

The Widest Welcome

Sermon by: Pastor John Anderson
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Each Sunday morning a group from our church sings at a local convalescent hospital. It's a great blessing, for them and especially for us. As part of our "routine," we customarily close by everyone repeating together one of the most famous of all Bible verses, John 3:16. This has now become a "tradition," which we all enjoy. Reflecting on this, the thought came into my mind that this would not be a bad custom for us to incorporate into our worship here at church. After all, keeping in focus the wonderful Gift that God has given to us in sending His Son Jesus to die for our sins on the cross is part of the news He wants the world to know in these last days. The "everlasting Gospel" is the very foundation of the Three Angels' Messages given in Revelation 14.

With that in mind, we're going to invite the congregation to join in one large voice choir and repeat this passage in unison, using, for the sake of uniformity, the King James language. We'll also include the next verse, John 3:17, because it adds much to the expression of God's great love for the world. This we propose to do each week at some point in the worship service. Are you ready? Let's repeat this together:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:16, 17.

It seems appropriate to use this passage as our text today, especially as we are celebrating the Lord's Supper, the ceremony established by Christ Himself as a reminder of His great accomplishment and the Gift of salvation. Years ago one of our most beloved preachers, H.M.S. Richards Sr., founder and speaker of the Voice of Prophecy radio program (which, by the way, is the longest running religious radio program in history) presented this delightful analysis of John 3:16, which I now share with you.

God: an Almighty Authority
So loved the world: the mightiest motive
that He gave His only begotten Son: the Greatest Gift
that whosoever: the widest welcome
believeth in Him: the easiest escape
should not perish: a divine deliverance
but have everlasting life: a priceless possession

The mystery of God's love and sacrifice are beyond human comprehension. Trying to comprehend the vast reservoir of God's love is like standing on the shore of the Pacific Ocean and trying to grasp every droplet that

makes up its totality. It's like trying to comprehend every molecule of air in the atmosphere. Even these comparisons fall far short of the enormity of God's great love. Forever throughout eternity we will be learning something new of His great heart of love, we'll see new revelations of His great compassion for lost humanity. The most we can do now is to scratch the surface, to gain a glimpse of His wonderful Gift to humanity.

God's love has been with us throughout our lives. Even when we weren't looking for Him; even when we were living in violation of His laws and ways, God's love was still there seeking us. Jesus didn't come to die for "good" people, but for the "world," a word which describes people in sin, people who are lost, people who are in need. If you feel you're a lost sinner in need, you are the very person Jesus came to save!

Even in the worst of times, when it seemed like God was nowhere near, He was there. When we struggled through the darkest moments of our lives, His love was still present with us. Wrote the psalmist, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, You are with me." Someday, when we have the opportunity to see our lives with the "veil" removed, we will know that God has loved us and been with us in thick or thin, in trials or prosperity. He has pledged His love to us as the heavenly Groom, and His love will not diminish "for better or worse, in sickness or in health." God's love is present especially in times of adversity.

We need to open our hearts to His great bounty of love and let it bathe our minds. I did something very foolish last Monday. It was time again to change the oil in my car, so I went about the proper procedures. The car was raised on the two ramps, the bolt removed to drain the oil, the filter exchanged. All was going well. After all the oil had dripped out, the bolt was put back in place and secured.

With a funnel I began to pour in the new oil, but in a minute sensed something was wrong. Please don't laugh when I tell you what the problem was. Mind you, I've done this dozens of times, but this time I was pouring the oil through the funnel, but had neglected to remove the oil cap! The fresh new oil was coating the outside of the engine and now pooling on my driveway. Quite a large mess, plus the thought that there was probably 2 or 3 dollars lying uselessly there on the cement. You have to remove the cap to allow the oil to flow in. Is there a lesson we can take from this, in a spiritual sense? We need to make sure that we've removed the "cap" so that God can pour in the priceless Gift of His Spirit, who ministers His love and salvation to us.

The reminders of His great Gift are before us; the bread which represents His broken body and the juice which represents His blood, shed for the remission of our sins. As we partake of them today, may God pour out His love into our open hearts.

