



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 3:16

“The Greatest Text of All”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] This morning we are studying John chapter 3, and verse 16, because it is such a great text and also because it is a text which has caused a great deal of perplexity to some. It's a text over which there has been quite a bit of spiritual and exegetical disputing and so in view of that we are going to spend the entire time on this one text. John 3, verse 16. Now most of you can read this text without looking at it but the Authorized Version text reads,

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever, (literally, the text says, ‘Everyone who believes,’ but, ‘Whosoever,’ is true to the sense,) whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. You probably have noticed that there is a great deal of similarity between the idea of this text and the text in Romans 8:32 where the apostle says, “He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.” Many commentators have commented upon the similarity of these texts. The one in 8:32 of Romans is a text built upon the offering up of Isaac by Abraham and thus there is a similarity because here in chapter 3 of John it is the Father who gives the Son and gives him ultimately to the cross. In Romans 8 the apostle's thoughts are simply that the ones for whom Christ

died may expect to have all of the other blessings of spiritual life as well. And he even uses the expression in Romans 8:32 which is taken from the Greek translation of the incident in Genesis chapter 22. So there is a similarity between the texts in that they each speak of the purpose of the Son’s coming. They speak of the intent of his coming and they speak of the love of God in the gift of the Son and what we may expect as a result of that. That is, that those for whom Christ died have all of the blessings of life as well. The blessing of faith, the blessing of efficacious grace, the blessing of eternal life and the other things that go with the saving ministry of Christ.

The title for our message this morning to you is “The Greatest Text of All” and we are turning to John chapter 3, and verse 16. John 3:16 is the favorite text of most readers of the Bible, probably. It may even be the greatest in the Bible. Some years ago I read a series of messages by one of the Australian preachers and his book was dealing with the favorite texts of famous people. Some of them were from the political sphere and most of the others were from the sphere of the ministry of the word of God; preachers or missionaries. And after a number of chapters dealing with various well-known texts that were the favorite texts of these preachers he had one final text in his book and it was entitled *Everybody’s Text*, and it was an exposition of John 3:16.

A Bible teacher that I knew who has for a long time expounded the Scriptures in this country has called John 3:16 a text that contains an ocean of thought and a drop of language. Luther called it the miniature gospel and he had some interesting things to say about it as one might expect. Luther called this text not only the miniature gospel but a text in which the whole Bible was contained. A fortnight before he passed away he repeated the text with evident ecstasy and added, “What Spartan saying can be compared with this wonderful brevity? It is a Bible in itself.” And then in his dying moments a few days later he repeated the words of John 3:16 three times in Latin.

How can anyone hope to offer a congregation of Christians anything new when it comes to John 3:16? Mr. Spurgeon said that he always preached on this text once a year. He preached on it once a year for the simple reason that he knew that he couldn’t say anything unusual or different and that it helped confirm him in the power of the word of God because he said, “When individuals were

converted through the preaching on John 3:16 it reminded him that men were not converted by virtue of the clever things or the new things that he was able to say. Well that’s not a bad habit to preach on it every year because I know that after a little while I could not say anything more about it as I was thinking about preparing for this message I got out my notes on John 3:16, my sermon notes, and I had at least four different messages that I had preached from time to time and so I know that it is very difficult to say anything new. God does save souls by his word and so we look at this text with that in mind.

Henry Moorehouse, a British preacher, he was a young man when he met D. L. Moody, in England. He had a conversation with Mr. Moody and Mr. Moody said to the young man, probably so far as we know, thinking that he would never see him again, “If you ever come to Chicago I’ll be glad to let you preach in my church there.” Now Mr. Moody had a very large church there in Chicago, the Moody Church, and he was surprised some months later that he got a call from New York City and it was Henry Moorehouse and he said that he was in the United States. Mr. Moody remembered his words to him and invited him to come and preach. He himself was going out of town, he thought that the young man might be allowed to preach and that would be it.

