



Sermon

10th March 2024

For God so loved the world

John 3:14-21; Ephesians 2:1-10; Number 21:4-9

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

I. HE LOVES:

“For God so loved the world...” If those words are true, it changes everything, doesn't it? Imagine what the world would be like without God's love... A dark planet hurtling through space unguided, undirected. No hope. No future. Nothing to live for. No greater purpose to our existence. Every death would be an end. Every grave a place of despair.

But God does love the world! We see it in every sunrise... every blade of grass... every fountain of water... every birth... every child's face. God so loved the world!

We hear it again in the Epistle reading: v4 “... because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.”

Max Lucado writes, “If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, he'll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and he chose your heart...”

He loves. And because he loves...

II. HE GIVES:

Jesus said, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” Just to say, “I love you,” doesn't really mean a whole lot. Love--agape love--is a verb. It has to act. The Bible says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8).

We may not think we are sinners, but the Bible defines sin as missing the mark - falling short of God's standard. (Romans 3:23). Our sin separates us from God. That's where Jesus comes in. He came on a mission to bring us back to God.

In verse fourteen, Jesus refers to an event in the Old Testament. The children of Israel were travelling through wilderness when they came to a place where there were many poisonous snakes. People who were bitten by the snakes died.

We might get hung up on why this happened. Helen told me yesterday, that she had prayed about it during the week when she was mediating on the Numbers passage. The idea that came to her was that the Israelites were like rebellious teenagers at that time. They were complaining about God's miraculous provision of manna bread in the desert and claiming that they feasted on the best of food when they were slaves in Egypt. Oh, how short is our memory sometimes! They had been downtrodden, beaten slaves longing to be free. Sometimes, nothing gets through but a short, sharp shock. How many parents have had to ask a teenager to leave home because their behaviour has become intolerable? It is not how the parent wants to treat the child, but when nothing else gets through, that is the last resort.

Yet – importantly - this was also a story of grace. Moses prayed for the people and God provided a remedy. He told Moses to make a brass serpent and lift it up on a pole for everyone to see. Anyone who had been bitten who then looked at the brass serpent would immediately be healed.

We're in a similar situation. The whole world has been bitten by sin, we are dying from that snake bite of sin. Just as the serpent was lifted on that pole for the people to look to for healing, Jesus would be lifted on a cross for us to look to for our healing. God sent his Son to die, for the whole world.

Although God's remedy was sufficient for all of Israel, it was only effective for those who "looked upon the serpent." And although God loves and Jesus sacrifice was sufficient for the whole world, it is only efficient if...

III. WE BELIEVE:

Jesus said that God, "gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish..." This concept runs contrary to our instincts. And it's so simple. We expect a more complicated cure, a more sophisticated salvation. But God is interested in simple things and real change in us.

Paul says the same in verse 8-9.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

By grace, through faith. The agent is God's grace. We make connection with his generosity through our faith, trusting he means what he says. There is no earning about this at all.

It is very common for people to think that they have to earn their place with God. If I just do enough good things, if I keep the rules, if I go to church. But we never can earn eternal life. We cannot undo the wrong we have done. We cannot make ourselves sinless. We cannot meet the standard necessary.

No, it is not by our efforts, so no one can boast. It is simply a gift to be received.

No other religion offers what Jesus promises. They all think we have to earn our way to acceptance but not Christianity. Jesus calls us to do one thing: **believe!**

Listen to what the Bible says:

- Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)
- Whoever believes in him is not condemned. (John 3:18)
- Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life... (John 3:36)

But what Jesus wants us to see is that it's not because of what we've done, but because of who he is.

It's not because of who I am, but because of what he has already done!

And all he asks is for us to put our trust in him, and him alone!

Once upon a time, there lived an elderly man whose only son died before him. The man was very wealthy, but because he had no living heirs, his estate was to be auctioned off when he died. People came from miles around to bid on all the wonderful antiques and riches. The first item up for bid was an amateurish portrait of the rich man's son. No one bid. The people grew restless, anxious to bid on the real family treasures. But the auctioneer wouldn't proceed to any other items until the painting had sold. Then, an old man bid \$5 for the painting. He had been a gardener at the house and knew the boy. They had often walked and talked together. No one else would bid and the painting was knocked down to the old man. Then the auctioneer announced that the auction was over. The entire estate is to go to the old man. The deceased left specific instructions in his will that whoever buys the son, gets it all!

God has done the same thing! The Bible says, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 John 5:12).

That story illustrates both the gain and the loss. The old man gained the whole estate with the picture of the son. The others who did not value the son, lost the whole estate.

So it illustrates Jesus' comment about those who reject him. The people in the auction did not value the painting of the son because they did not value him. Jesus warns that if people reject him, they will be condemned. Why? Because he is the only solution to the problem of sin. If we discard the only solution then all we have left is the problem.

"He who has the Son has life" When we believe in Jesus, ...

IV. WE LIVE:

"Whoever believes in him," Jesus said, "shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Again Paul in the Epistle reading tells us how we would otherwise be perishing:

V1-3: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."

That is why in the Baptism vows, we are asked – Lucas , "Do you turn away from evil?" We all find ourselves under that evil rule in the world. Paul here calls him, the ruler of the kingdom of the air and he is talking of the devil. Jesus referred to him as the Prince of this world. Same being. We need to come out of his rule. It is a selfish way of life. It is an oppressed way of life. It is a way of life that leads to spiritual death.

Paul talking to Christians tells them that is what they left. That leaving is what we celebrate in baptism. Going into the water is a picture of dying to sin and the old way of life. Rising out of the water continues the picture of rising to new life in Christ.

"Whoever believes in him," Jesus said, "shall not perish, but have eternal life."

And that life starts straight away. It is living knowing you are a child of God. It is living knowing you are accepted by the creator of the universe. It is about being remade with new life. It starts now and goes on forever.

Conclusion:

He loves. He gives. We believe. We live.

It really is that simple. God loves this world, more than we'll ever know. He gave his one and only Son so that we could live forever with him. With him we live.