

For God So Loved Us
John 3:14-17

All throughout these scripture passages that we have been studying here in this Book of John, our Lord has been revealing to us a realm of existence that is so very different from the one that we live within in our human condition. From the first words of chapter 1, God has been telling us about "Eternity", "Eternity".

And while our study for today concerns itself with the eternity that our Lord wants us to spend with Him, both here in this life and also in heaven that follows, I do want us to realize and accept that everyone who is born into this earthly life really does enter into an eternal condition of existence.

And again, yes, we who receive the gift of life that the Lord Jesus provides will live an eternity with Him. But folks, there really is also another side to this reality of eternity.

For those people who are born into this life, but refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus and to receive Him as Savior and Lord, they also will have an "eternity" of existence. And that eternity is not one that any person would want to experience. It is "eternal death", an existence completely separate from the presence of God, an existence within the sufferings of hell. And it really is "eternal", forever and ever.

Those words given to us in the Book of Revelation chapter 12,

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.

¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Oh dear friends, this is what “eternity”, “real eternity” looks like. And it is “real”, so very, very “real”.

And this study today is for everyone who will listen, for you and for me and for anyone who will receive our Lord’s truth. Because we really, really do not want anyone to suffer the sufferings spoken about here in these words we just read, this “second death”, “eternal death” in the “lake of fire”. We want every person to have “life”, the blessed “eternal life” that our Lord Jesus will freely provide for each of us if we will only receive it.

With that being said, let’s continue with these blessed words that our Lord has been speaking to us here in this passage in John chapter 3. And note carefully as we read that our Lord also tells us “how” and “Why” He has chosen to call us to come into and to be a part of His eternal kingdom.

This is John chapter 3, beginning in verse 14 where Jesus tells us . . .

¹⁴ . . . As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:14-17)

As we know, in this human condition that we are born into, we have and can perceive only the immediate life moments we live within, those past moments and the present. We have no way of knowing what the next moments, the future moments, will bring.

But our Lord is not that way. Though we can only imagine His abilities, we know from these scriptures and we know by faith in Him that He exists in a much more broad realm of existence, one that spans not only the past and the present, but also the future and for all eternity.

And again no, while we can’t comprehend such mysterious abilities as those, by faith we know it to be true.

But as part of that mystery, for some reason known only to our Lord, He wants you and me to join with Him and to be a part of that reality that He lives within, especially that part that He calls “Eternal Life”. “Eternal Life”.

And here in these very simple, but profound words, He tells us why. It's because He loves us. "He loves us".

Listen again to these words that you have heard so many, many times, but should never tire of hearing them. John 3:16,

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Precious words . . .

But let's go back and also reread all of the words of the passage that we're studying today. Because we always need to remember that His love and our entrance into eternal life comes at a cost, at a cost not to us, but to Him, our Lord. Verse 14 again,

¹⁴ . . . As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:14-17)

Folks, here in these words, our Lord is being very plain and clear. There is a fork in our road of existence. One side of that fork leads to death, our death, our "perishing". And it is not just a temporary condition. It is eternal, forever and ever . . . "perishing".

But praise be to God, the other fork is not death. It is life, life everlasting. A provision that comes not from our own hands or anything that we might be able to do. It's a provision that comes only through one source, one Person alone. The "Son of Man" that is spoken about here in verse 14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up".

We'll not get to the explanation of how this will take place until we read some of the last chapters of this Book of John. But here, our Lord is telling us that it will take the shed blood of the ultimate "Sacrifice Lamb" as He is "lifted up on that cross" that the words given in verse 15 will take place . . . "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life".

Profound words, and mysterious words, but words of truth. As the hymn writer expressed it, "Wonderful Words of Life". Words that tell us the mysterious truth that will lead us to verse 16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life."

And while yes, our bible is filled to the brim with all the reasons "why" God does what He does for us, this verse 17 says it so clearly that we have no excuse for not understanding it. Verse 17, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

These words remind me of the occasion when Jesus was confronted by some religious leaders who had caught a woman in the sin of adultery. And they demanded to know what Jesus thought should be done to her, what punishment she should receive. Jesus responded by saying,

⁷ "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." (John 8:7-11)

Those who read these words often come to differing understandings about what Jesus intended with His words. And some of them are probably correct. But there is also a simple explanation for His words. This mission that Jesus was on in His first coming to the earth was to "seek and to save those who are lost". And as we just read in verse 17 of our passage for today,

¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:17)

Yes, this woman was wrong in her sin, and Jesus told her to "go and sin no more". He did not condemn her because He had not come as "Judge over all the earth", but as Savior.

And yes, He will return later, in the last days. And then He will sit on the "Judgment Seat" and judge all people for their sins done in the flesh. And yes, even that woman if she did not obey His admonition to "go and sin no more".

But not at the time we are reading about here in these words of John chapter 3. Here, Jesus was on a mission of mercy, to seek and to save those who are lost so that they would not perish, but have eternal, everlasting life.

Aren't those the most wonderful words of mercy and grace you could ever hear!

And folks, as I read these precious words, I can't help but let my mind stop and ponder what this "Love" that our Lord tells us about here really means.

And no, we can't possibly fathom the extent of His love. It's far too vast. But we really ought to at least stop occasionally and ponder it.