Well, when he came back on Friday of the week he asked his wife how the young man from Britain did. She said, “He’s done fine, he’s a better preacher than you.” [Laughter] And that surprised Mr. Moody very much and interested him. He said, “What’s he been preaching on?” “Well, he’s been preaching on John 3:16 and he’s preached on John 3:16 every night.” So Mr. Moody said, “Well, is he preaching tonight?” and she said, “Yes, he’s preaching again tonight.” So he went to the meeting and Mr. Moorehouse stood up and he said that he had been asking the Lord about the text that he should preach on that night, he had preached on John 3:16 every night but he said, “The Lord keeps impressing it upon me that I should preach on John 3:16.” And so he did and Mr. Moody afterward said that it was through Henry Moorehouse that he learned the truth, that God loves sinners. He had always thought previously that the Bible really supported the idea of

it that God hated sinners, but it was through Mr. Moorehouse and John 3:16 that he really came to understand that God does love sinners.

Well the substance of John 3:16, if I may put it in a sentence, would be something like this, God loved and Christ died for all believers in the world. Believers composed of both Jews and Gentiles. That’s simply what this text teaches, God loved and Christ died for all believers in the world from among the Jews and among the Gentiles. There are three important clauses, one of them a compound clause in this verse in which we have an act, God loved, a result, God gave, and then a purpose. Now, the purpose is that negatively men should not perish but positively that believers should have life. So it contains an act, a result, and a purpose. And the purpose, just for the sake of emphasis, rests upon having eternal life.

Well let’s look at John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And the first clause, “For God so loved the world,” that contains the greatest fact, God’s love for the world. Now you’ll notice as you look at this text that the apostle has attached a *gar*, or a for, to the verse. He has said, “For God so loved the world,” and when you see something like that you want to ask yourself, “Well, why does he say, ‘For God so loved the world,’? What’s the reference for the ‘for’?”

Well now, there are many uses in English of the term for. Sometimes it’s a simple explanation, sometimes it introduces a cause or clause and there’s some other nuances that are contained in that English word as well. The Greek word lying back of this contains the same kind of usage. I think that he’s likely giving a reason why there exists such a provision for dying men as he has expressed in the preceding verse. He has said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” And one might ask how has it come about that there is such a provision for dying men? And verse 16 would give us the answer, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. So this is

an explanation of why there is this provision of eternal life. It's by virtue of what God and Christ have done.

Now one might also ask a question here and commentators do, is this text something that Jesus said to Nicodemus, for it's in the context of his interview with Nicodemus, or is this something that the Apostle John has added? Now remember, John was a very old man when he wrote this gospel and as you read through the Gospel of John you will notice that at a number of places he will be giving the words of our Lord but he just imperceptibly moves into commenting upon the things that Jesus is talking about so that it is very difficult in many places in the Gospel of John to make the transition from our Lord's words to John's words. That would be natural for an old man who had lived with our Lord, who had lived with this truth for many years, so much so that it had become a part of him and as he expressed what he believed, he and what the Lord had taught him, have become one. And here it's very difficult to know where the transition is, where our Lord's words stop to Nicodemus, and where John, the apostle's, words begin. Some have thought that this is something that our Lord spoke, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.”

There are some good reasons why one might think that but to engage in an exegetical discussion would probably mean that we wouldn't have as much time to expound the text so I'm just going to express my own view. I'm inclined to think that these are words that John the Apostle has added. They are words that are comments of him and they flow out of the interview that the Lord Jesus had with Nicodemus. One of the reasons I think this is so is that as we look at the tenses in verse 19 these tenses of the verbs are written from the Johannine standpoint and not from our Lord's standpoint in the interview with Nicodemus. This is the condemnation that light has come into the world and men loved, notice the past tense, loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. If this were still our Lord's words to Nicodemus, you would expect those things to be in the present tense. Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. But John writing from the vantage point of many years afterwards naturally puts it in the past tense.

Furthermore, the Son is described here as the only begotten Son and we have no record of our Lord ever using that term of himself. But it's a favorite term of the Apostle John. And so I am inclined again to think that the fact that he said, “God gave his only begotten Son,” that it is John the apostle who is given us that. And also you notice as you read from now on that the dialogue form with Nicodemus saying something and then our Lord saying something and then Nicodemus asking question, that has ceased and we hear it no more. So I think that the interview has ceased and John the apostle now is continuing giving things that are in thorough accord with the teaching that the Lord Jesus not only gave Nicodemus but gave others as well. So these are John's words, I think.

