

## 4. Why God gave up His only Son

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We come now to our reading from the Bible, and perhaps you turn with me to the beginning of the third chapter of John's Gospel, and you'll find this if you have one of our big church Bibles on page 887. I'm going to read John chapter 3, the first 21 verses. Our passage for the sermon for our study tonight is verses 16 to 21, but I want to read the first 15 verses as well, because they're very much part and parcel of what is said in verses 16 to 21. So John's Gospel, chapter 3, verse 1. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you're a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus said to him, How can these things be? Jesus answered him, Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things, and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 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. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, condemned. But whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God. Amen. And may God bless to us this reading from the scriptures.

Let's bow our heads again for a moment of prayer. Dear God, our Father, your words come to us from heaven, and they carry the power and the love of heaven upon them. And we pray that you will help us to hear your words this evening, to love them, and to accept the message of them with joy. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, do let's turn, if we may, to John's Gospel, chapter 3 once again. And we'll go straight to verses 16 to 21, on page 8, 8, 8.

Well, now, our subject this evening is why God gave up his only son. Gave him up, that is, to rejection and torture and crucifixion. And these six verses, verses 16 to 21, are a most important passage in the Bible. They're certainly one of the most important passages in John's Gospel.

[ 5 : 04 ] They help the person who is not yet a Christian to understand some wonderful things about the true God and about the Lord Jesus Christ. And they also help the person who is a Christian to see in sharper focus just how important the message of the Gospel is. These are verses which will humble us deeply, but they'll also fill us with joy and thankfulness as we think through their implications.

And let me first say something about how this third chapter of John's Gospel is structured. Because once we see the structure of this chapter, I think we'll understand it more clearly.

And the structure of it is really very simple. The chapter falls into two sections. First of all, verses 1 to 21. And secondly, verses 22 to 36.

And each of these two sections consists of a conversation followed by some explanatory comments from John the Evangelist, who is the author of the book. So you'll see that the first conversation is recorded in verses 1 to 15.

That's the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus that we studied last week. And then verses 16 to 21 are John, John the Evangelist's explanatory comments on that conversation.

[ 6 : 21 ] And particularly, John is commenting on the last two verses, verses 14 and 15, as we'll see in just a moment. Verse 15, where Jesus says that whoever believes in him, in the Son of Man, may have eternal life, is a very concise, condensed little verse from the Lord's mouth.

And so what John is doing in verses 16 to 21 is unpacking that little verse. He's drawing it out and showing us its implications. So verses 16 to 21 are really an inspired commentary on verses 14 and 15.

Now look at the second section of the chapter, which is verses 22 to 36. And you'll see that the scene changes abruptly at verse 22.

We leave Jerusalem, where Jesus has been talking to Nicodemus, and we go out to the Judean countryside, where John the Baptist is baptizing people. And again, we have a discussion recorded for us.

Some of John the Baptist's disciples raise a question in verse 26 about Jesus. And John the Baptist answers their question and makes various remarks in verses 27 to 30 concerning himself and Jesus.

[ 7 : 31 ] And then in verses 31 to 36, John the Evangelist gives us some inspired explanatory comments on the things that John the Baptist has just been saying. So it's a very simple structure.

Conversation followed by explanatory comment, and then a second conversation followed by a second explanatory comment. Now, if you've got sharp eyes, you will have spotted the inverted commas, or speech marks, at the beginning of verse 16.

And you'll also perhaps have spotted that there are no speech marks at the end of verse 15. So the way it's punctuated here in our English Standard Version is suggesting that Jesus is continuing to speak right from verse 10 through to verse 21.

Now, as you probably know, the original Greek text has no punctuation marks at all. So the punctuation marks have to be put in by modern translators, and they have to make their best guess as to where to punctuate the passage.

And commentators on John's Gospel don't all take quite the same view on this, but I think myself that it's by far the best way to read verses 16 to 21 as from the pen of John the Evangelist and not from the lips of Jesus.

[ 8 : 41 ] John is really saying to us in verses 16 to 21, look at verses 14 and 15. This is one of the greatest things that the Lord Jesus ever said.

And I'm going to take a whole paragraph now so as to open up what lies behind verses 14 and 15. So I think that's what verses 16 to 21 are doing. They're showing us what lies behind verses 14 and 15.

They're telling us why it is so important to put our trust in Jesus Christ so as to have eternal life. All right, well, let's turn now to the passage and the message of the passage.

In verses 14 and 15, Jesus has been telling Nicodemus that something must happen. And that is, verse 14, that the Son of Man must be lifted up.

