

The Greatest Gift

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John 3:16

So, Here we are, back in John 3:16. Actually, this is week two of a four-week series in these 24 words, which are possibly the most familiar and most loved words in the entire Bible. Now, in Hearing that we'll spend four weeks in one verse, I know that might shock some of you. I know many of you may be used to, to doing a whole chapter at a time. So, you'd be done with the Book of John in about five months. My hope is we get through John three in five months. But Hey, that's fine.

You're laughing because you're like, "Wait, is He serious?" We'll see. You're used to going through a whole chapter, not, not a few words. But just know that I, I have a method to the madness. Just know that I'm doing this on purpose.

First, there may be no greater verse in the Bible for sinners than this one. So, so it's good for us to slow down a little bit and make sure we really understand this verse that so many of us have memorized. Second, I'm doing this because we don't live in a day of great Bible knowledge. So, so I can't take any word of this text for granted. And third, I'm going slowly in this text because I care about you. I love you. And I want you to get everything I can possibly give you out of this famous, most loved verse that God is used for two millennia to save so many people with this verse. If God has actually saved millions of people with this verse, which He has, then this verse deserves more than just like being one point of a larger sermon. Now, this text deserves our utmost, our deepest, our most engaged attention. And that's why we'll spend three, probably four weeks in this text, with Easter happening right in the middle. So, Easter being the text, whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life. That's Easter this year.

So, if you're thinking, "Should I invite that family member who doesn't know Jesus? Should I tell that friend to join me Here at Easter?" The answer is what? Absolutely, you should tell them, right? Because they're going to Hear about Jesus. Good Friday and Easter will have different services, different music, different sermons, but the same Jesus, which brings us to our text and the greatest gift.

Now, last week we looked at the greatest love based on the phrase, God so loved the world. Sadly, far too many people out there think of God's love like that ugly, ugly kid that gave you a Valentine, proclaiming their love for you. You know and you're like, "Oh sweet, thanks. Not sure what to do with that." That's what people do with God's love. But I tried to show you last week that for God to love you is to be infinitely blessed. And that's not preacher hyperbole. That's real. Limitless, eternal blessings belong to those that God loves, especially since love is the last thing God should have for the world. Because we saw last time, the world is engaged in a bitter war against this God.

What we have in John 3:16 is, the greatness of love is measured by the greatness of the gift. The greater the gift, the greater the love. One pastor put it this way, He said, men who love much will give much. And you may usually measure the truth of love by its self-denials and sacrifices. That love which spares nothing, that love which spends itself to Help and bless others, that is love indeed. And that's the kind of love we saw last week, the greatest love.

So, there's a connection in our text between God's love and what He gave. I mean, you may have wondered last week and a message on the greatness of God's love, why I didn't emphasize the word so in verse 16, "For God so, so, so loved the world." You're like, "I mean, why didn't you talk about that? He so loved the world." Well, so, I think is being used here in a way that's not easily communicated well in English. That's because I, I don't think so refers to the amount like God so greatly loved the world or God loved the world to such a high degree. Actually the word so should likely be understood to mean how or in this way, meaning not God so loved the world, but God loved the world in this way. Well, in what way? Well, the phrase in this way would refer back to verse 14.

So, the Son of man, verse, 14 must be lifted up, must go to the cross. In this way, namely in the cross, God loved the world, with the result that He gave his only Son. And that's where we want to start. So, we wanna start, ugh, lets, lets first thing about point #1) The Giver, The Giver. Now, if you're one of those people that likes to fill in the next, the next line before we get to it, because you're trying to guess what it is. I gave you an easy one this week. Point number one is The Giver. You probably will figure out point number two.

The Giver obviously is the Father. But in connection with his love for the world, let's remember, actually let's, let's all admit that no one starts out life as God's friend. Each one of us starts out, verse 16, as part of the world. And the world is John's expression for culture-wide hostility towards God. This is, this is a rebellion against God on a culture-wide, society-wide scale. Why? Because John explains in the rest of his book, that, that the world hates Jesus, chapter 15, verse 18. The world hates Jesus followers, chapter 15 verse 19. And that is because the world is ruled by Satan, chapter 12, verse 31. And I know it's old hat for us. But the Father's giving love is shocking. It is a shocking thing for the God of the universe to love the world. And I'm going to give you three reasons why God's love is shocking.

