

THE BAPTIST HOUR

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The Eternal Gospel

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THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

TEXT—*“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.”*
—John 3:16

Charles Journeycake was the principal chief of the Delaware Indians. In 1886 at Washington, in a speech before the Indian Defense Association, he uttered the following significant words.

“We have been broken up and moved six times. We have been despoiled of our property. We thought when we moved across the Missouri River, and had paid for our homes in Kansas, we were safe. But in a few years the white man wanted our country. We had made good farms, built comfortable homes and big barns. We had schools for our children and churches, where we listened to the same Gospel the white man listened to. We had a great many cattle and horses. The white man came into our country from Missouri and drove our cattle and horses across the river. If our people followed them, they got killed. We try to forget these things, but we would not forget that the white man brought us the blessed Gospel of Christ, the Christian’s hope. This more than pays for all we have suffered.”

As we hear these words there is much to shame us. But we hasten to add that the injustices were not because of the Gospel, but in spite of it. This may be said of injustice wherever it raises its evil head throughout the earth. It remains to be said, therefore, that the hope of the world is found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. More than any other message, it will help us to conquer evil, forget and forgive injustices, and to find the path of peace both within our hearts and among men and nations.

And what is the Gospel? Here it is in one sentence. *“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." (John 3:16)

For over thirty-four years I have been trying to preach the Gospel of Christ. During that time I have gone through college and the seminary. I have read more books than I can recall. I have prepared and preached thousands of sermons. I have been the pastor of some wonderful churches. I have written books and articles. I have prayed and meditated over the Word of God for more days than I can number. But I have never felt that I could preach a sermon on John 3:16. Mind you, I have tried. But my efforts have been so inadequate. For when you quote those sublime words, what more can you say?

Now God did not give His Son simply to teach men a noble philosophy of life or to set an example which they might follow. He did not give Him to be the object of honor, praise, and adulation. He gave Him to die the most ignominious death known to man.

Some months ago Queen Elizabeth visited the nation of Ghana. Wherever she went, multitudes thronged the way to shout their praise and love.

Not so when the King of the universe visited the earth. "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*" (John 1:11) Here and there little groups welcomed Him. But in the end a rebellious humanity nailed Him to a cross. Nowhere else in all the universe does man's sin appear so gruesome or God's love so glorious as at the cross.

It is no wonder then that the poet tells us that were every man a scribe by trade, the entire sky a scroll, every blade of grass a pen, and the oceans were filled with ink, they would be inadequate to write of the love of God. And all of God's love says that God "*loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*" (I John 4:10)

But the Gospel does not end there. "*Whosoever believeth in him should not perish . . .*" As great as God's love is, it is of no avail for you unless you receive it. There is a condition attached to the supreme ex-

pression of God's love.

God loves you even if you are not a Christian. You may enjoy the glory of a star-studded sky, and not be a Christian. You may drink in the beauty of the earth carpeted in green held in place by lovely flowers, and not be a Christian. You may possess waving acres of grain and mountains of precious treasure, and not be a Christian. Yes, you may know that God loves you, and not be a Christian. But only the Christian can experience truly that "*God so loved.*"

I want you to notice three words in the phrase "*whosoever believeth on him should not perish*" They are "perish," "believeth," and "whosoever." "Perish" translates a word from which comes the word Apollyon, a name for Satan. It carries the idea of eternal punishment in hell.

Maybe you are saying that you cannot harmonize a God of love and hell. But the Bible does. In one verse it speaks of both. Hell is the destiny of all who are outside of Christ. But this verse tells you that a God of love has done all that He can do to save you from hell. If you go to hell it will be your choice, not God's.

Your decision is bound up in the word "believeth." It means trust. What will send your soul to hell? Not murder, theft, drunkenness, or any other sin of the flesh. The Bible says that by faith in Christ you can be forgiven for these sins. The sin that will send your soul to hell is unbelief. John 3:18 says, "*He that believeth is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*"

What must you do to be lost? Nothing. Just stay as you are. For you are condemned already. What must you do to be saved? Only one thing: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" (Acts 16:31)

And this suggests the word "*whosoever.*" It is a word which encompasses the entire human race. Yet it is a word which focuses on you alone.

We are not saved or lost in mass, but as individual persons. You can be the only saved person in a city. Or the only lost one. It is "*whosoever.*" You are not saved or lost because of your relation to a nation, family, or group. It is your relationship with Christ which determines your final spiritual destiny.

