

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

**For God So Loved the World
John 3:16
Part 2**

What are you willing to do in order to avoid pain? You might say, "Are you talking about physical pain or mental pain?" I am simply talking about pain in general. But if it helps you to look at a specific kind of pain I will do that for you. What would you do in order to avoid physical pain? Then you might say, "How much pain are you talking about?" Let me put it this way, think of a time in your life when you experienced the most pain that you have ever experienced, now think of that pain as being unrelenting. What would you do in order to avoid that pain? I would think that you might say, "I would do whatever I have to do to avoid that pain."
Whatever the source of that pain when it is extreme and unrelenting will cause people to go to extraordinary lengths to avoid it if there is a way that it can be avoided.

This leads us back to **John 3:16-21**, which we began to study last week. Let me read the passage for you, "**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. (18) He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (19) And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. (20) For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. (21) But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.**"

This is a wonderful passage of scripture which flows very nicely as I have shared with you from John 3:1-15. In John 3:1-15 we find Jesus talking to Nicodemus about the new birth. John 3:1-3 emphasized its necessity. John 3:4-8 emphasized its basic components. And John 3:9-15 emphasized its focus, which of course was Christ. The reason why this passage flows very nicely from John 3:16-21 is that these verses are the reflections of the Apostle John on the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus on the new birth.

I know that some of you who have red-letter edition Bibles were surprised last week by what I said. Certainly, most of the time you can certainly trust these red-letter editions in the way they render a particular text, but in this case in John 3:16-21 I believe that they made a mistake. Again let me remind you that all Bible scholars agree that from time to time the Apostle John in this Gospel introduces his own reflections rather than simply quoting the words of Jesus or others. It is difficult to know sometimes where his thoughts begin and where his thoughts end. In the first century there were no devices like quotation marks to show the precise limits of quoted speech. We are always left to the probabilities and we must work out for ourselves where a speech or a quotation begins and ends.

We know that Jesus begins to speak in **John 3:10** because it says "**Jesus answered and said to Him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?"**" But it is not absolutely clear when he stops speaking, or in other words when the Apostle John starts speaking.

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But the most likely place where this transition actually takes place is at the end of John 3:15. Why do I say this? I say this because in John 3:14-15 there is reference to the "Son of Man." This title is significant because it is a title that Jesus alone uses to refer to Himself in the gospels. We are therefore on fairly safe ground to say that John 3:15 are the words of Christ, however this does not appear to be the case in John 3:16.

The words of John 3:16 were most likely spoken by the Apostle John. I say this, first of all because the death of Christ alluded to in John 3:16 is spoken of as in the past. It would have been quite appropriate for the Apostle John when he was writing this gospel and reflecting on the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus, but it would not have been appropriate for Jesus when he was speaking with Nicodemus since His death on the cross was still in the future. And besides this, the phrase "only begotten" (MENOGENES) which is a part of John 3:16 is a phrase that is used exclusively by the apostle John in the New Testament when referring to Jesus. Though John 3:15 seems to have been clearly spoken by Jesus it appears that John 3:16-21 were clearly the words of the Apostle John.

This means that John 3:16-21 were the reflections of the Apostle John in response to what Jesus had shared with Nicodemus. This leads us to the question that we began to answer last week. What were the reflections of the Apostle John in John 3:16-21 that were generated by Jesus conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:1-15? What is the very first reflection?

In response to John 3:1-15, the Apostle John first of all reflected on the love of God for the world (John 3:16). Let us look at the very first words of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world" Why would John in reflecting on John 3:1-15 immediately be drawn to mention the love of God for this world?

Just as the new birth was grounded in the "lifting up" of the Son, which we have seen in John 3:14-15, the "lifting up" or in other words, the crucifixion of the Son was grounded in the love of God for the world. In other words, Jesus would never have been crucified if God did not in fact love the people who inhabit this sinful and hostile place.

What else does the Apostle John reflect on in response to the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:1-15? In response to John 3:1-15 the Apostle John secondly reflected on God's mission to the world (John 3:16-21). Jesus had already explained God's mission to the world to Nicodemus in John 3:13-15. That is the very reason why John, in recording those words had been drawn to reflect on what motivated that mission which was the love of God. So now after reflecting on what motivated that mission, the Apostle John is now going to give us his own rather expansive comments on that mission.

In reflecting on the rescue mission that God's love for the world produced, he first of all described the mission (John 3:16).

This could be approached in several different ways, but the way that he chooses to describe the mission is very interesting. John described the rescue mission in terms of its cost. He gave His only begotten Son. Anytime a project is undertaken the total cost of the project must be considered. Certainly we are doing this with the building project that we are presently pursuing and which you will be fully informed about in the informational meetings scheduled in March. But no matter what

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the cost might be to us in respect to the proposed building, it could never approach the cost incurred by God in seeking to rescue us from the consequences of our sins.

