

Sermon- A Love that Changed the World

Scripture: John 3: 13-17

Sunday, April 3, 2016

Last week as we celebrated the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ we paused in our John series to reflect on the new power Christ's Resurrection unleashed in his followers- the power to go against the patterns of this world no matter what the cost. Today we return to our John series and we find ourselves in the fascinating and most well-known verse in the whole bible, John 3:16-for God so loved the world... So today we are going to take some time to reflect on God's love, because God's love is perfect, uncorrupted and life changing love and if God's love does not move us, nothing will. So let's get started.

First let's look at the passage itself.

Our passage opens with the declaration that no human has gone to heaven and come back. No founder of any world religion, not Buddha, not Mohamad, not Confusion, no actually historical human being ever claimed to have come from heaven. So when you have someone who did, you have to pay very close attention to their words and actions. Now this individual who came from Heaven who in this passage is described as the Son of Man, did one thing that every other human being needs to know about. He was lifted up on a pole just like Moses lifted the bronze snake in the wilderness and the effect of the Son of Man being lifted up on a pole was similar to what happened when Moses lifted the bronze snake on the pole. So for those of you who may not be familiar with the Moses story let me recap it for you. More than a thousand years before Jesus came to earth, the Israelites had been liberated from Egypt and were roaming in the desert being led by God, they were fed directly by God with manna from heaven and they were able to defeat their enemies. After one such victory, the Israelites were on the road to the Red Sea making their way around the land of Edom. See map. The kingdom of Edom consisted of the descendants of Esau and God wanted to leave them alone for now and take the Israelites on the long route. But as they were walking along this route, the Israelites lost patience with God and began speaking against God and Moses and started complaining about why God had brought them out of Egypt in the first saying, "we have nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!" As a consequence of this complaining God sends them a plague of poisonous snakes that began biting and killing many of them. Only when people start dying, does realization suddenly kicks in and they turn to Moses, admit their sin and plead with Moses to pray that God would save them. God then asks Moses to make a bronze snake which

functions as a symbol of the curse against the people and asks him to attach it to a pole and hoist the pole where everyone can see it. Then God tells Moses to tell the people who were bitten to simply look at it and they would live. Now of course nobody knew that there was any connection between Moses putting this bronze snake on a pole and Jesus being hoisted up for crucifixion till the connection was revealed by God Himself to John and from John us. And this is the connection -we have all sinned and the curse of sin is death. But Jesus then becomes the symbol of the curse upon us and as we look to Jesus and see the curse that was upon us on Jesus, we are healed from our own curse and given eternal life.

So John 3, 14 and 15 are predictions of Jesus' death and the saving effect it will have on the world. John 3:16 tells you why does God do this in the first place. And the answer is, this is God's love. The New Living Translation puts it like this, "For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believed in Him will not perish but have eternal life. Then he goes on to add in verse 17 that God did not send his son into the world to judge it but to save it through him. So God is clear about what he wants the final outcome to be. The final outcome is "saving the people of the world who are willing to be saved." The means to achieving that final outcome is "pure and perfect divine love".

So if this divine love is so powerful and Jesus the only human to have come down from heaven to show this love to us is telling us about it, we need to take some time to understand God's love. So let's take a deeper dive in John 3:16. To do I want to begin with our human understanding of love. When people go about their day and see something nice we might say, "I love that car or I love that dress". When we say we love an object or even a person and something even for abstract as a city or a sunset, what we are really saying is that object or person or city or sunset makes me feel good and therefore I have a desire for this entity. And even the secular world recognizes the power of secular love. In the 70's the Beatles published a song called "All you need is love". And the lyrics go something like this, Nothing that you can do that can't be done, there is nothing that you make that can't be made, there is no one you can save that can't be saved. And the refrain that is repeated over and over is "All you need is love". The song finishes with "she loves you". In other words, what this song is saying is that, if you have a girl by your side you can do practically anything. Well, I can say from my own experience that there is truth to that. The only caveat I would like to add is, you have the right girl by your side. But that is the topic of a completely different sermon. But I will say this, secular love is a fallen attraction and it is only a matter of time before it crumbles. John 3:16 is talking about a love that transforms and purifies all other kinds of

love. It God's love towards us. Now there are three key things this verse is saying about God's love so let's look at each of these three elements.

