

The Greatest Decision

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John 3:16(c)

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I'm Jon. I get to be one of the pastors here and I want to start our time today with a fictitious story that I heard way back in 1999. Imagine you're driving home and you turn on your radio and you hear a little blurb about a village in India, where three villagers died suddenly, strangely of a flu that had never been seen before. Then you go, "That's kind of interesting." You don't think much about it, but on Sunday coming home from church, you hear another radio spot. Only they say it's not three villagers, it's 30,000 villagers now. They've died in the back hills of some area in India and it's on TV that night. The news reports that doctors from the CDC are frantically trying to make their way to India because the disease strain has never been seen before. By Monday morning when you get up, it's the lead story.

It's not just Indian now. It's Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran. And before you know it, you're hearing the story everywhere and everyone's calling it the mystery flu. The president says he's praying and hoping it all goes well over there, but everyone is wondering, how are we going to contain this? That's when the president of France makes an announcement that shocks the world, he's closing their borders. No flights from any countries where this thing's been seen. That night you're watching a little bit of the news before you go to bed and your jaw hits your chest when a weeping woman is translated from French news into English saying, "There's a man in a hospital in Paris, dying of the mystery flu. It's come to Europe." Panic strikes, as best they can tell once you get it, you have it for a week and you don't know it. Then you have four days of unbelievable symptoms.

Then you die. Britain closes its borders. It's too late for that though. North Hampton, Essex, Liverpool, Oxford are all infected. It's Tuesday morning when the president of United States makes his announcement. "Out of an abundance of caution for the health and safety of our nation, all flights to and from Europe and Asia have been canceled. If your loved one are overseas, I'm sorry. They cannot come back until we find a cure." And less than a week, our nation has been plunged into unbelievable fear. People are selling little masks for your face. People are talking about what if it comes to our country. Preachers are preaching it's the judgment of God. It's Wednesday night and you're at a church prayer meeting. Somebody runs in from the parking lot screaming, "Turn on the radio! Turn on the radio!" That's how you know this story is from 1999.

Well, the church listens to a little transistor radio with a microphone stuck up to it. The announcement is made, two women are in a Long Island hospital dying of the mystery flu. Within hours it seems this thing just sweeps across the country. People are working around the clock to try to find an antidote, but nothing is working. New York, Florida, Texas, Washington, even Arizona it's as if it's just sweeping in from our borders. Then all of a sudden news comes out. The code has been broken. A cure can be found, a vaccine can be made. It's going to take the blood of somebody though with the right DNA and the right blood type that hasn't been infected. So all through the Midwest, where this disease hasn't been seen yet, they're broadcasting on the emergency channels. Everyone is asked to just do one simple thing, go to your hospital and have

your blood taken. That's all we ask. When you hear the sirens go off in your neighborhood, please make your way quickly, quietly, safely to the hospital. Sure enough, you hear the sirens and you and your family get down to the hospital late one Friday, that Friday night and you see nurses and doctors pricking fingers taking blood, putting labels on them. Your wife and your kids are there. They take your blood. They say, "Wait here in the parking lot and if we call your name, you can go home." You stand there around all of your neighbors wondering, what in the world is going on? Asking yourself, is this the beginning of the end of the world?

Suddenly you hear a nurse screaming, coming out of the hospital, "We have a match." As we all know a story like this is pretty unbelievable until about two years ago. Right? We know this story is a bit unbelievable still right because people in the story were still going to church. Remember two years ago, we all celebrated Easter at home. Bodies in the streets was the prediction. Fear had gripped the world. We separated our air from one another. We separated of faces from one another. If we didn't do our part, we would be responsible for the death of friends and family. So we bathed in hand sanitizer, afraid to touch anything. Would we lock down, would we stay home, how long, what about masks, what about vaccines? More and more and more. There's a ton of decisions. Remember that we all had to think through.