Now this is the greatest fact, God's love for the world and we want to look at it a little more closely. He says, “For God so loved the world.” Now when we think of God we of course think of the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's the only God, the God of the Unitarians is not the God of the Bible. The God of unity is not the God of the Bible. The God of Christian science is not the God of the Bible. The God of the Mormons is not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is a Trinitarian God. He is a God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and who, with the Son and with the Spirit, form the triune God. “So in the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God.” And that word, the Son of the Father is God and the Father is the Father of the Son. So when we talk about God loving the world we are talking about the Trinitarian God. That means he's the God who in his infinitude is to be worshiped. In his majesty he is to be worshiped. He is the one who is ineffably exalted above all things. Characterized by complete and perfect holiness and flaming purity. We sometimes speak of infinite space; you'll find it often in the newspapers in describing the scientific achievements of our age. It's a magnificent thing, space. I am told by scientists that the space contains worlds that are fleeing away from our society at a hundred million miles an hour. I've forgotten whether it's an hour or second, it's so great.

But listen, what is called infinite space by man is nothing but a spec to the eternal God. The thing that is called infinite time is just a yesterday now past to the infinite God. What right do we

have to love this God? What right do we have to enter into a relationship with this magnificent God? What right would a peasant girl have to make love to an emperor? Well the only reason that a peasant girl might make love to an emperor is if the emperor took the initiative. And in this case this God, this great God, this infinite God, this one who is so mighty, so powerful, so vast in his being, has taken it upon himself to love us and we love him because he first loved us.

So this is the person who is the source of this magnificent work described here. The object of his love is the world. It is a common idea of people who read the Bible, one almost always beware of common ideas, they are commonly wrong. But it is the common idea of many people who read the Bible that when it says, “For God so loved the world that it means that he loved every individual in the world equally without exception and without distinction. In other words, everyone is the equal object of the love of God. Every individual past, present, and future, and all are loved in the precisely same way. Now that is not taught in the Bible; that’s a common conception but it’s not taught in the Bible. In the final analysis what do we follow as Christians? Do we follow common ideas or do we follow what the Bible says? Well, of course all Christians reply, “We follow what the Bible says.” But we do as Christians believe that the Bible says this and other Christians say the Bible says that. We do different. We differ in our interpretations. And so to answer questions like this we need to go to the Bible itself. Does the Bible say that God loves everybody? Every single individual equally, without exception, without distinction? Well let me give you at text, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.” That’s what the Bible says. “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.”

Now one might say, “Well I don’t like that text.” One may say, “I never have understood that text.” But one should not, having heard that text, say that it’s clear that God loves every individual equally without exception, without distinction. As a matter of fact, Paul said, “He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” In other words, Paul says if Jesus Christ has been delivered up for us all we therefore may expect to have everything else. If he’s given the greatest thing that he can give us, Jesus Christ, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? But the fact is, if he has given him for us all,

all men equally without exception and without distinction, why is it that all men don't have faith?

Why is it that all men are not convicted by the Holy Spirit in efficacious grace brought to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? If he that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all shall give us all things, how is it that we don't have all things? Well the answer is obvious, he's not given himself up for us all in the sense of everyone equally, without distinction, without exception.

These are things the Bible says, they're not common ideas, I grant you. But these are things that the Bible says. If it were true that God loved everybody equally, without distinction, without exception, how can the Lord Jesus say, with reference to his disciples, “I pray for them, I don't pray for the world, I pray for them. And for those that shall believe on my name.” How is it? At least if we have this common idea and we ought to go out this morning and say, “Well, it's not quite so clear as I thought it was. Dr. Johnson has got something he can say for what he believes.”