And he means by that lifted up on a cross. And the Son of Man lifted up on the cross will bring eternal life to whoever believes in him.

[ 9 : 42 ] So Jesus knows, and Jesus always knew, that the cross was unavoidable. If it had been possible for God to bring eternal life and eternal salvation to people in some other way, some perhaps less difficult way, no doubt he would have done it.

But it was the only way. The Son of Man had to be crucified because only through his death could our sin be dealt with. There was a price that had to be paid.

There was a punishment that had to be borne. Without the blood of the Lamb of God shed in death, it was impossible for the stain and guilt of our sin to be removed.

So John records and sets down this great saying of Jesus in verses 14 and 15. But John can see that it needs unpacking. It raises questions.

In particular, why did God go to such extremes? Were human beings so valuable to God that he had to pay such a great price?

[ 10 : 44 ] And what would be the destiny of human beings if God had not caused his Son to be crucified? Those are the kind of questions that John is seeking to answer in verses 16 to 21.

So what I want to do is really to work through this paragraph more or less verse by verse. So here's the first thing to notice. God shows us, sorry, John shows us God's loving motive in verse 16.

God's loving motive. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Behind the cross of Jesus behind the sending of God's Son into the world there lies an extraordinary unfathomable love.

And this is an intense love. God so loved so deeply loved the world. But it's also a surprising love when you stop to consider what it was that God so loved.

That would certainly have surprised somebody like Nicodemus a leading Jew. The Jews were very conscious of their status as God's chosen and special people the people with whom God had a special relationship.

[ 12 : 03 ] And indeed the Old Testament marks them out as being specially marked and specially favored. So the Jews would not have been surprised if John had written for God so loved the Jews.

But to think that Gentiles also might be the object of God's intense love would have been an extraordinary revelation to most Jews. It might have stuck in their craw.

They regarded Gentiles as dogs and outsiders. Could the one and only God love them? But what is said here in verse 16 ought to surprise not only Jewish people but also people like us.

What is it that God so loves? The answer is the world. And what does John mean by the world? Well in John's writing the word world is not a morally neutral word.

It doesn't just mean the planet or the earth. It means human beings humankind in all our diversity and all our rebelliousness against God.

[ 13 : 07 ] Men and women living life as if God didn't matter or even as if God didn't exist. Human beings caring not a fig for God. Treating God and his ways and his standards with contempt.

Now that's the basic attitude of all human beings towards God. Those of us who have become Christians well we know perfectly well that that is where we all started. All of us by birth and background have belonged to the world.

The world as John understands it is our native habitat and its peculiar distinguishing characteristic is its defiance of God and yet God extraordinarily has loved it and has loved us.

How much then has God loved the world? Real love we know this so well it's not just a feeling it always shows itself in deeds and actions and often self-sacrificial ones and the more we love someone the more we'll be willing to act towards that person in a way that costs something.

So how costly has it been to God to love the world? It has been very costly. Just look at what God was prepared to give. For God so loved the world that he gave what?

[ 14 : 30 ] Not just his son but his only son. The word really means his only begotten son. If God had had a hundred sons like Jesus and if he'd been able to keep 99 of them at his side and just lose one you might say that it hadn't been such a difficult thing to do but he had only one son and he gave him up to death.

Imagine all of us sitting here let's say on a Sunday morning when there are more children around. Imagine we're all here families grandparents whole families little ones as well at our Sunday service and imagine and this has happened in churches before now imagine that a group of terrorists would have burst in from the back brandishing machine guns.

I guess the service would come to a very fast halt and imagine the leader of the armed gang coming up to the front and standing down there with his machine gun and turning around and speaking to the congregation and he says we're going to kill you all unless you're willing to give up one child.

We'll spare the rest of you all of you if you give up one child to our bullets. Now I imagine under those circumstances that a number of parents or grandparents would have the courage to step forward and say shoot me take my life if that will satisfy you and stop you shooting everybody else.

But what parent would willingly take their own child and put it forward to be sacrificed. And yet on Good Friday God allowed Pontius Pilate to hand Jesus over to a troop of Roman soldiers who flogged him.

[ 16 : 16 ] And although a Roman flogging was so severe that many prisoners couldn't stand up after submitting to it and some people even died under it they forced Jesus to pick up the heavy crossbeam of his cross and to walk out through the streets of Jerusalem to the place called Golgotha.