Some watching this right now, you may still be trying to figure these things out. You may still be needing to make these kinds of decisions even to this day, decisions about who to trust, decisions about what to trust still abound even right now. But I'm here to talk to you about another decision and more than just any other decision, the greatest decision, the greatest decision you're ever going to make. And I know that sounds like exaggeration, I know. But once I define the terms or better, once the Bible defines the terms, it'll be obvious that this decision we're going to talk about today is the greatest decision you're ever going to make. But here's the good news. Once you have all the facts, once you know the truth, once you understand reality as it truly is, this will be the easiest most obvious decision. The right choice, the right decision could not be any clearer.

And this obvious decision just happens to be in the most well-known verse in the Bible, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Many people with no church background either know this verse or they know the teaching of this verse namely that God loves them. Many people with a church background not only know this verse, but we know it so well it's like seeing a movie for the 10th time. We like the movie, because we've seen it 10 times, but by the 10th time, it's completely lost its gravity, its impact its drama. So in order to understand this decision correctly, we need to start where everything should start. We need to start with God. And specifically we need to start with the love of God.

That's where John 3:16 starts. "God so loved." Now this word for love does not refer to physical attraction or physical desire. It's not the word either that refers to warm feelings of affection. God's love in our text has nothing to do with warm feelings towards people. This word for love refers to choices and actions that are done to bless, to do good, to benefit another person. Love in John 3:16 is doing what's best for others. So when coming to a crossroads and you've got an option, option number one, do what's best for you. Option number two, do what's best for another person. This word "for love" chooses option two. It's in other words, selfless, it's costly, it's sacrificial. Sacrificing what's best for me to do what's best for you. When the Bible talks about the love of God, this is what it's talking about.

God having the kind of love that does what's best for evil and for people even at great cost, at great sacrifice, at great harm to himself. That's the foundation. That's, that's the rock upon which John 3:16 is built. "God so loved" and notice he loved the world. The world is humanity in general. It's men, women and children, all cultures, all ethnicities, all nationalities. He loves them all. God loves all people without distinction. He loves humanity, but not just humanity in general. This is humanity in relation to him. See when when it comes to God, humanity, we are not neutral. We're biased and we're not biased towards God. We're biased against him. So the word "world" here is humanity. Yes, but it is humanity at war. It is humanity in rebellion against God. It's humanity in our defiance, in our disdain, in our indifference to God. It's humanity at our worst is what God loved.

God loves rebels. He loves sinners who give him no benefit. I mean mean what can we possibly do to benefit the God of the universe who has everything and has no needs. We don't, we don't offer him anything of value. He has no needs. He loves traders who are not attracted to him who want nothing to do with him, who do wicked things in defiance of everything he is and everything he wants. Now you may be sitting there not seeing yourself in that way. "That's not me, that's other people". But I wonder if we just compared your life to the 10 commandments, what would we see? Have you placed anything above God?

Have you placed anything above loving and honoring God in your life? If you have, that's, that has a name, it's called idolatry. Have you ever used God's name or his title as a curse word or to emphasize a curse word? That has a name, it's blasphemy. Have you honored your parents, always treating them with respect and love? Have you ever stolen anything, even something small? Have you ever told a lie, even a white lie that didn't hurt anybody? Have you resented others for having things that you think you should have? That's just 6 out of 10.

But just those six prove that we are all rebels against this God. And we think, it's not really big deal. Come on, it's Easter. What's up with that? Stop it. Make me feel good. I don't come here all the time. I, I need some encouragement that things are breaking down all around. That's not how I think about myself anyway. God doesn't care. It's kind of harsh and unloving.

Those reactions just prove the defiance. Why? Because God gave us his rules for our good, for our blessing and for our joy. But we believe that what's best for us, what's good for us, what will maximize our joy is defying him. So we do what we want instead. Middle finger in the air singing, "You're not the boss of me. I do things my way." Aren't you glad that God's love is not stopped by our defiance. Our resistance, our rejection, our revolution against him doesn't even diminish his love for the world. This truth is better than anything we refer to with the word best. God looks out of the world at war with him, a world where nothing attracts him to us, a world that is repulsed by him, his word, his ways. And instead of rejecting us, he loves us. Aren't you glad that the one true and living God is a God of love, and from the love of God, let's look next at the gift of God. Remember what I said earlier about love that the word does not refer to attraction or affection. It refers to choices to do what's best for others. Look back at John 3:16. "God so loved the world that he" did something for our good, he did what's best for us. And what he did was "he gave his only son" to do what's best for the defiant world at war with him. God loved that defiant world by giving his son for that defiant world. Think about it. God is the one that we wronged. He's the one that we defied. He's the one that we've ignored. And yet he responds in love by giving us a gift, a gift that was selfless, a gift that was costly when he gave his only son for us. John 3:16, love sacrifices for our good.

