

GOD'S LOVE FOR A SINFUL WORLD

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

Perhaps there is no text in the Bible which is so frequently quoted as this one. It is one of the first verses that is given to us in childhood for memorizing. It is one of the first texts that is translated into a foreign language by the pioneer missionaries. It has ever been, is now, and ever shall be a favorite text. By the vast majority of Christians it is considered to be the greatest text in the Bible. And there are reasons for the popularity of this verse. The language is simple and easily understood.

And yet ministers seldom preach on it. The reason is that it is so magnificent and so vast in its truth, so tremendous in its teachings, so comprehensive in its setting forth of divine grace, that no sermon can encompass it. There is an immense amount of truth packed into this one sentence. Many would be saved if they would only really consider this announcement.

I. The Greatest Giver — God.

The most fundamental fact in the universe is God. Everything starts with Him and ends with Him. We must assume that God is, or else we will be completely lost in the mystery of origins, marooned in the darkness of intellectual despair, and adrift in a universe that has no explanation for its beginning and no definite goal as its objective. But God is. Back behind all things, under all things, over all things, and in all things, as the source and origin of support, there is an infinite, all-wise, holy and righteous God.

What kind of a God is He? Does He care? If God does not care, He would not count. If God would not make any effort to save men, then spiritual things would not have any place in our thinking. But when God reveals His will and shows that He is marshalling the forces of heaven for man's salvation, then spiritual things should become man's chief concern.

Yes, God loves and cares. This is shown in many ways. The burden of the Bible is God's concern for man. God's love is all the more wonderful when we are told that He loves men in spite of their unloveliness; that He loves men even though they rebel against Him and disobey His commandments. This is the mystery of infinite goodness. Looking at sin, God hates it. Looking at the sinner, God loves him.

Characteristics of God's love:

1. It is universal love.

God's love pours forth its blessed beams not on a favored few, but on the whole wide world. He does not love just a certain part of the world, some select people. He does not love the rich and despise the poor. He does not love the learned and ignore the unlearned. None need to perish if they will but believe on Christ. It is wonderful that God should love this sinful world.

2. It is unchanging love.

Human love is often fickle. Human friendships are often broken. God's love is unchangeable because He is unchangeable. He still loves in spite of our waywardness. His love had no birthday, no changing day, and no dying day. The love of God abides. It is eternal.

3. It is unending love.

"Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." His love has never ceased and will never cease. It is continually winning souls. One man murdered five others. He was apprehended and tried. His mother attended the trial. The words that were spoken against him hurt her. The verdict of the jury was that of guilty. They sought a pardon for him, but were unsuccessful in their attempt to get one. He was hanged, and the mother sought his body. She begged to be buried by her son. Love made her willing to have her grave pointed out as the mother of that terrible criminal. God says, "I will love thee with an everlasting love."

"Love is a golden chain, one end of which is fixed to God's throne in eternity past, and the other end to His throne in eternity to come. This love of God is a bond not to be dissolved, a union never to be broken, a depth which cannot be fathomed, a height which can never be scaled, a length which can never be traversed, a breadth which cannot be measured, a science which passeth all knowledge, a fire which many waters cannot quench, a flame which the floods cannot drown."

4. It is unfailing love.

God's love is infinite, inexpressible, incomprehensible, immeasurable, inexhaustible, and illimitable. When sorrow comes, God's love comforts. When reversals come, God's love strengthens. When we stumble into sin, God's love forgives. You may measure many other things, but it is impossible to measure the love of God.

God's love is greater and goes deeper than human love. A would-be suicide was caught on a bridge and taken home by a young preacher, who told him about God's love. Thirty years later, this same preacher, then a bishop, stepped off the train in a distant city and was met by this same man, then a prominent judge, who took him home with him. He told the bishop that he wanted to show him what God's love had done for a wretch like him.

II. The Greatest Gift — His Son.

The wonderful love which God has for the world has expressed itself in the most gracious and matchless gift ever known—"He gave His only begotten Son."