What is the usage of the term “loved” and “world”? Specifically world. What does the Bible teach about the term “world”? Well I suggest you go home and take the term “world” in your concordance and just carefully look up its references. Now yesterday I took down my Greek concordance again and looked at every occurrence of the Greek term *kosmos* in the Johannine writings. That's instructed because even John uses the term in different senses. Let me, for example, ask you to turn to chapter 12, and verse 19. I think you will see that the term “world” does not necessarily in John refer to every single individual without distinction, without exception. In verse 19 of chapter 12 we read, “The Pharisees, therefore, sat among themselves, perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after him.” The world has gone after Christ. Well now I ask you, has everybody equally, without distinction and without exception, gone after Christ? Well of course not. Who are speaking? The Pharisees. They didn't go after him. Occasionally here and there one did, Joseph of Arimathea, later Nicodemus, but generally they were characterized by individuals who did not go after him. The same thing pertained to the Sadducees. Not to speak of all the Gentiles in the world who had never even heard of him at this time. So it's obvious the term world does not, in certain context, refer to everyone.



In 1 John chapter 5, in verse 19, we read, “The whole world lies in the evil one,” a reference to Satan. “The whole world lies in the evil one.” And there it not only says world, it says the whole world. The whole world lies in the evil one. But the facts are that the Christians did not lie in the evil one and John the apostle who wrote that did not lie in the evil one. So the term “world” does not necessarily refer to every individual in the world without distinction, without exception. Turn to John chapter 6, and verse 33. I confess, I had even forgotten about this text in connection with this until yesterday I got out my Greek concordance and looked up every occurrence of *kosmos*. I recommend that. If you don’t have a concordance, go buy one and look up all of the occurrences. Become a student of the Bible. Make a little note, “I want to prove Dr. Johnson and Sam Storms and the rest of those guys wrong.” Because it won’t be long before you’ll be coming up and saying, we’re with you. [Laughter] Now in verse 33 we read, “For the bread of God is he who cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world.” Has life been given to the world? Think about it. Has life been given by Jesus Christ to the world? To everyone equally without distinction, without exception? Why, of course not.

In verse 51 he says, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever. And the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world.” But now in John 10 he says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.” So it’s clear that the term “world” does not refer equally to all men without distinction and without exception. The limited sense is clearly found. Now I’ve just given you a few texts, I suggest you look at all of the significant uses of this term. We could argue from the standpoint of the eternal love of God, for it is immutable. And if God ever loves an individual in the redemptive sense, he loves them for eternity. For his love, one of his attributes, is an infinite love. His mercy is infinite mercy. His love is immutable love. The very fact that it is the love of God means it is immutable, it is eternal. And when it is set upon someone that love is forever. If he loved everybody in the world equally without distinction and without

exception, he would be loving all of those who right now eternally and without exception are being hailed for the judgment of the great day in the future. For his love is eternal and immutable.

Isn't it wonderful to be the object of eternal, immutable love? Now God, of course, loves the world as his creation. In the sense of common grace he bestows blessing upon all men equally, without distinction, without exception. What a beautiful day this is. What a beautiful privilege it is to live. The blessings of clothing, the blessings of rain, the blessings of life. These belong equally and without exception to all men. But his special redemptive love is for his own people. That's what the Bible means when it says, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.”

“My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life.” He said to the unbelievers in his day, “You don't believe in me because you are not of my sheep.” That's why they didn't believe, he said. These are the words of the Lord Jesus. I'm just repeating his words. If you have a conflict, don't get mad at me, I'm just one of his little helpers. Get mad at him. He's the real problem, it's our Lord. No man can come to me except the Father which has sent me, draw him. He's very narrow-minded. “I'm the way, the truth, the life; no man cometh under the Father except by me.” Cannot come by Mormonism, cannot come by Unitarianism, cannot come by unity; you can only come to the Father through me. Narrow-minded, bigoted, one-way: blame him, I'm just his little helper. Fight with him. This is what the word of God says. Well now, what does it mean, “For God so loved the world.” Well, if it doesn't mean everybody equally, without distinction, without exception, what does it mean?

B. B. Warfield, one of the greatest of the theologians of the 20th Century who was for many years Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, said the world here was a word of intensity, not extension. He's not trying to say that God's love is so big that it embraces the whole of the world, but rather that God's word is so deep and significant that it can love people who are as wicked as the world is. That's what he said it meant. So he said this is a word that is to be conceived of qualitatively. His love is such a love that it can embrace people who are in rebellion

against him, who hate him. God loved the world, think of it. Think of his tremendous love that it can embrace people who are his enemies; so qualitatively, not quantitatively.

