

Amazing Love (Part 1)

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[0:00] John 3.16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? I want you to know that today my sermon is going to focus on just the first portion of this verse, and we'll cover the other portions in the weeks to come.

So my focus is on the fact that God so loved the world. I want to share a statement with you. God is love.

Do you agree or do you disagree with that statement? God is love. Now another question. How does it make you feel? Does it make you feel safe? Or, for some of you, does it make you feel uncomfortable?

[1:23] I know that at times it makes me feel uncomfortable when I hear that statement made, that God is love.

When I hear people say that, I often get the impression that they are suggesting that God's love is His only attribute.

That that's all that He is. Or that it's the attribute that all other attributes of God bow down to. Love, as it's often defined in our society, is basically synonymous with acceptance.

We hear people say things all the time like, if you don't accept my choices, then you don't love me. Have you heard that? For many, when they say that God is love, what they really mean is God is accepting.

He accepts me as I am. He loves me no matter what I do. And He's okay with whatever decisions or choices that I make because He is loving.

[2:29] When they say that, what they really mean is that God accepts sin and He grants access to heaven to anyone, no matter what they believe or what they think or what they've done.

But as we've gone through this chapter, we've seen that that message does not jive with Scripture, does it? Nicodemus was a good man. As far as the world was concerned, he was saved.

He was the type of person that God would accept. However, Jesus told him that that wasn't the case. He challenged the viability of his religious efforts to save himself and told him, in fact, that he had to be changed completely in order to be saved.

He had to be born again. He had to be born from above. Now, if Jesus loved Nicodemus as the world defines it today, then this conversation would have been much different.

In fact, his whole ministry would have been much different. There would be no need for the cross if this was the case because there would be no need for deliverance from sin and its eternal consequences.

[3:45] However, it's because Jesus truly loved this man, Nicodemus, that he was willing to tell him the truth. And so I cringe when I hear that statement because it doesn't cover everything that the Bible has to say about God's love.

We know that God hates sin. God does not accept it. We know that it's alien to him, completely foreign to him, that his eyes are too pure even to look upon it.

It's totally opposed to everything that he is. The Bible says that all sin is ultimately committed against God and it incurs his wrath.

However, let's look at 1 John 4, 7 through 8. Did you catch that? Did you see that?

This verse tells us that love finds its source ultimately in God himself. That he is love. He's also holy.

[5:11] He's also merciful. He's sovereign and he's also just. He is all of his attributes to the fullest expression all the time. God is love.

And that is a truth that you should delight in greatly today. God wants you to delight in this truth. But in order to delight in it, we must understand what God's love is like.

And we find that by looking at his ultimate expression of love, which is through Jesus Christ, his one and only Son, whom he gave to save sinners.

And so here's the main idea for this morning's message. God calls us to discover his love for us through his Son, Jesus Christ. Our infinite happiness as saved sinners consists of enjoying the Son of God and exhibiting his love to the world.

Now let me make another statement.

[6:33] God loves you. God loves you. Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Does it make you feel uncomfortable?

You have been told, or I should say many of you have probably been told by someone before in your life that they loved you.

Only then to have them betray that love in some kind of a tragic way. Maybe someone who should have loved you didn't love you.

Maybe someone as close as a mother or a father or a spouse or a sibling or a close friend. And you know that few things hurt worse and do more psychological and emotional damage to a person than when someone whom they love or someone whom should love them has betrayed them.

Back in my church in Kansas, we had a gentleman who would bring his mother to church every Sunday. And he would always keep himself, at least at the beginning, a distance from everybody else.

[7:55] He was there. He told us to bring his mom to church. She couldn't drive on her own. And so he would come. He would come and he would come and he would come. I got to know him a little bit better. Not a whole lot better, but a little bit.

And then one Sunday, he came without his mom. That was different. I hadn't seen that before. I noticed that. And so I went over to him and I, you know, asked him how his mother was doing. Well, she wasn't feeling well, and so she wasn't able to make it.

But he still came. And I thought that was interesting. And then, I guess because his mother wasn't there, he felt comfortable to open up about himself more with me.

And so he volunteered this information. He said, you know, she's not my biological mother. And I said, really? He said, yeah, I was adopted when I was a young boy.

And then he proceeded to tell me that, you know, my parents had a lot of kids. I was the oldest. We were poor. Couldn't afford to feed us. And so I was the one that they chose to let go.

[9:00] And so he told me that as a boy, he couldn't understand that. And how could you understand that? He said, I couldn't understand why all my brothers and sisters got to stay, but I had to go.