The Old Testament had told how good and gracious God is by likening Him to a shepherd who loves and cares for his sheep. Exterior nature too has tried to make known God's keeping and comforting power. Abundant harvests speak of His sustaining grace, the gentle winds breathe His soothing kindness, health-giving sunshine proclaims His healing and rebuilding ministry; all nature voices God's love and care for man.

But the degree of God's love, the breadth and the fervor of it, could never have been known to anyone on earth, if it had not been revealed in Christ, the "only begotten Son," God's matchless gift.

Two things are to be kept in mind when we think of God's gift of His Son:

1. Christ is God's begotten Son.

Jesus, the son of Mary, is not an adopted child of God, but He is an actual son. The life of Christ on earth is the human life of God.

2. Christ is God's only begotten Son.

There is but one divinely given Saviour, hence, there is salvation in none other. There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

III. The Greatest Good -- Eternal Life.

What is eternal life? It is real life. It is life indeed. No one really knows what life is who has not received eternal life. It is full life. It is life abundant. Eternal life is full of peace, of joy, of power, of beauty, and of glory. It is abundant, abounding, and overflowing life. It is satisfying life. Only eternal life can ever satisfy the longings of these souls of ours. No life but the one we derive directly from God when we receive Christ as our Saviour can satisfy the infinite yearnings of these spirits of ours. Eternal life is a complete life. All other life is partial, fragmentary, unbalanced and incomplete. One receives complete life only when he receives eternal life. It is endless life. Endlessness is not the most essential characteristic of eternal life. Its quality is more than its duration, but nevertheless it is endless. Thank God because He offers us a life that is not only infinite in its quality but endless in its duration. We cannot be satisfied with that which comes to an end. Thank God for something that never ends, something that always has in it the freshness of the dawn, something that ever stretches on and on into the illimitable spaces of ever-increasing glory before you.

In that tragic hour when sin entered the world, and from generation to generation, it has worked desolation and death. It has filled the earth with confusion, injustice, and sorrow. As the result of sin man is corrupted in his nature, averse to God, and disposed to evil. Man is lost. The purpose of God in sending His Son into the world is to save lost people. This is the glad message of the Gospel.

No one should be permanently lost, for whosoever believeth in the heaven-sent Saviour shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. Surely, you rejoice in the message of love which Christ brings from our Heavenly Father. No one can read aright the story of the life of Jesus, which ended in the sacrifice of Himself on the cross, without being moved by the beauty and the glory of that life. And the Christ, Who loved us enough to die for us, wants us to trust Him, to accept Him as Saviour, Master and Lord.

Doubtless you have read, with thrilling interest, the poem, "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight." A young soldier, in the days of Cromwell, had been condemned to die, and the time of his execution had been fixed at the ringing of curfew. The girl, who loved him, had pleaded in vain with Cromwell for his life. In her despair she climbed the winding stairs into the lofty belfry and, grasping the clapper of the great bell, held on, bruised and bleeding, until the old sexton, deaf from many years of service, ceased to pull the rope. The brave girl hurried from the church to the place of execution. Cromwell himself was there. Just as he was sending to demand why the bell was silent she saw him.

"And her brow, lately white with sorrow, gleamed
with hope and courage now.
At his feet she told her story, showed her hands
all bruised and torn,
And her young face, still haggard with the sorrow
it had worn
Touched his heart with sudden pity, lit his eyes
wity misty light;
'Go, your lover lives!' said Cromwell, 'Curfew
shall not ring tonight!'"

By her sacrificial service a lover was saved from death; saved because she loved him and endangered her life in an effort to save him.

Then, recall the story of the Cross. There hangs on that cross One whose face in death is radiant with the light of heaven. His brow is torn with thorns; nails are driven through His hands and His feet. His heart, that throbbed in life with love for a lost world, is pierced with a cruel spear. The Lord of Glory hangs dead upon a cross of shame.

This was for you and for me, and for all men everywhere. He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed.

Won't you respond to His wonderful love? Won't you accept Christ as your Saviour? Won't you give Him your life, your all? Accept Him now as your Saviour, and enthrone Him as the Master and Lord of your life.