

The Father's Unspeakable Love

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Bible Text: John 3:16

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Scripture Reading: John 3:1-21; 35-36

Psalters: 261:1,2
399:1-4
233:2,3,6
4:3-5

Beloved congregation,

The Altar of Burnt Offering was the largest and most prominent piece of furniture in the Tabernacle of Israel. The reason for this was an important one, for the Altar of Burnt Offering prefigured or typified the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was by means of this altar, and the daily sacrifices performed there, that God wanted to teach the people of Israel that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). By means of that altar, and the sacrifices connected with it, Israel had to learn the centrality of the bloody sacrifice in God's redemptive purposes. The Israelites had to learn that without that bloody sacrifice it would be impossible for God to be their God, it would be impossible for Him to dwell in their midst, and it would be impossible for Him to be gracious to them. Because of the bloody sacrifice, however, God could dwell in the midst of a sinful people. The bloody sacrifice, pointing to the one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ brought in the fullness of time, made it possible for God to

pardon their sins freely. Because of that sacrifice, He was able to declare to them, “And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Lev. 26:12).

And thus, congregation, the rich symbolism of the ceremonial law teaches us that the cross is the central and core element of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without the cross there is no gospel; without the cross there is no salvation; without the cross there is no forgiveness of sins; and without the cross it would be impossible for God to be the God of sinners as we all are.

It is therefore most profitable for the Church of God to be directed ever and again to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we would glory in nothing else save Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

In this message we want to direct your attention to Christ by way of the text that is so rarely connected to the cross—a text quoted more than perhaps any other text from the Word of God. It is a text that truly represents the heart of the gospel and came from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is a text in which we hear the heartbeat of a triune God.

With God’s help, I therefore wish to say a few words about John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Congregation, the theme of our text is ***the Father’s unspeakable love***, for it is the Father who “so ***loved*** the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” This love of the Father is unspeakable indeed, for, as we shall see, it is a love of infinite dimension. I wish to develop this theme by way of three points:

First, I wish to speak about the wonder of this love—the wonder that God so loved ***the world***.

Secondly, I wish to speak about the measure of this love. “God so loved the world, ***that*** he gave his only begotten Son.”

And thirdly, I wish to speak about the promise of this love, namely, “that ***whosoever believeth in him*** should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Let me repeat the theme and points:

The Father’s unspeakable love

1. The wonder of His love
2. The measure of His love
3. The promise of His love

I. The Wonder of the Father's Love

Congregation, the love spoken of in our text is that love of which John speaks in his first epistle, declaring that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). We cannot begin to understand the depth and glory of this text unless we first of all focus on the fact that when we say that God is love that this relates first and foremost to the fact that the Father loves His Son. In fact, eight times John tells us in his gospel that the Father loves the Son—as, for instance, in John 3:35, “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.”

This means that the Son of God is the infinite object of His Father's love. From eternity to eternity, the Father loves His Son with an unspeakable and infinite love—a love that is beyond our ability to grasp. And so it must be, congregation! An infinite God who has infinite love must have an object for His love that is like unto Himself. We may say, therefore, that the Trinity is first and foremost an everlasting love relationship between the Father and His only begotten Son, who love Each Other in the Spirit and commune with One Another in the Spirit. The love of God can therefore only be measured in terms of His only begotten Son.

It is in His Son that the love of God the Father is most gloriously and fully revealed—and also defined. And thus it is the Father's love for His Son that motivates Him in all that He does. This is underscored in Colossians 1:16, where Paul tells us that all things were not only created by the Son, but also for the Son. In other words, when the Father created the universe, He created that universe for and to the glory of the Son of His love. When the Father therefore saw the work of His hands, He was well pleased with His creation, for He saw in that creation the reflection of the glory of His only begotten Son who is “the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3). It is a glory of which the psalmist declared, “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psa. 19:1). In light of this, the apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 3 that all things in heaven and in earth were named after Him (Eph. 3:15).