And so he's asking for an explanation from his mom. And you know what his mom told him? You have to go because we don't love you. True story.

And he left. And thankfully for him, praise God, he was adopted by a very loving and caring Christian family who loved him.

But even as we were having that conversation, now he's at that point in time in his later 60s, he was a tough guy, worked with his hands.

But as he was telling me that story, tears filled his eyes because he still felt that pain. And so it's what got me to thinking.

[10:00] I'd see him more and more even after that, and we'd talk some more. Why did he come to church? And why was he eventually saved? Because he got to hear about the love of God.

And he felt so unloved for much of his life and to hear the gospel that Jesus Christ, God's own son, came to die in his place and for his sins.

That he would be adopted into God's family. That he would be a child of God forever. And he'd know the love of God forever and forever and forever.

Never to be told, we don't love you. I don't love you. Go away. So if you feel unloved this morning, please pay attention to this message. If you feel cynical or bitter or unhappy in this life, please pay attention to this message.

Because God has a word for you. And this is a word for all of us, and I hope that together we will delight in this wonderful truth that God so loved the world.

[11:06] John 3.16 provides us with three aspects of God's love. And so today we'll cover one of those aspects and then the weeks to come we'll cover the other two. The first aspect of God's love is this, is that God's love is staggering.

It's staggering. Again, beginning of verse 16. For God so loved the world. To understand why God's love is staggering, we need to be reminded of the context in which this statement was originally made.

Remember? Remember, Jesus is speaking with Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a Jew. He's also a Pharisee. He believed that salvation could be passed on through the bloodstream, being a Jew. And he thought it also could be gained by observance to the law, which he was. He was a Pharisee. He not only observed it, he taught it. Jesus tells him, though, that neither of these things are able to save a person, but that salvation is really an act of God by which the sinner is acted upon. They are born again. They are born from above. They are recipients of a new heart, of a new mind, of a new spirit, in that this birth is essential for salvation.

[12:19] If you haven't experienced it, you haven't been saved. In verse 9, Nicodemus expresses his disbelief about what Jesus has said about the necessity of the new birth.

He can't believe it. He says, how can these things be? And then in verses 10 through 15, Jesus references Numbers 21, remember, about the serpent that came into the camp of the Israelites when they had been complaining against God again, wanting to go back to Egypt, wishing that they were slaves again, taking for granted all that God had done for them.

And so God sends the serpents into their camp and those who are bitten. If they do not look to God's provision, which is the serpent on the pole, then they will die.

The poison will continue to course through their veins and take their lives. And so God provides this image of the curse that if they look upon it, they will believe.

And so Jesus is telling Nicodemus in the same way. That was just a foreshadowing of ultimately what I came to do, which is to be the curse for your sin. that if you would look at me and believe, you too will be saved from the poison of sin.

[13:37] And so this is what Jesus has been telling Nicodemus. Why would the Son of Man be lifted up on the cross? Why would He become a curse? Why would He bear our sin?

He answers it. Here in verse 16. Why am I doing this? Why is God sending me? For God so loved the world.

That's why. To this point, Jesus had revealed three insights into the type of love that God has that staggered Nicodemus.

In all of his religious pursuits, in all of his understanding of God, Nicodemus thought he knew about God's love, but Jesus reforms his thinking. And by extension, ours as well.

Helping us all to see that God's love is not like man's love. God's love is untainted by sin. It's absolutely pure.

[14:41] And it's absolutely staggering. Because God's love is so unlike ours. Well, how so? First of all, because God's love is unmerited.

Nicodemus, again, had been told by Jesus that all of His good works were worthless to save Him. He couldn't earn God's love. Which makes me think of Isaiah 64, 6.

It says it very clearly, We have all become like one who is unclean. And all of our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf. And our inquiries like the wind take us away. So when it comes to our justification, when it comes to our legal standing before our holy God, our own good works in no way provide us with the grounds by which God would declare us righteous. Indeed, the gospel is good news because we are saved not by what we have done for God, but because of what God has done for us. What we could not do.

[15:48] We are accepted by God not because of our merit or our works but actually in spite of them. In fact, love that is based on merit isn't truly love at all, is it?

You guys know the terminology of a gold digger? Right? You know what a gold digger is. This is somebody who marries or enters into a relationship for what? Money.

And so they'll go through the motions of pretending like they love that person. Maybe, probably will even marry that person. Right? They'll say that they love that person.

They'll do loving things for that person. But ultimately, the reason why they've married that person is because that person has what they want and gives them access to what they want, which in the end is money or social status or some kind of material blessing.

