

“THE REVELATION OF CHRISTMAS: FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: John 3:13-18

Introduction:

How many of you know John 3:16? John 3:16 may be the most well-known verse in the Bible. We see it at football games and sports events, on bumper sticker and license plates. We learn it as children. It got me to wondering if its popularity is just a modern thing or an American thing.

Then I read a comment by the famous pastor J.C. Ryle of England from 1878 saying that few texts are better known than this. Then I came across Martin Luther’s statement that John 3:16 is “the Bible in miniature!” The whole Bible in 24 words.

Is Martin Luther’s statement just exaggeration? Is this verse the Bible in miniature? If this were the only verse in the Bible, think about how much we would know about God.

This verse is an inexhaustible fountain of rich truth; the importance cannot be emphasized enough. There are things here we must know or we will perish. A person can be ignorant about many things and still go to heaven, but we cannot be ignorant about the things contained in this verse and go to heaven. It’s that important.

This is way more important than how the Cougars or Huskies or Seahawks are doing. It’s more important than the stock market and our retirement funds. It’s more important than how many friends you have on Facebook, or what you get or give for Christmas. It’s even way more important than your kids and grandkids.

Don’t make the mistake of thinking this verse is too easy or too simple or just for children. It is wisdom so simple a child can understand it and wisdom so profound an adult cannot fathom all of it. I hope you and your family will memorize John 3:16-17 this next month. Say it together at the dinner table before saying grace. But also let’s not just memorize it but put it in our hearts and get the truths of it in our heads.

During these four weeks of Advent we will slow down long enough to consider what a vast amount of truth and wisdom is contained in this little verse. This verse reveals to us the meaning of Christmas.

The Revelation of Christmas
The Reality of Christmas
The Reason of Christmas
The Reward of Christmas

For God so loved the world
that He gave His only begotten Son
that whoever believes in Him should not perish
but shall have eternal life!

God.

This indeed is a very great revelation. The revelation of Christmas is no less than the revelation of God Himself in all His glory and splendor, the revelation of His character and nature.

God. No argument. No speculation. Simply God. God exists. He is the central reality of the universe and He is the central reality of my universe and yours whether I confess Him or believe in Him or not. One day just how central a reality He is will come blazingly clear. On that day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess.

How do such finite creates plumb the depths of so great a God?

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” ...

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Don't rush over this or rush past this. Ponder this in your heart, mediate on this slowly.

Old Dr Pepper commercials say it should be drunk slowly, to savor all 23 flavors. The truth concerning God should be savored slowly, tasted, treasured, pondered and meditated upon. The Lord is God, there is no other. Let that sink into your consciousness, let it leaven your life, let it marinate your mind, and permeate all your priorities. This Advent become God-saturated, God-entranced and God-centered by the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, the very image of God.

Because there is a God the origin of your life has meaning and purpose. Because there is a God the destiny of your life has meaning and purpose. Because there is a God your life right now has purpose and meaning. Don't waste it. Your life comes from God, it is to be lived for God and one day you will spend eternity either joyfully with Him or miserably separated from Him.

This God created the world and sustains the world. He created it in a way that absolutely everything in it is dependent on Him, and that includes you and me. We are created in His image for a reason, that we might know Him and reflect Him and His glory.

This God knows our every thought, every action, every word, every comment we make about someone else, every attitude we have toward others. There are no compartments, no aspects of our life where He is not present, where He has no opinion or where He has not spoken.

This God who created is now actively redeeming the world and your world. If God doesn't seem very real or important or close to you, if you don't know Him as your Father in heaven, take a step of faith toward Him and ask Him to reveal Himself to you. That is exactly what He did at Christmas, it is exactly what He wants to do and what He will do for you, ask.

Hebrews 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Ephesians 1:17-18 [Pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.

Be sure of this, the Lord is God. He made us and we are His. The revelation of Christmas is that God wants us to see Him and know Him. Ask Him for it.

God so loved.

The revelation is greater than can be imagined or hoped for. Not only does God exist, but God loves. The revelation of Christmas is that God is personal. God is a real person and He loves us with a real love.

There is no complacency in God, no half-heartedness, no apathetic disinterest. It doesn't say: "For God so pitied the world..." "For God felt sad for the world..." "For God liked the world."

God's love is a holy love, an eternal love, an inexhaustible love, full of compassion and mercy.

Notice the tense of the word. It's not God so *loves* the world, but God so *loved* the world. We might be able to grasp that He loves us now that Christ has come, now that Christ dies for us and cleans us up and forgives our sins.

But how do we grasp an eternal love, that stretches into the past forever? How do we grasp a love that loves before we were born, before our world was made? How do we grasp a love that knows all, sees all? Ephesians 1 clearly affirms, it was in love that God chose us in Christ from before the very foundations of the world according to the purpose of His will, before we could earn His love or prove ourselves worthy of His love.