First, the Father's love is shocking because He is the Giver of every good thing you and I have ever experienced in our entire lives. Let me say that again. God is the Giver of every good thing you have ever experienced in your entire life, every single good thing. If you were to take a list and start writing every good thing that's ever happened to you, every good thing that you've ever experienced, every single thing on that list, if you were able with, with like a memory that suddenly you could remember, every single thing that's ever happened to you and you start writing that down, every single thing on that list would come from God, the Father. How do I know that James 1:17 says it, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father." So, since good things are constantly being given both to those who are, and those who are not God's children." That means God's regular response to the world that is at war with him is what? It's goodness. It's kindness. It's grace.

Throughout our lives, God treats us against what we deserve. In Matthew 5:44 and 45, Jesus talks about this. He's, He's talking about God's love for his enemies. And He says that, that He expresses this love for his enemies, how? By causing the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. He expresses this love by causing the sun to rise on the good and the wicked. Good things happen to those who are his people and those who are not his people. Think about that. He's the attacked one. He's the wronged one. He's the abused and innocent one. And yet He responds with love for those who've attacked him. And which if we're honest is what? It's all of us. This is part of God's common grace. Grace that God shows everyone, everywhere, regardless of our status, as his children or not.

Wait a minute, did I attack God? Yeah, absolutely. We attack him through indifference. We attack him through defiance. We attack him through neglect and disobedience. We attack him through distrust, through pride, through deprioritizing him. "God, I got other things more important than you that I got to attend to." Real, Really? More important than the God of the universe. He's the attacked one. We're the attackers. And He loves us anyways. And He shows us that love by giving us every good thing we've ever had.

The world at war with God was once where we were at home. We were soldiers. We were traders, fighting against the one who has given us every good thing. I mean, it's easy to point the finger at how bad the world is, but if it wasn't for God's love, that would be us. Attacking the Giver of every good thing and doing so with all our Hearts, all our souls, our mind, and our strength.

His love is also shocking because the one we've attacked is not only the Giver of every good thing that we've ever had, but He is also the judge that we must all stand before. Genesis 18:25, God is the "judge of all the earth" who will do what's right when He judges.

Ecclesiastics 12:14 says, "The Lord will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil. I emphasize that word *every* to bring your line back to James 1:17. Why? Because the God who gives every good thing is the same God who will bring every deed into judgment. He will avenge himself on his attackers, his enemies. Isaiah 1:24, "Their punishment is certain. Their doom is assured." There is no escape for those who don't receive the gift that He's given to the world at war with him. I mean, could you imagine that? You're driving and you have a moment of recklessness, and a cop sees you hit a car. So, you're, you're driving recklessly. You're going to be arrested. And it just turns out, it just have happens that you hit the car belonging to the judge that you've got to stand before at your trial. That would stink, right? That would be the worst news. Well, that's reality. That's the future. The God we're at war with is the judge that all people must stand before.

But third, his love is shocking because to this world, that war, this world that's constantly attacking him, attacking his character. "I can't, I can't believe in a God who would..." Fill in the blank. Constantly attacking his will. "I'm not going to do what He says. The way that I view things. Yeah. That God, that book, all that's wrong." To this wicked world that He will judge with justice, to this world, He gives a gift.

Notice, the Father in 3:16 is active. God loved the world, so He gave. Don't miss this fact that this gift comes from him. It's not an angel. It's not even the Son. The Father gives this gift out of love for the world. The giving is an expression of his love for the world. That means He's not reluctant to give this gift. There's nothing in him that's saying, "I'm not sure if I want to do this. I'm not sure if I want to give this." The gift isn't taken from him against his will.

Roman soldiers aren't able to take and arrest Jesus if the Father hadn't already given him. He loved the world, and out of the overflow of this love for the world, He gave his Son. And this tells us what? This tells us why Jesus is Here, why He came in the first place, why He lived the life He did, why He taught the truth He did, why He did the miracles, why He confronted the religious leaders, why He was kind of sinners. And especially this text tells us why He endured the sufferings and the torture and his own murder on the cross.