They're gold diggers. And the more I think about that, the more I think of, you know, the health and wealth gospel which many of you heard? That's basically just Christian gold digging. And I wouldn't even call it Christian. They're just being gold diggers.

[16:57] They're treating God in the same way. Hey God, I'll tell you that I love you. I'll go to church. I'll read my Bible. I'll pray. And then, you'll think that I love you and so you'll love me by giving me money, giving me material possessions, making me healthy all the time and happy all the time and fat and whatever.

Right? They're gold diggers. They want God for what they think God can give them access to. But they haven't read the Bible because we know from Scripture that God isn't our genie.

It's not like we found the magic lamp and we can rub it and now God is at our every beck and call to do exactly what we want, when we want, how we want it done. No, in reading Scripture we realize that Jesus Christ is the pearl of great price.

Right? He is the treasure worth finding. He is the treasure worth pursuing. He is the one that once we find we sell everything that we have in order to acquire Him because we know that nothing in this world can give us what He alone can give us.

It's all worthless in comparison to Him. Since we who believe have done nothing to earn God's love there is nothing also that we can do to keep it.

[18:10] His love for us will never grow cold. And it will never run out. I want to back that up with Scripture. Romans 8 35-39 Speaking to Christians speaking to those who have been born again the Apostle Paul says who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing in this world or beyond it can separate the Christian from the love that God has for them. Now we also know from Scripture that Satan is the father of lies.

And what the devil likes to do is to try and tempt us to believe the lie that God is more like a disapproving father who only loves you out of obligation but doesn't truly delight in you.

[19:34] This verse says otherwise. He is the good shepherd who walks with us in the valley of the shadow of death who never leaves us nor forsakes us.

Yes, sin comes with consequences and the Lord the Bible says will discipline the one that he loves but ultimately trials and persecutions are just a part of the Christian life.

They aren't meant to be used by God to smite us but to make us more like Jesus Christ. By drawing us near to the cross by reminding us that this world is not our home.

This is why being in the word is so important. The pages of scripture remind us of God's love that it's an unmerited love that it's an unchanging love and that truth brings great happiness to our souls and it fills our hearts with joy throughout our days until that day when we enter into the eternal joy of our master having heard him say to us well done good and faithful servant.

God's love is unmerited. Secondly God's love is undeserved.

[20:59] Remember again the Israelites in the wilderness deserved the wrath of God not his love for their bickering for their constant complaining for their wanting to turn their backs to him.

They had sinned against him and he would have been justified in letting the poison continue to course through their veins until it took their lives but he made a provision instead to save them.

When Jesus tells Nicodemus that God so loved the world it would have staggered him because love such love is so undeserved. We are loved even though our sin makes us so unlovable.

Romans 3 10-18 None is righteous no not one no one understands no one seeks for God all have turned aside together they have become worthless and no one does good not even one.

Their throat is an open grave they use their tongue to deceive the venom of asps is under their lips their mouth is full of curses and bitterness their feet are swift to shed blood and their paths are ruin and misery and the way of peace they have not known there is no fear of God before their eyes.

[22:11] When Paul there talks about turning aside that word in the Greek is used to describe a soldier who runs away from battle or who deserts deserts his his comrades.

You see we're born sinful that doesn't mean that we are born with a nature that simply makes us indifferent to God we're born with a nature that turns aside from him. that runs from him that wants nothing to do with him. And so when I thought about that I thought about a movie that we recently saw with our kids Toy Story 4 okay sometimes these movies interest me because I can tell that the law of God is written in our hearts and it comes out a lot of times in the stories that we tell good versus evil an unlikely hero who rises to the occasion who saves everyone right because we know that's the story of the gospel that's the story of the Bible and so it's interesting in this movie it's been out long enough so if I'm spoiling it for you well you know too bad because you had time to watch it.

so in the movie Bonnie is the little girl and all the old toys are still you know are still there but she goes to school and she's worried about her first day of school and she's sad and so Woody you know the cowboy sneaks his way into her backpack and sees that she's she's really upset and so he he gets a bunch of trash out of the trash can and he throws it up on the table while she's crying she opens her eyes she sees all of this trash and then she starts to make something out of the trash and she makes a Forky who's a fork with a pipe cleaner and popsicle sticks and Play-Doh he's trash he's made from trash right but she created him and she loves her creation and she wants her creation to love her back right and so Forky goes back home and if you know the movie Forky wants nothing to do with Bonnie his creator he doesn't love her like she loves him because in his mind he's what?

