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Reading: **John 3:1-18**

For God So Loved

What is God like and what he has done? Nothing can be more important than understanding this. Our text will help you be clear and hopefully able to understand and even explain something of God's character and actions. Our text begins with the word **for**, which emphasises that God and his love are the reason, the explanation for why you are here today, why there is an opportunity for you to hear the message of salvation, it is because God is sovereign mercy has taken action according to his own character and plan. We see God, In the beginning created. We see when Adam sinned – rebelled against God's clear instruction, that it was God who called out to Adam, it was God who promised victory through the seed of the woman. It was God who provided the animal skins for Adam and his wife's covering. It was God, who when evil filled the mind of man, who when announcing judgement also commissioned the means of salvation. It was God who left the door of the ark open for a further seven days so that anyone who desired could be saved. We can go through the whole of the old Testament and again and again you will see the grace of God in action. For God so loved the world.

1. See the love of God

Our text says "for God so loved" the word here is *agape*. In Greek, which the Holy Spirit used to give us God's word, there is more than one word for love. One word is *phileo* – or brotherly love, but the one used here is *agape* – selfless love. You could not think of using *phileo* here – why? Because as we read Rm 5:8 "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, **while we were yet sinners**, Christ died for us." When God sees you he does not see someone worthy of saving he sees one worthy of judgement. But God in his grace decided to show love. And love is not a mere an emotion – *agape* love is always an action. This is not warm and friendly advice, but real costly action that does it all for the undeserving. It is impossible for us to begin to comprehend what it means, but think of Christ's injunction to Mat 5:44 "But I say unto you, **Love your enemies**, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;" and realise that this is what God has done. The infinite intensity and quality of God's love is brought out by the word "so," For God So Loved. Few words, but such depth of meaning. There was no holding back in the cost of God's love. 1 John 4:10 "**Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us**, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Now God's love was not limited to one people. The Jews were very proud, as we read in [Joh 8:33](#) "They answered him, **We be Abraham's seed**, and were never in bondage to any man: **how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?**" They thought being Abraham's descendants was enough. They failed to see their own bondage to sin and death. But God's love is not restricted by natural inheritance, geographic location or personal wealth. God's love is a worldwide love. That means that though we don't deserve it, this message of God's love in action is for us here today.

2. God's love is shown in his gift

His only begotten son. We are on holy ground here. This is a Trinitarian text. We see that Jesus has already explained to Nicodemus that the new birth is a work of the Holy Spirit,

Joh 3:5-6 "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water **and of the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and **that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**" now we see the one given is the son by eternal generation of the father. We see something of his glory in Isaiah chapter 6, which is clearly stated to be Christ in Joh 12:41 "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him." We hear the great announcement at Christ's baptism Mat 3:17 "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, **This is my beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased" and now we learn that it was the divine plan that the eternal son should be given – should leave heaven's glory and humble himself – the babe at Bethlehem, the wicked hands that crucified him. Acts 2:23 "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and **by wicked hands have crucified and slain:**" the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. It was God's plan of redemption. It was because of his love for lost sinners like us. When Nicodemus heard of this gift I believe he would have thought of how Abraham (Genesis 22:1-13) was called upon to give his precious son of promise on the altar Gen 22:2. Isaac was delivered from this Gen 22:11, and his place taken by a substitute who died where he was to die. We read Gen 22:8 "And Abraham said, My son, **God will provide himself a lamb** for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together." When John the Baptist cried out John 1:29 "**behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,**" we see the only begotten son who was given given as a substitute. Isaiah 53:3-5 "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

3. What about you? Will you perish or will you believe?

Jesus makes clear that this gracious gift, this beyond price gift is only for those who believe. Whosoever is a wide word, but it here divides. Be very clear if you refuse to believe in your need of a saviour, a substitute to die in your place, if you refuse to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save, that your sins could be forgiven, then you will not be saved, you are on the road to eternal perishing. An eternity banished from the presence and blessing of God. But give thanks, Jesus did not come to condemn but to save. You can still flee from the wrath to come, the day of grace is still with us.

This is not a new idea, for we read that Gen 15:6 "**And he [Abraham] believed** in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Believe and you will have everlasting life – communion with your creator, the love of God. As Isaiah said 55:1 "Ho everyone that's thirsteth, Come you to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk **without money and without price.**"

This is the point, God has provided a free gift. There is nothing which you can do to earn God's good favour, in fact trying to do something to make yourself acceptable to God is an insult to God's free gift and in salt to Christ Jesus the only begotten son who died as a substitute on the cross.

You must see your own personal need today. Turn from your self effort in repentance and cry out for mercy. As Paul and Silas told the jailer at Philippi Acts 16:34 "And they said, **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved**, and thy house."