

# Evangelism and the Love of God

John 3:16-21

**BI: One primary motivation for evangelism is a deep conviction that God loves the world and wants sinners to repent and be saved.**

Read John 3:16-19

## I. Review:

1. Two weeks ago we began looking at one of the most beloved texts of Scripture in the history of the church. John 3:16 is a verse that's so simple every Sunday school child can learn it, but at the same time so deep that theologians have wrestled with it for centuries. There are a couple of words here that are of primary importance as we seek to understand John's meaning. But the word we have been focusing on for the past couple weeks is the word "loved." Jesus says, "For God so loved the world..." What does He mean when He says God "loved" the world?

2. In the past couple of weeks we have learned that the love of God is a much deeper and richer thing than we ever imagined it to be. Two weeks ago we spent the whole hour looking at what it means that God loved the world. And we concluded that in this context "world" means all of humanity. Last week we sought to give clarity to our understanding of the love of God by considering the five ways Scripture speaks of the love of God. In case you weren't here for that, let me just rehearse these with you in brief.

- A. His intra-Trinitarian love. This is the love which the Father's love for the Son and the Son's love of the father for all eternity. One thing I did not mention last week is that when we are born again we actually become beneficiaries of this unique love between the members of the Godhead. Jesus will touch on this in John 17 when He says to the Father (17:22–23) "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;<sup>23</sup> I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.
- B. His providential love by which he loves His creation and takes personal interest in preserving it.
- C. His universal, yearning, commanding love which was supremely displayed on the cross. This is God's love for humanity (Jn. 3:16) It is a love that longs for sinner to repent and embrace the provision for their salvation which He made in the death of His son, Jesus Christ. This love of God is the fuel of our evangelistic and missionary zeal.
- D. His electing love by which He has predestined His elect to be saved from before the foundation of the world.
- E. His provisional love by which He relates to His elect as our Father who has both invited us to abide in His love and has given us the responsibility to do so by living in obedience to Him.

3. These are the five ways the Bible speaks of the love of God. And it behooves us to be careful not to confuse one expression of His love in Scripture with the others. But we spent our entire time last week on this, so let's get back to the text in John 3:16.

4. My goal on the first week we looked at John 3:16 was to establish that what Jesus was teaching Nicodemus was that God loves mankind. This would have been a shock to Nicodemus because he would have believed that the only people God loved were the Jews. The Jewish mindset had no

would have believed that the only people God loved were the Jews. The Jewish mindset had no room in it for the inclusion of Gentiles in the salvation that God offers. But that has never been God's view. Israel was always to be a "light to the nations" (Isa. 42:6). But Nicodemus' understanding of the way God saves sinners was so deficient there was hardly any gospel in it. He thought sinners were reconciled to God by birth and by works. But Jesus destroys such thinking with the hammer of eternal truth.

5. Now let me take this another step further by showing you another reason why we have to conclude that when Jesus says "God loved the world," he meant the entire human race.

## II. The Meaning of "World."

1. The word here for "world" is κόσμος. This is a very fluid word that can be translated many different ways. It can mean *universe, earth, world system, people, an ordered structure, all that exists, mankind*, and there are a number of other translations as well. So, as always, we have to look to the context for clues.

2. One of the most important places in this text to look for clues is in the verses that immediately follow 3:16. In verse 17-19 the term "world" is used four (4) more times and each time it is the term κόσμος. The question is, who does Jesus include in this term as He uses it in the verses? Notice with me that in verse 17 he speaks about judging the world. Again, in verse 18 he speaks of those in the world being judged by God. In fact He says that they are "judged already" because of their unbelief. And verse 19 explains that their being judged is owing to the fact that the Light (i.e. Jesus) came into the world but "men loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil."