Trash and so all he wants is to live in the trash and anytime he gets an opportunity he deserts her he turns away and he goes to the trash can until eventually he finds out that she loves him and you know how it's really I don't have to tell you the whole movie but it came to my mind because I think that's a lot of times how we feel until the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see the great love of God for us a lot of times we feel like we're trash but then when you hear the gospel and you realize the great love of God for you and how undeserving you are of having received it again you realize that you're not trash but you're treasure Romans 5 6-11 for why we were still weak at the right time [25:43] God died for the ungodly for one will scarcely die for a righteous person though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us since therefore we have now been justified by his blood much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life more than that we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation when we were God's enemies when we were running away from him wanting nothing to do with him hating him in fact Christ by his death reconciled us to him we heard the gospel and the Holy

Spirit enabled us to believe it and to receive it making us children of God who are kept forever by him by his power because he atoned for our sins and because he now lives and so I ask you have you looked to Christ and believed do you know that his death was necessary payment for the sins that you've committed do you believe in his resurrection from the dead do you know that he lived and he died and he lived again to save you do you know that you didn't deserve it do you marvel over that fact nobody knows you better than you other than God that though you didn't deserve it still he chose to save you the world might trash our beliefs and they might even trash you but if you know that you've been saved then you have experienced

God's love and you know that you are not trash you are greatly and amazingly loved again being in God's word reminds us of all of this and so for me it's it's important as a husband and as a father that I try every day to tell my wife and my kids that I love them because I know that we're going to part ways for the day and in our separation they're going to be exposed to the world and the world is going to tell them in many ways that they're trash unfortunately that they aren't loved or maybe that they aren't unlovable or that they are I should say unlovable and so because I know that I want to make sure that they understand that I don't ever see them that way and that I love them and so that's why

I think reading the Bible every day is so important because you're reminded from God that you're loved even though the world tells you that you're trash or makes you feel like you're unlovable the more you give yourself to God and to his word the more opportunity he has to communicate to you how great his love is for you it's a love that fills us to overflowing it's a love that enables us to love others in a supernatural way it's a love that when we come to church it should it should be pouring

out from every single one of us to each other church should be a place where when you come you know and you feel that you are loved it should be a place where the world can look and see people loving one another in a way that they can't understand and they don't understand it because it's not of this world but we love in this way because we understand that it's it's not a love based on merit that it's a love that we don't deserve that it's an amazing love and also when you feast upon the word of God your appetite for the world's trash diminishes since going on on this diet I noticed that as I lost weight about 40 pounds maybe that I feel a lot better and I feel a lot healthier now it was hard because you know what that meant that I had to give up food that I really really like eating and I'm not going to lie to you now that I've lost the weight I still go back and eat some of that food but during the process after you start to see the results and you start to feel better that food that you once desired now you're like no that is gross because I know what that does to me I know what it does to my body and in the same way the more you feast upon God's word the more you look at what the world says and what the world has to offer and you're like no that stuff is trash that stuff is garbage that stuff clings to my bones and it weighs me down I don't want that stuff anymore because I have the word of God that's why it's so important that you read it that you study it that you reflect upon it because you realize that the world is nothing but trash and that you're loved and you'll be fed well and you'll know how much you are loved and how much you didn't deserve it third [31 : 59] God's love is unrestricted Nicodemus assumed that God's love was restricted to only the Jews or that you had to become a Jew in order for God to love you but Jesus tells him otherwise he says there that God loves the world this would have been staggering statement for him to digest that God's love was not restricted to one race remember Jesus commanded his followers at the great commission before he ascended into heaven to go make disciples of all nations in revelation in the church that vision that we see of the body of Christ assembled to worship and we see that it's made up of people from every nation and every tribe and every tongue since God's love is unrestricted like this so should your love be you should endeavor to not only support missions but be involved with them knowing that everyone everywhere needs to hear the gospel and so it should be your desire that our earthly congregation also reflect that heavenly congregation this isn't a white church this is a church for

Christians no matter your race no matter your economic status or your social standing we don't care why because we all stand on level ground at the foot of the cross and so we should want that we should pray for that God make our church here more greatly reflect that church there God's love is staggering not simply because the world is so big and includes so many people but because the world is so bad in 1 John 2 verses 15 through 17 John forbids Christians to love the world so that might sound like a contradiction how are we supposed to do two of these things right God loves the world but we're not to well we're not to love the world in this way of participating in its promotion of the self but we are to be like God who loves the world in a selfless way who is willing to redeem it at his own cost and so next week we'll cover more of that second aspect of

God's love that God's love is sacrificial God purchased our salvation by offering his son the perfect spotless lamb of God to die in our place and for our sins God is love but he is also just and he cannot allow sin to go unpunished and so on the cross Christ endured that punishment for us if you believe that then you are the recipient of eternal life but if not as the bible says you are dead in your trespasses and sins the wrath of God remains on you but you must do is look to Jesus in faith and believe so what should we do with all of this God's love is unmerited okay God's love is undeserved!