Congregation, it is becoming increasingly clear to me that the Father's love for His Son is the fountainhead of all theology. We will neither understand Scripture correctly, nor will we understand the whole work of redemption correctly, unless we understand that it all flows out of

the fact that the Father loves His Son. In all that the Father does He is motivated by the love that He has for His Son.

This means that the entire work of redemption is ultimately not about us. Rather, it is about the Father's beloved Son! This parallels what Copernicus discovered. Contrary to what always had been believed, he discovered that everything did not revolve around the earth. Instead, he discovered that everything in our solar system revolves around the sun. It is therefore not at all accidental that Scripture also refers to the Lord Jesus Christ as the "Sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2), for He is at the very center of His Father's thoughts and purposes, and love for Him is the motive for all that the Father does.

All of this was most gloriously unveiled in and accomplished by the creation of man. Man was the masterpiece and crown jewel of God's creation, for he was in the fullest sense of the word created for and to the glory of God's Son. This was supremely manifested by the fact that Adam, as the created Son of God (Luke 3:38), was created in the image of the eternal Son of God. How can we arrive at such a conclusion? We may conclude this by considering what the goal of redemption is, for then we will also know what the goal of creation was. In redemption God accomplishes what He originally set out to do in creation. And what is the goal of redemption? We read in Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." In other words, the people of God have been predestinated by the Father to be like unto his Son by being conformed to the image of his Son. In 1 John 3:2, John clearly alludes to this when he writes, "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." This means that God's redemptive activity will ultimately bring forth a people who not only will have been redeemed by Christ, but a people who shall also be like Him, for that was God's original purpose in creation. He originally created man to reflect the glory of His only begotten Son in a wonderful and unique way, and that is why God's delights have eternally been with the sons of men (Prov. 8:31). Consequently, God loved Adam with the same love with which He loved His only begotten Son, for He saw in Adam the image of His Son.

It is against that background that we must consider the wretchedness of man's fall. What is it that makes the fall so very dreadful, congregation? Was it because Adam and Eve sinned by transgressing God's commandment? Yes, it was; but it was worse than that. When Adam sinned, and we in him, he was guilty of despising the love of his heavenly Father. He stepped on the

heart of his Father. He despised the love that God has for His Son, a love that also included him, and in so doing he also lost the image of God's Son. His grievous rejection of His Father's love and the loss of the image of His Son made Adam reprehensible in the sight of God, making him worthy of being expelled from the presence and fellowship of God.

And what could have been God's just response to such wickedness? What could have been His just response to men and women such as we are who, as Adam, by nature also despise the love of God? It would have been entirely just if God would have only revealed and manifested His infinite wrath for the despising of that love.

You well know that in this vast universe of ours this world is but like a speck of dust. Therefore, in one moment God, in His wrath, could have obliterated this planet and created a new world and a new humanity. *And yet it pleased him not to do so!* That is the amazing truth that is revealed in our text. Instead of this text reading, "For God so hated the world that He poured out his wrath," this text tells us, "For God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

Someone might immediately ask: "What exactly did Jesus mean when He used the word 'world'?" We could add the question, "What did John mean when he frequently used the word 'world' in his writings?" I am quite certain that John would have been rather astounded if he were to come back today, and if he would hear what explanations have been given for this text, and particularly what meanings have been ascribed to the word "world." For a correct understanding of the meaning of "world," we need to recognize that John wrote his gospel and epistles at the end of his life, doing so after having witnessed something that had never happened before in the history of mankind. John observed that God was no longer the God of the Jews only, but that He was now also the God of the Gentiles. In other words, salvation was no longer limited to the Jews, but salvation was now for the world. And so when John uses the word "world," he is simply referring to a world of Jews and Gentiles. We should therefore read our text as follows, "For God so loved a world of Jews and Gentiles that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever, whether he be a Jew or a Gentile, would believe in Him, he should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Therefore, in this context Christ is especially referring to a *fallen* humanity. He is referring to a wicked, ungodly, and rebellious humanity—a humanity that by nature hates the Son of God. The Lord's Christ is ultimately the object of man's hatred, a hatred stirred up by Satan himself.

