

God's Saving Love

A Topical Sermon

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"God is Love" series

Week 3 - God's Saving Love

Big Question: How does God show his love for all

Big Idea: At the cross we see God's love for bad people.

Prayer

Introduction

The well-known American preacher Dwight Moody once invited a young English evangelist named Henry Moorhead to preach for him if he ever came to the US, but he never really expected Moorhead to make it. To Dr. Moody's surprise, one week he received a telegram from Moorhead stating, "I have landed in New York and will be there to preach for you Sunday." As it turned out, Dr. Moody had to be out of town that Sunday evening and the week following, so it was perfect timing for Henry to step in and preach. When Dr. Moody returned, he found that Moorhead had not only preached that Sunday night, but every night since. Each night the crowds grew and many were saved. Every night he preached from the same text: John 3:16. Henry Moorhead's short career lasted just 17 years. He was only 33 when he died. In all of his sermons he never preached from any other text in the Bible than John 3:16. He preached many different sermons, but always from the same text.

John 3:16 is one of the best known verses in the Bible but we will never exhaust the content and meaning of this verse.

Today we continue our series on God's love. While it is a great topic, we have seen it is also a difficult topic. We have talked about how the love of God can be understood in different ways, but we must not over emphasize one way at the expense of others. We mustn't say that God's love is all about us. But it's not confined to the Trinity either. God shows his love in the way he provides for us. Today we're going to see that in the way he provides for our greatest need.

Through the series we are looking at how the love of God cannot be separated from his holiness, his sovereignty, or his wrath. Connecting the love of God with God's other attributes can be hard for people to accept. While many people in society may be comfortable with the idea of a loving God, they reject God's justice and his sovereignty. But if we have a skewed understanding, we risk oversimplifying God's love, which keeps us from giving praise and glory due to God. We'll fall into the world's trap and look for a shallow emotional love that is all about ME. We'll also fall into the trap of feeling like we have to do everything right in order for God to love us.

But God's love is spectacular and it doesn't depend on what we do.

It is this spectacular love we are looking at. It's at the cross where we see God's love for bad people, which is our big idea today.

We started this series looking at the love between God the Father and Jesus his Son, and we saw that this love is the basis for ALL love relationships.

Then last week we spoke about God's providential love over everything he's made. We looked at his love in providing for us and caring for us, right from creation through to today and into the future.

Today I am going to look at God's yearning love for all people. We will look at how he saves people by loving those who are unloveable, and this love is shown at the cross. We are going to look at John 3:16-18. Our outline for today is :

- Love for the unlovely
- Love that is costly
- Love for eternity

Let's look at this well known verse in the Bible, John 3:16 [put it up]. This is from the Christian Standard Bible. Please stand and let's say it together:

16 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.

John 3:16 is learnt by many children in Sunday School, you will see it on billboards and even people holding up signs at sporting events [slide].

That said, I ask that today we don't just think we know everything about the verse, but let's have a fresh look at it, and I pray a greater appreciation for what it's saying, and also application to our lives.

We often read this verse in isolation. However we should look at the context of John 3 as Reuben read. Jesus is speaking these words to Nicodemus, who is a Senior Pharisee on the council and has come to Jesus asking what it means to be born again. Jesus is explaining this truth to him. Nicodemus has seen Jesus perform miracles, but Jesus is telling him how he can see the Kingdom of God and spend eternal life in heaven with him. Nicodemus asks for clarification, and these verses are Jesus unpacking the meaning of how to be saved to this Jewish leader.

In these verses we'll see what God has done to demonstrate his love.

1. Love for the unlovely

Onto our first point today, Love for the unlovely .

Let's start with who God shows his love to: For God so loved the World.

As we look at God's love in this verse, the first question we may have is what does the word 'world' mean?

While we know he is a loving God, we also know that not everyone goes to heaven. For example, we read in Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." John 3:16 talks about those who believe, but does that mean he doesn't love those people in the world who don't believe?

Some people understand this verse as saying that God shows his love to all the people who live in the world.