Well I don't hesitate to disagree with such a great theologian and exegete. I doubt that that is what John has in mind. I think that what he's trying to say is that God's love for the world is a universal love and not a national love. God's love encompasses Gentiles and Jews. Men living throughout the world, both the Jews and Gentiles, because you see, he's talking to a Jewish man who was a Pharisee. Now he had the idea that when the Messiah would come he would come and give the Kingdom to the Jews and he would submit the Gentiles to judgment. That was their doctrine. Their doctrine was that the Jews would be saved, anybody connected with Abraham would be saved. In fact, Abraham sat at the door to the lake of fire and prevented any Israelite from entering in. That was their doctrine, stated in their rabbinical writings. But the Gentiles, they were just people who were fit for judgment. The Gentiles were outside the theocratic community at this time. God had spoken through the Jews. In fact, Jesus said, "It's our Lord again, he said salvation is of the Jews." Of the Jews. In other words, God had spoken to the Jews, through the Jews, to the world and it was his intention that through Israel the message would go out to the Gentiles. But they had, in their hands, the revelation of God.

Now when the Lord Jesus came it is time for the message for the word now to go out to the Gentiles and Apostle Paul becomes the apostle to the Gentiles later and we are seeing indications of it and so he says, "For God so loved the world," that is, his love is enough to embrace, not simply Israel. Israelite believers, but also Gentile believers, that's the meaning of the expression when John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." That's what John means when he says that Jesus is the savior of the world. Think of it; if he doesn't save the world why call him savior? What kind of title is it, savior of the world when he doesn't save the world? He does save the world but we must understand by world both Jews and Gentiles or Israel, the believers in Israel, and the saints of God scattered throughout the world.

Later on Caiaphas makes a prophecy in the 11th chapter, most interesting prophecy, incidentally, he says, “No one considered that it’s expedient for us that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation perished not.” And John adds, “And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation,” this is John 11:52 in case you are wondering, “And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that was scattered abroad.” So in other words, the Lord Jesus came to die not simply for the nation Israel but he came in order that the children of God who was scattered abroad throughout the world might be gathered together.

John 3:17 says, text right after this, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” And if his purposes are accomplished and I believe, and I’m convinced that most of you deep down in your heart believe this though you haven’t maybe thought through it, you believe too that God is a God who accomplishes his purposes, he’s not a frustrated deity. So if he is not a frustrated deity and he came to save the world, the world is to be saved. But not every individual is to be saved. So that term must mean something different from that. All men equally, without exception, without distinction.

Well I wish we had time to go into this further, but at least I hope I’ve caused you to say, if you came in with the other view, “Well there may be something that can be said for what Dr. Johnson believes, although I still think he’s wrong.” That’s all right, I used to think people who said these things were wrong too. That proves there’s hope for anyone. Look at me. [Laughter]. Look at me. There’s hope for anyone. “God can pierce the thinking of even the most stubborn of us,” Paul said. Well let’s drop that for a moment and let’s think about some of the other great things that are said here. Now I can understand why Mr. Moorehouse preached on this text every night. He probably preached on, “For God,” the first night, “So loved the world,” the next, “Gave his only begotten Son,” the next, “Should not perish,” the next, “Have everlasting life,” the next. And then had an extra sermon for, “Whosoever believeth.”

Well, the measure of the love of God is his only begotten Son. Incidentally, that term refers to the deity of Christ. If it's not a divine gift then the gift is less than the measure of the divine love. For God so loved the world and therefore we must have something that measures up to the divine office of the giver and it is in the only begotten Son, he gave his only begotten Son, the Son of his bosom, the Son who as he said in chapter 1, in verse 18, “Who is in the bosom of the Father,” he gave him. What a measure of love. There's a story that I read many years ago written by A. T. Pierson, one of the leaders in missionary activity and also one of the great preachers of a couple of generations ago. He supplied the pulpit often, for Mr. Spurgeon in the metropolitan tabernacle in London though he was a Presbyterian from the United States. Arthur T. Pierson has written some very, very good books about Bible study, about George Mueller, and about the mission field. And many sermons of his have been printed; I've read almost all of them.