We read of this enmity and hostility in Psalm 2:2, “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed.” That is the humanity and that is the world of which Christ is speaking here. It is a world that hates the Son of God—a world that conspires against the Lord’s anointed, against His Christ.

And yet our text says, that God so **loved** this world! Congregation, what an astonishing declaration this is! A greater contrast than we observe in our text is not imaginable. The contrast we have here is between the great and glorious Creator of the universe and this wicked, perverted, and rebellious world of ours— this wicked humanity. That is what makes the truth of this text so stupendous!

The fact that our text teaches that God so loved a fallen humanity by no means implies that Christ is teaching universal atonement. The word “world” is used here in a generic sense; that is, it describes the human race generically rather than referring to every human being individually. In other words, our text is saying that God so loved this fallen humanity (generically speaking) that He gave the very Son whom this humanity hates. That is amazing! The Father gave the Son of His eternal love, the Son of His bosom, and the Son in whom He has eternally delighted Himself to a world that hates His Son.

How astounding it therefore is that “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17); “...that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor 5:19)!

Having said this, however, let us also make a very personal application. Dear believer, you who have been drawn by the cords of God’s love out of darkness into His marvelous light, you may also insert your name in this text. And then the wonder becomes so amazing and so very personal, for God so loved you that He gave His only begotten Son specifically for you! This is all the more remarkable upon considering who you once were. Who were you before God dealt with you in His grace? What sort of a man or woman were you?

The Bible answers these questions very clearly. You were by nature an enemy of God. You were a person who by nature had no use for the Word of God or for the Son of God—and yet God so loved **you**. He has loved you with an everlasting love, and He specifically gave His only begotten Son that you might be saved. He gave His Son to a humanity that never asked for such a Savior and never desired such a Savior. And this also applies to you, dear believer, for you also

never sought after God and never asked for him. And yet, from all eternity God was moved with love towards you!

And in order to save you and make you a recipient of the love wherewith the Father loves His Son, He gave that very Son of His bosom and that Son of His love!

II. The Measure of the Father's Love

However, that brings us to the second point of our text: the measure of this love. Our text confronts us with a profound dilemma. How can this God who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, who cannot look on iniquity, and who has said that He will by no means clear the guilty, how can this God love such a wretched, filthy, abominable, and wicked humanity? How can God love such a sinner as I am? How can God love a world that hates and conspires against his Son?

That brings us to the word “gave.” The Father ***gave*** his only begotten Son. The implication of the original Greek word is that the Father gave Him as a sacrifice. There is the solution to our dilemma! There is the answer as to how God can be the God of such sinners as we are. There is the answer as to why God can love a people like us who are worthy of His wrath.

However, in order to accomplish that, God had to give everything He had. The Father had to part with His own Son, the Son whom He loves with an everlasting love, whom He delights in, and for whom He does all things. ***That Son*** He had to give as a sacrifice for sin. Why? Because God cannot manifest His love in contradiction to His justice. The justice of God is that divine attribute that demands that the integrity of His law be maintained and vindicated. It is that attribute that demands the punishment of the transgressor of God's law, demanding that His wrath be poured out upon all those who hate Him and who hate His only begotten Son. And therefore, the only way God could love sinners like you and me is by giving the very object of His love, the Son of His eternal good pleasure. That Son had to come into this world, and had to take upon Himself our human nature. That Son, the Son of His love, had to become the subject of His Father's wrath.

Congregation, that makes the cross such an unfathomable mystery. It is not a mystery for me why the cross had to come. It is not a mystery for me how we, sinners, benefit from the cross. But the mystery of the cross is this, that the Father who loves His Son and who does everything for His Son, a Father who from all eternity is preoccupied with His Son and who aims for His glory—that the Father gave that Son to be a sacrifice for our sin. What a mystery indeed!