He came according to Luke 19:10, to seek and save the lost. But John 3:16 tells us why. It tells us what motivated him to do that. And it was the Father's love for the world. His mission coming from God's love, according to our text, though, was to die. The word gave Here in verse 16,

refers to being delivered over, given up to death. It's a word coming from the sacrificial system, which points back to verse 14 again. And, and the idea that He's being lifted up to die on the cross. And verse, verse 16, notice it begins with the word for, it means because, it means Here's the reason, Here's the motive. So, so verse 14 is the statement, the Son of man must be lifted up on the cross to die, die for the rebellious, because God so loved the world that He gave his Son.

Verse 16 tells us the motive for the cross. God loved the world. In other words, there is no cross, there's no Jesus to die on the cross, were it not first for the Father's love for the world at war with him. Jesus died as a loving gift from God, so that his enemies could forever be his children, which brings us to point #2) The Gift, The Gift. Obviously, just as the Giver is the Father, the gift is the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God the Father loved the world, so He gave God the Son. But more than that, God loved the world, so He gave his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave his Son to die. In other words, the greatest gift is not God giving the Son in general like, "Hey, I'm giving you my Son, kind of in just a general way. I'm I'm making this whole thing, this whole salvation thing possible." No, this is saying God is giving his Son, sacrificing his Son for the world on the cross. That means the Father doesn't love people because Jesus died for them. His death doesn't cause the Father to love sinners. That's, that's bad theology. That God doesn't love sinners. Thank you, Jesus. Now, He does. That's bad theology. Why? Because the text says God's love resulted in the death of his Son.

The cross starts with God's love for sinners. In other words, first God loves, then He gave, which means the cross, the atonement, which is a fancy word for the payment made to forgive all the sins of all who would ever believe. The punishment for our sins in the substitute, instead of us. Jesus receiving the wrath and the hatred that we deserve for our rebellion, for our war, the beating, the mockery, the torture, the agony, the horrific death, all of it happens because as of the loving, merciful Heart of the Father. As the Song says, "The wonder of wonders, oh how can it be that God became flesh and was given for me? The almighty came down and walked among men. The wonder of wonders, He died for my sins."

Romans 8:32 captures this amazement, this wonder of wonders. I want you to keep your finger Here in John 3, and I want you to turn to Romans 8:32 because you'll be tempted not to believe what this text says. You'll be tempted that, "No, does it really say that?" So, I want you to see it with your own eyes.

Romans 8:32, Romans 8:32, towards the end of the verse. Romans 8:32 says, "God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all." I know. We already know that, but I want you to think about this for a minute. God the Father did not protect his own Son from the cross. God the Father handed him over. He turned him over to the torture that was the cross. And I'm not just talking about the physical agony. I'm talking about the spiritual agony, the agony of of Jesus, the perfect, holy one, becoming sin, in the words of 2 Corinthians 5:21. The one who knew no sin became sin. I'm talking about the agony of being forsaken by the Father, screaming., "Why are you doing this? Why are you forsaking me?" I'm talking about the, the spiritual agony of receiving the full, relentless, crushing blows of God's wrath for three hours in darkness on the cross. That, that, that is what God did not spare his own Son from.

1 John 4:10 puts it this way, "In this is love, not that we've loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation, probably not a word that you use all the time. It's just, it's a big word that means the Father satisfies, He quells, He squashes his own

correct hatred for sin by unleashing that hatred to the fullest and most furious extent on his Son, instead.

No wonder Jesus prays for this to pass him by, right? The torture of becoming sin. The torture of being separated from the Father, that He loved eternally, that He's eternally with face to face, perfect friendship. The one that He loves so dearly being separated from him, as well as being separated from him. Why? Because He's experiencing, He's experiencing God's punishment, his wrath for sins that He never committed. And there He is in the garden anticipating all of that. And his holy, righteous, good soul almost could not endure that. I say almost because John 10:15 to 18 is clear that Jesus agreed with the Father's plan to sacrifice him on the cross. He was in full agreement. Three times in that text, Jesus emphasized that no one takes his life from him. Three times, He says, "I lay it down. I lay it down. I lay it down willingly." But why did He lay it down? Why did He give his life? Galatians 2:20 tells us He died out of love for sinners. Galatians 2:20, Jesus dies out of love for sinners.