In other words, God loves everyone, even though only some will choose to respond by believing.

What makes God's love amazing is the large number of people he shows his love to.

Other people say, "No. No. No."

God only loves the elect.

They say that 'world' here must only refer to the people God had pre-determined to be saved.

However, that understanding of love is too small.

Last week we saw that God shows love for the unrighteous by providing for them.

The problem with both of these approaches is that they're worried about how many people God shows his love to.

The thing is, that's not the point Jesus is making here.

He's not referring to everyone in the world OR to just a select few.

It's not a question of 'bigness'.

In John's gospel, the word "world" is about 'badness'.

The world is the corrupt place that Jesus stepped into.

The world are the rebellious people that Jesus came to save.

The point of the word is not to suggest that the world is so big that it takes a great deal of love to embrace it all, but that the world is so bad that it takes a great kind of love to love it at all.

The Bible is saying that God loved the world, fully knowing how bad it is. This is what John means when he uses the term 'world'.

So the love of God in John 3:16 is great, not because it refers to so many people, but to so bad a people.

What God is doing here is loving what is unloveable. It isn't like he's loving a cute little puppy like our little one on the left, he is loving a Chinese crested dog, an ugly weird looking thing. It looks unloveable to you and me, and that is the world that God loves. [slide of chinese crested dog].

It reminds me of...well...me. When Sarah and I were first married and on our honeymoon, I decided to go sleep-walking one night, which totally freaked her out. I had her in tears and terrified and she wondered what sort of a weirdo she was going to be stuck with for the rest of her life. Now on top of this there are many ways that I frustrate her and I'm sure she still thinks I'm a weirdo, but she loves me anyway. She loves me even though I'm weird and unlovable.

You might have this idea that you are lovely. Most Aussies think that they're actually not too bad. They'd be doing God a favour by becoming a Christian. He'd be lucky to have them on his team.

The Bible says though that we're not lovely. It says that NO ONE is. Sin cuts us off from God. We lie, cheat, steal...a whole bunch of actions and attitudes that we're not proud of.

But the great news is: as unloveable as you are, you can't be too bad for God to love. God loves you as you are.

In John 3:16, God is saying, "I love you." Not due to how good we are or how loveable we are, but he is saying, "I love you despite your total lack of loveableness." This undeserved aspect of God's love is what makes his love so wonderful.

That's our first point: the verse shows that God loves the unlovely.

2. Love that is costly

Now we move onto point 2, that God's love is a costly love and in this section we'll look at how God has shown his love.

The whole Bible is the story of how God gave his love.

Gave- 16 For God loved the world in this way: He gave

This giving is God sending his Son to earth on a mission to die. Verse 17 replaces the word 'gave' with 'send':

17 For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Giving is awesome. It means God initiated the love and moved towards us, not away from us, even though we're in a world full of sin.

What did God give that showed his love? What was so costly that we can see that it was an act of love? Actually, it's not 'what', but 'who'. When we dwell on God's love, it's important to look at his love for his Son. The verse starts: "For God loved the world in this way: he gave his one and only son." This huge cost to the father in the giving of his Son shows how great the love is.

Son- 16 For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son

Giving your own son is a huge measure of love. We know Jesus is infinitely precious to God the Father because we read elsewhere in the New Testament about Jesus being God's beloved son, the one he loves so dearly. Those of us blessed with children have experienced how much we love them. Can you imagine willingly handing them over to die for someone else who is totally sinful? That is the gift God has given. He didn't withhold his son. As we read in Romans 8:32: 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all..." The who in this verse is God, it was God that gave up his son

And consider now not only Jesus' life, which God gave for us, but consider also what this sacrifice involved. Jesus left the glory of heaven and took on human nature so that he could be hungry and weary and in the end suffer and die. Jesus' back was whipped. His skull was

gouged with thorns. He needed cheeks for Judas' kiss and soldiers' spit. He needed hands and feet for spikes. He needed a side as a place for the sword to pierce. And he needed a brain and a spinal cord, so that he could feel the entire excruciating death. This death was one of the worst kinds of torture devised for human pain.

