

The Greatest Promise Ever Made – John 3:16-18

Welcome; Glad you've chosen to worship with us this Easter weekend
Especially on our first Saturday service here at Harvest

We're talking about the Greatest Promise Ever Made today

It made me think about all the promises we make in life

Ever thought about that?

Marriage (divorce), Mortgage (bankruptcy)

Promises of profits (losses); Promises of a job (unemployment)

Products that will last (junk yard)

Promises that we'll work hard, instead of watching the basketball games on ESPN

Promises, promises

By the time the week was over, I couldn't get that '80s song out of my head

Since misery loves company, here's a little blast from the past for ya'

(Promises, Promises; Naked Eyes)

You made me, promises, promises; You knew you'd never keep

And of course, that's the problem

We make all kinds of promises in life, but we also break them

Marriage ends in divorce . . . (see above)

But there's one promise that will never be broken

One promise that we can believe with confident assurance

Because it's made by a never-changing God

That's the promise of Jn 3:16 – The Greatest Promise Ever Made

*For . . . indicates that what follows is the basis for his statement in v15, that **whoever believes in him may have eternal life***

And it all starts with the fact that . . .

God loves the unlovable – even you

It's the first of 5 potentially life-changing truths in this verse

God so loved the world – common way for John to refer to mankind in general

The unlovable part is that we are sinful – might be a stark realization for you

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23)

None is righteous . . . not even one (Rom 3:10-12)

Even our righteous deeds are like filthy rags (Is 64:6)

All of which makes us very unlovable; And yet, God loves us – amazing

That God in his holiness would even think to love us in our sin

That God in his power, would even think to love us in our weakness

That God in his perfection would even think to love us in our mess

But he does – God loves the unlovable; that's the first life-changing truth we find here

- Think of the most despicable person you can imagine

Maybe it's the sick person who abducts and molests children

Or the serial rapist or murderer; Or the man who leaves family for another woman

Who is it that you love to hate?

Now imagine loving them

It doesn't work very well, does it?

Instead of loving them, you hate them – or want to

You want them to pay; You want them to suffer

It's hard to imagine loving someone so unlovable, isn't it?

But that's exactly what God does in loving us – no matter how good you think you are

Because in God's holy eyes, sin is sin – and he hates it all

But maybe you don't have such a hard time with that – with admitting you're unlovable

because you're so good

Maybe your problem is accepting fact that you're lovable at all – because you're so bad

Maybe that's the hard part for you

That God's love for the unlovable includes you – even you

In spite of who you are or what you've done

God loves the unlovable world, and that includes you

So much so, that he . . .

And gave the unimaginable – his only Son

. . . he gave his only Son

Still have that despicable person in mind?

Now imagine that person is dying and needs a transplant that only your child can give

And that transplant will cost your son or daughter, their life

Do you do it? Do you sacrifice the life of your child for the low-life?

That's hard to imagine, isn't it?

Most people couldn't imagine doing such a thing

It makes my chest hurt just thinking about it

Fact is, most people *wouldn't* imagine doing such a thing – it defies our sensibilities

But that's exactly what God did when he *gave* his son

He gave up his life, the life of Christ, to suffer and die on a cross, for your sake – the sake of the unlovable

Rom 5:8 – *God demonstrates his love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

But why did he have to die? Why couldn't he have just slapped our hand?

Because an infinite offense against a holy God (and any sin is) requires that an infinite price be paid

That price, the Bible says, is death – *The wages [price] of sin is death* (Rom 6:23)

That's why he gave his only son to die – to pay the price we deserved to pay ourselves

That's unimaginable – that almighty God, gave his only Son, to die for *you*

It's a life-changing truth, *if* you embrace it

God loves the unlovable; And gave the unimaginable . . .

To prevent the unthinkable – our death

. . . that whoever believes in him should not perish

Should not die and spend eternity in the torment of hell . . .

That's the implication of *perish* here

It means to die a forever death – separated from God, and subject to his wrath

The Bible says (**Rom 2:8**) – *For those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*

Mt 25:46 – The unrighteous, those whose sins are un-forgiven, *will go away into eternal punishment*; a place of torment forever and ever (Rev 14:11)

The death of Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, is a big deal because the punishment for your sins is unthinkable – it's terrible, frightening, unpleasant to even think about

Unfortunately, far too many don't

And because of that, they live in a false bliss

There's a bridge out up ahead in their life, but they refuse to heed the warning signs, and open the eyes of their heart to see it

Consequently, they're headed toward a cliff called death, from which there's no return and no escape

- Does that describe you?

Are you so caught up in the *here* and *now*, that you don't even *want* to consider your future? Don't even want to think about the unthinkable?

Are you so immersed in satisfying your own temporal desires and wants, that you could care less about your eternity?

If so, please hear me – you're headed for a disaster of biblical proportions, literally

And God gave his only Son, to prevent it

To save you from the jaws of death, and the condemnation/punishment that goes with it
Jn 3:17 – *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

God gave his only Son to save you from the unthinkable

But you have to want it – you have to want to be saved; embrace it with your whole heart

- Some time ago I ran into a blurb about sheep in the highlands of Scotland, who, like all sheep, are prone to wander off and look for greener grass . . .

In that area, it's not uncommon for them to find patches of grass on rocky ledges, and risk their lives by jumping 10-12 feet down, in order to eat it and savor it

Problem is, they can't get back up

And though the Shepherd knows exactly where they are, and the predicament they're in, he will leave them there sometimes for days. . .