And there they took long heavy iron nails four, five, six inches long nails and hammered them through his wrists and his ankles and then secured the crossbeam to the upright pole and dropped it into the hole in the ground which had been prepared for it.

And there he hung for three hours until he died. And God allowed them to do all this to his only begotten son.

Now at any moment he could have sent legions of angels to rescue him but for our sake he didn't. And the physical suffering that Jesus endured was not the worst of it.

Many people have had to endure similar physical torture but the worst of it the thing that no one else has ever suffered or could ever suffer was the lethal weight of the sin of the world.

[ 17 : 30 ] He bore our sins on the cross. The whole weight of our rebellion our hardness of heart towards God our contempt of his standards and his wonderful laws all this Jesus carried for those terrible hours on the cross.

And he carried our sins willingly because it wasn't only the father who loved us Jesus himself deeply loved us too. He wanted to do it but he knew it would kill him because he knew only too well that the wages of sin is death and that without the shedding of blood in death there is no forgiveness.

The only way in which the stain and guilt of our sin could be removed was by Jesus taking our penalty in our place.

we deserved we were the ones who deserved to receive the wages of our sin but Jesus accepted that terrible wage for us.

Now if the first part of verse 16 shows us God's loving motive in giving up his son to death on the cross the second part of verse 16 shows us God's astonishing purpose in giving up his son and that is in John's words that whoever believes in Christ should not perish but have eternal life.

[ 18 : 56 ] Now the implication of this is absolutely clear and that is that unless Jesus had come unless Jesus had died for our sins on the cross we would all perish which means that we would all spend eternity in hell banished from God's presence cut off forever from any possibility of being in God's company but it's not God's will that we should perish like that what God wants for us is that we should spend eternity with him in the new world which one day will open up before us and this too is an astonishing fact about God that he actually wants our company wants my company and yours forever now we're not always like that with each other are we?

have you ever had guests at home who have overstayed their welcome? you think to yourself Auntie Gertie she's been here for a month she was only coming for two days I wish she'd go and you're very relieved when eventually she does go but you see God is not like that with us he wants our company forever he wants to enjoy us and to love us and to welcome us and to be with us and the Bible promises also that he is going to transform us in the end those who belong to Jesus will in the end be like him our characters our thoughts and our ways will be just like his that means that all our nastiness and selfishness and greed and godlessness all of that will be gone in eternal life in the land of pure delight but verse 16 you'll see is also very plain on this point that it's only those who are prepared to believe in him in Jesus who will not perish but have eternal life that means that if you have not yet taken the courageous and decisive step of putting your trust in Jesus you need to do it nobody else will do it for you it is if you like yourself and Jesus facing each other and when everything is stripped down to the wire either you will say to him

I want to rule my own life even if it means that I perish eternally or you will say to him I forsake self rule and I place all my confidence in you as my master and my king and I'm so grateful to you for dying for my sins now the person who speaks to him like that is the person to whom eternal life is promised so we have God's loving motive God's astonishing purpose and then in verses 17 and 18 John teaches us about the reality of condemnation and salvation let me read those two verses again 17 and 18 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 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 now those two verses are really opening up verse 16 and helping us to understand better what is meant by perishing and what is meant by eternal life those who perish perish not through natural causes and not because of some impersonal natural process they perish because they're condemned by God whereas those who have eternal life are saved through what

Jesus has done but let's notice how John expresses it in verse 17 he uses a wonderful construction and not this but that construction that's a way of making a point crystal clear you often find it in the Bible not this but that so he says there in verse 17 God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world no on the contrary he sent him so that the world might be saved in other words God's overwhelming reason for sending Jesus was to bring rescue and not condemnation now if we ask how is it then that Jesus' coming was not designed to bring condemnation the answer is this that the world was already under condemnation it didn't need Jesus to come so as to announce to the world that it was condemned to death the world was already under God's deserved condemnation and had been ever since God closed and locked the gates of the garden of Eden the sentence of death was announced by God back in

Genesis chapter 3 Jesus came to undo the sentence of death to lift the curse as the old hymn puts it to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers he came on a rescue mission not a condemnation mission that's what verse 17 is saying and if verse 17 tells us why God sent Jesus into the world verse 18 states the positions of the believer and the unbeliever the one who believes in Christ is not condemned he has fixed his heart's trust on Jesus and is immediately lifted out of the sphere of condemnation but says John whoever does not believe is condemned already he has always been in the sphere of condemnation and he has not taken advantage of the one way out of it now somebody who is not a Christian might want to ask a question here he might say well I have friends who are

