Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (12-5-1991 Cleland Baptist Church)

John 3:13-36

Introduction

John 3:16 is the greatest of all the 31,373 verses in the Bible. If we memorize just one verse from the Bible, this must be the one. The preacher approaches this text with deep unworthiness – can never do it justice, its richness is inexhaustible. This glorious text contains the most powerful, wonderful and glorious good news.

There is so much about the love of God that is not appreciated or realized. The "love of God" is perhaps the most misused and misrepresented truth. The phrase is trotted out at every turn in a sentimental way, as if God is a benevolent old grandfather who is there just to help and support us as we pursue our own self-centred way in the world, as if He is just there to make sure everything will turn out well for everybody in the end. It is a short step to believing that the fact that He is a "God of love" must surely mean that all will be saved, so they can live as they like, do as they like, believe what they like. How far from the truth. Going to look at four wonders of God's love in John 3:16.

The object of God's love

We will never understand God's love till we consider the "world". God did not just love a select group, indeed not just mankind, but a mankind in tremendous spiritual need and alienation from Him. The world does not know God. It is marked by sin, rebellion and hatred of God, in darkness and under the shadow of eternal death. The prince of darkness – the Devil, who hates Christ and His disciples, rules this perishing world. The world is under God's judgment. Its characteristics are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride of life. Everyone lies under the sway of the wicked one.

God has every right to leave the world to rot in its sin and consign it to eternal banishment and condemnation. Not until we accept this as the true picture of the world can we appreciate the marvel that is the love of God. Lost, guilty, ruined world. Nothing lovable about it. Enmity to God, hatred of truth, disregard of the Law, rebellion against the Commandments, perishing by own wilfulness. Such a black background of sin makes the bright light of God's love shine out the more brightly.

If there had been no sin, fall, perishing, hatred, ungodliness, we might have begun to understand that love. But with the world as it is, and with us as we are, we are in the presence of something quite amazing.

So much talk about the love of God that is mere sentiment, indulgent, softness has robbed us of any real Biblical understanding of the word. God is reduced to mere nobody, just there for our convenience. Instead we need to begin by considering God as utter light, purity and holiness, who is repulsed by all that is evil and perverse, who loves righteousness and hates iniquity. Then we must go on to speak about our unloveliness, corruption, and law breaking. Then the love of God takes on real meaning. We find it staggering that God could love sinners. Nothing in us to attract or prompt His love. His love is free, spontaneous, uncaused and utterly undeserved. He

loves us simply because He close to love us. P.T.Forsyth wrote, "If we spoke less about God's love and more about His holiness and judgment, we should say much more when we did speak of His love." Karl Barth, one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, with a massive intellect. Asked by his student, "Dr Barth, what is the greatest thought that has ever passed through your mind?" The aging professor paused for a long time as he pondered his answer. Then with great simplicity, he replied,

"Jesus loves me, this I know
For the Bible tells me so"

The extent of His love

He gave His only Son. This is the second wonder of the love of God. We measure a person's love, not by what they say, but by what they do – what they sacrifice, give up, the way they deny themselves. Love which spares nothing but spends self to help and bless another is love indeed.

Consider His gift. His only "begotten" Son. God had only one Son, and He was an eternally divine being as much as the Father. The Son was fully God as much as the Father. God gave His Son because of His love. So often we give what does not hurt us, our leftovers, what we don't need. But in giving His only and beloved Son, God gave the most precious thing He possessed. God the Father gave His other self; the Father gave One who was also God. When God gave God for us, He gave Himself. What more could anyone give?

God did not spare his own son, but gave him up for all (Romans 8:32). There is a sense in which the Father seemed to love us better than He loved His Son, and He did not spare Him that He might spare us. And what did it mean for Him to give His Son? Consider the manger in Bethlehem, the carpenter's shop, His hunger and thirst, utter poverty so that He did not have anywhere to lay His head, dull and ungrateful disciples, cunning eyes and cruel tongues of the Pharisees, agony and heart-break in the Garden of Gethsemane, scourging and thorny crown, mockery and betrayal, nails, sheer pain. But above all – being laden with men's sins, the agony of separation from His Father as He took the penalty, paid the debt, discharged our liabilities, died, **the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God** (1 Peter 3:18).

Sometimes men have begun to grasp a very little of what it meant for God giving His Son. Hudson Taylor, setting off for China, ran down the gangway yet again to embrace his mother as he saw her anguish which cut him to the quick. Then when the gangway was taken away, he wrote on the inside of his pocket Bible the words, "The love of God which passes knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19). He flung the Bible onto the pier where his mother stood. As the ship passed through the lock gates Taylor heard her cry of anguish. "It went through me like a knife. I never realized till that moment what it really meant for God to so love the world as to give His Son". And yet even this is a poor illustration of God giving the eternal Son to be the Saviour of the world, with all that that meant.

