

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



The Love of God

KEY PASSAGE: John 3:16 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1:1 | Ezekiel 18:4 | Luke 15:11-32 | John 3:1-21
Ephesians 4:30 | Titus 3:5

SUMMARY

The most beloved and well-known verse in the Bible is John 3:16.

The occasion for these words was a nighttime conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a Pharisee and teacher in Israel. Jesus explained that a new birth and faith in Him were required for entrance into God's eternal kingdom. Then He gave a brief statement which summarizes the plan of salvation: "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" (John 3:16). Packed into this one sentence is all the information anyone needs to be saved.

SERMON POINTS

Although most of us are very familiar with this verse and can probably quote it, the more important issue is whether we truly understand it.

The Source of This Love—"For God"

There are a great many gods in this world who are worshipped by people of other religions, but the God in John 3:16 is the One who was in the beginning, the Creator of heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1). He is the source of all life, is continually present with us, and will someday bring all creation to a climax. The Lord has given us the Bible that is an expression of Himself and His love. And because He loves us so much, in His Word is a message, which can change our eternal destiny.

The Character of God's Love—"So Loved"

First of all, we must understand that God's love is not like ours. Human love is an intense affection for another person which is based on feelings and which can change from moment to moment. In contrast, divine love is unconditional because it is not based on what we do or don't do but on God's nature. It's also consistent. If Christ is our Savior, we never have to worry that the Lord may be angry with us.

Perhaps the best example of the nature of God's love is the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). The father's love never changed even though the son left home, wasted his wealth, and ended up destitute. As soon as the father saw his son returning, he ran to him and hugged him—not because he started to love him at that moment, but because he'd never stopped loving him. And that's the kind of love God has for us.

God's love is also sacrificial. Because He is holy, true, and just, everyone who sins must bear the penalty for his sins (Ezek. 18:4). That's why we all deserve to be separated from the Lord forever. Yet He also loves us and desires that we be saved. That's why He sent His Son to pay the penalty for our sin. This was the only way He could remain true to His nature and still forgive sins.

The Son of God was born of a virgin, grew up to manhood, and died on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for us. Jesus' resurrection proved that His death was sufficient payment for all mankind's sin. Now when we believe in Christ and repent of our sins, God is able to justly forgive us because the penalty for our sins has been fully paid by His Son. Without Jesus there would be no forgiveness of sins.

The Object of God's Love—"The World"

Although the Lord created the world and all that is in it, this verse is not referring to the earth, but to mankind. "The world" encompasses every person who's ever been born. God desires to have a relationship with us and wants us to respond by giving ourselves to Him in complete surrender and trust. He offers us salvation and the forgiveness of our sins, but that is only the beginning. From that point on, He works to sanctify us, enabling us to live righteously. This doesn't mean we are perfect, but we have the life of Christ living within us through His Spirit. As we reflect His character and actions, we become a light in a dark world. Knowing that our salvation cost Jesus His life, His immeasurable love should motivate us to obey His commands and walk faithfully with Him in a way that brings Him honor and glory.

The Gift of God's Love—"That He gave His only begotten Son"

Here is the gift that surpasses all others. The Lord didn't give the world something but someone—His own Son who came to earth as deity in flesh to offer His life for us. It wasn't a onetime gift but one that abides in us forever. Through His Holy Spirit, Jesus lives within the heart of everyone who believes in Him. This is not mere intellectual belief, but a firm conviction that Jesus is God's Son who died for us. Genuine faith acknowledges sin and our need for a Savior and results in a life surrendered to Him.

The Purpose of God's Love—"That whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life"

After death, there are only two possible destinies—we either perish and are forever separated from God, or we have eternal life in His presence. On that day it won't matter how many good deeds we've done or how much money we've given away (Titus 3:5). There is only one way to be saved—through faith in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross as the payment for our sins. When

we trust Him as Savior, our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and we have no reason to fear death. When we stop breathing, we'll start living in God's presence.

Jesus came to give mankind eternal life. We don't have to understand all that's involved in the process; we simply need to respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction, recognize our sinful condition, and ask Jesus to forgive us and become our Savior. At that moment, the Lord seals us for Himself with His Holy Spirit forever (Eph. 4:30). Nothing or no one can break His seal because it is held fast by His power. When Christ is our Savior, we are eternally secure, awaiting our redemption as children of God.

RESPONSE

- Do you feel safe and secure in God's unconditional love, or do you worry that you've done something to anger him? What does the story of the prodigal son teach you about the character of God's love as demonstrated by the father (Luke 15:11-32)? How does this change your perception of His love for you?
- The Lord wants us not only to receive His love but also to let it influence our lives. How has His immeasurable love motivated or changed you? How has it affected your relationships, your fears, and your sense of security?
- To further enrich your appreciation for God's love, read or sing the lyrics of the hymn entitled "The Love of God."

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