

**"For God So Loved"**  
**(John 3:16-21)**  
**Pastor Peter Yi**  
**March 25, 2018**

**(John 3:16-21)**

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. <sup>19</sup> This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

The message of Christianity is that God loves us. That might be one of the simplest ways to communicate what Christianity is all about. However, love is a very misunderstood word.

When the word 'love' is used in our culture we have to closely examine the context to determine what the person means by it. It could mean anything from deep admiration to something as shallow as a preference. You can say, I love "The Walking Dead" (admiration) and you can say, "I love Italian food" (preference) and you can say, "I love my children". Even with this last phrase we have to think what that actually means.

The Greeks made it a lot simpler. They had different words for love for different situations. C.S. Lewis wrote a book entitled "The Four Loves" where he dives into this vast topic from a Christian perspective. And he bases his book on the four different words for love that were used among the Greeks.

He talks about "**affection**" which can be seen as fondness through familiarity. Like the love that family members have toward each other. It's the most widely used type of love. Lewis says this type of love seems to be "built-into" people. It's natural, normal. This love is mentioned several times in the New Testament.

Then there's **friendship** love.

This is the second most common type of love found in the Bible:

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. (**Romans 12:10**)

It's the strong bond that exists between people who share a common interest or activity. Think of those friends that are closest to you. These are the friends with which you shared struggles and trials and great joys together. Or think of those in your Life Group, where at first you were strangers, but after many months have grown incredibly fond of each other, and you can honestly say that you love them. That's friendship love.

The third type of love that Lewis mentions is **sexual** or **romantic** love, which comes from the Greek word *eros* which is the same name as the Greek goddess of love. This is what is meant when we say, “I’m in love that person.” Interestingly this word is not found in the Bible.

Lewis then says that the final type of love is **charity**. Some of us know this as *agape* love from the Greek word *agape*. This is the most common word for love in the New Testament. This is a love directed towards one’s neighbor which does not depend on any lovable qualities that the object of love possesses. Lewis ranks this as the greatest of all the loves and specifically sees it as a somewhat uniquely Christian virtue.

So, for us living today, we’re at a disadvantage because we have just one word for love and we have to use context or simply define it to understand what is meant when we use the word.

If I were to share with you and tell you that God is love, what would that mean to you? We all may have our ideas and our interpretations, but would we completely understand what that phrase means? It’s not as simple as we might think. That’s why New testament scholar Don Carson wrote a book entitled, “The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God.” In it he writes first, that there is a unique love that exists only between God the Father and God the Son. Next, he says that there is a love that God has for all of his creation, because he is a loving creator. It’s shown in God caring for creation. Not a bird falls from the sky apart from God’s providential care. All the animals are fed ultimately by God, the very creator of those animals. Third, there’s a special love that God has toward a fallen world that he wants to save. This will be the love we’ll be looking at a lot more closely today. Fourth, there’s a special love that God has especially for his elect, those he has saved and adopted as his children. It’s similar to a person that has a great love for his countrymen, but nothing in comparison with the love that he has for his family members. This aspect of the love of God is seen in great detail throughout the pages of the Bible.

Then, Carson says that there is one final way that God’s love is shown in the Bible. It’s a love that is given to his own people that’s conditional upon the people’s obedience. It’s part of the way we remain in a relationship with him. We are to remain or to keep ourselves in God’s love. Only when we keep ourselves in it, do we actually experience it. All that to say that the love of God is not as simple as we might have thought it to be.

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

In this verse, when it states that God so loved the world, the definition for love is the last one that C.S. Lewis mentioned’ it’s the love of charity. And according to Carson it’s God’s saving love toward a fallen world. It’s with this *agape* love that God loves us. And that’s the love I hope will move us to love him back. So I want to give you some reasons for why God’s love is so great.

**The first reason why God’s love is so great is because he loves something that was so unworthy of his love.** The unworthy object in this case is the world.

Most people, including you and I, love things or people that are worthy of love, or have earned love. We don't really love things or people that are underserving or those who are against us or have hurt us. But that's not how God loves. Often we underestimate the awesomeness of God's love because of how we view ourselves. Our view of ourselves and humanity is often times not in line with the way the Bible describes humanity. When we look at our fellow humans we describe them with words like nice and good. Sure there are a few bad apples, but generally speaking the population is nice and good, but that's not how the Bible and that's not how God perceives us.

We are actually far worse than we think. We like to give ourselves good grades and pat ourselves on the back for some small gesture of goodness. But if we are honest with ourselves, we all know that we are far worse than we let on to be. How can this be? Well, most people look at their actions. But even with their actions they set incredibly low standards of what it means to be good. I remember one person saying that he's good because he pays his taxes and cuts his grass. Is that the standard of what it means to be good? What if goodness was measured by our thoughts, attitudes and motivations? Would we still call ourselves good? The truth of the matter is that if someone took all our thoughts, attitudes, and motivations from just one day in our lives and played them on the evening news, people would all grab their torches and pitchforks and drive us out of town. None of us, not one, are as good as we let on to be. Rather, we are far worse, infinitely worse than we can imagine.