[ 24 : 44 ] Christians but I'm not a Christian myself and it's just a fact of my life so why should I be condemned by God for not being a Christian isn't that rather unfair isn't it a bit like saying everyone with blue eyes will not be condemned but everyone with brown eyes will be condemned nobody can alter the color of their eyes can they so isn't it the same with being a Christian believer some people see Jesus as the son of God but I'm just not one of them that's the way things are so why should I be condemned simply because I can't see what my Christian friends can see now the problem with that objection is that the speaker is treating the gospel of Jesus as if it were an intellectual puzzle a puzzle that some people can solve but other people can't but the gospel is not an intellectual puzzle it's a commanding call from our maker in the gospel God is saying don't you realize my friend that you're in mortal danger because you have offended me the God of heaven and in my love for you

I've sent a rescuer for you my only son are you going to turn your back on the only one who can save you from my righteous judgment don't you see that you're under condemnation and the most important thing you need is to be saved if you were drowning in the sea and a lifeboat came to rescue you would you send it away and say I don't need you or if you were trapped high up in a burning building would you refuse the fireman's ladder that was pushed up to fetch you perhaps part of our trouble in the modern world is that there is so much information and entertainment that comes our way every day that we can lose the capacity to distinguish what is trivial from what is really important think of the course of a few evenings in a person's life on Thursday evening you might go to the cinema and enjoy it on Friday evening you have dinner with some friends and you enjoy that on Saturday you go to a football match on Sunday you come to church for an hour or two on Monday evening you spend the evening in with a

DVD it's all gently entertaining a little bit like sampling a range of cheeses you try half a dozen different cheeses and each one is interesting just for a few seconds but you soon forget it and move on and we can't treat the gospel and the Bible like that these verses from John chapter 3 are one of the most important passages that have ever been written in the history of the world these words are about our eternal destiny in heaven or hell in a hundred years time it's conceivable that this building will still be here but you and I certainly will not be so where will we be verse 18 tells us exactly where we will be each one of us whoever believes in Jesus is not condemned but whoever does not believe is condemned already if you're not a

Christian don't deceive yourself into thinking that believing or not believing in Christ is a morally neutral question like whether you have brown eyes or blue eyes it is not look again at verse 18 the one who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed that means because he has refused to believe in the name of the only son of God do you see how the issue is not really an issue of understanding it's an issue of obedience the problem is in the will not in the mind when a person remains an unbeliever it's not that he can't put his trust in Christ it's that he won't put his trust in Christ well let's look on now to the last three verses verses 19 to 21 because they show us the underlying reason why some people become Christians and others don't so verse 19 and this is the judgment in other words this is the verdict this is the reason for the division of people into two groups the saved and the lost this is the judgment the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil so what is going on behind this verdict

John tells us the light has come into the world by that John means that Jesus who is the light has come into the world and he's the light in this sense that he enables us to see things as they really are I guess most of us have had the experience occasionally of getting up rather early in the morning well before dawn breaks and you're up and active for some reason doing things in the dark and then as the sun comes up as the dawn breaks we begin to make sense of the world around us the light comes and it enables us to see things clearly that's the same here with Jesus here he is he has come into the world as the light and his coming enables us to make sense of our world and of our own lives we begin to see ourselves for what we really are Jesus takes away our illusions and our fantasies about ourselves we begin to see in the light of his teaching that we are much loved human beings amazing and wonderful creatures because we've been made in the very image of God and yet also deeply corrupted and soiled by our defiant sinfulness the blazing light of his teaching helps us to understand mankind and especially our desperate plight and our need for rescue but what does verse 19 go on to tell us it tells us that the light has come into the world and people well how did they react did they say welcome light of the world on the contrary

[ 31 : 00 ] Jesus says that they loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil and this means that they enjoyed corruption and greed and violence and drunkenness and robbery and lust and lying and envy and murder and they were so wedded to that way of life that when they saw the pure lovely delightful life and teaching of Jesus they said we don't want this and they behaved like moles and they dug underground and tunneled into the darkness saying in the strongest terms that they weren't going to come out of the darkness don't disturb us light of the world go away and in verse 20 John tells us why people react like this to Jesus for he says everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light here's the reason lest his deeds should be exposed and it's that final phrase that opens up the truth about why some people shun Jesus it's because coming to him coming out of the underground tunnel into the daylight involves the exposing of dark deeds and the person who is bent on refusing to trust Jesus hates the idea that his real life should at last be shown up for what it really is so the real reason

