

The Greatest Verse

Introduction. Babes in Christ and the mature in Christ here feed upon one common food (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18). From time to time, those who have long known the Lord benefit from taking up your first spelling book, and go over your alphabet again.

I do not call you to an elementary lesson because you have forgotten your letters, but because it is a good thing to refresh the memory. John 3:16 is often called the "Golden Text of the Bible" and it is probably the most well-known of all scripture.

I. ***God Loved The World***

- A. God loves because it is His nature to do so (1 John 4:8). Nothing upon the earth could have merited His love, though there was much to merit His displeasure. It is easy to think of God as looking at men in their rebellion and saying, "I'll break them." It is easy to think of God as seeking the allegiance of men in order to satisfy His own desire for power. But God acted to satisfy His love. A parent can love their child while being strongly opposed to their conduct.
- B. God has such love in His nature that He must let it flow forth to a world perishing by its own willful sin; and when it flowed forth it was so deep, so wide, so strong, that even inspiration could not compute its measure, and therefore the Holy Spirit gave us that great little word "so," and left us to attempt the measurement, according as we perceive more and more of love divine.
- C. The Greeks had four words for love:
 1. *Eros* describes physical, sensual, passionate love; the kind of love which led to the satisfaction of one's appetites. This word is not used in the New Testament.
 2. *Storge* describes a love of kindred, especially of parents and children. This was a natural affection, a strong sentiment which arose from close family relationships.
 3. *Phileo* is used to describe warmth and tender affection which exists between family, friends or others in the human race because we are all in the same condition. This was a higher form of love, but it was still based upon emotion.
 4. *Agape* is the word God used to describe a love that goes beyond emotion. It is supremely an act of the will which goes beyond natural desires. While we were completely unworthy of His love Christ died for us.

- D. The term "world" is used in three sense in the New Testament:
1. It is used in the sense of the universe or all of creation (John 21:25; Acts 17:24).
 2. It is used in the sense of the abode of humanity or the earth (Matthew 4:8; Luke 12:30; Romans 4:13).
 3. It is used in the sense of fallen humanity or the subjects of God's salvation (John 1:29; 3:16; 8:12; 12:31). It was not a nation; not the good people; not only the people who loved Him; it was the world. The unlovable and the unlovely, the lonely who have no one else to love them, the man who loves God and the woman who never thinks of Him; the woman who rests in the love of God and the man who spurns it -- all are included in this vast inclusive love of God.

II. ***He Gave His Only Begotten Son***

- A. In the gift of His Son, God commended His love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for the ungodly (Roman 5:8). The black background of sin makes the bright light of love shine out all the more clearly. There was no higher proof of Abraham's love to God than when he did not withhold from God his only son, Isaac whom he loved; and there can certainly be no greater display of love than for the Eternal Father to give His only begotten Son to die for us (Hebrews 2:9).
- B. The words "only begotten" means "one of a kind." It was more than God's only Son. Jesus Christ was God's one of a kind or unique Son. Because of this relationship, we need to pay careful attention to Jesus Christ (Luke 8:25). Only John uses "only begotten" to refer to Jesus (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:19).
- C. God gave His Son to be an exile among men. He sent Him down to a manger where oxen fed. The Lord God sent the heir of all things to toil in a carpenter's shop: to drive the nail, and push the plane, and use the saw. He sent Him down among scribes and Pharisees, whose cunning eyes watched Him, and whose cruel tongues scourged Him with baseless slander. He sent Him down to hunger, and thirst, amid poverty so dire that He had not where to lay His head. He sent Him down to the scourging and the crowning with thorns. At length He gave him up to a felon's death. He gave Him to be made a curse for us; gave Him that He might die, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." The redemption of the world was accomplished and God's glorious kingdom established by the humiliation and death of His Son and not by any military leadership or earthly pomp and glory such as the Pharisees anticipated.

III. ***We Must Believe On Him***

- A. Many preachers will declare that salvation is a gift received only by believing God for it. They say that the nature of belief is implied in the illustration of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (vs. 14). They proclaim that salvation consists of accepting something, not doing something.
- B. But belief is a "work" of God (John 6:29). Now it is true that we are not saved by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). But what Paul had reference to is the works of man which they believe will save them. Cornelius did "good works" but it did not save him (Acts 11:14). Faith without works is dead (James 2:26). One learns in Hebrews 11 that faith leads one to obey. Likewise, when one believes, they will act in faith and repent, confess, and be baptized.
- C. The verb "perish" depicts the opposite of salvation. It does not mean to cease to exist, but it means to experience utter failure, futility, and loss of all that makes existence worthwhile, and thus consequently to be excluded forever from His fellowship.

IV. ***We Will Have Everlasting Life***

- A. The last two words in verses 15 and 16 are exactly the same. The KJV translates them "eternal life" in 15 and "everlasting life" in 16. Evidently the KJV translators used "everlasting" in vs. 16 to avoid repetition. This original word occurs 17 times in John's gospel and not more than 6 times in any other New Testament book. In the KJV it is translated "eternal" in 42 of the 71 times it occurs.
- B. "Everlasting" refers not only to the duration of existence but also to the quality of life as contrasted with futility. It can never be exhausted in any measurable span of time, but it introduces a totally new quality of life.
- C. God has set eternity in our heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11). This promise of eternity gives us hope (1 John 2:25; Colossians 1:5; Titus 3:7; 1 Peter 1:3, 13).

Conclusion. The revelation of Jesus was still veiled and profound as were His declarations concerning the kingdom, but He opened the door of a mighty vista to Nicodemus and challenged him to come to the light. I cannot take Jesus up in my arms as Simeon did, but I will at least touch the hem of the garment hem as did the poor diseased woman.

Today, you can have everlasting life. This is a life that will last through your threescore years and ten; a life that will last you should you outlive a century; a life that will still flourish when you lie at the grave's mouth; a life that will continue when your body is raised again, and you

will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. As long as there is a heaven, you will enjoy it; as long as there is a Christ, you will live in His love; and as long as there is an eternity, you will continue to fill it with delight.

I pray that you may gladly accept the unspeakable gift! Will you refuse? God has given a full Christ for empty sinners. Nothing is freer than a gift. Nothing is more worth having than a gift which comes fresh from the hand of God. The fountain is eternal, but the stream from it is as fresh as when first the fountain was opened. There is no exhausting this gift.