In my own considerations, I have often thought how yes, if my son were about to be injured or killed and I could sacrifice myself in his place, I would do that.

But if I were faced with willingly asking him, my beloved son, to sacrifice his life for some other people, would I be able to do that? Especially when those other people are wretched sinners, killers, child abusers, thieves, liars, drunkards, drug addicts, and the like. People who had in the past shook their fist in my face on many occasions, even cursing me.

I confess that I have no thought that even in my best of moments I would or could ask my beloved son to give up his life for them.

But folks, this "love" that our Lord is speaking about here is no ordinary love, the kind like we have within our human soul.

We think that we "love" other people, and we do, to some extent. I know that I dearly love my wife. But still . . . that is not the kind of love that God is talking about here in these words of John 3:16. Our human love can barely reach past the level of "affection".

No! The love that God is describing for us here in these words is beyond our ability to think or imagine. But folks, I am so grateful for it. Because without it, without that indescribable measure of God's love, we would all be lost, eternally. We would, as He tells us here, "perish". We would "perish"!

But though we can't fathom it's depth or imagine its vastness, I do believe that He, God, wants something similar to come back out of our own hearts for Him. I say that because when asked what the "greatest", most important commandment would be, Jesus responded by saying,

³⁷ . . . "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
(Matthew 22:37-40)

Take careful note that this is not the usual kind of love that flows out of the heart of one person for another person, even when the fondest of love is present.

The human heart, soul and mind is only capable of so much. Remember, each of us comes into this life filled to capacity with a sinful nature, a heart that is desperately wicked and so deceitful that we ourselves can't recognize how wicked we are.

And yes, when the Holy Spirit draws us into salvation and we are washed clean by the Blood of the Lord Jesus, we are cleansed from all our sins and our sinful nature no longer has any control over us . . . but . . . but . . . as we know from our daily living habits and from such testimony as that given by the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 7, we can still often look a lot like we used to look before we were saved.

But with all of that being said and all of that taken into consideration, this one word that Jesus tells us about here can and does give us opportunity and occasion for all the matters of salvation and all the matters of daily life to turn out the way that our Lord wants it to turn out. And that word is "Love", "Love".

And may I stress again, our Lord is not speaking about the kind of "love" that is natural to our hearts, the weak and powerless and fickle kind of "love".

No, there really is another kind of "Love" that is above all other kinds of "Love".

Jesus explained to Peter and to us about that kind of love when He came to meet with the disciples there on the beach in Galilee just after He was resurrected from the dead.

You might recall that on that occasion, Jesus took Peter aside and talked to him about love. Listen first to this conversation and then we'll talk about it. This is John chapter 23 verse 15,

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. (John 23:15-17)

Many sermons have been preached about this encounter between Jesus and Peter, and many varying points of understanding have come from it. But just as with all of the other words of the Lord Jesus, He is able to convey more than one thought and one message. And so it is with these words.

Here, Jesus spoke very strongly to Peter about "Love". And He asked Peter three times if Peter loved Him. Unfortunately, as we read our modern English, we see only the word "love". But as Jesus was asking Peter about the love Peter had for Him, Jesus was asking one question, but Peter was giving a response that did not answer Jesus' question.

Here, in the first two questions by the Lord Jesus, He asked Peter, "Peter, do you love me, using the word for love, "Agape"? And for those first two questions, Peter answered that yes he loved the Lord Jesus, but used a very different word for love. Peter used "Phileo", a word meaning I have "brotherly affection for you", or "I like you". And the third time Jesus asked Peter the question, He asked Peter, "Do you have "brotherly affection for me", "do you like Me".

In this conversation, when Jesus asked Peter if Peter loved Him more than he love the other men there with them, the disciples, and then pressed the point by asking two more times, that was such a very, very important question. Jesus was saying to Peter, "Peter, the love that you have for me must be far and above the kind of love that you feel for your friends or for any other person.

And as Jesus would tell us on another occasion, our "Love" for Him must be far more even than that that we have for our father, our mother, our brother, our sister, our wife and our children.

Can our response of "Love" be as strong as the "Love" that He had for us as He gave His Son to die for us? NO! No where even close! But it is a legitimate comparison.

He "Loves" us that much and He wants us to respond with all the "love" that we can have within us. And it is that "Agape" kind of love that He requires and expects from us.

And why not? Why not? Why should we waste our love on the things of this world. This world cannot and does not love us.

And the really good part about our loving our Lord with all of our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength is that the second part of that "Greatest Commandment" flows out from our love for our Lord. And that is that we will "love our neighbor, our mother, our father, our sister, our brother, our wife and our children with a love that is enabled and empowered by the love of the Lord Jesus that fills our heart.

Think about all of this folks! This "Love", our Lord's love for us, our love for Him and our love for other people, this is what makes life worth living and makes our relationships with each other enjoyable.

Love is the only thing that makes good sense for these brief moments that we live here on this earth. And we can have love only because God has "first loved us" and His love has been shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit.

Listen to these precious words and we'll close for today.

First, God's love for us in John 3:16.

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ 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)

And then our response in Matthew chapter 22,

³⁷ "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
(Matthew 22:37-40)

Pray with me.