Until they've eaten all the grass they want and just lay down, or they're so faint for lack of water, they can no longer stand

Only then will he climb down, put a rope around them, and pull them to safety

Why doesn't he attempt a rescue when they first get into trouble?

It's because the sheep don't *want* to be saved

They're so oblivious to the danger, and so focused on the pleasure . . .

That they dash away from the shepherd when he tries to rescue them, and run over the edge to their death

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way (Is 53:6)

God gave his only Son to rescue you; To save you from the unthinkable

But you have to *want* it, and surrender; You have to *want* to be saved

Question is – if you've never entered into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, do you want to? Do you want to be saved?

Some of you have been ignoring the dangers ahead

Others of you are focused on the pleasures at hand

In either case, you don't *want* to be rescued, and you're facing the unthinkable

The very thing for which God gave his Son to prevent

Won't you lay down your life today, and let him save you?

God loves the unlovable; And gave the unimaginable; To prevent the unthinkable . . .

And offer the unbelievable – eternal life

. . . *but have eternal life*

That's unbelievable – amazing, incredible, mind-boggling . . .

That we, the unlovable, get eternal life

Life that goes on forever and ever in the presence of God and his people

Life that starts the moment you receive Jesus into your heart

Never to leave you or forsake you; Always to lead you and guide you

It's life to the full and life forever

An unbelievable offer, and the greatest promise ever made

Take a look at this – **John 3:16 video**

Bible is clear that all of us will continue to live on after our physical death

The question is, under what circumstances?

Will it be eternal life – filled with joy, peace, and fellowship in heaven?

Or eternal death – filled with darkness, weeping, and hatred in hell?

God gave his only Son to prevent the one and offer the other

And it's ours to receive . . .

When we believe – in Jesus

It's that simple . . . *that whoever believes in him*

There is no neutral ground here

Jn 3:18 – *Whoever believes in him is not condemned [no longer headed toward the unthinkable], but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

There's no neutral ground – you're either in or you're out

You've either crossed over from death to life, or you haven't

- But what does it mean to believe?

Some years back in PNG, Wycliffe Bible translators were stumped when they discovered that the Saniyo language didn't have a word for "believe" of all things

They tried all kinds of words and concepts, but nothing fit and conveyed the intended meaning of Scripture

So after much discussion, settled on this: "Ane Jisas loperi wantu tote tawesi u masi namisiya."

Which translated means: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that . . .*

"Whoever hears, thinks about, grasps hold of, and follows the talk of Jesus continuously all the time" *should not perish but have eternal life.*

That's what it means to believe

It means to *treasure* Jesus with all your heart
And *trust* him with all your life; And *live* for him with all you have
That's what it means to *believe in him*

- The question is, *do* you?
Or are you still hoping that your Mom and Dad's faith will carry you through?
Or that your occasional good works will get you to heaven?
Or that your sincerity in life counts for something it doesn't?

Or maybe you're among the *skeptical* because you don't have it all figured out?
Can tell you something – you'll *never* have all figured out, especially *before* u believe
Bible says – *The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing* (1 Cor 1:18)
The natural person . . . is not able to understand [the things of God] *because they are*
spiritually discerned. (1 Cor 2:14)
And who has known the mind of the Lord [anyway]? (Rom 11:34)
If you wait to believe until you have it all figured out, you never will

Or maybe you're *afraid* – afraid of what God might require of you if you commit your
life to him
Or maybe you're in *denial* – thinking you're just fine, and want to keep it that way
“I have my religion and rituals, and they do me just fine, thank you very much”
But will they save your soul?
Or perhaps you're among the *complacent* who just doesn't care?

However you are, and whoever you are – don't be that way; for your sake and for God's
Not only are you flirtin' with disaster, but God *loves* you
And gave his Son for you – to prevent the unthinkable and offer the unbelievable
But you *have* to believe
It's the greatest promise ever made, and it's yours to receive – if you embrace it

- Pray (**summary slide**)
There's an old hymn out there – Just As I Am
One of the verses goes like this – Just as I am, and waiting not; To rid my soul, of one
dark blot; To thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come

If that's your heart this morning
If you believe, and you're ready to confess your sins to God, commit your life to him
I want to lead you in a prayer – and help you make today the day of your salvation, for
the rest of your life

If that's you, will you just raise your hand and look at me?
I'm not going to ask you to come forward – I just want to know who I'm praying w/?
Is there anyone?

Don't put this off – because there may not be an “off”
There may not be a tomorrow for you
And if there is, your heart may become hardened by the deceit of sin in the meantime,
and you won't care anymore – it's a huge risk
Don't wait; do it now

- God, I admit I'm a sinner, and that I've been so unlovable
I need a Savior, desperately so – because I know where I'm headed without one
I believe that Jesus died in my place, for my sins . . .
And rose again that first Easter to save my soul from death and condemnation

On that basis, please forgive me of my sins
Please forgive me for how I've offended you, and brought shame to you – I'm sorry
Lord Jesus, come into my heart and save me
I commit to live for you for the rest of my life (Amen)

- If you just prayed with me – Happy Easter
We praise God for you, and rejoice with you
I want you to do two things –
1. *Response Card* – we want to pray for you, encourage you, and help you to grow in
your newfound relationship with Christ (give it to an usher)
2. *New Believer's Packet*

From our family to yours, have a blessed Easter