



SERMON TITLE: John 3:16
SCRIPTURE: John 3:16

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

Love might be one of the most important realities in the universe. We say that we love our husbands, our wives, our kids, our friends, and our families. It's not strange to say that we love people. But we also say that we love food, sports, music, art, and entertainment. But do we love people the same way we love things? And what about when our love for people *or* things change? Can love change? Is it allowed to come and go as it pleases? Or is it fixed somehow? What truly defines love? If love is real, what does it do? What does it look like?

If we are followers of Jesus, we don't have the luxury of defining love however we want. Love simply can't be contingent on what we feel, what culture says is cool, or what we deem is our most important need. For Christians, we must submit to God's definition of love. The Bible even says that God IS love. So, how do we filter all of our questions about love through who God is? How can we look at God in the Bible, and better understand what love is, and how love truly acts?

While we can literally go to dozens of places in Scripture to see this, we can see it plainly in the most popular verse in all of Scripture, John 3:16. Here, John will help us answer our questions.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Here we see love in action. Love is not a passion that sits still. It's not an emotion that doesn't move. Love is a reality in God that acts. And one of the ultimate actions of love is that love gives. "For God so loved the world that he gave." We give our time, money, resources, and energy to the things we love. We buy birthday gifts for, spend time with, and exhaust our energy on the people and things that we love. We *give* so that we can express our love. It's the exact same with God. "For God so loved the world that he gave."

Love gives.

But what does love give? "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." Here, God gives his only Son. And if we've been paying attention in John's gospel, we know that this language means that God is not giving leftovers. He's not giving passively. He's giving himself, all that he is. Jesus is God's Son, eternally begotten by the Father, and fully divine himself. And this means that,

Love gives itself.

True love doesn't give out of convenience or comfort or ease. Love costs something. Love gives sacrificially. Love gives of its essence. God gave his only Son, and here John particularly has the cross in mind (3:15). And God's love gift of his is not a mere act of unconditional, sacrificial love. It is simultaneously an invitation. In giving us Jesus, God invites us to believe - to trust, to depend, to swear total allegiance to him. The word "believe" throughout John is not a word about an intellectual or emotional decision made in the past. Believing in John is about pledging oneself wholly to God. It's a trusting allegiance that looks to God in all of life. So...

Love gives itself, and asks for allegiance in return.

And what happens when we respond to God's love by believing? John's answer is that we "won't perish, but have eternal life." This means that the goal of love is life - not abstract life in the future, but real life right now that won't expire. Life like God intended with people in the Garden, life abundant. We won't perish or be destroyed; we won't live in death. For those who respond to the gospel of Jesus with trusting allegiance, relationship with God both now and forever is our inheritance. We get hope, peace, joy, and intimacy with God - all the result of God's initiating love in Jesus.

Love gives itself, and asks for allegiance in return, resulting in real life.

And if we begin to think of love like this, it will change all of life. It will change our "eternal life." That's what the gospel does. It will change our lives as spouses, as parents, as students, as employees, as friends. If we understand the lengths to which God has gone to lovingly give us himself, if we trust him, we will do the same to others. We will sacrifice so others can live, reflecting divine love. "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son as a sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). And the more we believe in this love, the more life will blossom in a way that honors God supremely.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- What are deficient or lacking definitions of love?
- What does it mean that love gives? What does this look like in your life?
- How does John think about the idea of believing?
- What makes believing (or "allegiance to Jesus") difficult?
- Who is someone you know who loves well, by giving of themselves?
- How has God loved us supremely in Jesus? Why?
- In what ways is it difficult for you to reflect God's self-giving love?