

A Generous God

Read John 3:14-18

I will not say everything that can be said about this verse. I want to try to say 2 things.

1. God so loved the world

I'm aiming here at the beginning to **narrow in on** this little phrase "loved the world"

In the context of John's writings it really is an **unusual statement**.

To unpack how suprising it is that John says this, we need to know how John **uses the word "love"** and how John uses the word **"world"** in his gospel. We'll start with the latter.

Now, how does John use the word, "world" in his Gospel?

It occurs **80 times**. And John almost always means one of two things when he says it. The **first meaning** is the **physical space of the world, ie the earth**. That is the neutral use.

So for example **John 21.25**, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that *the world* itself could not contain the books that would be written." That's the neutral, geographical, spatial sense of the world. Earth would fit in that sentence.

Or, secondly, John is talking about (and this is the negative use) the **whole order of human beings and human affairs** that are in rebellion against their Maker.

John 15.18, "If the **world** hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."

John 12.31, "Now is the judgment of this **world**; now will the ruler of **this world** be cast out."

That is the negative sense. There John is talking about the **sinful lump of humanity....its people there**.

What's the **meaning of world in 3:16**? It not spatial or neutral. This is **about people that need saving**, isn't it? Its about **"whoever,"** which is people....its about **living eternally instead of perishing**....that is souls....not inanimate creation. So when John uses "world" in 3:16 he is talking about the whole lot of human beings and human affairs.

And John casts the "world" in some **seriously negatively light**:

The world rejects its Maker (John 1)
 The world is under Judgment (John 9)
 The world is under the rule of the evil One (John 12)
 The world hates Jesus (John 15)
 The world hates Jesus' disciples (John 17)
 The world will rejoice at the death of Jesus (John 16)

Alright, that is world. Now, let's talk about "loved."

And the **vast majority of the occurrences of "love" come in chapters 13-17**. Those chapters, are especially focused on the relationship between the Father and the Son, between the Godhead and the people of God, and between individual Christians.

Then there are **three other smaller clusters of this word** love in the gospel of John.

- In the telling of **Jesus raising Lazarus** (his treasured friend) from the dead, the love of Jesus for Lazarus is noted **three times**.

- **Seven times** in the conversation between **Peter and Jesus** where Jesus is saying, “Peter, do you love me?” and Peter keeps saying, “Lord, you know that I love you.”
- And then **thirdly sprinkled throughout the Gospel** are the references to the author as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

So in summary for John, **love is a family word**. Its an **insider word**.

In John 3:16 we have this word love—we have it **used to express God’s love for the whole lot of sinful humans** who are in rebellion against their Maker.

This is a truth we **become numb to because of familiarity**.

But do you see **what a radical statement this is?** To say that God loved the world.....**what world?**

The world that **loves the darkness of sin more** than the light of Jesus (John 3.19)

The world that **does not love God** (John 5:42)

The world that is **ruled by Satan**.

The world that **rejoices at the death** of Jesus.

It is to a **world in full-tilt rebellion against God** that God gave His Son.

THAT is the world that God loves.

This **brings up an important point**. What God’s love for you demonstrates is **NOT the value of you** (remember, you are a part of “the world” ...or at least you were). The cross is often **preached in such a way as to highlight the value of** people—if God loves me, if he would die for me....than I must be really wonderful and important.

No. The fact that God loves you **demonstrates how great he is**. God’s love is **NOTEWORTHY BECAUSE HE LOVES ENEMIES**. God’s love is great because of how much he gives for those enemies.

ill. I’ve been reading the book Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand. It’s the story of two US Airmen who crashed at sea during WWII, and then floated 2,000 miles to the Japanese occupied Marshall Islands.

During their time as POWs they were treated in some of the most inhumane ways imaginable. Just to give you a sample, they were used as human lab rats in Japanese experimentation with chemical weapons. They were repeatedly beaten by gangs of soldiers. When they would beg for water from the hole in the door of their prison cell their guards would occasionally come with a pot scalding hot water, and throw it in the prisoner’s face.

Now imagine for a moment a hypothetical scenario where after the war one of the US POWs had the chance to forgive one of his captors. Meet him; forgive him. If he did it, it would be amazing.

Ok, take it one step further. Imagine a hypothetical scenario where the US POWs, after the war, had a chance to save the life of one of their captors, but in order to do so, had to give their own son in the effort.

In thinking through those hypothetical scenarios we are beginning, just beginning, to get a taste of what it means for God to *love the world*.

God loves *the world* so much that he brings the **offer of salvation to all the world**—look to Jesus, the one lifted up; look to him, and live. Look to him and be saved.

God **loves the world so much that he sends his Son**, his only Son into the world to die on the cross, to bear the sins of enemies, and make the **offer of salvation** available to all people.

Into all the world the invitation goes—come to him! **Come today!** Let the Children Come! The old; the broken; the failed; all nations; all people. Let them all come! He has died to save the world! So you can look to Him....the sin bearing Son of God. He died to make you alive. He died to give you eternal life; to **remove the sentence of condemnation** that has been resting over your life.