John 3:16, the Father sacrifices his love. Why? Love for sinners. Both the Son and the Father together in perfect alignment, perfect agreement, "This is the way that it must be. This is the only way for the world to be saved. I must be sacrificed. I must give my life." Or the Father looking at the Son, "You must be sacrificed." And in the Son saying, "I must lay down my life." The Father did not spare his Son from his wrath. He handed Jesus over, so He would experience the full weight of his wrath. And He did it, Romans 8:32, why? What does the text say? For us all.

One author put it this way, He said, "You almost get the sense from John 3:16 and Romans 8:32, that God loves us more than He loves his Son." You almost get that sense from these two texts that God loves us more than He loves this Son. Why? Because God did not spare his own Son, so that He could spare you. If the cross did not deter God from sacrificing his Son, if the cross did not deter Jesus from laying down his life, that must be one incredible, one enormous, one immeasurable amount of love. And that must be one great gift.

So, the expression of God's love is seen in that He sacrificed his Son. The extension of that love is that He sacrifices his Son to save the world. And the irony of God's love is that He gave his beloved Son to the world that hates him, doesn't really care about what Jesus did, trying to find all other ways to get to Heaven apart from Jesus. And God does this to a world at war with him because He is a kind and merciful, and loving God. I mean this is, you got to let your mind think about this for a minute. How this holy and good God can love this wicked world is beyond comprehension, but to give his Son for it, to hand him over to death. I could, I could imagine him going, "Well, you angel, you go, you go take care of this." I could imagine him doing that. Or coming to a human being going, "You know what? I'm sorry. It sucks for you, but you're the one, I'm just going to kill you, kill you, so everyone can be saved." But his only Son.

I mean, who would sacrifice the life of one of their children for the safety of their enemy? No one would do that. But I want you to notice in John 3:16, that the Father just didn't give his Son. He gave what? He gave his only Son. That word only in Greek means unique, distinct, special, one of a kind, the only one in a class by himself. There is no one like this Son, no one that is even close to his equal. So, this gift, the Father's only Son is not only the best gift in the universe, this Son is incomparable. You can't find anything that is an equal to him. He has no rivals. He's priceless. His worth, his value has no estimate. Why? Because John 1:1, the Son is God. That's who He is. Why? Because John 1:1-2, the Son has been with the Father face to face, perfect harmony from all eternity. So, it's not just his value as deity, but it's his value in relation to the Father. There's nothing more wonderful to the Father than the Son.

And, and why is the Son so infinitely valuable? Add this to it, John 1:14, the Son became a human being. And add this to it, John 1:29, He became a human being, why? To take away the sin of the world. This is why Jesus is so valuable, so priceless, it's not just who He is, it's not just what He did, but it's who He is to the Father. There's no one more wonderful. I, I, I, don't have a fraction of the words to convey the relationship, the love, the cherishing that the Father has for the Son. And yet He, this special Son was sacrificed because God loved the world.

So, the degree to which God loved the world, I don't think is found in the word, so. I think it's found in the word, only. How much did God love the world? Enough to give his only Son to save people out of the world. In other words, God the Son who is and always has been as great as the Father, equal in value, equal in dignity, equal in deity. The Son who is the perfect, spotless relationship, no secrets, perfect intimacy, perfect love, a friendship, a value that that we could not possibly ever imagine. This priceless one was sacrificed for the world, so that people would not perish in Hell forever, but have eternal life when they believe, when they give their life to the Son.

God's gift was his most precious possession, his one and only Son, the one that the Father could not possibly love any more than He does. And yet, He sacrificed him out of love for the world. There is no greater gift. There's no greater expression of love in all the universe than the Father giving his only Son to love and save the world. At this point, for me, that Song comes back, wonder of wonders, oh, how could it be that the almighty came down and died from me?

So, let me ask you those of you who doubt God's love for you, what more could He do? What more could the Father have given you to prove his love for you? If his love was proved by a spouse, that would do it. Maybe if my bank account was bigger, that, that would prove his love for me. Maybe if I didn't have as much trial in my life. Maybe if my life wasn't so hard, that would prove his love for me. No, it wouldn't. See, He gives those things to people at war with him, right? He gives those things to people who He will judge and send to Hell. He gives them those things and even more. That doesn't prove his love for you. It proves his general love for them, but not his special love for them.

