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For God So Loved the World John 3:16 Part 4

This world is full of pain and suffering. Certainly there are times when we are happy. Certainly there are times of joy. But unfortunately those times of happiness and even those times of joy are often punctuated with all kinds of trouble. What do the scriptures teach us, "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." When we are younger this truth may not be so obvious to us, but as we get older this truth becomes all too real. But even though this is true there is a wonderful hope that God has extended to us through His Son.

This leads us back to **John 3:16-21** which we began to study several weeks ago. 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.**" These verses are the reflections of the Apostle John on the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in **John 3:1-15**.

Because these verses are the reflections of John on what he had just recorded, we have been asking the following question. 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 . . ."** John is telling us that the new birth would never have taken place if God did not love this world. John is telling us that the new birth would never have taken place if God did not love this very hostile place filled with His enemies. But God did love the world and this is what John initially reflects on.

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 rescue mission to the world (John 3:16-21). In reflecting on the rescue mission to the world he begins by describing it.

John, in reflecting on God's rescue mission first of all described it in terms of its cost. Let us continue to read the verse, "**For God so loved the world (this hostile place filled with the enemies of God) that He gave His only begotten Son.**" What did God's rescue mission cost Him?

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He gave up to death on the cross his only begotten Son, in other words "His unique Son" who had been with Him since the beginning. And why did he do this? He gave up His only begotten Son to death on the cross to pay the debt of our sins.

But John is not only concerned with describing God's rescue mission in terms of cost. John, in reflecting on God's rescue mission also describes 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."**

The first benefit of God's rescue mission for all those who believe is being delivered from God's final *judgment*. In other words, the first benefit of God's rescue mission for all those who believe is being delivered from the eternal torment of hell, which is described as an unquenchable fire and where their worm will never die. Now that is good news for those who believe. In fact that is really good news. But there is more.

The Apostle John mentions another benefit. 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 second benefit?

The second benefit of God's rescue mission for all those who believe is that they will be granted the gift of eternal *life*. Let us once again read the verse, **"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."** The benefit of God's rescue mission is not just about what we don't experience but what we do experience. And what will those who believe in Christ experience? They will experience eternal life.

But what it does not mean? The phrase "eternal life" does not simply mean living eternally. Every person who has ever lived will live eternally.

Either they will live eternally in a state of blessedness or they will live eternally in a state of torment. Either they will live eternally in a place called "heaven" or they will live eternally in a place called "hell." When John tells us that those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life he is not simply saying that they will live forever and ever. It has to be something more than that.

Eternal life comprises all the wonderful things that come to us as a result of our spiritual union with the life of *Christ*.

We could have ended the message at this point last week but I chose to rather emphasize for you one of those wonderful things that come to us as a result of our spiritual union with the life of Christ, not in the hereafter but rather in the here and now. And what was the benefit that I emphasized?

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One of the wonderful things that come to those who have been spiritually joined to Christ is the confident expectation that we will become *better* people (1 John 3:3). Listen to **1 John 3:1-3**, "**See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies Himself, just as He is pure.**"

Christ did not die simply that we might be saved from a bad conscience, or even to remove the stain of past failure, but to "clear the decks" for divine *action* (Rom. 5:10). Let me read for you **Romans 5:10**, "**For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**"

Hopefully every one of you here this weekend is even now enjoying the saving life of Christ. Hopefully you not only have a settled conviction about what the Lord wants you to do, but that you by faith are taking advantage of the power supplied to us by Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit. In other words you are not just sitting at the airport admiring the plane, but that you have become airborne. This is not something that we should be experiencing periodically, but continually.

What can we call this? We can call this eternal life because it is one of those wonderful things that come to us because of our union with the life of Christ. But eternal life involves more than just the wonderful things that come to us because of our union with the life of Christ in the here and now.

This weekend I would like us to consider another wonderful thing that has come to those who have been joined to the life of Christ. Not only do we have the confident expectation of becoming a better person through the saving life of Christ in the here and now, but another wonderful thing that comes to those who have been joined to the life of Christ is the confident expectation of a better *future* (Revelation 21:1-4).

