

# God Loving the World

Lent 2 a  
Jn.3.16-17

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The gospel that I just read ended with that very famous passage that I know many of you have committed to heart.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

That single verse from scripture, John 3:16, has been called the “Gospel in miniature” or the “Gospel in a nutshell.” That one verse holds the most central theme of all of Christianity.

Given that we are in Lent, that season that invites us into a closer relationship with God, I thought it would be good to spend a little time meditating on this single verse of scripture and plumbing its depths for all that we can learn. It’s my hope that by this little study, we might find our understanding of God widened and our faith in him deepened.

So let us begin. “God so loved the world.”

The first thing to note is that the verse begins with God and God’s action. That’s important, because the gospel isn’t about what WE do or about what faith WE might muster up or what WE bring to God in terms of our offerings or sacrifices or our good works. No, the gospel is about God and what God does. God is the subject of the sentence, and God is the subject of the gospel. It all starts with God and God’s action.

Our first lesson for today illustrates this in Genesis 12. It wasn’t Abraham who called on God. It was God who called on Abraham. In fact, when God first came to Abraham, he was “serving other gods,” according to the book of Joshua (24:2). Abraham didn’t even KNOW our God until God came to him that day and brought him the promise of blessing and descendants.

The subject is always about God and God’s action. God initiates. God saves. We don’t. It all starts with God and God’s action.

And what is that action? “For God so LOVED.”

God loves. This is the essence of God. God loves. This is the purpose behind everything that God does. God loves.

Even at the beginning, God CREATES out of love. You can see it in the two stories of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, especially in the creation of humanity. In Genesis 1, God says, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (v.26). There is desire in that statement. There is longing in that statement.

And that desire for a humanity that is in God's image and likeness is a loving desire. A desire to commune and communicate. A desire to love and be loved.

And so in Genesis 2, God forms the man "from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (v.7). There is a real intimacy there. The hands-on forming. The up-close breathing into the nostrils. The sharing of the breath of life. There is a loving intimacy.

God loves. That is God's whole purpose. God loves.

What does God love? "For God so loved the world."

What world? The world we see on the TV news every night. The world that is careening toward disaster and self-destruction at any given moment. The world of fear and dread and sudden diseases. The world of selfishness and unbounded pride and lack of caring. The world of greed and lust. The world of exclusion and hurt, crime and punishment, grief and mourning. The world of me and mine and not yours. The world that constantly divides and pits one against another.

THIS world, God loves. God so loves THIS world that continually turns its back on God in self-pursuit. THIS world, God loves. "The unlovable and the unlovely, the lonely who have no one else to love, the one who loves God and the one who never thinks of him, the one who rests in the love of God and the one who spurns it," says William Barclay in his *Daily Study Bible on The Gospel of John* (v.1, p.138). THIS world, God loves.

How does God love? "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." Here we see the extent of God's love. God holds nothing back in order to love. God loves and holds nothing back. Not even his Son.

Again God acts. God doesn't wait for us to act first. God doesn't wait for a sinful world to acknowledge its sin. No, God acts first in order to save the world he loves. St. Paul says it this way in Romans 5, "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (v.8).

God initiates the action. God acts. He doesn't wait. God gives. God, the one who loves, loves by giving – giving even his Son. He doesn't hold back. God sends his Son.

Why? "So that everyone who believes in him may not perish."

Why? Because perishing is exactly what we are doing. Daily, if not hourly. Because we, the world, aren't paying attention. Because the world is too caught up in itself. Because sin reigns in the world, and that sin is killing us and killing our friends and neighbors and families and all the nations. Because that sin is keeping us from God, and it threatens to keep us from God eternally.

The world is perishing, and taking us right along with it. It's the ultimate problem. Sin leading to eternal death.

And so God loves. God doesn't wait. God loves. He sees the need, and the need is now. So God loves. God SO loves. And gives the Son. Because only the Son can carry the sin. Only the Son can remove the sin. Only the Son can save us from ourselves and from our perishing. Only the Son can take it all to that cross, that truly awful cross, and bring us to the resurrection right along with himself.

God so loves. God so loves and gives the Son.

For everyone. God does this for everyone. Only that loving and giving for everyone feels so particular to me. Which is a darn good thing, because I feel it – I am perishing too. In MY sin. Even I, who try my darnedest to love God, but continually fall short. I am perishing too.

And so God loves. And God gives the Son. God so loves. Says St. Augustine, “God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love” (ibid.). God SO loves. Me. And you. God so loves me and you.

And in so loving, in so giving, God wipes away the perishing, wipes away the sin that leads to perishing, and gives instead eternal life. And not just for later, but for now.

God saves. For now too. God so loves, and God saves and redeems this world now. When we need it. By loving. By constantly loving. By constantly loving the world, the unloving world. And not waiting. But acting. Now. When we need it.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Such is God’s word for today.