

What love is...the other John 3 16

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Most people are at least somewhat familiar with the gospel in miniature that is contained in the Gospel of John...the beautiful and wonderful and deep John 3:16:

“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.”

Vs. 17 must also be added...for it too is beautiful and powerful...
“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him!”

Wow. That is it! That is the Gospel message is a succinct and clear statement. God did not just love the world, but SO loved the world that he gave...he gave his one and only Son, his beloved. He gave him so that we might be believe in him and have eternal life. He did not send him here to be the means by which we are condemned. Far from it. This is an act of love! The motive is love, the act is loving, and the result is loving. He did not come into the world to condemn us, but that the world might be saved through him. Wow.

What does that mean to you and to me? It is one thing to think about it in relation to the whole world...but what about Jim, or Karen or Wil or Juan or fill in the blank....take a piece of paper off the table now and write the verse with your name in it...For God so loved Jim....

The center of the Gospel message is the love God has for us...God so loved...that he gave. Love is a verb. It is something that moves us to action...to moving, to doing, to feeling. God’s love moves God to sending his one and only Son into the world...

As the years go by, John becomes one of the leaders of the early Church. He is one of the 12 Apostles, who takes the Gospel message of

love to people's everywhere. John is given a special privilege by Jesus when he is dying on the cross...Jesus gives John responsibility for taking care of Mary, his Mother. So we know that John does not travel as much as many of the Apostles do. John is the only Apostle who dies of old age...but he dies in exile, living out his old age scraping out an existence like a wild animal on the deserted isle of Potmos—exiled there by the Roman government for his Christian activities.

John writes three short letters...which are not written to any particular church (like Corinth, or Galatia or Ephesus), but rather, are called General Epistles because they are written to the whole of the Christian Church. He wants his message to go to everyone. In his letter, John has a lot to say about the nature of Love and God's love for us. And in it, there is a second John 3:16...1st John 3:16:

“This is how we know what love is: JESUS CHRIST LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR US! WE OUGHT TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.”

This is how we know what real love is, that Jesus Christ... Jesus the Messiah, remember, Christ is not Jesus' last name, but rather, it is a title meaning Messiah or Savior. Jesus the Christ is perhaps more proper a translation. This is how we know what real love is, that Jesus the Christ laid down his life for us. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...who laid down his life for us.

Jesus demonstrates to humanity for all time the length to which God will go to save us, the depth of his love that has no bottom...there is no end to it. He will go to any end, even death. And not just any death, but death on a cross...the most humiliating, painful, gruesome, horrifying death known in their day.

This death, we must be clear, is not God demanding a blood sacrifice from Jesus in payment for our sins. It is the demonstration of God's

love, as John says. The Apostle Paul says the same thing in the 5th chapter of the book of Romans, that God demonstrates his great love for us in that while we are still sinners Christ dies for us. Jesus' death demonstrates God's love us, it does not earn it. To say it another way, God does not love us because Jesus died for us...Jesus died for us BECAUSE God loves us.

Love involves sacrifice. With small or large, love always involves giving and giving up. The sacrifice might be giving up your time, or giving over your heart...giving control of your time, eating what the other person likes, doing what they want, watching what they want on TV, or some other more meaningful sacrifice. Real love is not selfish, arrogant, self centered or proud. True love is willing to sacrifice for it's beloved.

Our easiest example is that of parents. Why do you think that God chooses to use this human relationship as the most common illustration as his relationship with us? God is our father, not a distant father who send child support through the court and makes holiday visits occasionally. But an active and engaged dad or tender and caring Mom, who is willing to give us what we need and also some of what we want.

But God's ultimate expression of his love for us is in Jesus...his coming into the world is an act of Love, God coming close..becoming one with us, one of us. Can you imagine? As John says in the beginning of his Gospel, Jesus was the eternal Word...

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the Beginning. Through Him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of humanity. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not understood it." (Gospel John 1: 1-5)

“The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of Grace and Truth.” (Gospel of John 1: 14)

Jesus comes into the world, and then he gives his life for us. This is my body, given for you...this is the cup of the new covenant, give for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

John reminds us that this is how we really know what real love is...looking at Jesus, his coming, his teaching, and his dying for us all.

And that love is at work in us. When we experience the love of Christ, it changes us from the inside out. Our hearts are changed and our lives change as well. As John says, we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters as well. This is not literal, but figuratively. We ought to love as Jesus loved. John goes on in his letter to talk about loving as Jesus loved. The Commandment that Jesus gives us is to love as he loves. To love others with a love that is willing to sacrifice. But many in the church had so spiritualized the love of God that it was no longer of any earthly or practical good. How can anyone say, ask John later in the letter, that they love God yet hate their neighbor? How can you love God whom you have not seen and hate your neighbor whom you have seen? It can't be done! If the love of Christ is in us, we will love others. Christ will love them through us.

So we need to make our love real. As John says, *“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need and has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear Children, let us not love with words or tongue (only), but with actions and in truth.”*

John says that if we know the Love of God in Jesus Christ, that Love will so fill our hearts that we will know Christ's compassion...and we will love others. And that love is more than just feeling compassion, it moves us to actions. Sometimes we can't do much. We can't give what we don't have. But we can give support. We can give prayer. We can

give a warm smile, friendly encouragement, a warm hand, we can meet the person's eye and let them know we see them...and sometimes it is not helpful to give them what they want...because it is not what they need.

God knows our hearts and God is at work within us...loving us more than we can ever know. And Jesus is at work within us to help us love not just in emotion, or in word or tongue, but in action and in truth...so our love is real and authentic.

And the world will see that we really care. That our love is real and therefore our faith is real.

But what about when we screw it up. When we drop the ball. When we hold back out of fear or anxiety or out of dread or whatever reason...

There is grace upon grace, fresh each morning. Remember, God so loved YOU that he sent his one and only son into the world that you might not perish but have everlasting life...for God did not send his son into the world to condemn you...but that through him you might be saved!

God is patient beyond measure and his love is deeper than the deepest ocean and higher than the sky. REALLY. We know what love is: Jesus the Christ laid down his life for YOU and me. Wow. He held nothing back.

So, when we fail or falter, we come back to the core of our beliefs...to the table of the Lord. To communion. Here is the center of who we are, what we believe and know...

Any and all are welcome. We will receive the elements around our tables...share with each other.