Of course this better future is our entrance into heaven. What might this be like? We get a sense of what this might be like as we consider John's vision of the New Heaven and New Earth in **Revelation 22:1-4**.

Let me read for you **Revelation 21:1-4**, "**And I saw a new heaven and new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. (2) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, (4) And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death, there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."** Certainly what we have just read about speaks of a better future. This morning I would like us to look at this better future in fuller detail.

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There are *four* features of this better future outlined for us in Revelation 21:1-4. I would hope that as we focus on these four features we will be encouraged and be filled with thanksgiving for all that God has done for us through His Son when He gave us the gift of eternal life. What is the first feature?

The first feature of this better future in Revelation 21:1-4 is the appearance of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1). Let me read for you **Revelation 21:1 "And I saw a new heaven and new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea."** After the great white throne judgment in **Revelation 20:11-15** when all unbelievers will be cast into the lake of fire for all eternity, the Apostle John witnesses the appearance of the new heaven and earth. And then he informs us that the old heaven and earth has passed away.

This certainly is not a new teaching. There are a number of passages that teach us that God will one day destroy the current heavens and earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:12-13). Will He, after destroying what we are familiar with replace it with something somewhat similar to what we have known? And the answer is, No!

The term new (KAINOS) indicates new in a qualitative sense, or in other words it is emphasizing that heavens and earth will be far different than what we have known.

We get a sense of how different this place will be when John tells us that there is no longer any sea. Look at the verse one more time, "**And I saw a new heaven and new earth; for the first heaven and first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.**" This does not mean that there will not be water in the new heavens and earth. Certainly we see the real possibility of water in fact a substantial amount of water being present based on **Revelation 22** but looking specifically at **Revelation 21:1** it would appear that there will no longer be any sea.

Some of you at this point might say, "That is terrible, I love the sea." I know that many, if not most of us love the sea. I love the sea. I love driving over to Ventura with my wife on our day off and walking along the seashore. But even though I love the sea I know that in the new heavens and new earth that I will not miss it. Why would I say this? Listen to the words of **Isaiah 65:17, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind."** When we finally inhabit the new heavens and new earth we will not sit around and long for the good old days. The new heavens and new earth will be so much more magnificent, so much more glorious that we will not miss anything that we presently enjoy. What is another feature of the new heaven and new earth?

The second feature of this better future in Revelation 21:1-4 is the capital of the new heaven and new (Revelation 21:2). Let us read **verse 2 "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."** The capital of the new heaven and new earth is the holy city, the New Jerusalem.

Does the New Jerusalem have anything to do with the earthly Jerusalem that we are familiar with today? And the answer is no! Just like the new earth and the new heaven is not the earth and heaven that we know today neither is the New Jerusalem the Jerusalem that we know today.

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What did the passage say, "**And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.**"

Clearly the New Jerusalem is something totally different from the earthly Jerusalem. The holy city that John saw coming down out of heaven I believe is the very thing that Christ promised He would prepare for His *disciples* in John 14:1-3.

Let me read for you **John 14:1-3**, "**Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. (2) In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.**" What a wonderful promise. What a wonderful hope. When we pass out of this life we are anticipating that there is a very special prepared place awaiting us. But this very special place that is awaiting us in heaven will not always remain where it is. There will be a time in the future when it will descend into the sphere of the new heaven and new earth. Heaven to us at that time will not be thought of as up there but rather here.

But it is more than simply a very special prepared place for the church or in other words church age saints.

The holy city that John saw coming down out of heaven I believe is also the very thing that the Lord promised Abraham in Hebrews 11:8-10. Let me read this passage of Scripture for you, "**By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; (10) for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**"

The eternal abode of every Old or New Testament *saint* is the holy city that John saw coming out of heaven from God.

Will the New Jerusalem be as splendid and as glorious as the new earth and the new heaven? And the answer is of course. Listen to the read of **Revelation 21:2**, "**And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven form God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.**"

The expression "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" is a symbolic reference to the preparation of a virtuous woman for the day of her marriage. God has been preparing this city for almost 2000 years. Since Christ instantly called everything as we now know it into existence in six days according to **Genesis 1** one can scarcely imagine the glories of this city, which has been so long in preparation.