Let us go back to **John 3:16**, "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.**" Let us look at a few key words. Let us first of all look at the word "gave." The verb "gave" must be understood as God giving up His Son to death on the cross for our sins (1 John 4:10). Let me read for you **1 John 4:10**, "**In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**"

Let me ask you a question, would it be difficult for you to give up one of your children to death on a cross in order to satisfy a debt owed by another? I believe that the answer would have to be, "Of course!" In fact I would think most of you, if not all of you would say, "Not only would it be difficult, I wouldn't do it."

It is mind boggling to consider the fact that God gave up His Son to death on a cross to rescue us. But what is even more amazing is the fact that Jesus was not just a son, but rather He was the "**only begotten Son of God.**"

When John refers to Jesus as God's "only begotten Son" he is communicating that Jesus is uniquely God's Son (Hebrews 11:17). He is using it in the very same way as it is used in **Hebrews 11:17**. Let me read this verse for you, "**By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; . . . his only begotten son.**" Let me ask you a question. Was Isaac Abraham's only son? The answer is no! He also had a son named Ishmael by Hagar, Sarah's handmaid. But even though this is true. Isaac was uniquely Abraham's son because He had been given to Abraham and Sarah according to God's promise. In other words it would be through Isaac, Abraham's only begotten or unique son that God would fulfill all the promises He had given to Abraham in **Genesis 12** and He could not fulfill His promises to Isaac through any other son.

Let me ask you a question? Are born again Christians the sons of God? And the answer would have to be, yes! All true born again Christians are the sons of God but they are not uniquely God's sons, they are together the sons of God through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26). Let me read for you **Galatians 3:26**, "**For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.**"

If you are a born again Christian, you have become a son of God through faith in Christ but you are not the only begotten Son of God. Jesus alone is the only begotten Son of God because He has always been God's Son. And the Apostle John is telling us that it is the "**only begotten Son**" that God gave up to death on the cross.

When undertaking a project, the total cost of that project should be counted before the project begins. And certainly you would have to say that God did this when He sent His Son into this world to be lifted up on a cross for our sins. But John is not only concerned with describing God's rescue mission in terms of cost John also described the rescue mission in terms of its *benefits*. Let us continue to read **John 3:16**, "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.**"

In describing the benefits of God's rescue mission John began by telling us that those who *believe in Christ* are the ones who will be benefited. Let us read the verse one more time, "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him . . .**"

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The only people who are going to be benefited by God's rescue mission are those who choose to believe in Christ whoever they are. Does this mean that people whoever they are can believe in just any Christ? Of course the answer is no! The only people who are going to be benefited by God's rescue mission are those who choose to believe in Christ as He has been revealed in the Scriptures. And how has He been revealed in Scriptures? First of all in respect to His person He has been revealed in the Scriptures as the only begotten Son of God who was in the beginning with God and who was God. In terms of His work He has been revealed in the Scriptures as the one who was given up to death on the cross for our sins.

If we would believe in Christ, whoever we might be, as He has been revealed in the Scriptures and would as an expression of our faith embrace Him as our Savior and Lord then we will experience the benefits of God's rescue mission.

If you would do this, then practically speaking this would mean in your desire to be set free from your sins that you would humble yourself before the Lord, recognizing his right to rule in your life and that you would also transfer your trust from yourself and your good works to Jesus Christ alone for your salvation.

In describing the benefits of God's rescue mission John begins by telling us that those who believe in Christ are the ones who will be benefited but he goes on.

In describing the benefits of God's rescue mission John not only told us who will be benefited, but how they will be benefited. I would hope that as we consider these benefits that we might by the grace of God have our eyes open to the unfathomable riches that have been extended to us in Christ.

In order to appreciate the unfathomable riches being extended by God's rescue mission to those who believe, we must first of all appreciate what we have been delivered from. Let us continue to read **John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."**

What is the significance of the phrase "**should not perish?**" The phrase, "Should not perish" clearly refers to being delivered from God's final judgment (Revelation 20:13-15).

As the final climax to human history at the conclusion of the millennial kingdom, Scripture records the judgment of the great white throne. Let me read for you a description of that judgment in Revelation 20:11-15, "**(11) And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne and the books were opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds, (13) And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, everyone of them, according to their deeds. (14) And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**"

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Those whose deeds do not demonstrate that they in fact have believed in Jesus and have embraced Him as their Lord and Savior will be thrown into the lake of fire and they will perish. Does this mean that they will be annihilated?