John 3:16 says it so plainly—For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him, will not perish but have everlasting life.

If you have never believed in Jesus before, you can today. He loves you. He died for sinners. Believe in him, and be saved. Believe in him, and receive eternal life.

Just think of the **woman at the well in John 4**—that **lying, adulterous, chronically failed mess** of a woman that Jesus saved. She returns to her village after meeting Jesus, and she says to all of her village—“come to him!! Come see the Messiah!”

You can **take that message into your heart.** You can believe on him. You can put your trust in his death and resurrection on your behalf. And **he will save you. Because he loves you.**

Come today.

Now, **let me say one other thing** about this phrase before we move on to the next point.

There are some people....Christian people....who would **define world differently than we have here.**

Now, I've already **tried to show that “world,” means the whole lump** of sinful humanity. **God loves all of the people** of the world so much that he **brings the offer of salvation** to them. That if they will believe, he will save.

But, there are a **number of folks out there who, like us,** treasure the **doctrines related to God's absolute sovereignty** in salvation, that will **twist “world” in this text** in order to **limit its scope.**

They will say that it is not all individuals that God is said to love in John 3:16, but that this verse is **just breaking the news that in addition to some Jews,** God also loves some Gentiles. Now, its true to say that God loves Gentiles and Jews, but John 3:16 is **not trying to make that point.**

Its making the point that wherever you find a human, God loves them so much as to offer His Son for their salvation.

When you study the uses of the word “world” in John, that seems very plain to me. For it to mean something else, would mean that John sees a definition of world in John 3:16 that he does not see anywhere else. Now, that is certainly possible, but I don't see anything in the surrounding context that would lead us to that conclusion.

Now, I **love the doctrines of God's sovereignty in salvation.** They are **precious to me.** I hope I get to preach **John 6** where we will see that **only those who the Father draws** come. And I hope I get to preach **John 10** where we'll see that belief occurs **because someone is a sheep,** its not belief that makes them into sheep.

Listen, **if God's only action in the world** was to make the offer of salvation, than **we'd all still be dead in our sin.** **The responders to God's offer are not more spiritual or insightful than the non-responders.** But God **goes beyond the offer for his people.** He **causes them to be born again** (1 Peter 1.3). In **his great love he “makes them alive”** Ephesians 2 says--so that they can believe.

There is a **calling in the new birth** (what john 3:1-8 describes) that is a kind of **summons from the King** of the universe and it has such power that it **brings about the response** that it asks for in people's hearts. If you are a Christian, you have experienced that summons. God brought you to himself.

But **we cannot reject the idea that God makes a genuine offer of salvation** to all people because of his love for them.

There are **two very real dangers,** I see in this false definition of world.

Its prompted (maybe) by **wanting to make this text fit into our theological systems. That is a serious mistake. We conform our systems to the Scripture. We don't make the Word of God fit into our systems. **People get scared that this text undermines their system, and so they twist this text.** First of all it **does not undermine God's sovereignty** in salvation. Second of all, **you better not be playing games with God's word** so that you can win an **argument.**

****Second danger: God loves the people of the world.** His heart breaks for them. So should ours. We should love the world too. Not with the selfish love of participation, but with the selfless love of witness.

We should want to see people we know trust in Jesus. **Our hearts should break** because they refuse him.

ill. Our hearts should beat like the **great pioneering missionary CT Studd** who once said, ""Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

We **need this text** to provoke that in us.

2. **He Gave His Only Son**

The measure of God's love is God's generous giving of His Son.

Let us be clear that **when John 3:16 says "gave"** it has the **lifting up of John 3:14-15** in mind. The giving of John 3:16 is **Jesus' brutal, undeserved, substitutionary** death on the cross. It was the **torture rack** of Calvary that John 3:16 has in mind when it says, "he gave". He Gave His Only Son....He gave him to die.

And this giving is **THE measure of God's love**. As a society we have **reduced love to mere sentiment**. It's a feeling we have. But feelings come and go. God's **love is demonstrated in a decisive, pre-planned, self-giving, sacrificial** act for his enemies.

"God demonstrates his love for us in [this way], while we were still sinners, Christ died." (Romans 5:8)

God has nothing more profound or moving to say to you about his love for you than this—he gave his only Son to die on the cross in your place.

Does that move you?

So, let's ask a couple of questions:

- How does God feel about the world? *He loves the world (we have seen this already)*
- How does God demonstrate his love for the world? *By giving his Son to die on the cross (we have seen this)*

But this we have not seen.....**(3) why did Jesus have to be given? Why did he have to die?**

The context is so important. Verse 17—in order to save the world. But how, how does God giving Jesus to the world bring salvation to the world?

verses 14 and 15 are the clue. Jesus says that **like Moses lifted up the serpent**, so also must Jesus be lifted up. Jesus' meaning there is plain—the **serpent in the wilderness points to my crucifixion**. It was lifted up; so must I be lifted up. He's talking about the **lifting up of the crucifixion**.

But why the serpent, and why the crucifixion? Why the giving of the Son of God?