This giving was an act of love. Jesus, God's perfect Son, chose to do this. For you.

So when Ephesians 5:2 says, "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us," don't breeze over the words: "gave himself up." This was a costly love, a painful sacrifice which he willingly gave. The greatness of his love is equal to the costliness of his sacrifice.

This is a costly love.

Compare this costly love with the view that many in the wider society, including many Christians have. We've been trained by popular culture, from movies to sitcoms to songs, on what love is, and our modern cultural idea of love is a shallow, fickle emotional love that ignores a deep, lasting, biblical love. For many people love is purely emotional, and they think that it's just as easy to fall OUT of love as it is to fall into it, depending on how happy the other person is making ME. Love today is largely based on how happy it makes ME feel.

This love has no cost, no sacrifice.

Most people have this shallow, sentimental view of God's love. That God is just there to give us good stuff.

But when we look at God's love, we need to take off this worldly view of love completely, and look at it fresh, and take a step back and consider how the Bible speaks of it.

If we don't have a solid understanding of what love actually is, and if our understanding doesn't have depth, then when we begin to talk about God's love, we just won't have the right picture in our mind, and so we won't value it.

As mentioned earlier, the greatness of God's love is equal to the costliness of his sacrifice.

We have looked at the 'world', and at what it means that God 'gave' his son.

We have seen that he loves the unloveable and we have seen this is a costly love, but why would God love the unloveable with such a costly love? What is the purpose for this great act of love? This brings us to our 3rd point today, "love for eternity", and we'll consider the terms 'believe', 'perish' and 'eternal life'.

3. Love for eternity

Not everybody will benefit from what Jesus came to do. Only those who believe will. In John 1:11-12 we read that to believe is to receive [slide]:

'11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him (meaning the Jews). 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.'

We do need to be clear on what 'believe' means. Many would say they believe in God, but this belief doesn't show in the way they live their life. We read in James 2:19 that even the demons believe. But the word 'believe' in John 3:16 is a deeper belief, one that impacts every area of your life.

You can't believe in God unless you acknowledge the sin in your life and repent of it, and unless you have a desire to grow in your understanding of who God is and who Jesus is.

If you don't hate your sin or you don't desire to grow you do not truly believe.

This is one of the big changes in our lives when we become Christians. But it doesn't happen completely overnight. As we grow in Christ we'll want to put to death sins that mightn't have even bothered us in the past.

You can't believe in Jesus as JUST a historical figure or JUST a good moral teacher. Jesus needs to be our saviour and he needs to be Lord of our lives. We all need to submit to him and put him first in our lives.

Perish- *16 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*

Continuing on in the verse, 'perish' here is the alternative to eternal life. Perishing shows that God's judgement of wrath remains on sinners. We see this in John 3:36:

36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

We are all under condemnation because of our sin, and perishing means we remain under this condemnation forever. It is important, as we think about God's love, to remember what God has saved us from. Jesus speaks about Hell more than anyone else in the Bible and this isolation, this pain of separation from God should magnify his love when we remember what he has saved us from.

He wants us to repent, which means to turn away from our sin. His love shows us this.

Eternal Life-

Eternal life' here doesn't just mean exist forever. Everyone exists forever. Eternal life means being united with the Son of God forever in perfect joy and peace. This is the opposite of eternal separation from God. Either way is eternal, but only one way is perfect eternity with our loving saviour.

So we have eternal life because Christ died in our place. He removes the great obstacle of God's wrath, and he supplies the eternal life.

While it is great that Jesus demonstrated such awesome love, it is even greater that this demonstration of love had a clear purpose.

Now not all gifts serve a purpose, do they? We've all probably given and received gifts over the years which had no real purpose, but this awesome gift from God DOES have a purpose.

The purpose of God's love for us is to have eternal life. Let's look at verses 17 and 18 of John 3:

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

In these verses we read the purpose is to give us eternal life. God saves us from eternal condemnation, or punishment. The opposite of eternal punishment is eternal life.

