

Message: The Best Love Ever
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
John 3:16-21
The Best Ever Sermon Series

Love is proactive. Love takes initiative. Love always gives. John 3:16 is at the top of favorite Bible verses. It shows that God initiates. God loves and so He came to us Himself. As Eugene Peterson famously interpreted John 1:14, *"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood."* God does not want anyone to perish. The word *"whoever"* plainly expresses God's intent. However, God has given us freedom. He gives us the ability to choose. A drowning swimmer can refuse to take the hand of one who tries to save. Unless it is accepted, the offer of life will be lost. Why would anyone refuse God's gracious offer? Ignorance? Some have never heard or understood the message. They need to understand grace. This is why Christians need to share our faith. Self-righteousness? Some are like the Pharisees and try to save themselves. Unworthiness? Some feel ashamed of their sin and believe God does not love them. Procrastination? Some wait until later to trust the Lord but never get around to it. However, Jesus described another reason. He said some prefer the darkness to the light. He said there are *"evil"* and *"wicked"* people. They reject God's offer of salvation and are on their own. *"Greater love has no one than this that someone lays down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13-14) This is the love of God toward us.

APPLICATION: Memorize John 3:16. Every Christian can share this good news with others. We are not the message but we have the best message. Our message is about the best love ever. The love of God is freely given. Who can you share your faith with this week? We don't need to scold or preach. People respond to love and kindness. We begin by asking good questions and listening.

On Wed. Jan. 6 from 6:00-7:45 we will have a joint Spring Teacher: **"Prodigal Father."** 11 sessions on God's prodigious love.

Music, teaching, testimony, communion.

2 parts of this sermon:

1.) **GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD** *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*

For God so loved WHY would God love? God love for people is emphasized throughout the Bible (OT, too). 1 John 4 says it twice: "God IS love." Why does God love? Because love is God's essential nature.

HOW does God show His love? 5 words: CREATION/FALL/ISRAEL/JESUS/CHURCH. The Lord has many roles in the Bible. First, in **CREATION**. All was in perfect harmony in the Garden. But when sin entered the world through Adam & Eve, like Humpty Dumpty, there was a great **FALL**. Sin separated us from God, from one another, and even from ourselves. The creation itself was impacted. While God is **holy, righteous, and perfect**, and is **judge**, God is also on a mission. After sin and separation entered the world, God became a **redeemer**. Act I of the

redemption story was the call of Abram. God promised to give Abram a special land with numerous descendants. This people would be called **ISRAEL**. They were meant to be a special people who knew the one, true God and to share that knowledge with the entire world. God's redeemed His people from bondage and slavery in Egypt. By this time, they had plenty of people, but they were homeless wanderers. He gave them the Law and a new land, complete with a new law. But the people continually stayed. Judgment came. Other nations took conquered them & took the land.

Act II of the story of redemption was in **JESUS**. His coming is what we call Christmas (the "incarnation") and His death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins and most importantly, His resurrection resulted in the creation of followers of Jesus, which is ACT III - His **CHURCH**. Together we await ACT IV of God's story of REDEMPTION – when Jesus returns and reunites heaven/earth and restores the paradise that was lost in the Garden of Eden.

John 3:16-21

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

2.) **WHOEVER** The focus shifts from God to the object of God's love = us **the world**, That God loves "the world" would be a new thought. God not only loved the chosen few, the Israelites, but also loved everyone. The story of Jonah being told to go preach to the evil people in Nineveh, Assyria that God loves the lost.

Sometimes agree that while God so loved "the world" that this doesn't include "me." *"If God really knew how bad I was, some of the things I've done....I'm unlovable."* Live in shame/disgrace.

that he gave Not only did God love – but God gave us a gift. Jesus is that gift of eternal life. This is the heart of the gospel – "God is love. And God so loved us that He gave." God is not passive or passive-aggressive, but proactive. God gave.

his only Son, The gift is God gave His Only Son.

that whoever This gift is for anyone

believes in him The emphasis is upon trusting in Jesus.

Titus 3:3-6 *For 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. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Ephesians 2:1-9 *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

should not perish The negative is removed. The curse is ended.

but have eternal life. When does eternal life begin? When we die? No. When we believe. What does that mean? We have light and life now.

Dr. Don Webb was President of Centenary College in Shreveport, LA. He was born in Wales and served in the British Navy before coming to the U.S. to begin his ministry as a Methodist pastor. While he was serving in the British Navy, he was named captain of the H.M.S. Switha. Their 1st assignment was to check the anchors that held the buoys in place. The only way to do that was to send down a deep-sea diver. He was told the previous captain always liked to go down first. He wanted to impress his crew with how wise and brave he was, too. The only problem was that he had never gone deep sea diving. He didn't know the first thing about it. He was too proud to admit his inadequacy, so he said, *"Well, of course I'll be the first to go down – wouldn't have it any other way."* Of course, he was scared to death as he put on this incredibly heavy suit, the thick gloves, the leaded shoes, and the helmet. He jumped overboard and slowly sank to the ocean floor. On the ocean floor he realized he did not know how to walk in the suit. He panicked. He fell forward, face down in the mud. They had told him, *"Whatever you do, Captain, do not let go of the lifeline. If you need some help, just give it a tug."* Of course, he had let go of the lifeline. Lying on the ocean floor, unable to move he thought, *"This is it. This is how it all ends."* After several minutes, which seemed like an eternity, Don felt a gentle touch on his shoulder. The crew realized he had lost his lifeline and was probably in trouble. They sent an experienced diver to come down, pick him up, get him out of the mud. They literally saved his life. Then they taught him how to walk.

In the same way, Jesus has acted on our behalf. He is the Resurrection and the Life. We have someone who came down from above who can rescue us and restore our life to us. He will give us a lifeline we could never have. And not only are we "saved" we get to "walk" in them.

Eph. 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We come to communion today to receive God's grace. This grace is available for us all. I want to tell you one more story.

A young student in Europe was trying to put his life back together but he was turned off by religion and skeptical about Jesus. One day, he felt particularly low. He went into the Cathedral of Our Lady in Copenhagen, Denmark. He was the only person there at the time. When he walked into the cathedral, he noticed that there was this huge statue of Jesus. Curious, he walked down the center aisle to get a better look. It was **Thorvaldsen's** famous sculpture of Jesus, with His arms outstretched and the words, "Come unto Me" carved on the base. (Show picture here) As the young man drew closer to the statue, he looked at very carefully and thoughtfully. But he wanted to see the face of Jesus, but he couldn't do it because Jesus was looking down toward the ground. Suddenly, it hit him, what he needed to do if he wanted to see Jesus' face. He did it very quietly and reverently. He knelt and looked up. Then he saw the face of our Lord. And when he did, it was a turning point that changed his life forever.

Do you need to do that, too? In our own way, of course, but something like that in your life. Jesus is the beginning point, turning point, and ending point for all of us. Whether we look up to receive him as the young man did in Copenhagen, or down into the manger as the poor shepherds did in Bethlehem who looked down into the manger, or the wise men who when they saw Jesus fell and worshipped Him – and gave Him their gifts. – at some time in our life we must recognize we are lost, and He is our savior. We fall and worship Him. Can that be today? The love of Jesus Christ will be the best love you will ever know.