He tells the story in one of his sermons somewhere about a man by the name of Hunt, a missionary who had gone to the island of Tahiti in the earlier part of the 19th Century to preach the gospel. He labored there for fifteen years and they did not have a single convert but all of the time he was translating the Bible. The island was characterized by idolatry and sensuality and ignorance and brutality. Finally he completed the Gospel of John and he called together some of his friends among the islanders and the chief of the islanders and asked them to listen, he wanted to check his translation. So he began to read in John 1:1 and when he got to John 3:16 he read, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,” and the chief stopped him. His name was Promair II [phonetic]. He stepped out and he said, “Would you read that again Mr. Hunt?” So he read the text again. “Ah,” said the chief, “That may be true of you white folks, but it's not true of us down here in these islands. The gods have no such love as that for us.” Well, Mr. Hunt took the word “whosoever”, everyone who believes, whosoever, and he expounded that text and showed the poor chief that God's gospel meant him. And as he was expounding it and finally reached the conclusion of it, Promair said, “Well if that's the case, your book shall be my book, your God shall be my God, your people shall be my people, and

your heaven shall be my home.” By the end of the 19th Century there were over a million believers in the islands of Tahiti as a result of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

That word “loved” is a word that expresses the nature of God’s love. It is an eternal, immutable love. And when it is set on a particular person, that love lasts throughout all eternity. It begins back in eternity when God elected his saints to salvation and it culminates in Bethlehem and Calvary historically but it stretches on into the ages of the future. Calvary: the highest expression perhaps of eternal, immutable love. He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? The Son, faith, regeneration, the gift of the Spirit, eternal life, all of the blessings belong to those for whom Christ died, Paul says. Oh, you don’t like that? That’s Paul. That’s what Paul says. Class him with the company of these strange people. Our Lord, Paul, not to mention John and the rest of the apostles, and some of us, their little helpers. I’m kind of rubbing it in now, I take that back, I don’t want to rub it in.

Now he says, “He so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” This is the expression of that love in the greatest result; the gift of the Son. It was an affection that acted and the result is attained. Those who know Greek grammar and have your Greek testaments with you, you’ll understand that the apostle expresses this in a construction that stresses the fact that the love and the result that is attained is really the result that is intended to be attained. Some, incidentally, read this, “For God so loved, that he gave everlasting life.” And they omit that in between, “That whosoever believeth in him should not perish.” They like to think that God, if he’s a God of love, he’ll just give everybody eternal life. Why is it necessary for Christ to suffer? Why is it necessary for the blood to be shed? Why is it necessary for a sacrifice to be made? Why cannot Jesus Christ just be the gift of God for eternal life? Why cannot the Father, just because he’s the Father, convey eternal life to all men? That’s to forget the nature of our God.

He doesn’t save arbitrarily. Why can he not save arbitrarily? Because he’s a holy God. Because he’s a righteous God. And his holiness must be satisfied. His broken law demands penalty.

His righteousness demands judgment and so Christ must die as the sin offering. That’s why he gave his Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish. Luther said -- oh how vividly Luther could speak and how beautifully he could get to the point -- “If I were as our Lord God,” he cried in his vivid way, “And these vile people were as disobedient as they now be, I would knock the world in pieces.”

Well actually, God didn’t do that but he gave the Lord Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for sins. Satisfying the holiness of God, satisfying the righteousness of God, satisfying the demand of his nature that sin be judged and now God is free to give eternal life to those who believe. God’s love is love, but its holy love. Chief Justice Hale used to say, “When I feel myself swayed by the impulse of mercy toward an offender, let me remember that there is a mercy due unto my country.” In other words, righteousness must prevail in our courts and in our nation. How it must prevail in the life of God.

The greatest purpose follows: “That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, (that’s the negative side,) but should have eternal life.” Incidentally, these two aspects that are stressed are put in two different tenses in the Greek text. “That he should not perish, (an event,) but have, (present tense,) and enduring having of eternal life.” Now when he says, “Enduring having,” and when he says, “They shall not perish,” he’s not talking about physical death and just physical life, he’s not talking about annihilation and just living physically, but he’s talking about living in the presence of God. And when he talks about dying or perishing, it’s not simply physical death, but it’s death under the judgment of God that means eternal punishment. Listen to the very next verse, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but the world through him might be saved.” This is a judicial condemnation from which men are freed by the death of Jesus Christ. For when we leave this earthly existence, if we have never believed in Jesus Christ we are ushered into the presence of a God of eternal wrath.

