

“For God so Loved”
John 3:16
(Preached at Trinity, October 4, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we entered **Chapter 3** we witnessed a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night. He recognized that there was something uniquely different about Jesus. He saw Jesus as a teacher sent from God.
2. At the end of **Chapter 2** we saw the unique discernment of Jesus regarding the hearts of men.
John 2:23-25 NAU - "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.
²⁴ But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, ²⁵ and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man."
3. While Jesus did not commit Himself to the “many” of **Chapter 2** He began instructing Nicodemus. We can surely see the doctrine of God's sovereign grace in this passage. As Jesus spoke to Nicodemus the focus was the Gospel. Jesus taught on the Kingdom and the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus did not understand because of His sinful heart. What he needed was a new heart.
4. Then Jesus began instructing Nicodemus on his need for a Savior. In **Verse 13** He told Nicodemus of the Son of Man who had come down from heaven. He was the Son of Man, the Christ who had come to save His people from their sins.
5. In **Verse 14** Jesus used a figure that Nicodemus would have known as a teacher of the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus set before him Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, but applied it in a way that Nicodemus had never heard.
 - A. Israel had rebelled against God and God judged them by sending serpents into the camp—hundreds of venomous serpents and many died from their bites.
Numbers 21:6 NAU - "The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died."
 - B. Israel confessed their sin and cried out for deliverance. The deliverance they cried out for was the removal of the serpents.
Numbers 21:7 NAU - "So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us."
 - C. Instead, their deliverance came in a different way.
Numbers 21:8 NAU - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live."
 - D. This was God's way and it was the only way. It was an act of faith. They had to cast their gaze upon the serpent trusting in God's provision. Israel wasn't commanded to pray to the serpent on the pole or to bow down before the serpent on the pole but to look to the pole. They were to trust God's Word.

6. Jesus applied the bronze serpent to Himself. He is the way of salvation. There is no other way.
- A. All men have been bitten by the serpent of sin. Like with the fiery serpents of old, only the direct intervention of God will provide the rescue from the certainty of death.
 - B. Unlike the fiery serpents in Moses' generation, many smitten with the deadly curse of sin today deny the danger. They pretend all is well. Or they believe that if they just limit the exposure, try to be bitten less all will be well. They will surely perish in their sin.
 - C. Others seek their own solutions. The salves and potions of religion and good works shall do nothing to cure the poison of sin. The solution for sin is Christ and Christ alone. What may seem like foolishness is God's only way of salvation
John 12:32 - "if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."
7. Jesus was teaching Nicodemus about justification by faith alone. We look to the cross. We don't worship the cross but we trust in what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Israel was not to worship the bronze serpent but to look to what it represented—God's deliverance from their sin.
8. It is interesting that worshipping the pole is exactly what Israel ultimately did. The bronze serpent was kept and remained in Israel for hundreds of years. Hezekiah finally destroyed it, putting to an end the idolatrous worship.
2 Kings 18:1-4 NAU - "Now it came about in the third year of Hoshea, the son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah became king. ² He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. ³ He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. ⁴ He removed the high places and broke down the *sacred* pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan."
9. The way of the endless religions of this world is to look to the external, to trust in the tangible, to develop a plan of action: observe certain rituals, undertake pilgrimages, obey certain sacraments, clean up your life and do good works. The Gospel commands us to look to Christ and none other.
Acts 16:31 NAU - "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved"
Isaiah 45:21-22 KJV - "*there is* no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; *there is none* beside me. ²² Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is none* else."
Acts 4:12 NAU - "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."
10. The great need of Nicodemus and all men is deliverance from the poisonous sting of sin and death. Jesus is the only way of salvation. We must look to Him and Him alone.
John 3:14-15 NAU - "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; ¹⁵ so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life."
11. Continuing the thought of **Verse 15** Jesus speaks one of the greatest passages in Scripture and one of the best known.
John 3:16 NAU - "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."