Why is that? Well it's because we are rebels against the one and only King. We are traitors against the rightful rule and reign of God. We shake our puny little fists in defiance against the only worthy and deserving King of the universe and Leader of our lives. Every time we sin, we are violating a law of a holy and just God and against his holy and just kingdom and yet, this is the world, these are the people that God loves. God's love is great because he loves the utterly sinful, the completely unlovable.

**Second, God's love is great because of the costly sacrifice.**

One teacher said, "The measure of love is how much it gives" Isn't that true? I've officiated around 75-100 weddings and they're all wonderful, but the most moving wedding I ever went to was my brother's over 20 years ago. *They wrote their own vows expressing their undying commitment to one another. By brother, he's quite the romantic, so with rhyme and poetry he wrote this beautiful vow. Ladies, there's more. He also wrote a song for her and played it so passionately, so intensely for her, expressing his deep devotion to her. Wow, anyone would have said, Man, he must really love her.* But, that is not love.

*Not many people know about the many trips he made to the hospital with her because of an illness she has. Not many people know about how he would stay with her when her illness would come out of remission. When the medication would make her look like a bloated cartoon figure, he could have just as easily stayed at home, but he would go out with her. Few people know about the favor he had to earn from her parents. Few people know about what he had to go through with our parents to get married to a girl with such a severe illness. It cost him a lot to get married. The measure of love is how much it gives!*

Friends, you and I, we can love so conditionally. We get out the measuring stick. The scale. We measure the amount of love we're receiving and then reciprocate the same amount. And often times we don't reciprocate more than what we've received. God's love was not like that. He did not hold back.

God's love included a costly sacrifice. How did God demonstrate his love for us, for someone who is so unlovable, for someone who is so dirty and sinful? He gave his one and only Son to suffer the punishment for our sins. Sins or offenses require justice. Don't they? Doesn't someone need to pay when a crime is committed? Don't we want our police and our judges to fairly punish those people? Of course. This is even more true with God. He's our fair judge. And because he's fair, he has to judge fairly. And the punishment for our mistakes and sins is death. So each one of us deserves to be punished by God for our sins. But here's what God does in love. He sent his perfect Son, Jesus Christ to suffer our punishment in his place.

Who was this Jesus who was sent? He was worthy of the sinlessness of heaven, yet he entered the corrupted world of men and women. He was holy, completely without sin and yet the Bible says he became sin for us. He was the only one that deserved to be served by all his creation, yet he came to serve us and give his life as a payment for sin. He was the one who worthy of the greatest honor and praise, yet he received the cruelest and most unjust scorn and shame. As the holy one, He himself was the rightful judge of all humanity, yet he himself was judged by God, for us! He was the creator and giver of life, who gave up his own life for you and me.

2000 years ago this Jesus Christ was executed on a Roman cross for our sins. Why? Because love gives, and because God is love, he gave us his Son.

**Finally, God's love is great because of its great benefits to us.**

When many of us were growing up, the world was different. On a summer day, we could play outside from sun up to sun down. Our parents didn't have to worry about anything. But we live in a different world today. Where there are thousands of missing children every year. Today, we hardly let our children out of our sights, even for a moment. But imagine if your child was taken from you? What would you do to get her back? Wouldn't we spare no expense. Wouldn't we contact the authorities? Wouldn't we hire our own investigators? Wouldn't we be driving around combing the neighborhood over and over and over? Wouldn't we stay vigilant near the phone? Maybe we'd create websites to help get the word. Wouldn't you beg your friends and neighbors to help your cause? Basically, we would be on an all-out search to retrieve and rescue our lost child.

That's why God sent his Son. God sent Jesus on earth to perform an all-out search and rescue mission. God sent his Son to rescue us from his just and holy wrath. God gave us his son to save us from and eternal hell as well as to save us from misery on earth, an unfulfilled live, a life without hope or vision or direction, a life that has no meaning, a life that would be forever wandering. He saved us from the absence of his presence. He wanted to have a relationship with us. He wants you to have a relationship with him. He wants you to know him personally. God also wants to save us from sin and the destructive effects of sin in our lives. And that's why God's love is so great.

Anyone who believes in him, who puts his or her trust in him, who decides to hand over their lives fully into the hands of God will be saved. This isn't for the weak of heart, but it is for those with a broken heart, those who know their sin, those who recognize their rebellion against God, for those who know that they've been running away from him, those who want peace and joy and purpose to their lives. Our God is rich in mercy, no sin is too great.

**Conclusion:**

Remember earlier I said that all of us are far worse, far more sinful than we let on to be. That's the bad news, but the good news, the incredibly good news, is that each of us is far more loved than we could ever imagine. Friends, there is no reason to fear the love of God. There's no reason to doubt the love of God. What love creates, what all true love creates is safety and security. When a parent loves a child, when a wife loves a husband, when a friend loves a friend, it creates a real state of safety and security, especially when we know that we are loved regardless of how bad we are. This is what the love of God is like. You are far more loved than you could ever imagine. Ask God for that love and he will give it to you. He will surround you in that love.

Let's pray.