God's love is unrestricted okay so what? Well we know as Christians who are we to reflect to this world? Christ Christ we are to be also the salt and the light of the world we are to be as Jesus asked us or commanded us to be the city on the hill that gives light to everyone we want to be visible to the world and we want them to see the love that God has for us and the love that we have for one another and the love that we have for you see when our love dries out for each other for God we lose our saltiness our light dims and we no longer reflect through our words and actions the staggering overwhelming life changing impact that God's love through Jesus Christ his son has had for us so

Matthew 22 34 through 40 and I answer that question what does it matter! What's the point? Well let's look at this first when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees they gathered together as one of them a lawyer asked him a question to test him teacher what is the great commandment in the law and he said to him you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart

and with all your soul and with all your mind this as yourself on these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets so what are we to do well first of all love God love God now let me ask you if the only time that you ever saw me spend with my wife was one day per week you would question how much I would love her wouldn't you and you'd be right to do so 52 days out of a year seem to express that you truly love that person and

[37:41] I say this that some of you are only spending one day a week with God 52 days maybe a year what does that say how can you know God's love when you only give him such a small amount of your time on a weekly basis like any relationship fellowship is necessary for it to widen and for it to deepen prayer and the reading of God's word are necessary for a lengthening and a deepening of our understanding of God's love for us and it cultivates within us a love for him that has a huge impact on our lives does does your giving reflect God's giving he's been incredibly generous to you giving his only son giving you his best are you giving him your best now I'm not talking about your money I'm talking about your life so often what we give to God is the parts that are sort of useless like the scraps you know

I'll pray when I don't have anything else to do when it's convenient for me or I'll read the Bible when it's convenient for me and I say this because it's a huge problem I think a lot of times we treat God like we treat our family pet I love my dog my wife can tell you I love my dog and he loves me unconditionally!

Doesn't matter what I do what mood I in if I left him outside for hours if he's been cooped up in his crate for a long period of time he comes out and even though it was I who put him there he loves me and I can take that love for granted right because I know that he's going to love me no matter what and so sometimes I'll throw a scrap here or a scrap there from whatever we had for dinner to show my appreciation and I say that because I think a lot of us treat God in the same way we can push him over here but we know that he loves us and he's always going to be there so you know we'll throw him a scrap every once in a while here or there is that is that how we should treat the God who gave us his absolute best and I don't say that to guilt you I say that because it will change your life and because God wants to have more of you than just a part of you because he knows he's what's best for you so let's give our best to him and in so doing we will reflect

Christ to the world second love others Jesus says to love your neighbors and sometimes you go to the same church as your neighbors sometimes you go to the same church as your enemies if we don't love each other well here then our message to the rest of the world won't mean anything the more you love God the more you will love others because through pursuing him in prayer and in reading his word you will be filled!

You will be reminded of his great love for undeserved unrestricted and that he has loved you in such a way it will make you love others in such a way as well not based on merit not based on anything that they deserve and it will be unrestricted and then this love yourself the more you love God and the more that you love others the more like Christ you will become you will be Christ centered and not self centered and when that's the case you will love yourself more okay now don't misunderstand me here please this is not a you centered message this is what I mean when you realize the love that God has for you by sending his son to live and die and rise from the grave for you you know that you are a child of

[41:56] God that his! and dwells you and that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit that changes the way you perceive yourself doesn't it? You will avoid putting things into your body that are bad for you or doing things with your body that are harmful You will have a healthy respect for yourself because you know again that you aren't trash.

You also know that you aren't better than anyone else because the love you've received from God is undeserved. You will experience healthy fellowship in your community and with God and with others.

You're thankful to be just a part of the body of Christ whether that's an eye or an eyelash. You'll be content as you become more like Christ.

You will like the person that you see in the mirror because you are decreasing so that Christ may increase and then you will find infinite happiness and enjoyment in the Lord forever.

Do you understand that? The more like Christ you are, the more you will like what you see in the mirror because you're seeing Him living and working through you and your life that you're living and your motivation isn't for yourself and that feels so good.

[43 : 34] it's so different from the rest of the world. Remember, Jesus says, love your enemies as yourself. And the more you'll be able to do that is because you're able to understand the great and amazing love of God.

Thank you.