This is a revelation of the glory of God's great love. He loved first when there was nothing to love. He loved not because of us but because of Him. Do you believe it? Do you know it in the depths of your heart?

When God wanted to illustrate to us how great His love is He raised up a prophet in the OT Hosea and instructed him to marry a prostitute and later when she was unfaithful, God told him to buy her back, redeem her again and take her back. But the book of Hosea is not about Hosea, it is about God and His love for His people and about His faithfulness despite our unfaithfulness. It is a beautiful and astonishing picture of redeeming love.

There is absolutely nothing at all in any of us worthy of or deserving of God's love. That God loves us at all comes from a sovereign decision of His will and nothing else. This is the revelation of Christmas God wants us to know, He loves us with an exceedingly great love.

Ephesians 3:17-19 [May Christ] dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend ... what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

God so loved the world.

The revelation of Christmas is the great God of the universe is a personal God who loves with an exceedingly great love, and wonder of all wonders, He loves the world. I wonder if that came as a shock to Nicodemus, that God didn't just love the Jews in Israel, that the Jewish Messiah wasn't just for the Jewish people?

Think about it. Is there a more stunning verse in the Bible? What was there in this world to love? The magnitude of His great love expands beyond all limits when we consider the state of the human soul and the human society.

The entire earth is engulfed in wickedness and sin. Idolatry, rebellion, sexual immorality, porn, perversion, lust, gossip, greed, murder, adultery, homosexuality, abortion, theft, unbelief, pride, lying, swearing, envy, hatred of God and His commandments and His truth, calling good evil and evil good, loving darkness and all the deeds of darkness.

Titus 3:3-5 We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy (Also Eph. 2:1-5).

Some people have a hard time believing in miracles like Jonah being swallowed by a whale or the sun standing still. Those are nothing compared to a holy God loving this wicked world.

The greatness of God's love is not measured by the size of the world or by how many people there are in the world. It's a big world and it's a lot of people but neither of those measurements comes close to the greatness of God's love. There are four measurements of God's love right here in our text.

First, it is measured by the fact that it is God's. God is love and His love is God-sized, beyond measuring. *Second*, it is measured by the size of the gift, His love gives us His only Son. Nothing greater gift can be given. *Third*, it is measured by the fact that the world is so wicked and this love is given to wicked sinners. And *fourth*, it is measured by the fact that this love secures the eternal life of each person who believes (See A.W. Pink).

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor

depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Implication and Application:

John writes his own application of our text in his first letter.

I John 4:11-12 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

This will be our strongest testimony to the truth of this revelation. This will be our way of holding up signs that say John 3:16 on them. You and I are that sign this week and this month.

Imitate God and love the world He has placed you in, love the world right around you. Love for the sake of Christ, God's gift of love. Love others to show you have been greatly loved, love sinners to show how you are loved and to show the way to the Father through the Son.

Imitate God. Extend grace to those who don't deserve it, to those who least deserve it. Love an enemy this season just as God came to love those who were enemies to Him. This season lay aside envy, hate, bitterness, offenses, selfishness, unkindness, gossip, criticizing, unforgiveness.

This season let us out-love each other as God has loved us. Who will outdo who in love, kindness and care? Who will put these words into practice first?

Matthew 5:44-45 Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

Romans 12:20-21 If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Finally, is there any one here today who has any questions or any doubts about the great love and kindness and compassion of God toward you?

Do you think of God as an angry being, always disappointed with you, always chastising you, always impatiently waiting for you to get your act together? Do bad experiences with your sinful earthly fathers cloud and taint your picture of God?

Christmas is the season to ponder in our hearts this great revelation of God. Be like Mary and store these things up and treasure them.

Yes, God is just but His justice is completely satisfied in the perfect righteousness of Christ. Yes, God is a God of wrath, but His wrath is completely satisfied in Jesus' perfect obedience and death on the cross. By repenting and believing in Jesus you are reconciled to God and His love.

Is there a more beautiful picture of John 3:16 than *this table*? Here is the love of God on display in His Son. The bread of heaven, the cup of salvation, the love of God for undeserving sinners who by believing in Christ are delivered from perishing and from death.

There is a glorious exchange that takes place here, His life for our sins. Jesus bears God's wrath, and gives to us God's love. I bring nothing but sin to this table and He gives love. He does it all. He gets the glory and we get the grace. Glory to the God who so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will never perish but have eternal life.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, we have barely scratched the surface of this powerful revelation of yourself in this verse. We thank you for Christmas, we thank you for the incarnation of yourself in Jesus and we thank you especially for your love. Thank you for first loving us that we might love you and our neighbor. Help us to be the revelation of your love to someone else this week and this season. For your glory. In the name of your Son and our Savior. Amen.