this morning, “Come to Christ.” You see, each one of you—and I speak about myself also—will one day follow your brother through the doorway of death. As sure as you are sitting in these pews today, the mortician’s hand will have his way with you and with me. There is no way to get around it. And until Christ comes a second time in glory this is how it shall be. And when you walk through the doorway of death, you will hear one of two things, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels,”¹⁷ or you will hear the voice of the Savior saying to you, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”¹⁸

And the way you will know in this life, on this side of that doorway, the way you will know which of these two responses you will receive, is that in this life that you come to Christ. You cast yourself on the Savior. You acknowledge your own emptiness. You say to Christ, “You are the one who is sufficient for all of my needs in this life and in the next. I trust you, Lord Jesus. Take me. Escort me through death itself.” And so I exhort you, Come to Christ. Come to Christ, dear friend.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”¹⁹

Let’s pray.

Father, thank you for your Word. Bring it home to our hearts. Grant that we will contemplate and understand our own mortality and the fact that we, too, will be taken from this life one day. We pray, Father, that you would work faith in Jesus Christ in us even now as we hear the gospel message so that when we pass through the doorway of death we may hear those good and gracious words from the Savior, “Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your Lord.” Grant us this grace we pray on this day we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

¹⁷ Matthew 25:41.

¹⁸ Matthew 25:34.

¹⁹ John 3:16.