Those who are thrown into the lake of fire and who perish according to John are not annihilated, they simply suffer eternally (Revelation 20:7-10). Let me read for you **Revelation 20:7-10** which refers to an event taking place immediately prior to the great white throne judgment, "**And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from His prison, (8) and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. (9) And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. (10) And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet are also; and they will be annihilated? NO!** What does it say? It says, "**where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**" "Perish" does not refer to annihilation but rather to the eternal torment that results from being thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7-10).

Is this a literal fire? Christian doctrine as a point of orthodoxy has never demanded that "unquenchable fire" be interpreted as "a fiery oven" where "the flames do now rage and glow" and that "the view of the misery of the damned will double the ardour of the love and gratitude of the saints in heaven which was the view of Jonathan Edwards. The church has never formally taken the position that "in order that nothing may be wanting to the happiness of the blessed in heaven a perfect view is granted them of the torture of the damned" which was the view of Thomas Aquinas.

Nor has the church even remotely declared that "in fire exactly like that which we have on earth thy body will lie, asbestos-like, forever unconsumed, all thy veins roads for the feet of pain to travel on, every nerve a string on which the Devil shall for ever play his diabolical tune of hell's unutterable lament" which were the words of Charles Spurgeon.

Is the fire of hell a literal fire? Is the fire associated with the lake of fire a literal fire? Certainly as I have just shown you there are those whom we are quite familiar who think so but there are others who disagree and rather understand the fire to be metaphorical and I would count myself amongst them. I believe the fire of hell is metaphorical. Why?

I believe it is metaphorical because other terms describing the torment of hell appear to be metaphorical (Mark 9:44,46,48). In **Mark 9:44-48** Jesus speaks of the eternal torment of hell as a place where "**their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.**" He uses this phrase three times.

The fire is not quenched is easy enough to understand and could be taken literally, but what does Jesus mean by "**where their worm does not die?**" Their worm which does not die must be referring to the worms that are associated with death and the corruption of the body. Clearly the resurrected bodies even of the unredeemed will not be subject to decay and the corrupting influence of worms.

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"**Their worm that will not die**" would seem to be a metaphorical term designed to communicate the horrible nature of the punishment that God will inflict on those who participate in the great white throne judgment. And of course if we understand the phrase "their worm will not die" as metaphorical then it would seem that we would have to understand "and the fire is not quenched" which in all three cases in Mark 9 attached to it.

Listen to the comments of John Calvin. "Many persons, I am aware, have entered into ingenious debates about the eternal fire, by which the wicked will be tormented after the judgment. But we may conclude from many passages of scripture, that it is a metaphorical expression. For, if we must believe that it is real, or what they call material fire, we must also believe that the brimstone and the fan are material. . . We must explain the fire in the same manner as the worm (Mark 9:44,46,48) and if it is universally agreed that the worm is a metaphorical term, we must form the same opinion as to the fire."

But there is another reason why I believe that the fire of hell is metaphorical. I believe the fire of hell is metaphorical because *other* occupants of hell would not be affected by what we know as fire. Who are these occupants of hell that would not be affected by what we know as fire? The devil and his angels will be with those who have been cast into the Lake of Fire and they really would not have a whole lot of problem with fire as we see in the story Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were visited by angels while in the fiery furnace.

Listen to what Charles Hodge has to say. "There seems no more reason for supposing that the fire spoken of in Scripture is to be a literal fire, than that the worm that never dies is literally a worm. The devil and his angels who are to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire, and whose doom the finally impenitent are to share, have no material bodies to be acted upon by elemental fire."

But let us not think that by what I am saying that torment of hell in our mind should be diminished. This would be a terrible mistake. I would hope that nothing that I have said diminishes in your mind the misery and the doom of those who will be eternally separated from hope, from Christ, and from God. Hopefully nothing that I have said diminishes in your mind the remorse and suffering that will be the lot of those under the penal judgment of God. Hell, as Christ Himself refers to it is an awesome reality.

The lake of fire is a place of eternal suffering that will far exceed anything that we have ever experienced or could *imagine*. It is a place where their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched. It is a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:42). It is a place where the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever (Rev. 14:11).

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CONCLUSION

When I began this message I asked you what would you be willing to do to avoid chronic and unrelenting pain? I am sure that your mind went to the pain that we from time to time experience in our lives in the here and now.

But there is a much greater problem ahead for many people in this world today according to the Scriptures and that is the pain of hell. A pain that will far exceed anything that we have ever experienced in this world and which will persist for eternity.

Is there any hope for us? And the answer is, "Yes." "For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not *perish*"