



Part 2 – The Gift of the Son

John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world that he gave...

There are few verses in the Bible as well known among Christians as John 3:16. Even in popular culture there has been a general awareness of this verse of the Bible, most notably due to the rainbow wiggled man whose t-shirt displayed the

reference in national sporting events for years. Among Christians John 3:16 is so well known that we can easily miss the power of Jesus' words. In this brief statement we learn something quite dramatic about the nature of God and how he works. Specifically, we learn that the mysteriously triune God brings about the redemption of his lost and sin-ruined world through radical generosity; the sending of the Son by the Father.

Contrary to some opinions, John 3:16 is not an encapsulation of the gospel. For instance, in these words Jesus does not explain anything about his death and resurrection (That will come later). Rather, Jesus' words are an explanation of the Divine generosity behind the gospel message and a summons to faith. To believe in "Him" (Jesus) is to place faith in his person and work. So, believing in Jesus is believing in the gospel which is the message that Jesus Christ died for sinners and was raised for their life.

God trains us to see the gift of the Son as proof positive that he is for us and that he will withhold from us nothing that we truly need (**Romans 8:32**). Though we will struggle through times of doubt and anxiety we can be assured that our Heavenly Father, who has already given us what was most precious to him, will never fail or forget us.

1. The God who loves the world

"For God so loved the world..."

- The reference to the world ought to be understood as the world in all of its sinful corruption and willful rebellion against God. That the Father sent the Son to those who had made themselves his enemies makes his generosity all the more extraordinary (**Matt. 21:33ff; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:10**).
- But John 3:16 should never be understood as advocating some sort of universal salvation. Jesus makes it clear that there is no salvation outside of believing in Him and the consequence of unbelief is condemnation (**John 3:17-21**). The scope of Jesus' salvation mission was specific. Indeed, the Scriptures are clear that Jesus came to atone for the sins of God's own people; all those who by grace will come to faith in Christ.
- When the angel announced to Joseph that Mary was bearing the Messiah and told him to name him Jesus, he explained, "for he shall save his people from their sins." In his discourse on the "Good Shepherd," the Lord made a point of saying "I lay down my life for the sheep." And later in that discourse he turned to the Pharisees and said, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep" (**John 10:11-14**). In his discourse on the "Bread of Life" Jesus said, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day" (**John 6:39**). In Ephesians five the Apostle Paul writes that Christ "loved the church and gave himself up for her" (vs. 25).

2. The Father who gave the Son

“...that he gave his only begotten Son...”

- In John 3:16 Jesus points directly to the mystery of the Trinity. God’s triune nature is progressively revealed in Scripture beginning as early as the creation account (“Let *us* make man in *our* own image” – **Genesis 1:26**). From that point on God is gradually revealed to be indivisibly one in essence yet eternally existing in three Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). God’s entry into human flesh in the person of Jesus is the final lifting of the veil on this deep and glorious mystery.
- That the Father gave His Son does not mean that God, like his human creatures, came into being at some point in time. God is eternal and has no point of origin. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are from before all ages, and exists by their own power over, above, and outside time. This world was brought into being by God through the Son of His love - the Word (**John 1:1ff**). But the Father has always been the Father and the Son has always been the Son. The Son was not brought into being by human generation; He is eternal, and He has been in relationship with His Father from before there was a world. And the Father gave that Son for the world.
- In contemplating the Trinity, the great 4th century theologian, Gregory of Nazianzus wrote:
No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendor of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of anyone of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that one so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.
- The second clause of verse 16 reveals the greatest act of sacrificial generosity ever known: “...that he gave his only begotten Son...” Because of God’s triune nature there is a two-fold giving in the sending of Jesus. First, since God is one and indivisible, it is true that God himself came to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. For God to come to the very ones who rebelled against him is extraordinarily generous on its own. But God’s triune nature reveals a deeper and even more profound expression of generosity. Namely, the Father gave the Son. Any father would prefer to sacrifice himself than to give up his own son to the wicked. And yet, our Heavenly Father showed us his love in sending his beloved Son to save his enemies. No greater love has ever been known or acted upon.

3. The Son who came to save sinners

“...that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

- Jesus’ words in John 3 are not an explanation of the Father’s generosity only. Our Lord also makes a sobering appeal to believe. In doing so, he holds forth two options for human destiny: eternal life or eternal perishing. Heaven and Hell hang in the balance. Just as Adam and Eve, after they sinned, had to rely wholly on the grace of God for their salvation and just as Abraham’s right standing before God was due to his believing (**Romans 4:3**) so the salvation of every sinner comes by means of faith in God’s generous provision in Jesus Christ. As much as we would like a right standing before God to be due, at least in part, to our own good works, God insists on justifying sinners by faith in the Son. It makes sense that such a radically generous Gift would yield a salvation that is radically generous.