

“The Heart of the Gospel”

Today we are looking at the most famous passage in the New Testament.

Most everybody has heard of John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” It is the 23rd Psalm of the New Testament. As children we memorized it in Sunday School class. As parents we emphasized its importance to our children. We have all seen the John 3:16 banners at football games on TV.

It is one of those passages of scripture that you would want if you were going to be stranded on an island and you could only take one Bible verse with you.

The title of my message this morning is “The Heart of the Gospel.” I entitled it this because our text from John hits at the very heart of who we are as Christians.

Every organization, club, team, business, or group has some type of value, characteristic, or mission statement that gets at the very heart of who it is; something that defines its core values. John 3:16-21 is that for us. We could call our text today the gospel in a nutshell. Nothing sums up better what we believe as Christians than this text from John.

There are three wonderful truths that I want to share with you today from our text.

God Loves the World

First, Jesus tells us something elementary, yet very important. Something that perhaps, we take for granted. Jesus tells us, “For God so loved the world.”

This is a remarkable statement. Here is this fallen, messed up, sinful world that we live in, with all of its problems, and here is Jesus telling us that “For God so loved the world.”

If you could somehow get the same eternal view that God has on the world and you could see all of its brokenness, all of its madness, all of its sin, all of its evil, murder, oppression, and war, could you love it?

The answer is no. If we could love the world the way God loves it we wouldn't do such things; we wouldn't destroy ourselves and others. But God is not like us. God still loves us, the world, the whole world, even though we have made a mess of it from the beginning. We do not deserve to be loved, yet God loves us anyway.

Jesus tells us in this text that “God did not send him into the world in order to condemn it.” (v.17) No, God sent Jesus into the world in order to condemn sin! There is a huge difference between the two ideas.

One connotes God's hatred for the world, which is **not** true; the other God's love, which **is** true.

By sending his Son Jesus into the world to die for our sins the Father makes a way for the world to be saved through him. God loves the world.

This message that God loves the world runs consistent throughout the Bible. Some people mistake the Old Testament to only be a story about God's love for Israel, but it is not true. The Old Testament tells the story of God's love for the whole world.

When God called Abraham and told him that he would make a great nation out of his offspring it was for the purpose of blessing the world. God said, "I will bless those who bless you and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through you." (Gen.12:3)

God made this special covenant with Abraham so that He could love the world, and bring salvation to her. Israel's existence was not only for her own benefit, but for the benefit of us all.

When you study the Old Testament carefully you will notice that along the way there are Gentiles, non-Jewish people, who get engrafted into the family of faith, slowly but surely. This is because God loves the world.

Then there is the preaching of the OT prophets. They lived with the hope that one day, through Israel, there would be a massive engrafting of the Gentiles into family of God. We heard our passage from Isaiah today. It said that the foreigner would not be excluded and that one day God's temple would be "a house of prayer for all nations."

In the NT the ministry of Jesus mostly took place amongst his own people, the Jews, but Jesus commissioned his disciples to take the gospel to all the nations of the earth. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." (Matt. 28:19)

It's in the book of Acts that we see this command begin to come into fruition. At Pentecost all of these different people from many different countries converge upon Jerusalem. There they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit so they can go back home to their own countries and take the message of Jesus with them.

In the book of Acts God also saves Paul and he becomes an apostle to the Gentiles. When that happens the gospel begins to take on an international scope. The message of Jesus travels north and west, all the way across the Mediterranean coastline, taking root in Turkey, Greece, and Italy. This spread eventually became the spring board that led to Christianity blanketing all of Europe. Consequently, Christianity spread to America and then we sent missionaries and the gospel spread to Africa and Asia.

So we see God loves the world- all nations and races of all people. God will gather to himself his elect people (the church) from all four corners of the earth, because God loves all that he has created. "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world."

God Gave His Son to Us

The second wonderful thing we see in our text is that “God gave his one and only Son to us.”

Because God loves us he gives his Son to us. God did not have to do this. God could have withheld his Son from us and let us remain lost in our sins, but instead God gave him up for us.

In his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul says that it is possible that a righteous man might give up his life for another good man if he is lucky, however that is a rare thing. But Jesus Christ is different. He died for the ungodly. That is the difference between us and Jesus. We might sacrifice our lives for a good person, someone we love, but Jesus lays down his life for those who are the enemies of God, all of us. But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8)

This is why we don’t deserve it- enemies do not deserve such grace- and it is why God did not have to do it. God could have withheld his Son from us, choosing not to break the uninterrupted holy communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in heaven, but instead God sent his Son into the world to die for our sins.