God's love is clear and directed. Jesus doesn't go to the cross as a lesson or a mere example of sacrifice. He has a purpose in going to the cross, to save people from condemnation.

He knows we are unloveable and left to our sinful desires we are all condemned, but in his great love he has come to earth, died on a cross to take the punishment we deserve and if we believe, has given us eternal life with him. This great act of love was clear and deliberate. What awesome love!

We see here that we can have eternal life and live only because Jesus died. His purpose of dying was to give us life.

A simple illustration would be to look at the food we eat. I, probably like many of you, enjoy eating. A favourite of mine would be roast lamb and vegies, but I'm pretty much happy to eat anything. Now pretty much everything we eat was once living, things like meat, vegetables and wheat. All of this food has given its life in substitution. This lamb or potatoes have given their life so we live. It's us or them, either it dies, or we do.

Now of course this food didn't volunteer, the lamb didn't tell the farmer he wanted to give his life so Michael Magrath can live, but the point here is the reality of it, they died that we might live. Jesus voluntarily died for us and he says unless you eat of me, you die.

Also note in verse 17 that there is no neutral position. We are either condemned to death or saved to eternal life. And our starting position is condemned due to our sin, and it is only those who truly believe in him who are pardoned.

God loves sinners. He shows his love by providing a way for sinners to be saved.

God initiated the giving. He moved towards us and said I love you and this is how much I love you: I'm going to give my beloved Son, my perfect son to die for you and to take the punishment you deserve.

I will do this because I love you and I don't want you to be condemned.

What does this mean for you and me?

Firstly, if you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, if you haven't truly believed in what he has done in dying on the cross, I would strongly urge you to consider this, to speak with someone here about this great news and what it means to be a Christian. God gave his

son whom he loved to die on the cross and if we truly believe in this we too can have eternal life.

This is the greatest news.

God wants you to repent of your sins, to turn away from them and believe that Jesus has taken the punishment you deserve. Turn away from your sin and turn to him and come into a personal relationship with him.

If you have already made this commitment and experience the joy and peace that comes with your relationship with God, I would ask you to remind yourself every day about this great news. Remind yourself every day what John 3:16 and similar verses say, and be truly thankful that God gave his son to die for you and you can be sure of the promise of eternal life.

So we now have a definition of many of the words in this verse. God loved the 1)World which is a bad place full of sin, that he 2)gave his 3)son to suffer and die a painful death that will save us from eternal separation from God and bring us into eternal relationship. And if we 4)believe in him and what he has done, we won't 5)perish but have 6)eternal life.

This verse is so amazing and has brought so many to believe in what Jesus has done for them. It shows that this free offer of the gospel goes to every age, ethnic group and demographic and this free offer is available to everyone here today.

Conclusion

We have seen how much God loves us. We have seen how he showed his love and why .

In the coming weeks we will talk about God's special love for those he has saved and how this love is demonstrated in the lives of believers. We will look at how God loving us first results in us being able to truly love others.

We started this morning speaking about Henry Moorhead, a British Bible teacher who always delivered sermons from the same text, John 3:16. While not always the same message, it was always the same text.

Here at Grace Bible Church, we don't always teach from the same text, but we almost always give the same message, that God loves you, that he wants you to be in a relationship with him, and that Jesus died to take the punishment that you and I deserve. This love is the greatest news of all.

Lets pray.

Questions

1. Did you notice anything new as we went through John 3:16 ?
2. What does the 'World' mean?
3. Why does the World not mean the elect?
4. Are we truly unloveable? Doesn't that sound a bit harsh?
5. How was Gods saving love costly?
6. What is the perception of love in the general community? If you really reflect on yourself, whats your perception?
7. Why is the general view different to the Biblical view?
8. What does this different view mean when you are sharing the Gospel?How would you explain this difference to someone who was not a believer?
9. What does it mean to believe?
- 10.What was the purpose of Gods love?
- 11.How can you apply this verse to your life?