Behold Him hanging on Calvary's cross—the Son of the Father, forsaken by his own Father! Reverently speaking, it was even a mystery for Him! That is why in those awful hours of darkness when the Son of God descended into the depths of hell, when the billows of God's wrath came upon His head, even the Son of God cried out in holy astonishment, “My God, my God, [My Father] why hast thou forsaken me, the eternal object of Thy love? Why hast Thou forsaken *Me*?” (Mat. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

Luther, when meditating upon this, was dumbfounded. For three days he did not leave his study until finally his wife came in and asked him, “Why have you been here all this while?” All he could stammer was, “God forsaken of God. Who can fathom that?” Who can indeed fathom this, congregation? I cannot fathom it. On the one hand, we have the clear testimony of Scripture that everything the Father does is because He loves His Son, and we also know that the ultimate outcome of the work of redemption will be the everlasting glorification of His only begotten Son. And then, on the other hand, we see this Son being subjected to His Father's wrath!

Oh, how amazing is the love of God and how amazing is the outcome of the cross! Precisely because the Son was forsaken by His Father and was subjected to the wrath of His Father against sin, hanging there as the Substitute for an innumerable multitude of men and women representing all of humanity, all nations, and all tongues, sinners like you and me can become the recipients of the same love with which the Father loves His Son. That is amazing indeed, for on the basis of that sacrifice a holy God can love unholy sinners! More specifically, Jesus declares in John 17:23 & 26 that the Father loves His people with the same love wherewith He loves His only begotten Son. Can you fathom that?

Dear people of God, God's Word declares that you are chosen in Christ, the Father's Son, from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). You were chosen in Him in order to be redeemed by Him, and that you might become the recipients of the love wherewith the Father loves His Son. That is amazing love, congregation! That is a love that never began; a love that never wavers; a love that never ends; and a love that endures for ever.

However, in order to make that possible, the cross was an absolute necessity. The cross was demanded by a God of infinite love, because on that cross something was accomplished that no man could have accomplished. On that cross the love of God and the justice of God embraced each other. They kissed each other (Psa. 85:10). On Calvary's cross both the justice of God and the love of God were fully vindicated. And by hanging on that cross, the Lord Jesus Christ, the

eternal Son of the Father, transformed that which was the symbol of God's curse into the symbol of God's love.

This brings us to the heart of our second point, for when it says, "God *so* loved the world," then the measure of this love is expressed in the fact that the Father gave His Son to this fallen world. Thus, the miracle is not so much that God loved the world, but that He *so* loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. In other words, congregation, the Father's gift of His Son, of His only begotten Son, is the true measure of His love.

If you would say about someone who is a giant of a man with bulging muscles, "You know what? That man is able to hold a grain of sand in his hand," you would have said absolutely nothing about the strength of that man. And since God's love is infinite, when you say that God so loved the world, a fallen humanity, you have said nothing about the measure of His love. The measure of His love is, however, defined by that little word "*so*." "God *so* loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," that He gave Him to be the sacrifice for sin. *That* is the measure of his love, congregation!

John therefore testifies in 1 John 4:9-10 that "in this was manifested the love of God toward us, [and listen carefully!] because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world." This expresses the same truth as found in our text. Notice also how this particular passage continues: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and [here it comes again] sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And thus it is the sending of His Son into the world that defines the Father's love.

Oh, congregation, has this ever caused you to worship in holy adoration? Have you ever been overwhelmed by this astounding reality? This truly becomes a matter of holy amazement for the people of God, for the more we get to know ourselves, the more we become acquainted with the ugliness of our sinful flesh, and the more we see the sinfulness of our lives, the more amazing this truth becomes.

Dear believer—you who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity—God gave His Son to be a sacrifice for your sins in order that your sins could be blotted out, in order that you could be reconciled to God, and in order that you could become the recipient of the love wherewith the Father loves His Son. The apostle Paul would therefore so often run out of words in attempting to express this wonder, saying in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"

III. The Promise of the Father's Love

And it is because of that unspeakable gift, because of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary's cross, that our text ends with the promise of the Father's love, namely, "...that whosoever believeth in him [in this crucified Christ] should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Lest there be any misunderstanding, however, it should be noted at the outset that there is one thing the text does not say, namely, that everyone will be saved. Our text becomes very specific when it says, "...that whosoever *believeth in him* [in this crucified Christ] should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And yet, congregation, what a marvelous promise this is—a promise that comes from none other than Christ himself! Here the Son of God, of whom John says in John 1:1 that He is the Word of the Father, the living Word, declares to us the promise of the gospel, saying, "...that whosoever believeth in him [in this crucified Christ] should not perish."