3. So who is the world in these verses Jesus is speaking of? Is it not the sinful, darkness-loving human race? It is not a world of people comprised only of the elect of God, but also of people who will ultimately fall under the judgment of God! Jesus is telling us that God loved this humanity so much that He sent His one and only Son so that whoever among us believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

4. Someone will say, "Well I don't believe that because I'm a Calvinist." Well, if you say that then you must think that you agree the teaching of John Calving. But let me assure you that if you don't believe "World" means "world" here, then John Calvin doesn't agree with you. Listen to what Calvin actually said about John 3:16. "[Two] points are distinctly stated to us: namely, that faith in Christ brings life to all, and that Christ brought life, because the Father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish" (quoted in MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1996). *The God Who Loves* (17-18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers).

5. Calvin went further to explain:

"[In John 3:16 the evangelist] has employed the universal term *whosoever*, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also the import of the term *world*, which he formerly used; for though nothing will be found in *the world* that is worthy of the favor of God, yet He shows himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when he invites all without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life.

Let us remember, on the other hand [Calvin continues], that while *life* is promised universally to *all who believe* in Christ, still faith is not common to all, but the elect alone are they whose eyes God opens, that they may seek him by faith" (Ibid).

6. D.A. Carson likewise, in his excellent book "*The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*" writes, "I know that some try to take κόσμος ("world") here to refer to the elect. But that really will not do. All the evidence of the usage of the word in John's Gospel is against the suggestion." (Carson, Crossway (2000), p. 17).

7. Again, Robert L. Dabney explains: "A... logical connection between verse 17 and verse 18 shows that "the world" of verse 17 includes "those that believe" and "those that believe not" of verse 18.... It is hard to see, if [Christ's coming into the world] is not a true manifestation of divine [Love] to the part of "the world" that does *NOT* believe, how their choosing to reject it is the just ground of a

part of the world that does NOT believe, how their choosing to reject it is the just ground of a deeper condemnation, as is expressly stated in verse 19.” In other words, Dabney is saying that it makes no sense to say that God condemns the people in the world who reject His love, if God never loved them to begin with.

8. MacArthur agrees: “There is no delimiting language anywhere in the context [of John 3:16]. It has nothing to do with how God’s love is distributed between the elect and the rest of the world. It is a statement about God’s demeanor toward mankind in general” (LOG, p. 104).

9. We don’t have time to quote anyone else on the subject. I just want us to see that if the term “world” doesn’t mean “humanity” the passage simply makes no sense. Humanity in general is the object of divine love. And verse 17 simply means that Christ came to offer redemption to this fallen race.

10. But there’s more. Beyond this immediate context we must consider other passage that hint at the same truth.

Luke 13:34 Jesus cried out, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *the city* that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen *gathers* her brood under her wings, and you would not *have it!*”

Titus 3:4. Speaking of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world Paul says, “The kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared.”

2 Peter 3:9 Peter explains, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, *not wishing for any to perish* but for all to come to repentance.”

11. You see, beloved, there is a very real sense in which God loves the world. Yes, it is a world full of sinners, rebels, and Christ-rejecters, but in some holy and divinely omnipotent way, God loves all men and yearns for sinners to repent. That’s why Paul says things like, (1 Tim. 2:3–4) “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

### III. Conclusion:

1. Why should this matter to us?

A. Because the glory of God is at stake. If we are living to show the world what God is like then we must know that He loves the world... not just the elect.

B. Because, there are some who are hearing my voice right now who have yet to be reconciled to the God who loves them. In this passage Jesus is not simply pleading with Nicodemus to repent, He is pleading for you to repent and find the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Because God’s love for the world is strong motivation for evangelism. If God doesn’t really love the world, then why should we take the risks that evangelism and missions require. If we understand the love of God correctly than we know that the only hope sinners have is that someone like you and me will tell them about the love of God in Christ. As Paul wrote in Rom. 10:11-15,

“For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; <sup>13</sup> for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”

2. Beloved, we should not hesitate to tell our unbelieving family and friends that God loves them. He really does! And He wants them to repent and find the forgiveness of sins and the eternal joy that He has provided them in Christ.

3. John 3:16–17 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”