Rod showed us last week--**the serpent on the pole was a symbol of God's judgment**. Remember, the Israelites had started to **complain and grumble**, and so God sent snakes to bite them as a **form of judgment**. And so for their healing they had to **look to a symbol of the judgment that God brought (snakes)** as if to say, "God's **judgment was right** and fair."

That was their repentance. And then in believing God's promise to give them life, they lived.

The **snake on the pole is a symbol of God's judgment** on the people's sin. It didn't actually pay for sins. It **pointed to another pole** that would pay for sins.

Jesus' sacrifice that was **not a symbol**. The **blood there was not a picture**.

Jesus crucifixion is the judgment. The punishment that **we deserve for our sins was hanging on his pole.** That is what our sins should win for us. Death on a cross. Jesus took that punishment—not as mere symbol of judgment. **But as judgment-bearer. Sin-bearer.**

2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake God made Jesus to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.”

- God loves us. How do we know? *He gave His son.*
- Why did he give His son? *To bear the wrath and judgment that we deserved.*

This is the heart of the Christian message. There is nothing more central than this. God gave Jesus to take our judgment, and give us eternal life.

And so we find it all over the Bible:

Matthew 20:28, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Ephesians 5:2, “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”

Ephesians 5:25, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

For this to have its **full effect** on you, it will have to be **personal**:

Galatians 2:20, “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Ultimately, **this is the way we should understand** the sufferings and death of Christ. **They have to do with me.** They are about Christ’s love for me personally.

- It is **my hard-heartedness; my self rule; my love of the darkness** that caused the only Son’s death.
- **I was lost and perishing.**
- When it comes to salvation, **I am the one that stands in need.**

And I am the one for whom he died. He gave himself **up for me.** Do you **see him there** on the tree? **For whom?** *For me!! Could it be...it was for me that God gave his only Son.* Not because of **any intrinsic value** in me. But in spite of me, he chose to set his love on me, and in so doing, he died in my place, became my sin-bearer; my suffering servant.

This verse (Galatians 2:20) was one of the **most quoted verses** of Scripture by the **first century Christian martyrs.** Why? Because they were **so moved that God would give his Son** for them, that they were **willing to give** their lives back to him.

“Imitation is not salvation. But salvation brings imitation.” JP Christ is not given to us first as model, but as Savior.

BUT, after we experience his pardon....we should pursue his pattern.

Are **you moved by the generosity that is in John 3:16?** For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

Does that familiar refrain **still move you?** Has it sunk **deeply into your soul**, or is it still **skipping along the surface** of some old memory from childhood Sunday School class?

Did you know that **there is a test** of have deeply its truth as sunk into you?

Luke 12:48, “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.”

That is **not white guilt.** That is the Bible.

ill.A lot of Americans spent a lot of money on themselves and their families this weekend. Right or wrong? It depends.

“I don’t believe that the antidote to over consumption of pointless junk is to buy nothing.” The antidote is to **attach your life to the life of Jesus Christ.** The antidote is to sync the mission of your life with the mission of Jesus.

His generosity, if we comprehend it, makes us into generous people.

ill. syncing devices....sometimes we want items on our mission to override items on his mission.

Look, I'm going to be straight with you. **If you comprehend the generosity** of Jesus Christ; if you truly know what John 3:16 says and means:

- you'll be able to **go online and look at your bank accounts** and tell.
- You'll be able to **look on your calendar** and tell.
- You'll be able to look at the **guest list to your events and functions** and be able to tell.
- You'll be able to look into the **"grudges section"** in your heart and be able to tell.

This is a **generous, giving God that we serve**. Do you **know him**? Give yourself **the test**—are you Christ-like in your generosity? I'm not just talking about money here. That's included. But not exclusively.

And let me be careful. I'm **not trying to move you on the basis of guilt**.

ill. Oh, how can you eat **steak at the restaurant and drive two cars**, when there are so many hungry people in the world.

That's not what I'm saying. I'm not asking you to compare your situation to the plight of others, and give of yourself on that basis. That's false guilt that the world serves up.

Here's what I'm saying—if you know, truly know, the Lord **Jesus Christ who emptied himself for you**—that will sink so deeply into your soul as to **utterly change the kind of person you are**, and make you into a generous individual.

If we are to be generous people it will be the **overflow** of an experience with the **grace of Jesus**.

This is why **Robert Murray M'Cheyne** could say, "there are many hearing me who now know well that they are not Christians because they do not love to give. To give largely and liberally, not grudging at all, requires a new heart."

You see at the heart of God there is a gladness in his giving. A cheerfulness; a loving disposition that compels him to do it. The generosity of God is not something that is forced on him from outside. It rises up from within him.

Jesus said, "**no one takes my life from me**; I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to take it up, and I have authority to lay it down."

And so **when God grants us the new birth**, and **creates us a new** in Christ Jesus, He takes up **residence in our hearts**. His **generous nature begins to well up in us** toward others, making us **cheerfully generous** ourselves.

Oh friends, let's look to him....let's see him there. Given for us. Transforming Us.