We have now seen two different features of our better future outlined for us in **Revelation 21:1-4**. The first feature of this better future in Revelation 21:1-4 is the appearance of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1).

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The second feature of this better future in Revelation 21:1-4 is the capital of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:2). What is the third feature of this better future outlined for us in **Revelation 21:1-4?**

The third feature of this better future in Revelation 21:1-4 is that *God* will dwell with us (Revelation 21:3). Let me read this verse for you, "**And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.'**" God will "dwell" or "tabernacle" on earth in the New Jerusalem with the redeemed. This truth is mind-boggling.

The imperfect, sin-hindered fellowship that believers have with God now in this life will become full, complete, and unlimited. What will this be like? "I can only imagine."

What are the features of a better future outlined for us in **Revelation 21:1-4?** The first feature of this better future in Revelation 21:1-4 is the appearance of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1). The second feature of this better future in Revelation 21:1-4 is the capital of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:2). The third feature of this better future in Revelation 21:1-4 is that God will dwell with us (Revelation 21:3). And finally the fourth feature of this better future in Revelation 21:1-4 is what we *leave* behind (Revelation 21:4).

Let me read for you **Revelation 21:4, "And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."** What will we leave behind?

First of all we will leave behind tears. Let us look at the verse again, "**And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.**" Obviously He is not referring to tears of joy but rather to tears of sadness. And I certainly know a whole lot about this.

If there is one thing I know about myself is that I am "tender hearted." When I see suffering I am invariably moved to tears. Some people might think that this is a good thing for a pastor. This is easy for you to say. But I have to live with myself and I can honestly tell you that the grief that often times fills me is exhausting. I don't know how you feel when you read this phrase, "**And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes,**" but I'm ecstatic.

But John is not satisfied with simply saying that the future in Revelation 21:1-4 is better because tears are left behind. He then goes on to share with something even more basic.

We also leave behind what causes tears. Let us read the verse one more time, "**And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death.**" This side of glory death is a continual enemy taking those that we love from us and eventually taking us from our loved ones.

I know that as I continue to live I will continue to suffer the death of people in this congregation and in my family that I have known and loved. And I know that each time this happens I will once again be filled with grief.

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Certainly I know that my grief will be tempered by the fact that I know that those who have died in Christ will immediately go into the presence of the Lord into the place that He has prepared for them but there still will be grief and there will be tears. And in some cases there will be a whole lot of tears.

I know that some of you may have lived through the death of a spouse or perhaps even a child whom you have known and loved and I can't even imagine the depth of grief that must fill a person at that time. But I do know this that one day when we enter into the eternal state and take up residence in the city that is being prepared for us by Christ, the New Jerusalem, that death will no longer be a part of our experience ever again.

And of course not only will death no longer be a part of our experience but neither will anything else that might produce tears. Let us continue to read **Revelation 21:4**, "**And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; and there will no longer be any mourning or crying, or pain; the first things have past away.**"

CONCLUSION

God so loved this world that he mounted a rescue mission on our behalf that cost him dearly. It cost Him the life of His only begotten Son. Hopefully each of us have taken advantage of what he has done by exercising faith in Christ as He has been revealed in the scriptures. And if we have done this no matter what we might be experiencing today we know that we will be experiencing a far better future.

How much better future? I don't believe that we are in a position to fully grasp the extent of the blessings that will be coming to us in Christ. But it does not seem so unprofitable from time to time to imagine what it might be like. And this leads me to share with you the words of a familiar chorus.

I can only imagine what it will be like, when I walk by your side...
I can only imagine, what my eyes will see, when Your face is before me!
I can only imagine. I can only imagine.

Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel?

Will I dance for you, Jesus? Or in awe of You, be still?
Will I stand in Your presence, or to my knees will I fall?
Will I sing 'Hallelujah?' Will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine! I can only imagine!

I can only imagine, when that day comes, when I find myself standing in the Son!
I can only imagine, when all I will do, is forever, forever, worship You!
I can only imagine! I can only imagine!

If we have exercised faith in Christ not only will we be assured becoming a better person but also we will be assured of a better future and this is *eternal life*.