7. We sometimes miss the powerful truth of this passage by becoming bogged down with the “whosoever will” argument. The truth is, this verse says nothing about the free will of man. It simply defines those who have eternal life—those who believe.
8. Over the next several sermons from I want us to look at several dimensions of this passage.
 - A. First, we’ll look at the amazing love of God – “For God So Loved”
 - B. Second, we’ll look at the infinite gift of God – “That He Gave His Son”
 - C. Third, we’ll look at the objects of eternal life – “Whosoever Believeth”
 - B. Finally, we’ll look at the outcome of their belief – “Eternal Life”
9. Tonight, we’ll look at the first phrase, “For God So Loved”
 - I. First, we need to look at the general love of God that flows from His common grace
 - A. God has a general love for all of creation – In a general sense God loves the whole world.
 1. Love stands at the very heart of God’s triune nature. The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are characterized by love.
 - a. God is the Father of mercies, and so the Father of love, who so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son to die for it.
 - b. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, the prince of peace and of love, who so loved the world that He shed his blood, and poured out His soul unto death for men.
 - c. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of divine love, in whom the very essence of God flows out, and by whom God’s holy love is shed abroad in the hearts of all the saints on earth and in heaven.”
 2. While it is God’s nature to love this doesn’t mean that He *must* love all men equally. Like all of God’s attributes, God’s love is displayed according to His divine sovereign will.
 3. He has a general love for all men—“God so loved the world . . .”
 - a. He provides for all – though His provisions are not equal
 - b. God looks upon humanity with pity and compassion. He has been merciful unto sinful humanity. Such mercy is because God so loved the world.
 - c. The Bible describes the lost man as the enemy of God, yet God is merciful to His enemies.
Matthew 5:44-45 NAU - "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous."
 4. As we look across our land we see hundreds of thousands, yea millions of God hating rebels.
 - a. This world should be a place of darkness with unquenchable heat and the unending stench of sulfur burning our nostrils.
 - b. Instead God sends life giving rain. Crops grow bountifully. Beauty fills the earth. Every sunrise is a token of God’s love upon God hating sinners.
 5. Such goodness and grace is because of God’s common love for creation.

- B. Such goodness, however, is only possible because God so loved the world.
1. Apart from God's sovereign redemptive purpose all of humanity would be under God's condemnation and would suffer under His wrath in hell with absolutely no remedy.
In this sense, Jesus Christ is the Savior of all men.
1 Timothy 4:10 NAU - "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers."
 2. It's because of Christ that there are any blessings at all upon the earth. Every blessing comes because of His redeeming grace.
 3. It is only by God's grace in Christ Jesus that we experience beauty, love, the rich bounty of food, medical care, housing, clothes. The pleasure of marriage and the joy of children. These things are all glorious displays of God's goodness to undeserving sinners.
 4. What ingratitude for hardened sinners to despise the love of their Creator. Matthew Henry – "Herein God has commended his *love to the world*: God so *loved the world*, so really, so richly. Now his creatures shall see that he loves them, and wishes them well. He so loved the world of fallen man as he did not love that of fallen angels. Behold, and wonder, that the *great God* should love such a *worthless* world! That the *holy God* should love such a *wicked* world with a love of good will." ¹
- II. As we consider the grace of God in our salvation we must ponder God's particular love for the elect.
- A. Redemption has a particular end, a particular purpose
1. God didn't send Christ in order that we might receive a temporary reprieve from judgment. Jesus didn't come just to ensure some temporal blessings upon men.
 2. Jesus came redeem His people from their sins.
Ephesians 2:4-6 NAU - "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,"
- B. God sent forth His Beloved Son so that He might suffer the wrath of God's just condemnation upon sinful men
1. He would suffer and unimaginable torment; He would suffer under God's infinite wrath to save undeserving sinners.
 2. But why would God do this? The Bible stresses over and over again. Because of love! Only an infinite love would bring God to give up His Son. This is the meaning of, "For God so loved the world . . ."
Literally it could read, "For God loved the world in this manner . . ."
The Christian Standard Version translates it well:

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1930.

John 3:16 CSBO - "For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."

- C. The ultimate application of John 3:16 has in view God's elect people that He chose before the world began.
1. God loved His elect people in such a way that He was willing to bring His Son under His judgment.
1 John 3:1 NAU - "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God"
1 John 4:8-10 NAU - "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins."
 2. God sent forth His only Son to die for a particular people
Matthew 1:21 NAU - "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
John 10:11 NAU - "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."
 3. He loves His particular sheep. He loves His sheep. He laid down His life for His sheep.
 4. This is His particular love – covenant love. He calls His own sheep by name.
John 10:14 NAU - "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,"
John 10:27-28 NAU - "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."
 5. Listen to our Lord's prayer in John 17
John 17:21-23 NAU – "That they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."
- D. God has bestowed upon us His electing love and mercy in Christ Jesus.
John 13:1 NAU – "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."
εἰς τέλος – this carries the meaning completely, fully, to the uttermost
1. God loves us to the full extent of His capacity to love – no limits, unreserved, extravagant
"For God so loved the world that he gave. . ."
John 15:13 NAU - "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."
 2. This boundless love that God has poured out upon us is unconditional

Conclusion:

1. How do you obtain this glorious love?
You can't obtain it! You can only receive it! It is a gift.
"For God so loved the world that He gave"
2. Do you know this love? Can you comprehend the love of God in Christ Jesus?
3. Paul's prayer for the Church of Ephesus is the great need of every church; of every Christian.
Ephesians 3:14-19 NAU - "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."
4. Do you know this love? Do you marvel at this love? Do you awaken each day with the wonder, "Oh that God would save a wicked person like me; that He has fixed His love on me." Is this your joy? Is there anything any more precious to you than that?
How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure