

THE LOVE OF GOD

SERMON preached by Mr.H.Dawson, at Union Chapel, Bethersden, on Good Friday Morning, April 15th, 1960.

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.

This is a word which is familiar to you all, a word that is often quoted, but it is an unspeakable mercy for a poor sinner to realise a living interest therein. This word must never be lifted out of its setting, but it must be always pondered in the light of the great truth which is set forth in the context: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again," - born from above, - "he cannot see the kingdom of God". - "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again". I do hope that grace will be given at this time to preacher and people alike to contemplate this word. The subject is sublime, and our minds are very limited in considering it, and any of us who have the mercy to be taught of God can enter into it but little. In this subject there are ocean depths:

"Angelic minds cannot explore,
This vast unfathomed sea,
'Tis void of bottom, brim or shore
And lost in Deity".

I expect there have been thousands, tens of thousands of sermons, preached from this word down through the ages, but when all is said and done that men sent of God to preach can say in seeking to preach from it, nothing could be more helpful, and simple, and encouraging than to stick closely to the words of the text

itself: "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".

I will look at this subject, as grace is given, from three or four viewpoints; and it might be well first of all, to look a little at what is the setting of it. You will be well aware, all of you that read the Word of God, as you ought to do, that it was spoken by the Saviour to Nicodemus. Now Nicodemus was a man who came to Jesus, and while he was wonderfully wise in the wisdom of this world, he did not understand the things of God which were set forth by Jesus Christ; but there was something that lived and moved in the breast of Nicodemus whereby he became what it is a mercy to be made: an honest enquirer. There is a word that you dear young people might remember, and God says it: "I will be enquired of by you, O house of Israel, to do these things". Long ago the queen of Sheba journeyed to see Solomon, and to prove him with hard questions, and to enquire concerning the Name of the Lord: it is a mercy to have that enquiring spirit deep down in our hearts, for the Word of God says: "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him". If any of you young people, (I am still addressing you, for I do wish you well, and seek your eternal welfare); and I say if any of you are asking the way to Zion, with your faces thitherward, and you have it in your hearts to be found among God's dear people, living and dying, you are welcome to go to the throne of Grace, like the woman in the Gospel, who "fell down at Jesus' feet and told Him all the truth". Nicodemus, then, as I understand it, had this enquiring spirit, and when he appeared before Jesus, how tenderly Jesus Christ dealt with him. Nicodemus, with all his wisdom which he had acquired from earthly sources, could not begin as yet to understand how it was possible for a man to be born again, (margin reading "born from above"), and he questioned the Saviour about it. In answering Nicodemus Jesus Christ sets forth the truth, and it will be well if you and I are given grace to heed it: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again".

Now Nicodemus was very religious when he approached the Saviour, and he had been brought up in all the ritual of the Mosaic Law; but the Saviour made it plain that all his religion which he had acquired was just that which was born of the flesh, and it was no more than the doings of the great 'I'. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh"; and there is only one issue to such religion, dear friends, young and old, "Tekel" must be stamped upon it:- "Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting". "That which is born of the spirit is spirit", and when a sinner has that inestimable mercy come down into his heart, and to be born again, then he is found at Jesus' feet to get an interest in the things of God, such as can be communicated alone by the Spirit of God, whose prerogative it is alone to lead poor sinners into the truth. In speaking to Nicodemus the Saviour comes to this great word which I have read, and on which I hope I may have grace given to say a little to you: "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". Let us look, as grace is given, at this tremendous theme. It is so tremendous that it makes us tremble to try to say even just a little about it. "God is love", what a declaration! "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life". O how good it would be if you and I, dear friends, could go deeper down into the Love of God than any of us seem to do as yet! Said Paul to the Thessalonians: "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ". What a word that was too that the Apostle Paul penned to the godly Ephesians: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God". Many of us can echo the words of our hymnwriter :-

"God only knows the love of God,
Oh, that it now were shed abroad,
In my poor, stony heart".

Looking at this wording here: "God so loved", I would remind you of how the Apostle Paul set it forth to the godly Ephesians, and he speaks of the love of God in its breadth, and yet who can describe it? It is breadth; but there is no boundary, no limit. It is a boundary that, if you can call it a boundary, embraces people of every "Kindred tribe and tongue", and "Whosoever believeth in Him". Such is the love of God in its breadth. Paul speaks of the love of God in its length, but then it is a length without an ending, because the love of God is everlasting in its nature; and he speaks too of the love of God in its depth, and yet who can describe that depth? It is a deep, without a bottom; remember that. "Great is the mystery of godliness, God was made manifest in the flesh"; such was the love of God in its depth that the Word of God says: "Who remembered us in our low estate, for His mercy endureth for ever". Such was the love of God in its depth that it goes right down underneath the Adam fall; such was the love of God in its depth, - who can describe in thinking on it what were the sufferings of Christ:

"What He endured no tongue can tell,
Which must have sunk our souls to hell",

otherwise. Here is the love of God in its depth: other-

"O, love, thou bottomless abyss,
My sins are swallowed up in thee,
Covered is my unrighteousness,
From condemnation I am free;
While Jesu's blood, through earth and skies,
Mercy, eternal mercy, cries".

Oh, the love of

God in its depth! Then, Paul speaks about this wondrous love in its height; but however high you climb in "heavenly places in Christ Jesus", as that sweet blessed experience is granted unto you, you do not reach the top of it; and you cannot do it, because it is height without any top to it: "As high as the heaven is above the earth", the Word of God uses as an illustration, but it is higher than that, dear friends. Much might be said about the love of God from that viewpoint, in its breadth, and depth, and length and height; but when all is said and done, how wonderful it is when you get just a little of it let down into our hearts! Then you can feel as you want to feel, and enter into that Scripture: "God is love"; and Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God". In this subject the Saviour set before Nicodemus what was a wonderful expression of the love of God: "For God so loved the world", - here is God the Father showing forth His love in an infinite, indescribable fulness: "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". This is a wonderful theme to contemplate, ask God to help you to think on it; and remember, in contemplating this subject, you and I need to feel like Moses when He stood before the burning bush: "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground". Nothing less than this would do that sinners might be saved, and that they might be a prepared people - "before prepared unto glory" the Word of God says. How it shows to us what sin really is in all the wickedness of it, no words of any preacher can adequately describe it, but:

"Sin to pardon without blood,
Never in God's nature stood,
Think not that He can or may
Pardon any other way",

In the covenant that was

"ordered in all things and sure", wherein Jesus Christ was made the Mediator, there was one tremendous truth: "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission on sin"; and that truth was set forth throughout Old Testament times in how God ordained that Israel of old should live according to the ritual of the Mosaic law. There must have been millions of birds and beasts slain, and rivers of blood run away, but with all those sacrifices beyond any calculation of man's mind, and all the rivers of blood that did flow, it was only to set forth this great truth: "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins", but

"Not all the blood of beasts," (or birds)
"On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience ease,
Or wash away the stain".

And "God so loved the world",-
the Father did all that He could do (speaking with great reverence) "and He gave His only begotten Son"; and it was ordained that in the fulness of time He should come down into this world, and be seen among men, verily Man, made of a woman, made under the law, and, blessed be His Name, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". In that wondrous humanity, born of the virgin, through the power of the Holy Spirit:

"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Pleased a Man with men to be";

and, as God in our nature, He lived under the law, and kept it, yielded to it complete obedience in every jot and tittle, and then died in our stead on Calvary's cross; He shed His precious sin-atoning blood on behalf of all those ordained to life eternal, and now:

"Jesu's blood through earth and skies,
Mercy, eternal mercy, cries".

"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 in thinking on this, Oh that you and I might find in our hearts a welling up on the love of God, and echo the words of Paul: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift," - "His only begotten Son". Look at it from this viewpoint as grace is given, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son". What did He give Him to be? and to do? Think on it like that, as the Lord shall help us. He gave Him to be a Refuge for sinners:-

"A Refuge for sinners the Gospel makes known,
'Tis found in the merits of Jesus alone",

He gave Him that He might magnify His name as Jehovah Rophi, "I am the Lord which healeth thee". He gave Him to be a wise Physician, and such a Physician is He:

"What though bad is your condition,
And your wounds you can't endure,
Christ, the sinners' wise Physician,
Will effect a perfect cure".

"He is able to save unto the uttermost, all them that come unto God" in His great Name. Yes. He gave Him, blessed be His Name, that God and Man might be brought together on friendly terms: "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus"; so that you

" - - can no denial take,
While you plead for Jesus' sake";

and, wonder of wonders, which beggars all language to say much about it: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" that He might be the sinner's Substitute. There is one word which I think is the

most tremendous word in the Holy Bible, book divine, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we may be made the righteousness of God in Him". "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all"; on Calvary's Cross it was -

" - - a scene of matchless grace,
'Twas Jesus in the sinner's place",

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"; He gave Him to be our Advocate on high. It is a good word, - you will be glad of it if you are taught of God: "If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous";

"Founded on right Thy prayer avails,
The Father smiles on Thee;
And now Thou in Thy Kingdom art, -
Dear Lord, remember me".

"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". Looking again into the context, how the Saviour brought this truth before Nicodemus by a very beautiful, a very simple illustration, which would be wonderfully familiar to Nicodemus from Israel's history: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up". Do mark the wording here, dear friends, young friends especially, "Son of Man be lifted up", "That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life". The Son of Man must be lifted up, and so a door of mercy is opened in heaven thereby: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me", - all sorts of men, people of every kindred, tribe and tongue shall dwell on His Name with sweetest song. It might be helpful to look just a little at this lifting up. "Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up". First of all,

Jesus Christ was lifted up in eternal purposes, before time was born, or the world was built, then, in the covenant "ordered in all things and sure" Jesus Christ was lifted up to be, in the fulness of time, made manifest as a Saviour, and a great one. When "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth", and Eden's garden was established, and Adam and Eve dwelt therein, and, alas, (I take up no time in going into the details) the Adam fall took place, the Lord God drove out the man and the woman too; and when the angel with the fiery flaming sword, which turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life was there at the entrance to it, even then there was a lifting up of Jesus Christ. The first lifting up of Jesus Christ made known to poor sinners: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head", and that brings me to the point: Jesus Christ is lifted up in the word of God from end to end. Do remember, do not cavil at it; some folks argue about it, but it is a beautiful and blessed truth:

"The Scriptures and the Lord,
Bear one tremendous Name;
The written and the Incarnate Word,
In all things are the same".

And Jesus Christ said: "In the volume of the Book it is written of Me"; and as you search the Scriptures how evident it is they are they which testify of Jesus Christ as the dear sinners' Friend. Solemn it is that nowadays the Word of God is so much assailed by enemies within the church professing, and from without; godless men, although scholars, seek to undermine the blessed authority of the Word of God, and suggest that this and that which is recorded therein is not inspired truth. Do remember what the Word of God says: "God spake all these words"; "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God", -

never let that truth go, all Scripture is God breathed; and if you begin to mutilate the Holy Bible, and think your own thoughts about it, and that you will receive this, and not receive that, if you live like that, and die like that, I tell you plainly before God and man this Good Friday morning, your mutilated Bible will be hung round your neck, and sink you deeper down into eternal misery than you otherwise would have been. Remember that!

"Divine Instructor, gracious Lord,
O be for ever near;
Help me to read Thy sacred Word,
And find my Saviour there!

Yes! The Son of Man must be lifted up in the Word of God, and it means too in the Gospel. Who can preach the Gospel properly unless they start like this: "I determine to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified". My dear brethren in the Ministry, and the poor preacher in the pulpit, we would, if we could, preach a great deal better than we feel we do. I am in full agreement with Berridge:-

"I try, and try again,
To publish Jesu's worth;
And fain I would but never can.
Set half his riches forth".

"Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up". "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and Ourselves your servants for Jesu's sake"; and you listening to the Gospel, wherever you listen to it, you must be saying before God, "Sir we would see Jesus", -

"Nought will content our hearts,
But fellowship with Him."

It is not just sermons you want to listen to, worked out on this theme and that, which

may be interesting to listen to, and possibly instructive, what you want is something to eat!

"I seek, and hope to find,
A portion for my soul",

"The meek shall eat, and be satisfied, and shall increase their joy in the Lord". The Word of God says: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled". The Son of Man must be lifted up! How He was lifted up when He dwelt on earth, before He reached Calvary's Cross; how He was lifted up in the life He lived! what a lovely life it was, beautiful in its perfection:

"In Him the Father never saw,
The least transgression of His law;
In Him we then perfection view,
The saints in Him are perfect too!"

"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". He was lifted up in the life He lived, in the holiness of it, the blessed obedience of it, - "Thy law is within My heart", - and at the end of His life - "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do". When He was lifted up at last on Calvary's cross, He was lifted up higher than the heavens in the infinite merit of His death:

"It is finished, cried the Lord,
In His dying minute;
Holy Ghost, repeat the word,
Full salvation's in it",

Yes. Remember, dear friends, (I have already hinted at it), He is now lifted up

at God's right hand: - "For this Man, after He had offered one Sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool".

"He lives! the great Redeemer lives!
What joy this blest assurance gives,
And now before His Father, God,
Pleads the full merits of His blood."

He is lifted up in all the triumph of His resurrection from the dead on that Easter morn long ago; and as you and I are here in the attitude of worship:

"Jesus on the eternal throne,
For mourners intercedes".

There is one more lifting up which is unspeakably important, and that is the Son of Man must be lifted up in our lives and in our lips: - "And they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus". Do you think, as you are here before God, that the life you are living does give evidence that Jesus Christ is lifted up in it? and in what drops from your lips all day long? Is it the truth that Jesus Christ is lifted up in what you say? Is it the truth: "Our conversation is in heaven"? Suffer the word of exhortation, dear friends. The Son of Man must be lifted up, "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world".

"Let our lives and acts profess,
The holy Gospel we profess".

Much might be said along that line of thought. Let us look at the subject from another viewpoint, coming along towards the 'Amen'. "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". There is much controversy at times about the world referred to in this word, but if you seek to compare Scripture with Scripture the meaning of it will be made very solemnly plain. The world to whom God gave His only begotten Son is that world which includes "whosoever believeth in Him". No unbelievers are in the world referred to in the text that God so loved. Remember that. The Word of God tells us, - let Jesus Christ speak on His own behalf, (I say that with great reverence) - and Jesus Christ said to His Father: "I pray for them, I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine. And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them". Jesus Christ is glorified in every poor sinner who is enabled to believe in Him for Whom He is, - verily God, verily Man. "We believe, and are sure Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God". There is one thing about this word which I feel is very admirable, and again, I speak with great reverence, how wonderfully simply Jesus Christ preached His own Gospel to Nicodemus, and there is no doubt whatever that Nicodemus was wrought upon by it, - the Spirit of God led Him into the truth of it, and he became one of those in that category: "Whosoever believeth in Him". What a wonderful mercy! "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" is a question in the Word of His grace; let your conscience tell you what is the answer - "Dost thou believe on the Son of God"? "What think ye of Christ?" How many this Good Friday morn can appeal to God:

"To me Christ is more precious far,
Than life and all its comforts are".

Look
at it again. "Whosoever believeth", irrespective of age, whoever they are, wherever they are, "Whosoever

believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life". Now when the sinner is born again, and is being brought into a solemn awareness of how sad his state by nature is, the Adam fall ruin being made manifest, he understands a little about this word 'perish'; because under the law, (and "By the law the knowledge of sin",) the poor sinner trembles lest it should be the ultimate outcome at the end of his life, - when he appears before God, to eternally perish.

"If my soul is sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well".

But even while he feels under the law that he must perish, there is something deep down in his heart that says:

"Yet save a trembling sinner, Lord,
Whose soul, still hovering round thy Word,
Would light some promise there,
Some sure support against despair".

"God be merciful to me, a sinner", a poor perishing sinner, a hell-deserving sinner; "God be merciful to me". "Whosoever believeth" Does that include you? What does it mean? "And without faith it is impossible to please Him". "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek Him". Whosoever believeth! Sometimes it is set forth as "looking unto Jesus"; sometimes "Asking the way to Zion with one's face thitherward"; Yes! Sometimes it is set forth like this: "Behold! he prayeth". "Whosoever believeth". The outcome of it is this: "Whosoever believeth", "From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores". "Whosoever believeth" as Job confesses: "Behold! I am vile":

"O Lord, how vile am I,
 Unholy and unclean;
 How can I dare to venture nigh,
 With such a load of sin!"

"Whosoever believeth" - "By grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast". "Whosoever believeth": "Salvation is of the Lord", in every jot and tittle of it. "Whosoever believeth" :-

"If ever my poor soul is saved,
 'Tis Christ must be the way".

"Whosoever believeth", as Job describes it: "Though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him"; - as Jonah believed: "Though I am cast out of Thy sight, I will look again toward Thy holy temple. "Whosoever believeth":-

"The soul that with sincere desires,
 Seeks after Jesus' love,
 That soul the Holy Ghost inspires,
 With breathings from above".

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life". What does this beautiful and blessed subject, of which I have said such a little, mean to you? It should be, and it will be, - if it does mean to you what it means to people taught of God:

"Jesus is the one Thing needful,
 I without Him perish must;
 Gracious Spirit, make me heedful,
 Help me in Thy Name to trust,
 And with pleasure,
 In Him as my portion boast."

This word, so familiar to us all, as I said at the outset, is such a deep that you and I can only as it were stand on the sea shore and gaze upon it. O that God, as we journey on through life, would more often shed abroad His love in our hearts, that we might evidence, more and more, Whose we are, Whom we serve. "By love serve one another"; and remember:

"Love is the golden chain that binds,
 The favoured souls above;
 And he's a heir of heaven that finds
 His bosom glow with love".

Amen.