God has already commended His love toward you in the atoning work of His Son. He does not have to be reconciled to you. That He did in Christ. But you must be reconciled to Him. For God's saving love to effect your salvation it must be through the response of your love to Him. Thus in the words of Paul ". . . . *we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*" (II Cor. 5:20)

Henry Moorhouse once told a congregation, "For seven consecutive nights I have been preaching to you from John 3:16. I have been trying to tell you that God loves you, but my poor stammering tongue is too inadequate. But if God could send His angel Gabriel down to tell us of His love, all that Gabriel could say would be, '*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*'"

Helen Keller once said, "Love is like a beautiful flower which I may not touch, but whose fragrance makes the garden a place of delight just the same."

If we cannot comprehend or enhance John 3:16 we can most surely rejoice in its words. And as we do so let us note, first, God's love; second, God's gift; third, God's condition; fourth, God's bestowal.

"*God so loved the world.*" What is your concept of God? Many of you think of Him as a policeman to make you do right. Or a judge to punish you when you do wrong. The average heathen thinks of God as a cruel Being whose wrath must be assuaged by ritual, sacrifice, sometimes human sacrifice, or the punishment and mu-

tilation of one's own body. Many Christian people think of God only as a God of wrath. To be sure the Bible speaks of "*the wrath of God.*" (cf. Rom. 1:18) But it is a wrath of love. It is the working of God's benevolent natural and spiritual laws. When we violate them we are punished by them.

The Bible says that "*God is love.*" (I John 4:8) It does not say that love is God, but that "*God is love.*" He is the source of love in its highest sense. This love does not begin with man but with God. "*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us*" (I John 4:10)

You do not begin to know the true nature of God until you know Him as love. Thomas Carlyle said, "Love is ever the beginning of Knowledge as fire is of light." And even though God loves you eternally, you do not come to a true knowledge of Him until with your love you respond to His love.

Love, to be complete, must have an object. Thus "*God so loved the world.*" Not Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas, Australia, or the isles of the sea. Literally, "*God so loved the inhabited earth.*" He loves you and me. Not because we are lovely or lovable. But because God is love. It is one thing to love one's friends. It is quite another thing to love one's enemies. The Bible says that "*God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Rom. 5:8)

Indeed, it is in the light of your sin that you see the true nature of God's love. Sir Walter Scott said, "The rose is sweetest wash'd with morning dew, and Love is loveliest when embalm'd in tears." God has every right to leave you to your fate, to consign you to a sinner's hell. You have rebelled against Him. You have ignored Him. You have trodden under foot every evidence of His love. You have broken His heart. Yet His love is so strong, so true, that "embalm'd in tears" it shines toward you in resplendent glory.

"*God so loved that he gave*

his only begotten Son . . ." I want you to look at the words "God so loved." What do they mean? A preacher once said that when he got to heaven he wanted to ask God what He meant by that little word "so." It does not say that "God loved" but that "God so loved."

There are many evidences of God's love. The beauty of the earth and glory of the sky, waving fields of grain, cattle on a thousand hills, mountains bursting with their mineral treasures, all say in eloquent tones, "God loved." But you do not begin to comprehend the words "God so loved" until you read "*that he gave his only begotten Son.*" It is natural for love to give, and the greater the gift the greater the love.

Had God given to each of us wealth untold, He would have plenty of wealth left. But He had only one Son. So when He gave His only Son He gave all that He had.

God's bestowal . . . "everlasting life." One of the most beautiful stories in the Bible is Jesus' parable of the one lost sheep. It reveals the shepherd heart of God. With ninety-nine sheep safe in the fold the shepherd went into the wild night to find just one that was lost. Jesus concluded the story by saying, "*Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*" (Matt. 18:14) One little child. Not a king or potentate. One little child.

Now let me ask you two questions. For how many lost people did Christ die? For every last one of them. But how many lost people were necessary for Christ to die? Just one. For Matthew 18:11 reads, "*The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*" In the Greek original "the lost" is a singular noun. For one lost person Jesus died. God does not see us in mass, but each one separately. And had all men been saved but you, God still would have given His Son to die for you. And why? That you might not perish, but have everlasting life. Not life here and now alone. But life that lasts forever, an age-

abiding life. You cannot conceive of it. But you can receive it, now, as you believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour.

This sermon leaflet is free. However, if you wish to share in the cost of printing and distribution our address is: THE BAPTIST HOUR, P. O. Box 12157, Fort Worth 16, Texas.

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