So what, what could God give that would be more valuable to him than his son? Nothing. The word "only" in the text means one of a kind, special, unique, precious. Nothing at all compares to his son. Nothing is his rival. Nothing is even close to his equal. The purest diamond, the richest bank accounts in history pale in comparison to the infinite value that this son has to his father. There's never been, there will never be a greater gift, a greater expression of love than this God giving his only precious son out of love for rebels against him.

That's because the word "give" is not, uh, here, here you go. This word "give" means to give over. It means to give up. It means to give up to death, to relinquish. It's a word used for the sacrifices to offer up as a sacrifice. Jesus mentions this just two verses earlier in verse 14, where he talks about being lifted up. That's being lifted up on a cross, to die. Now we put it all together. Out of love for people at war with him, God gave up, he sacrificed his specialist treasure, nothing more valuable, nothing more wonderful to him than his only son. You see our rebellion doesn't diminish God's love at all because he gave his very best for us. One author put it this way. I thought it was brilliant.

He said, "If Jesus was not given on the cross, it would've meant that there was a limit to God's love for rebels, that there was something which his love was not prepared to suffer. That there was a line which he would not cross," but Jesus went the whole way and died on the cross proving that there is literally no limit to God's love for rebels, that there is nothing in all the universe, which that love was not prepared to give for the world to suffer for the world. That there is nothing, not even death on a cross, which he will refuse to endure to save the world. Nothing. Listen, if God's only son is what he gave out of love for the world, it would seem, as another author said, that he loves rebels. He loves his enemies more than he loves his son, because he did not spare his son from the cross so that he could spare all of us.

Spare us from what? From the punishment we all deserve for our rebellion. Look back at the text. Why did God do all of this? John 3:16, "That rebels would not perish, but have eternal life." We'll end our look at John 3:16 next week and we'll dig into this last phrase, but very simply on one side is eternal life, on the other side is perishing eternal death. So which one will it be for you? God's love and God's gift result in two great destinies, eternal life or perishing, which bring us back to the great decision. "God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

God spares rebels from punishment for their rebellion by punishing his son instead. Punishing forever as punishment for our rebellion is what is on the line right now for every single one of us. Our crimes, our apathy, our pride, our sin must be punished either in us or in the son. We, we feel guilt because we're guilty. Our sin, my sin, your sin, our crimes must be punished. And here's what God did. He gave his son to be our stand-in, to be our replacement, to be our substitute. That's what the cross is all about. God punishing Jesus for the rebellion of all who would believe in him. When you put all of that together, do you see what I said earlier? This is not a hard decision. Who wouldn't trade all of their rebellion for forgiveness and grace and mercy forever? Who who wouldn't do that? The greatest being gives the greatest gift. His only son of the greatness of his love for incredibly great sinners like you and me so that whoever believes in his son will not perish but have eternal life. That is the truth. It's that easy.

It's that obvious. What's it going to be? Will you believe in him? "Well, preacher, I'm here right now. I already do believe in him. What are you getting all worked up about?" You sure about that? See to believe in Jesus has nothing to do with believing in God. Everybody believes in

God. To believe in Jesus, even people that deny him, they hate a being that they don't, they think doesn't even exist. To believe in Jesus has nothing to do with your preferences. Like, "well, Jesus is kind of my way. I know there are a bunch of other ways and that's fine for them, but he's mine."