His special love, his infinite love, his greatest love is reserved for those He gives his Son to. That and that alone is not only proof of his love, it is proof of his infinite, unending, eternal love for you, that He would give you his Son. Even if He took of those things away from you and only gave you his Son, you are infinitely and eternally blessed.

So, believe the cross is God's saying, "I love you more than you believe those feelings." Take, take the cross and fight those feelings. Say, "No, that's not true." Because of the cross. Believe the cross more than you believe your past. Believe the cross more than you believe your circumstances. Believe the cross more than you believe your marriage, or you believe your bank account, or you believe your Health, or you believe your present sufferings. Believe that the cross is God saying to you, "I love you infinitely because I gave you the one that I love infinitely, my Son on the cross." You don't need any other proof of God's love than the proof that He gave on the cross.

Anything else that God could possibly give you would be far less proof of his love for you than his Son. He did not spare his own Son, his only Son, the Son that He loves, but gave him up, so that He could spare you. To think that something else is better proof of God's love for you than the cross is an insult to the priceless majesty that is Jesus.

Also, let me ask you, do you complain about what's going on in the world? Is God doing anything about all the sin in the world? Yes. He sent his Son to die for sin. And because He sent his Son to die for sin and his Son has already died for sin, God's response is, "Just wait. Right now, I'm saving people out of the world, but there will come a day when the door of the ark will be closed. There will come a day when the day of salvation will be done. And in that day, I will do away with all sin. And I will be really good at it. I will rid the universe of sin. The problem of evil will be practically and eternally solved. Just wait. I gave my Son to fix the problem of evil and He did a perfect job. So, just wait and all evil will be destroyed."

Also, let me ask you, you who are overcome with doubt about your salvation, will you look to Christ instead of yourself? There's nothing good here. It's really easy to find things that God's not pleased with here, but you cannot find anything that God is not pleased with in Christ, nothing. Can you own that you're a sinner? Can you own that you deserve God's wrath? And in that ownership, can you say, "In spite of my sin, in spite of the wrath that I so richly deserve, in spite of all of that, God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish. Whoever believes in him will have eternal life. And I believe that." Can you speak that truth to those doubts and say, "I'm not going to trust me. There's nothing good here. I trust in Christ." Can you say that? Can you mean that?

Jesus conquered sin. He conquered death. He conquered the devil. He did all of that on the cross. Don't trust in yourself. There's nothing good there. Trust alone in Christ.

In Genesis 22, there's the historical account of God telling Abraham to sacrifice his Son, Isaac, his only Son, his special Son, the Son that He loved, the Son that God promised to give him. God told him, "I want you to sacrifice your Son. I want you to kill him on top of a mountain called Mount Moriah. He's going to be an offering to me. And this offering of your Son is going to show how much you love me, Abraham, how much you're committed to me, that, that you would not spare even your only Son, the Son that you love, that you would not spare him if he comes in between you and me." So, Abraham, Genesis 22, obeys. Walks great distance away from his house, probably to keep his wife from chasing after them. He takes some wood. He takes some fire. He takes a knife and He takes his Son.

And after a few days, they get to the mountain, starts up the mountain with Isaac, his Son, the Son that He loves. And Isaac even notices this, "Dad, you got wood for the altar, but where's the sacrifice, dad?" I wonder if that question ripped Abraham's heart out. Son asked that, He's looking at his Son, "You're the sacrifice. It's you. The Son that I love, you're the sacrifice." As Abraham and Isaac get to the top of the hill, I wonder, Abraham is making this altar." I wonder if He's stalling. I wonder if He's going slowly. I wonder if He's putting it together. And He is looking at his Son and He is putting it together and looking at his Son. He's, He's having this moment of like, "What, what am I doing? What's going on here?" Or if He's just resolute, "This is what God wants from me, and I will obey." We don't know what's going on in his mind.