May I emphasize quickly two things as we close? There is an enviable requirement from the human standpoint. The text does say that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have

everlasting life. Even if you should not agree with my exposition of the first clause, you’ll have to admit that there is required of individuals who enter into the presence of God with everlasting life that they believe the message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, believe.

What does it mean to believe? There is a story of a skeptical physician who was administering to a Christian patient. He said to his patient, “I could never understand saving faith. I believe in God and I suppose I believe in Jesus Christ, I’m not conscious of any doubts. I believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and I believe in the Bible, yet I’m not saved, what’s the matter with me?” The Christian patient said, “Well, a day or two ago I believed in you. I believed that you were a very skillful physician; I believed that you could possibly prescribe for me and heal me. But then a few days just recently I discovered I was really sick and so I came to you and I put myself in your hands to be healed. In other words, I trusted you.” He said, “For a time now I’ve been taking some mysterious stuff out of a bottle, I don’t know what it is, I don’t understand it, but I’m trusting you.” Well that’s a good explanation of what saving faith is. It’s to turn to the Lord Jesus and say, “If you’re puzzled, Lord Jesus, Christianity seems to me to be full of mysteries. I don’t understand all those mysteries but I believe that you are trustworthy and I trust you. I entrust myself and my eternal destiny into your hands because you have offered an atoning sacrifice for sinners and that’s what I am. That’s saving faith. Saving faith is the faith that takes Christ to save.

I like that woman who was going to Bay City, Michigan on the train, she was very puzzled, she had never ridden on the train. And she got on the train and she had a ticket in her hand and she showed it to the person next to her, ask him if the train was really going to Bay City and when she was assured it was she still was uncertain. She went across the aisle and showed it to a person across the aisle and still was uncertain, couldn’t think of anything but, “I may be on the wrong train.” And finally the conductor came through and when he came through she showed him her ticket when he asked for her ticket when he asked for the ticket and said, “Is this train going to Bay City?” And he said, “Yes.” And with that she leaned back and before the train started to move she was asleep. She trusted the conductor. That’s what it is to have saving faith; it’s to read in the Bible that God saved



sinners. That I am a sinner. That this salvation is offered to sinners. That if I believe in Jesus Christ who offered this sacrifice for sinners and trust him, I have eternal life. God gives me the Holy Spirit. He gives me eternal life. You may not understand everything about Christianity, that’s why you come. Most of us are saved as Arminians, sanctified into Calvinism. [Laughter] That’s why you keep coming, to grow in the faith and grow in the knowledge of the great thing that has happened to. I’ve been saved by the hand of God and I have life from one who has loved me eternally and immutably, so we rest on the immutable, unchangeable love of God for his people. What a great thing it is to be the object of divine love.

John Newton said, reflecting upon this unlimited invitation “to whosoever”, “Calvinists preach an unlimited gospel, to whosoever believeth is we who can really preach that. Because we know that salvation works because it’s one that God gives us.” He said, “He was so glad this text did not read, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that if John Newton believed in him he would not perish but have everlasting life,’” because he said there may be some other fellow named John Newton and the text might have him in mind but the fact that it said, “Whosoever,” included that John Newton, and this John Newton, and any other John Newton.

Let me sum it up: God loved both Jews and Gentiles. His love is as wide as the world in its comprehension. Both Jews and Gentiles, not simply Israel, but the Gentiles as well. He gave the Son; only begotten Son, the Son of his heart. We believe, we have; could anything be simpler? May God help you to come. Come to Christ, believe in him. By the grace of God, lean on Jesus Christ and let eternal love sustain you throughout all the ages of eternity.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we know Lord we have not expounded anything in this text that is new but oh how significant it is to us who believe. O Father, if there are some in this audience who have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, draw them to the Son that they too may be taught of God as the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. We remember Thou hast said, Lord, “No man can come to me except the Father which has sent me,

draw them.” O Father, draw them. Draw men and women in this audience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

That they may truly rest upon him...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**