The first thing to note about God's love is-who is God love directed to? And God's love is directed to sinful humanity. When you look at the larger testimony of scripture you know that God is loving people who don't care about him, people who have hurt him deeply, and here is the most painful part I think, God's love is directed to people who will continue to do things that will hurt him some because they will insist on rejecting him and each of us who have accepted him will also continue to hurt him even though we know and accept everything about our own sin. So why does God do it? It is because God is drawn to us so much that his love is blind and he is willing to overlook our faults? Does God have any attraction towards the people of the world? Well, when God first created the world, he was pleased with the first man and woman and called the first couple "very good". But not too long after sin entered the world, God in Genesis 6:6 looks upon the sins in the world and says these words that I think is the saddest verse in the Bible [6](#)The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. Now was he only talking about those people because those people were particularly evil? I don't think so. Romans 3:23 says "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. In other words, everyone is sinful, no sin is hidden from God. And the same time Habbakuk 1:13 says God is too pure to look upon evil. So when you combine the fact of universal human sinfulness with God's purity and then think about God's love being directed towards humanity who he cannot even look upon, now be begin to see the nature of God's love. Secular love is directed towards people that make us feel good. God's love is directed upon people whose lives and thoughts he cannot stand. Romans 5:8 says "while we were still sinners, Christ dies for us. The first thing to know about God's love is that God loves the unlovable.

The second aspect of God's love that you see in John 3:16 is that God does not simply say he loves us. God's love is an action that benefits the one who he is loving. So what are the things that God does to benefit us? Matt 5:45 says For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. In other words God is willing to sustain and take care of life irrespective of the human response to him. It gets even better. God has made unconditional covenants both to Noah, to Abraham and even to David. With an unconditional covenant God is telling humanity, I will do things to benefit you irrespective of what you do. And all that only sets the stage for God's greatest act of love which is John 3:16. You see in John 3:16 God showers his love by conferring on humanity the highest gift possible, the gift of eternal life. Eternal life is a gift because we do not pay for it and we do not deserve it. All we

have to do is believe. In other words, be willing to accept a world view that has a place for Christ as your savior and understand that the cross is the place designated for your sin and mine. If you and I are willing to believe, then the gift of eternal life is ours. What is the gift of eternal life? It is this privilege of living in a body that will never die in a perfect city with a perfect life with the privilege of where you will be able to spend an eternity worshipping Him, asking questions and just enjoying his creation that is being remade and ever more beautiful than the most beautiful place on earth today. God shows his love by not only loving the unlovable but then showering on sinners this incredibly amazing gift of eternal life.

Finally John 3:16 reveals one more aspect of God's love for us. The price he is willing to pay to make the gift of eternal life available to us. You see if a rich person has to give an expensive gift you know that it has to be really expensive right. If Bill Gates has to give you something that is really expensive for him you can imagine what it might actually cost. Now what you imagine if a gift has to be extremely expensive to God who owns the whole universe. Of course now we as human beings are talking about things that are way beyond our imagination. You and I have not even seen God, how can we imagine what it means that God has to sacrifice what is most expensive to him? What does it mean for one person of the Trinity to die even temporarily? What does it mean for Jesus to take on the sins of the whole world and then cry or "my God my God why have you forsaken me?" These are questions we can ask God when we meet him but being finite we will even then never be fully able to grasp the answers, because they have to do with matters of infinite weight. But know this. God shows us his love for us by the price he is willing to pay for us.

We have seen three aspects of God's love in John 3:16. God love is incredible because God loves those who don't care about him. God's love is incredible because he makes available the most amazing gift ever to us, the gift of eternal life. God's love is amazing because he pays a price that you and I can never imagine, his own death to enable us to have eternal life.

The question we are faced with is this. If you and I are beneficiaries of so great a love what is the effect of that love on us. Now there is a long term effect and a short term effect of this love. The long term effect is that even death will not separate us from God's love and we will literally come back to life in a world that we can only describe as paradise to experience this love even more. The short term effect of this love is that it will make us more like God in this life. A study has shown that couples who are married a long time begin to look like each other and even become like each other. We become like those we love and spend the most time with. So when we love God and spend time

with Him we start resembling God in terms of his qualities. This is why Jesus is able to tell his followers in the sermon on the mount, ⁴³ “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies!^[r] Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven..In verse 47 he says ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends,^[s] how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Let me close with this illustration. One day Mother Teresa went to a local bakery to ask for bread for the starving children in the orphanage. The baker, was really angry that people were coming and begging for bread from him so he spat in her face and told her no. Now Mother Teresa calmly took out her handkerchief, wiped the spit from her face and said to the baker, “Okay, that was for me. Now what about the bread for the orphans?” The baker, was so shamed at that moment, that he gave her the bread she wanted.

When you love like that, it points beyond the individual directly to God. May each of us who have received the gift of eternal life exude this kind of love. That is enough to change the world. Let us pray.