That's not, that's not it. To believe in Jesus is not about your knowledge. "I know some stuff, I know some stuff about, I've read the Bible a couple times". Great. To believe in Jesus has nothing to do with your childhood. "I grew up going to church. I know David and Goliath, I heard that story. I know some Sunday school songs". Yeah. "Father Abraham. I know stuff". To believe in Jesus has nothing to do with being impressed with Jesus. Like, "I like him. He's a good guy. His teaching is amazing, blows my mind. Man, like he died for what he believed. That, that is impressive.

He's revolutionary fighting oppression and injustice. He he's the man. I like him". That's not believing in Jesus. To believe in Jesus has nothing to do with wishing. "Like man, just hoping this Jesus thing works out. I don't know". That's not it. To believe in Jesus has nothing to do with, "Sure. I believe in Jesus. He's great. I never think about him though, except for a couple times a year. Tip my hat, say hi, but but all the rest of the time I live however I want. I'm in charge. God forgives anyway. Yolo. I'm good."

To believe in Jesus isn't to believe in him plus my good works. "That, that'll make sure I don't perish. I got my good works. I'm good. Believe and go to church, believe and give money. Believe and serve, believe, give all my money. Believe, usher in world peace. Like whatever it is, it's, it's Jesus and me together. I'm not going to perish. I got him and I got me. I'm good". No, you're not. Look at the text. It just says what? Believe. That's all. Believe and you will not perish. Believe in Jesus and you will have eternal life. To believe in Jesus isn't even about what you think is true. "Like I agree, man. I'm like calm down. Jesus, he lived, he died, he rose again. It's all true. Great". Yeah, great. Demons think it's all true. Demons know it's all true. So what does it mean to believe in Jesus? To believe in Jesus is to trust in Him and Him only. Him and Him only to trust in Him and no one else.

No prophet, no priest, no king. And listen, not even yourself. Ah, I'm a good person. I've got these good ideas. I do this good things. It's me and Jesus together. No, it's not. It's to be done with that, especially, and to say, "I trust in Jesus alone," and it's trusting in Jesus and not just no one else, but Jesus and nothing else, no organization, no religion, no other way that you think maybe that might be the way, but that's how I'm going to not perish and have eternal life some other way. Not him. No. This is putting your hope, your trust, your confidence in Jesus and Jesus alone.

And by doing so, you turn away from what would hold you back from him. If this Jesus is most precious to the father, then nothing at all is better than Jesus. Nothing. Anything that tries to get in the way of trusting in Jesus should automatically be rejected. You're, in that moment, what you're being offered to trade in for Jesus is garbage compared to infinite treasure. Who would hold onto the garbage? Nobody, but some of you, you're being tempted to right now. But notice what the text says, who is this for? Who is this gift offered to? What does the text say? "Whoever". Whoever reaches outward to everyone in this rebellious world that God loves.

Whoever means the gift goes out to all people. Whoever means it doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter how old you are. It doesn't matter what culture you grew up in, what nationality you identify with, what ethnicity you're born into, whoever you are, whatever you are, believe in

Jesus and you will not perish. Whoever reaches up to the smartest, the capable, the moral who say, "I don't need this. That's for other people." No, it's not. It's for you.

Believe in Jesus or you will perish. Whoever reaches down to the lowest pit of despair, pit of brokenness, pit of rebellion. Whoever means no one is too sinful. Whoever means no one is too wretched. No one is too despised and rejected. If that's you believe in Jesus and you will be washed clean and have eternal life. Whoever reaches even lower than that to the most repulsive to the people that most people look away from can't stand and want nothing to do with, not Jesus, no not him. He will take you.

He loves you, believe in him and you will be accepted and you will have eternal life. And at the same time, whoever reaches up to the very top of the elite, the presidents, the senators, the Kings and Queens, the rich and the famous, the ones that everyone wants to be like and everyone wants to be around. No they, they also are at war with God. But he loved them. He loves the elite, he loves you and he gave his son for you so that even you, you can't buy it. You can't do anything with all your fame and all your riches. You can't do anything with this. You just believe.