In short, through Jesus, God himself bore the penalty that our sins deserve through Christ’s death on the cross. He did this so that we could be with him and not die an eternal spiritual death in hell.

Hell is not a vogue subject in our world today, but the Bible does speak of it. In v. 18 of the text Jesus says, “But whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

We must always remember that God would not be **just** if hell did not exist. But what John is telling us today is that God is also **merciful** and God has provided a way of salvation, reconciliation, and escape through the giving of his Son. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.”

All We Have to Do Is Believe

The third wonderful truth is this, “that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

This is truly good news because Jesus is telling us that all we have to do in order to have life with God is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Now that is not all we have to do, or are called to do, as Christians, but as far as it concerns our salvation that is it- believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel in all of its simplicity. Sometimes we try to make it too complicated. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you will be saved.

Did you know that is the only thing required of you in order to join the Presbyterian Church? To confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

You don't have to be a five point Calvinist in order to join the Presbyterian Church (I'm beginning a series of sermons on the five points of Calvinism starting next week).

You don't have to be rich, drive a certain kind of car, or come from the right part of town. You don't have to dress a certain kind of way, and your descendants don't have to come from Scotland.

You don't have to be a Republican or Democrat in order to join our church.

Most importantly, you don't have to have your act together before you can join, God will work on that after you become a member. All you have to do to join the Presbyterian Church is to confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. If you can do that with sincerity of heart then you can join our church.

Paul tells us in Ephesians that we are saved by grace, through the gift of faith, and that our salvation is not accomplished by our works, so that no man can boast before God. (Eph. 2:8-9)

Friends, that is good news of the gospel. Through Jesus Christ's work on the cross God has accomplished your salvation and the only thing that God requires from you in order for it to be real is to believe. For God to require anything else for your salvation would be asking too much.

Conclusion and Application of the Text

Friends, this is the gospel of Jesus Christ in all of its simplicity:

- 1) God **loves** the world, which means he loves you and me.
- 2) Because God loves the world he **gave** his one and only Son to us so that He might accomplish our salvation through Jesus' death on the cross. This is love: Not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (I John 4:10)
- 3) All we have to do in order to receive this love from God is to **believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. When we do this we move from a position of perishing to eternal life with God.

This passage from John expresses the very core of our Christian faith. It is the very heart of the Gospel. It is so easy and simple that a child can get it, but it is also so easy and simple that it can go right over our heads and we miss it entirely. In fact, John warns us about this in our text.

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." (v.19)

My friend, I hope you get the gospel this morning and I hope that you do not make it more complicated than it is. God loves you, He sent His Son to die for you, and all you have to do is believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you would like to talk more about what it means to follow Jesus Christ I would love to be able to do that with you. If you would like to join this church I would love to speak with you about that as well. If you are ready now to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior then I would like to invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Dear God, I confess to you that I am a fallen sinner and a broken person.

Just like Adam and Eve and every person who has ever lived since them, I too have made a mess out of my life. Because of my sin I have separated myself from you and I stand condemned because of my wickedness.

I give thanks to you God that even though I have sinned in thought, word, and deed, you still love me and you sent your Son into this world to die for me and my sins, so that your justice might be met and your mercy freely given.

Right now, Lord Jesus Christ, I invite you to come into my heart and into my life and save me from my sins and from myself.

I invite you to change me from the inside/out and to make me into your new creation.

Through the power of your Holy Spirit, O' God, restore all that is broken and messed up within in me.

From this day forward give me the grace and strength to follow you all the days of my life and to love you and my neighbor with all of my heart, soul, mind and strength.

Thank you for saving me Lord Jesus Christ and thank you for receiving me into your kingdom, and help me to live with the deep assurance that my sins are truly forgiven and that I will be with you in your kingdom when I die and leave this world.

I make this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

My friend, if you sincerely prayed that prayer you are God's child and He will never let you go.

If you prayed it please let me know so that I can help get you pointed in the right direction in your new relationship with Jesus.

The gospel of John tells us that we **must** do this when we believe on Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. "But whoever lives by the truth must come into the light, so that it may be **seen** plainly that what He has done has been done through God." (v.21)

Amen.