

The Wildest Welcome, part 2
Clairemont SDA Church
Sermon by: Pastor John Anderson
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We're going to look at today what is perhaps the most often repeated verse in Scripture, John 3:16. Many of you know it by heart, I'm sure. It's a great verse to keep in focus the wonderful Gift that God has given to us in sending His Son Jesus to die for our sins on the cross, and 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. 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 a delightful analysis of John 3:16, which I have modified somewhat and now share with you.

God: an Almighty Authority. We're talking about the Sovereign of the universe; the Creator of all; the One Who has the power to speak and galaxies appear.

So loved: the mightiest motive. Hate and force are thought by the world to induce action and results, but God uses His mighty love. In the book Song of Solomon we find the phrase "love is as strong as death (SS 8:6), but God's love is stronger than death. God's love caused Him to leave His majestic throne above and come to this dismal planet. God's love says, "You can disobey Me and eat the forbidden fruit, but I'll still love you." It says, "You can scourge Me, spit on Me and spike Me to a wooden cross, but I'll still love you."

God so loved the world: a hopeless habitat. Without divine intervention, mankind would be hopeless and helpless to recover from the pit of sin. The term "world" in the Bible, especially in the book of John, describes the unlovely, the wretched, poor, blind and naked. Yet these are the objects of God's eternal love. You and I may be apparently "unlovable" in the eyes of the world, but not in God's eyes!

God so loved the world that He gave: the Greatest Gift. Heaven was emptied when God gave Jesus to be our Savior. All the gold of the streets of the New Jerusalem, all the diamonds and gems of the foundations of the eternal city; all the value of the gleaming gates of pearl can not compare with the blood of Jesus Christ, shed to secure our salvation.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son: A sufficient Savior. Yes, because Jesus is the Creator God; because He is a divine being, His blood can atone for all the sins of mankind. No "righteous person," no angel could accomplish that achievement. Because a divine law had been broken, only a divine Being could save. But that is exactly what Jesus, the divine Son of God, the Creator of the universe, the Jehovah of Scripture, did by coming to this planet to die for our sins.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever: the widest welcome. God's love knows no boundaries. When He looks at this planet, He doesn't see lines on it. There are no grids of geography that separate or distinguish one human being from another. There are no variants of skin color, education, wealth or even wisdom that categorize one as more valuable than another. We are all precious in His sight.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him: the easiest escape. God doesn't require that we accomplish some great feat or achievement to receive salvation. It's not a high mountain that you have to ascend, long

pilgrimage you have to complete or a large sum of money you have to pay. How does the Gospel song put it? "If religion were a thing that money could buy, the rich would live and the poor would die." All you have to do is believe, something that any rational being at any time in this earth's history and in any place on this planet can do.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish: a divine deliverance. Only when we are swept up into that cloud at His coming; only when we assemble on the sparkling sea of glass; only when we are escorted through the gates of pearl into the City; only when we taste the fruit of the tree of life; only when we are embraced by the loving arms of Jesus will we know the reality of this gift of eternal life. Today we can only dream; we can only imagine; but all of our dreams and imaginations fall short of the "great salvation" He has given to us.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life: a priceless possession. Costly? Yes! It cost the life of the Life-giver. But He willingly gave His life; He willingly put His throne in jeopardy because He so loved the world; because He so loved you!

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 dimly lit 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, as we're told in our text for today, 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 a while back. 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! How foolish was that! 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.