

God Gave His Son

Lord's Day: 23/05/04 am

Study Text: John 3:16

There is a story of a man who during WW1 was walking down the street with his small boy. The lad noticed that there were stars in the windows of some of the houses they passed.

"Daddy, why are there stars in some of the windows," he asked. His father replied, "That comes from this terrible war, laddie. It shows that these people have given a son."

The little fellow went on silently digesting this information. Then he looked up and there was the evening star shining brightly in the sky. He said, "Daddy, God must have given a Son too."

God gave his son Jesus Christ in the Great War against evil. His death brought victory. Whoever believes in Him will live and not die. *Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 15).

We come today to the most well known verse in the whole of Scripture. It is a verse that tells out the gospel in a very succinct and beautiful way. It takes us to the very heart of gospel, indeed to the heart of God and his love. God's love, his love from the very foundation of the world, initiated and completed our salvation.

It is an amazing and powerful verse but still is like any other verse- it is the inspired word of God. And as with any verse we must see it in its context. We do not lift it out and use it as a proof text for our own favourite doctrines.

Jesus was talking with Nicodemus. He confronted him with the fact that you must be born again to enter the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit must give you a new heart; you become a new creation through this regeneration by God the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus explained to him from the Scriptures the need to believe, to believe in Jesus who must be lifted up. The heart once quickened is able to believe.

If you look back to the prologue, to 1:12-13 you will see the essence of what is being explained here. Although belief in His name is mentioned first, logically it follows in the one who is born of God or born again. There in 1:13 you will see how this spiritual birth is contrasted to physical birth. Being born a Jew or a Gentile, Presbyterian or not, slave or free, male or female has no bearing upon this new birth.

Nicodemus has faded somewhat from the scene by this time. In fact it is not certain that Jesus spoke the words of 3:16. They may be from the inspired mind of the apostle John. Note that the second part of 3:16 parallels 3:15 – *whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*.

This verse takes us back, back to Bethlehem and the incarnation, and way back into eternity, into the secret counsels of God. But most of all it takes us into the very heart of God, to the truth that God is love.

Let us now look at the different aspects of love, the wonderful love of God found in these words. Our hearts must surely be touched as we focus upon God's love for us – the width and length, the height and the depth of his love in Christ Jesus.

Character of Love

For God so loved The little word *so* is very important here. Some translate 'God loved the world so much'. This speaks of the intensity, the infinite depth, of God's love – and that is the focus of this verse. His love becomes the very definition of love as we read in I John 3:16 – *By this we know love, because He laid down his life for us*

Can love be any greater than to lay down one's life for another? Can it be greater than to lay down one's life for an enemy? Can it be greater than to invite that enemy into one's family? The parable of the lost son tells of the depth of a father's love. Jesus ate with sinners, with tax collectors, because he loved them and desired that they not perish.

But God who is rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us (Ephesians 2:4). Paul wrote of the great love, that love that was beyond human comprehension. Let us think about this great love of God for us, remembering that we are sinners, that we are unworthy of his love.

Origin/Author

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love (I John 4:8). Love is a fundamental attribute of God. Question 4 of the Shorter Catechism asks "What is God?" God is love could well have been included in this list of attributes. For without the love of God where would we be – still dead in our sin! It was because of his great love that he sent his son into this world to redeem us from sin and death. Love not only motivated God, it is of his very nature to love.

Now obviously love is not the only attribute of God. *I will sing of your love and justice* said the Psalmist (101:1). Indeed the justice of God comes in the very next verse here in John 3. In the Cross God's love and his justice are revealed.

Object

God so loved the world. What does this mean? Actually it is fairly clear in the context even though John uses this word 'world' in different ways (see 3:17). It does not mean the physical world for the verse goes on to tell of believing in Him, something limited to human beings. Sometimes John uses this word to specify the sinful world – we are told not to love the world meaning the evil in the world.

World here refers to the human race, to mankind. As Calvin says 'the heavenly father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish'. God made man in his own image, but man sinned, he rebelled against God. He was cast out from the presence of God, suffering the

consequences of his sin, death. The whole human race came under the Fall as we call it. Likewise the object of Gods love is the human race. The only way for mankind, for *whoever/whosoever* of the human race, to be saved is through believing in Christ.

The text does not say that all will be saved. World does not mean each and every individual. Clearly, again in the context, the following verses speak of he who believes and he who does not believe.

Likewise the text does not say ‘God so loved the elect’. We cannot impose upon the text in this way. J.C. Ryle comments ‘If ‘world’ means only the believing portion of mankind it would have been quite enough to say ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that the world should not perish’. Moreover it will be difficult to read ‘elect’ for ‘world’ in the following verse. God’s sovereignty in election stands firm, but from texts other than this.

Gift

Gods love was not just in word but in deed. His love was active. His love led him to give, to give his Son. He gave what was most precious to him as to any father. But more than a Son, this was his only begotten Son, this was God the Son the second person of the trinity. *He who did not spare his own son but delivered him up for us all* (Romans 8:32). What shall we say to these things said the apostle Paul. Indeed what shall we say to such amazing love. He loved us more than he loved his only Son.

Not only did he give his Son to be born in the likeness of sinful flesh, to be born in this sinful world and experience the evil of it. He gave his Son to die at the hands of sinful men, to be shamefully treated and hung on a cross to die. This is the gift of God, His gift to us as sinners.

Its Purpose

What was Gods purpose in giving his Son to die upon the Cross? Did he just want to show us how loving He is and then tell us to love one another. The world would be a much better place if we all loved one another in this way. Is that the message of this text? Many try to live with the motto ‘Love is God’ – we used to see it like graffiti around the cities of India – Love is God. What a hopeless message for a dying world.

The purpose of this great love of God is that we might not perish, we might not die in our sin and spend eternity in Hell, but that we might have eternal life, eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Yes his gift is indeed the ‘gift of life’ to whoever believes in him. The most precious gift in the world – life – and it is free. How can anyone reject such an amazing gift – it is hard to imagine.

Was Nicodemus still listening – the man who sought to get eternal life through good works. Are you still listening? You have heard this wonderful verse before, maybe many times. But have you believed. Do you have eternal life – have it here and now? Do you appreciate Gods great love?

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