What is it that makes this promise so beautiful, congregation? It is the realization that this promise is made to men and women like you and me, to boys and girls like you are—to sinners who deserve the very opposite. It is made to men and women who deserve eternal damnation—men and women who deserve to perish. It is by way of the gospel that Christ promises to such hell-worthy sinners, worthy of condemnation and the wrath of God, "If you believe in Me, whosoever you may be, if you believe in Me, the Son of the Father, you will not perish, but have eternal life."

Congregation, this defines for us what grace is. It is not merely the unmerited favor of God. It is indeed that, but it is also much more than that. I once heard a brother in the ministry define grace as follows, "Grace means that God gives you the exact opposite of what you deserve." Think about that! As sinners, we deserve the wrath of God, and yet He is pleased to bestow His love on sinners. We deserve condemnation, and yet He gives unto sinners eternal life. We deserve to be cast out of His presence, and yet He offers peace and pardon to sinners. And thus in His Son, the Father promises us the exact opposite of what we deserve!

Has this ever become a reality to you, congregation? For this is indeed how the Spirit of God works. In order to make room in our hearts for this Christ, and for this gospel, the Spirit will teach us that the nature of our sin is such that we deserve the wrath of God. It will then become an experiential reality to us that "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are

written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10). Why is it that the Spirit of God needs to teach us this? Because without an experiential knowledge of this, the promise of our text will never have meaning nor value for our soul, for by nature we do not desire such a Savior.

By nature we have no need of the beloved Son of God, even though we truly do need Him. There is not a sinner here today who doesn’t need this Christ. But what a wonder it is that the Spirit of God works, and continues to work, and that He convicts of sin, especially the sin of unbelief. He will bring a sinner to the place where it becomes utterly amazing to him that for such a wretch, for such a man or woman, boy, or girl who deserves hell and condemnation, there is a gospel message—a gospel message that God so loved such sinners that He gave His only begotten Son, and that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

This marvelous promise, congregation, flows directly out of the cross. Christ also merited the proclamation of the gospel. Had there been no cross, there would have been no gospel. This is a promise made by a Father who is so well pleased with the work of His only begotten Son! It is a Father who, when His Son cried out triumphantly, “It is finished” (John 19:30), could no longer refrain Himself and rent the veil to demonstrate that the wall of separation had been removed by the blood of the Lamb of God. It is a Father who resurrected His only begotten Son as a demonstration that He was well pleased with the work of His Son.

And because He is so well pleased with the work of his Son, He now offers His Son to hell-worthy sinners such as you and I are. Also today the Father offers to you His only begotten Son who was crucified on Calvary’s cross, who has accomplished a perfect and complete redemption, and who has done a complete work. Therefore, He can now freely offer salvation to you, a sinner, offering it to you without money and without price. Why can He do so? Why is it that grace is entirely free? Why is His offer without money and without price—without strings attached? It is precisely because the price for salvation was completely and fully paid by the eternal Son of God who became the Son of Man.

The apostles therefore did not hesitate to offer Christ freely in their preaching. Take the time to read the sermon Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia, recorded in Acts 13. You cannot help but be struck by how he ends that sermon, saying, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” That is the gospel! That is the good news we may proclaim to you, namely, that “Through this man is preached *unto you* the forgiveness of sins.”

And now the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ invites sinners like you and me in the gospel to believe in the Son of His eternal love, the Son of His eternal good pleasure, and the Son of whom He declared, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him” (Mat. 17:5).