New Testament writers have much to say about the love of God in sending His Son to the Cross. **God demonstrates his own love towards us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Romans 5:8). **He did not spare His own Son but**

delivered Him up for us all (Romans 8:32). **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** (1 John 4:9). **To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood** (Revelation 1:5).

God is love. Not absolutely clear in nature, because there are earthquakes as well as beautiful sunsets, deadly diseases as well as good health. It is only at the Cross that we are sure that God is love, fully and without ambiguity. Augustine wrote, "The Cross was the pulpit from which Christ preached God's love to the world."

Blessing provided by His love

The third wonder of God's love is that whoever believes on Him will not perish but will have eternal life. A two-fold blessing - saved from great danger, and receive a wonderful gift. We were in danger of perishing, being spiritually destroyed, condemned, eternally lost, dying in our sins, to face dread punishment beyond the grave, banished forever from the presence of God, with all utter ruin, misery and anguish which is involved.

To perish is to lose all light in life, all peace in death, and all hope in eternity. This is summed up in "hell". Christ died that men should not perish. If a man is saved by Christ, he can never perish, he is eternally secure. **I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand** (John 10:28).

In the future, we may encounter doubt and fear, as a man on board a ship is tossed about. But if we are in Christ, we are on board a ship that can never be wrecked. Instead of perishing, we have the gift of eternal life. Not just life which goes on for ever and ever, but a new kind of life. The very life of God in the soul. A new creature, a new man. Everything becomes new – outlook, values, interests, hopes, fears, and desires.

Then at death, we enter into even fuller dimension of eternal life. **For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day** (John 6:40). To be raised, body and soul, at the Lord's second coming, and dwell forever in that blessed place where **there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away** (Revelation 21:4). The redeemed are to enjoy eternal fellowship with Him.

This life will last if we live to be 100, flourish when we are at the mouth of the grave, will abide when we have quitted the body and it rots in the tomb, continue at the resurrection, be ours at the judgement seat, outshine and outlast the sun and the moon. It will last as long as the life of the Father will last. As long as there is a God, the believer will not only exist, but also live. As long as there is heaven, we shall enjoy it. As long as there is a Christ, we shall live in His love.

"How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable friend.
His love is as great as His power
And knows neither measure nor end."

Condition imposed by His love

How may all this be mine? The fourth wonder of God's love is the simplicity and freeness of the way of salvation. We do not see written on a gate "Whoever has prepared himself by years of repentance, turned over so many new leaves, done sufficient quota of good works, attended church for so many Sundays, may enter here." But simply the requirement is "whoever believes on Him", however bad they may be, regardless of their past, no matter how stained and defiled. Whoever puts His trust in Christ. The way of salvation – such is God's love – is extremely simple to understand and practice once the heart becomes willing and obedient.

What does it involve? Firm and cordial assent to the truth. To know and acknowledge your sin and your need. To believe God laid on His Son your sins, and bore their penalty. That He died in your place as a substitute. Then you must go on to see how this good news applies in your case. Through Christ you can be saved from the penalty of your sin. He will be your Saviour and Lord. Then you must place personal trust in Him. Simply trust yourself to Christ. Faith is trust, reliance, and dependence. Turn away from depending on anything else, and trust Christ simply and solely, place your faith and confidence in Christ. Your faith may be very weak, slender and feeble, but if it is real, it will bring salvation. If you touch but the hem of His garment, healing power and saving grace will flow into your life.

This is the only way to avoid perishing and to receive eternal life. There is not one way for the rich, and another for the poor; one way for the learned, and another for the unlearned; one way for black and another for white. There is no difference, **for the same Lord is Lord of all, and richly blesses all who call on Him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved** (Romans 10:12,13).

But note that if we are to be saved we have got to do something. We have got to take action. We have got to trust Him. For whoever does not believe will perish and will not have eternal life.

Here is the condition imposed by love. While every believer is included, every unbeliever is excluded. **He who believes in the Son has everlasting life. But he who does not believe in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him** (John 3:36). Salvation is entirely of the Lord. Ruin is entirely one's own fault.

Conclusion

The love of God – the object of His love is a ruined, perishing, God-hating, sin-loving world. The extent of His love is not just to give gifts, but He gave Himself. He went to the Cross to bear our curse and condemnation. The blessing provided by His love is that we do not go to a Christ-less eternity, but have everlasting life, which is begun here and reaches fullness hereafter.

The condition imposed by His love is the simplest of all conditions – personal faith, trust and reliance on the Son. The grasp of a drowning man on the hand stretched out to save him.

To believers – think again of His love to you. How can I ever again be a grumbler, distrustful, fearful? How can I grow cool or distant, or half-hearted in my allegiance and service to Him?

To unbelievers - God still gives away Christ today – God's free gift to free receivers. Full Christ for empty sinners. He still gives Christ to all willing to accept Him.