John is saying why he doesn't come to Jesus is not because he has intellectual difficulties but because he has moral entanglements that he doesn't want to have exposed and dealt with now what might this mean for an individual it will mean for one person that he doesn't want to have his fraudulent financial dealings exposed by fraudulent means and deceitful accounting he's a few thousand pounds a year better off than he would be if his financial activities were entirely honest so he is willing for the sake of a few thousand extra grubby pounds per year to forsake Jesus and eternal life now I ask you is that a good bargain or another person might be cheating on his wife and carrying on a secret affair and of course having to spin a web of lies and deceit in order to cover his tracks and keep his wife and friends from knowing what he's doing and this man is willing for the sake of this wretched adulterous relationship to turn his back on Jesus and eternal life isn't that a very bad bargain indeed is it worth it to count eternal life so cheap and an adulterous relationship so valuable this is the kind of thing that verse 20 is all about the light is avoided not because of intellectual difficulties but because a person loves the grubby deeds of darkness and says

I have no wish to give up my lifestyle even if it costs me my eternal joy now that's not the whole story thank God because verse 21 tells us about the person who does come to the light and becomes a Christian now this person does not earn eternal life by being good the Bible never teaches that idea this person to translate John's Greek a bit more literally does the truth in other words sticks to the truth as it is in Jesus which is going to involve repenting and believing and the consequence is that it becomes clearly seen that his deeds his open and honest lifestyle are carried out not in the strength of his own will or determination but in the strength and enabling that comes from God so the person who refuses Christ hides from Christ that's what verse 20 is saying but the person who comes to Christ opens his heart and life to Christ and that's what verse 21 is saying we've seen then that these verses 16 to 21 are an explanatory comment on verses 14 and 15 in verses 14 and 15

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he Jesus has got to be crucified he must be lifted up on a cross so that eternal life becomes available to whoever believes in him and then John proceeds to explain and clarify he tells us of God's loving motive the great great love that lay behind the gift of his son he tells us of God's astonishing purpose that people should not perish but have eternal life if they're willing to believe he then explains the reality of condemnation and salvation in verses 17 and 18 and he shows us that all people in the end will either be saved or condemned there are only two final destinies heaven and hell there is no third and then in verses 19 to 21 John shows us the reasons that lie behind God's verdict why it is that some people love darkness and cling to it and why it is that others thankfully come to the light well let me let me conclude now by pointing out a most important word here and that is the word whoever you'll see it in verse 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life and then verse 16 that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life and then verse 18 whoever believes in him is not condemned you might add verse 36 as well whoever believes in the son has eternal life whoever does not obey the son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains upon him now that little word whoever it's a very important word here and it's a wonderful word and many people have become Christians because of that word whoever some people might think

I can't come to Christ I just can't do it because I've never had anything to do with a church and I've got no Christian background our friend that is no reason not to come to Christ whoever believes in him will have eternal life another person might think I'd quite like to come to Jesus but I can't because a long time ago I did a particularly wicked and horrible thing to somebody in fact the thing that I did was so horrible that I can't believe I could ever be forgiven now John the apostle speaking for God says whoever believes in Christ has eternal life another person might think well I could never be a Christian because I've spent my life as a Hindu or a Muslim well friend lots of people have left Hinduism and Islam and lots of other faiths in order to come to Jesus because John assures us that whoever believes in him will have eternal life another person might think



[ 38 : 13 ] I could never come to Jesus because my life has been so crushed and downtrodden so almost destroyed by people and circumstances and pressures and illness and poverty and misery and Christians seem to be so happy and well put together and I'm never going to be that sort of a person don't think like that friend don't you don't need to John is telling you the absolute truth when he says whoever believes in him will have eternal life do you see what that wonderful little whoever means it means that anybody from any kind of past from any kind of background can come to Christ the invitation is there and it's more than an invitation it is a loving command from heaven the compassionate love of God lies behind the coming of Jesus to die on the cross for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life let us bow our heads and we'll pray our gracious God who are we that you should have dealt with us so kindly and tenderly but it's what you have done and we're amazed at the grace and the compassion and pity that you've had upon us you've looked at us in our sinfulness and our rebellion against you our defiance and you have given up the most precious and wonderful treasure your only son given him up to an agonizing death so that he should bear our sins in our place on the cross have mercy upon us all of us we pray and give us a great sense of thankfulness and joy as we trust the savior and we ask it in his name amen thank you so that that has a malinery home and wemap we■■ asolt asolt as race as we want to

Arin al Shut for the■■ god no oh