Congregation, you cannot please God more, and you cannot honor Him more, than by believing on the Son of His eternal love! We often use the expression that God must be exalted to the highest. And indeed, this must be the goal of all gospel ministry. However, how do we accomplish this? God will be exalted to the highest when we believe on His Son, for “the Father loveth the Son, and has committed all things into his hands” (John 3:35). Only when we believe on His Son do we truly endorse all that God has revealed of Himself in His Word. Only then do we truly say “Amen” to all of God’s attributes.

John therefore writes in the same chapter, “He that hath received his testimony [the testimony of his Son] hath set to his seal that God is true” (John 3:33).

Congregation, there is therefore nothing that so pleases God and so stirs Him to the very depth of His being as when you believe on his Son—when you as a poor, needy, guilty, and condemned sinner take refuge to His Son, take hold of his Son, and put your trust in His Son. Then the Father will truly be well pleased! And then, reverently speaking, He will not be able to refrain Himself any longer, and He will freely bestow eternal life on a repenting and believing sinner. The Lord Jesus Himself affirms this in John 6:40: “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.”

Perhaps you will now ask me, “But how do I know that I am included in that invitation? How do I know that such a salvation is also offered to me?” The answer, congregation, is expressed in the precious word “whosoever.” John had witnessed the reality of this “whosoever” during his lengthy ministry. He was 90 years old when he wrote his gospel and epistles, and he had preached the gospel to all kinds of Gentiles who had lived in sin and wickedness. He had seen those men and women repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He observed repeatedly that *whosoever* believed in Christ was saved.

To grasp the preciousness of the word “whosoever,” we must look at the two verses preceding our text. In order to instruct Nicodemus about the gospel of the cross, the Lord Jesus uses the history of the brazen serpent, saying, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should

not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). He then immediately proceeds to utter the magnificent words of our text: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.”

And, congregation, the affirmation of this was observed in the camp of Israel. Whosoever, regardless of who they were; whether they belonged to the rabble rousers who spoke against Moses and who spoke against the Lord; whether they were children; whether they were old; or whether they were young—whosoever looked at the brazen serpent was healed immediately. These bitten Israelites responded to God’s message spoken by the mouth of Moses, proclaiming to them that there would be instant and complete healing if they would but look upon the brazen and exalted serpent. Can you imagine if Moses would have placed all kinds of conditions before these people? Can you imagine if Moses, surrounded by people that were dying by the thousands, dropping left and right, would have told them, “You may only look at that serpent if you first suck all the poison out of your wounds, or if you first get as close as you can. You must have as clear a view of the brazen serpent as you possibly can. And only then may you look?” Had he proclaimed such a message, multitudes would have perished. Instead, however, Moses had a simple message for his dying people: “Whoever you are, wherever you are in the camp, just look! Oh, look at that brazen serpent, and I have a message from God that if you but look at this divinely provided remedy, you shall not perish but you shall live!”

I may likewise say to you, congregation, that you are included in the promise of the gospel. No matter who you are; no matter how much and how long you have sinned; no matter how deeply you have fallen in sin; no matter how far you have departed from God; no matter how cold and hard your heart has become; and no matter who you are, I may say to you that if you believe in Christ you will “not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Some of you may know that John Bunyan was so happy that it says “whosoever” in our text. Why? He reasoned that if the text would have said, “...that if John Bunyan should believe in him, he would not perish but have everlasting life,” he would have been convinced that there was another John Bunyan somewhere in England, and that he was not addressed by the invitation of the gospel. To his joy, however, he concluded that it says “whosoever.” That included even him!

The word “whosoever” includes the very chief of sinners, congregation! It included a thief on the cross; it included a Manasseh; it included a Saul of Tarsus who persecuted the Church of God; and it included a John Newton who lived in great wickedness. It includes all sinners throughout the ages who have been saved by grace alone. Let me illustrate the all-inclusiveness

of the gospel by way of a dramatic example. The gospel is so all-inclusive that even if Osama Bin Laden or a Saddam Hussein would believe, even they would be saved! So all-inclusive is meaning of the word “whosoever”!