We do know that at some point He says, "Isaac, come here." And He takes ropes and He ties Isaac up, and He puts Isaac on the altar, and He ties Isaac down. And I don't know in that moment, I know my Son would be pleading with me. Is Isaac doing that? "Dad, why are you doing this?" My Son would be doing that. "Dad, dad, I love you. Don't do this. What are you doing? Why are you forsaking me? Please don't do this."

And here's Abraham, his father, ties him down, grabs the knife. Maybe He positions himself over Isaac's neck. Maybe He positions himself over Isaac's chest. Maybe tears are streaming

down his face. And just as He's about to plunge that knife into his Son, Abraham Here's what? "Stop! Don't harm him. I know that you fear me." Interesting.

That same mountain, 2 Chronicles 3:1 says, "Then Solomon began to build the temple, the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah." So, on that same mountain where Isaac was almost sacrificed is where all of the sacrifices, all of the, all of the sacrifices in the Old Testament, they were all performed on that same mountain. And it is in that same place, somewhere around there that Jesus was crucified. Somewhere on that same hill, some 2000 years later, after Isaac and Abraham, God's only Son was attached to the cross. And as He is dying for the world, nobody screams, "Stop!" But God crushed his own Son.

The supreme test of Abraham's love for God was that He was willing to give his Son, his only Son, the Son that He loved as a sacrifice to God. God spared Abraham's Son, but He did not spare his own. He shows his love for the world by not sparing his Son, his only Son, but sacrificing him on the cross to spare this world at war with him. Friends, this is the greatest gift there has ever been, as an expression of the greatest love humanity has ever seen, God's love in the death of his only Son. This gift was given on the cross almost 2000 years ago. And this gift is being offered to you now. This gift is a hundred percent free. It costs the Father dearly. It costs the Son dearly. It will cost you nothing but your sin.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Listen, nothing in this world, nothing that's tempting you right now to reject this gift has a fraction of the worth that Jesus has as God's one and only priceless Son. No one would trade a billion dollars for used Kleenex, right? If someone came to you and said, "I'll trade you a billion dollars for that used Kleenex in your trash can." First, you'd think they were lying. "That's too good. There's no way in the world that's true." And then if you thought, "Wait, this is this is real. This is a real offer." Nothing would stop you from making that trade. Nothing at all would stop you from making that trade. "Oh, this Kleenex is so valuable. I don't know, a billion. I don't know. It's kind of close." No it's not.

Listen, sin is far less valuable and far more repulsive than used Kleenex. And Jesus is infinitely more valuable than a billion dollars. A billion dollars is an insult compared to his infinite value as God's only Son. And the Father will trade all of your sin for him. He really will. Jesus can be yours. Ask him. Cry out to him. Trust in him and you will have eternal life.

In this moment, the words of that Song make more sense, right? Wonder of Wonders. Now, we have a better idea of that phrase, right? It's, it's wonderful. It's amazing. How could this be? How is it possible? Is this really true? The priceless Jesus for my worthless repulsive sin, really? How can this be, that the almighty came down and died for me? John 3:16 says He did that because He loves sinners. Aren't you glad that the God of the Bible is that God who loves sinners?

Let's pray. Father, it's a text like this one that it's true. I wish I had dictionaries memorized, encyclopedias memorized, so I could pull words and concepts and illustrations to try to make it clear, just how wonderful and priceless Jesus is. And yet I get to this moment and have four times previously, thinking I did not even scratch the surface of the value of your love and the giving of your Son to die on the cross for our sins. And so, my hope is that we're leaving this time together, just amazed, just amazed at your love for sinners, just amazed at the gift of your Son.

And I pray that you who not only gave your Son almost 2000 years ago on the cross, but I am so grateful that you are giving him again now in this moment. You are giving him, you're offering him as a ransom to free people from slavery to their sin and the inescapable result of that slavery,

which is perishing in Hell forever. That you are giving him to say, "You don't need to go there. You don't need to perish. Trust in my Son, believe in my Son, and you will be freed from that. I'll take your sin. I'll give you my Son. What more do I need to do?"

Thank you, Father, for being a God of love, who expresses that love for sinners by sacrificing your Son, so that sinners can become your children. Use this text in each of our lives to draw us closer to you, I pray, for the glory of your name. Amen.