Whoever even includes those who have heard all of this before and continue to walk away. It even includes you. Whoever means, if you can hear my voice, if the synapses are still firing in your brain, the greatest love that gave the greatest gift is offered to you today. Suddenly a young nurse comes running out of the hospital, screaming. He's yelling a name and waving a clipboard. What? He, he yells it again and your little boy tugs on your arm, "Daddy that's me."

Before you know it they've grabbed your boy, "Wait a minute. What are you doing? Hold on." And they say, "It's okay. His DNA is right. His blood is pure. We can, we can make a vaccine. He hasn't had, we need to make sure that he doesn't have the disease." Five minutes later, out comes the doctors and the nurses and they're crying and they're hugging one another, some are even laughing. You haven't seen people laughing for days and an old doctor walks up to you and says, "Thank you, sir. Your son's DNA is pure. His blood type is perfect and he's clean. We can make a vaccine."

This word begins to spread across the parking lot. People are screaming and they're praying and they're laughing and they're crying and they're cheering, joy is beginning to fill this once gloomy parking lot. But then the gray-haired doctor pulls you and your wife aside and says, "May we see you for a moment? We didn't realize the donor would be a minor so we need you to sign this consent form." You're thinking, great that's wonderful. You begin to sign it and then you realize that the number of pints of blood, that they're going to take, that, that line is empty. You ask, "How many pints?" And the old doctor smile fades. And he says, "We didn't know it would be a child. We need it all. We need everything."

You start to protest and you say, "No, you don't understand. We're talking about the world. Please sign. We need it all." "But can't you give him a transfusion?" "If we had more clean blood, we would, but we don't. We just have him. Please sign." And there you are with the weight of the world on your shoulders, comparing certain deaths for millions, the life of your son and deafening silence, you sign. And they say, "Would you like to have a moment with him before we begin? Could you go to him? Would you walk to that room where he sits on a table and says, daddy, mommy, what's going on?" Could you take his hand and say, "Son, your mommy and I love you and we would never let anything happen to you that didn't have to happen. We love you."

When the old doctor comes back in and says, "I'm sorry, we've got to start. People all over the world are dying. Could you leave that room? Could you walk out?" As he saying, "Daddy, mommy, why are you leaving? Why are you forsaking me?" And then next week when they have a worldwide ceremony to honor your son and some people sleep through it and others don't even watch because they go to the lake instead. And many that do come, they barely even try to pretend to care. Would you just want to jump up and scream, "I gave my son, he died so that you could live, live." You would scream that, and God is screaming that right now to you. I gave my only son up to death for you so that you would not perish for your sins, but so that you would have eternal life. Do not take my son lightly. There is nothing that you have ever heard in your entire life that is more real than what we have just heard from John 3:16. Do not ignore the son. Do not leave here without making the greatest of all decisions. Do not walk away again, do not put this off. Do not wait until a better time. There is no better time than right now. Believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ and you will have eternal life. Your sins will be washed away forever. That's not some dramatic end to a sermon. That is reality. Let's pray.

Jesus, this is Easter Sunday. This is the day that we celebrate. This is the day that we remember the fact of history. You are risen indeed, truly, factually, historically that you didn't stay dead, but you rose from the grave. By doing that you proved once and for all you proved for all time that everything we heard today from your word is true. Rebels really can be forgiven. Criminals really can become God's children. Enemies really can be reconciled. The lost really can be found. Slaves to sin really can be set free. And all of that is because you died and rose again. It is so easy in this moment to distract ourselves with, "are we ready for tonight? What are we going to have for lunch? Oh, we got to go take a picture. Got to go grab the kids". Please, please arrest every one of our souls, mine included. Please help us please, to understand that we have a moment right now to make the greatest decision, not just that we're going to make, but that anyone could ever make. Please take these truths and arrest our hearts with them. Let every attempt to distract ourselves fail so that we may align our lives, our hearts, everything, with what is true. That would be evidence of your kindness, of your grace, your mercy to each one of us. If you would allow that to happen, please do that for us, I pray, for the glory of your beautiful name. Amen.