And, therefore, my friends, if you should perish, it will not be because the gospel invitation excludes you. If you should perish, you will perish because you did not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Someone has rightly said that when you live under the gospel, God places his Son, as it were, on the pathway of your life. To go lost means that somehow you have to work your way around Him and His gospel. You will then perish because of your unbelief. That is also the warning implied in this text, namely, “that whosoever believeth *not* on him, shall perish and have everlasting condemnation.”

Listen to the explicit testimony of God’s Word regarding this in the same chapter in which our text is found: “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already”; and then listen why, “...because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

You see, congregation, God’s wrath is His just response to our unbelieving rejection of His beloved Son. Thus, the wrath of God is the negative manifestation of the love the Father has for His Son. That is why there is a hell! There is a hell because the Father loves His Son. He loves His Son so much that there is only one appropriate and fitting punishment for all those who have no use for His only begotten and well beloved Son, and that is hell. Hell is a place where the infinite wrath of God will burn—the wrath of a Father who loves His Son.

My friend, if you are still unconverted because you do not believe the testimony of God’s Word, you belong to those human beings of whom it is true that the wrath of God is already abiding on you. (Present tense!) Why? Because you do not believe in His only begotten Son! Again, hear the witness of God’s Word, “And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.” And then listen carefully: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:47-48). Then there are these striking words from 1 Corinthians 16:22: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema”; that is, “Let him be accursed.”

Do you now understand why? Do you understand why God's wrath burns against those who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ? Precisely because He is the Object of his Father's love, and therefore you cannot offend God more, and you cannot provoke Him more than by not believing on His Son, and by not loving His only begotten Son. Indeed, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed!"

So I ask you, dear congregation, do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? That is the pressing question of the moment, as love for the Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate mark of grace. It is the mark of all marks! If that mark is missing, all religious experience is but a vain illusion. How can you therefore know whether you are a converted person? The answer is simple: Converted people will always love the Lord Jesus Christ! The apostle Paul therefore ends his epistle to the Ephesians by addressing those who "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" (Eph. 6:24).

My friends, my urgent question to you is, "Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?" Your answer to that question is the real litmus test of your spiritual state, for "unto you therefore which believe he is precious" (1 Pet. 2:7). Your answer will determine your eternal destiny!

Therefore, listen once more to the explicit testimony of Scripture: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." Consequently, the apostle writes in Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" And indeed, how shall escape if such a Christ has been preached to us, if such a Christ has been offered to us, and if such an invitation has been extended to you that whosoever believes on Him will not perish but have everlasting life? If you will yet go lost, you will then perish because you have neglected so great a salvation and so great and willing a Savior. How shall you then escape?

No wonder that this same apostle declares, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). It will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Father whose Son you have rejected in unbelief. That is why you will not escape the wrath of a Father whose Son you have spurned. That is why judgment came upon the keepers of the vineyard when they killed the master's son, for the wrath of the keeper of the vineyard was roused because they had murdered his beloved son. And therefore, oh sinner, I conclude by urging you with all the love of my heart to consider this text. You may bow your knees even now, however cold, hard, or indifferent you may be, and say, "Lord, I heard today that even if I should believe in thy Son, then even I shall not perish, but have eternal life."

God is so pleased when we come to Him with His own words! He loves His written Word, because His written Word is about His Son, the living Word. He delights in His Word, and He is delighted when you, as a poor and needy sinner, honor His Word by taking hold of His Word and promises, saying, “Lord, hast thou not said, hast thou not promised that whosoever shall believe shall be saved, and that if I come I shall in now wise be cast out?”

Therefore, sinner, come! Come without delay! Come, lest you perish! As Moses spoke to a dying people, so I say to you, “Look, sinner, look to a crucified Christ. Behold him, the eternal Son of God who became the Son of man. Believe on Him and put your trust in Him. Touch the hem of His garment, even this very day and this very hour.”

And so we are, and do stand before you, as “ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). Therefore, in light of our text, namely, that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” I lovingly urge you to kiss the Son of God by faith. Hear therefore the Word of the Father as it comes to you today, “Kiss the Son, lest he [the Father] be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they (and they alone!) that put their trust in him” (Psa. 2:12)

Amen!