

Lent 4
March 11, 2018

John 3:14-21
402-391-392-399

God's Love in Jesus – Universal and Personal

- I. Universally and personally needed.
- II. Universally given.
- III. Personally received by faith.

Dear Christian friends,

I've preached several times on these verses but it's always with some hesitation. These are some of the MOST FAMILIAR and **clear** verses of God's Word. I pray it for **every** sermon but perhaps especially when preaching on these verses. "**Please**, Lord, don't let me GET IN THE WAY of Your Word! Please keep me from MESSING and MUDDING up Your **clear** Word!"

So I prayed as I **worked on** this sermon – a sermon with the theme, "GOD'S LOVES in Jesus – UNIVERSAL and PERSONAL." I bet that really **caught your eye** in the bulletin. That got you REALLY EXCITED, right?

That's not the **most exciting** sermon theme but then the excitement and comfort come from GOD'S OWN WORDS here. Jesus conversation with Nicodemus show us that GOD'S LOVE IN JESUS is 1)universally and personally needed, 2)is universally given and 3)personally received by faith.

I. Universally and personally needed.

God's love in Jesus is UNIVERSALLY and PERSONALLY NEEDED. That's another way of saying **all people** are guilty sinners. That's a clear BIBLICAL TRUTH. These verses are IN BOTH the OT and NT. "***There is no one who is righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands. They all turned away; together they became useless. There is no one who does what is good; there is not even one.***"

The Bible also clearly teaches that it's NOT JUST our **sinful lives** that have MADE US **guilty sinners**. At the heart of our **sin problem** are our SINFUL HEARTS. "***Surely I was a sinner at birth,***" David confessed, "***sinful from the time my mother conceived me.***" A few verses before these Jesus had told Nicodemus, "***Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.***" Sinful parents don't give birth to LITTLE ANGELS. **Sinful parents** give birth to sinful children.

That's a UNIVERSAL TRUTH that needs to be taken PERSONALLY. **That** is true about all people so it's also TRUE ABOUT ME/you. God is not just talking about OTHER people and their sinful hearts and lives. God is talking about YOUR/my **sinful heart** and life. That's something Nicodemus AS A PHARISEE would have trouble taking **personally**. Pharisees were DEVOUT – **sincere** – **religious** people. They tried to live **good** lives. They took their relationship with God PERSONALLY and SERIOUSLY. The Pharisees thought everything was OK between God and them. It was other people who were IN TROUBLE with God.

All people need to **take God** SERIOUSLY and PERSONALLY. God's commandments are UNIVERSAL – they apply to all people – NO EXCEPTIONS. **God's commandments** are also PERSONAL – they apply to **your life/my** life.

Take another look at God in that OT reading. WHY was God so upset with those Israelites that He sent poisonous snakes to **punish** them? They were grumbling and complaining – AGAIN! – and God had had enough of it. HOW OFTEN have you – and **I'm just as guilty!** – grumbled and complained about the WEATHER – **politicians** – prices at the drugstore, the grocery store – health problems?

When we grumble about whatever what are we REALLY SAYING? "God, You're doing a LOUSY JOB taking care of me. I deserve better than this!" Oh, REALLY?!

God's love in Jesus is UNIVERSALLY and PERSONALLY needed. WITHOUT it all would **"perish"** – **condemned for their sins to hell's eternal banishment and punishment.** That includes you and me **condemned because** of our sins to hell forever. Jesus here **repeatedly used** JUST THOSE words – **"condemned – perish."** So **rejoice to hear** ONCE MORE that **God's love in Jesus** is also...

II. Universally given.

To help understand God's love Jesus directed Nicodemus to that familiar OT story of the bronze snake. **"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

Jesus is talking about HIS DEATH on the cross - that He **"MUST be lifted up"** and die on the cross. Now, **nobody can force** God to do something God DOESN'T WANT to do. **We can be forced** to do things **against our will** but not God. This is the **"must"** of God's love. **God's own love for rebellious – defiant sinners** FORCED Him to **send and sacrifice** His own **"beloved Son"** SO THAT we **"should not perish but have eternal life."**

The words are SO FAMILIAR – each word SO FULL of **grace and mercy – comfort and peace.** God **"SO loved"** – loved IN THIS WAY – **to such a degree** – such an **extent.** **"So LOVED"** – **not because** we're SO LOVEABLE but **only because** God is SO GRACIOUS. **God's love** for us is **not a BLIND** love that **doesn't see** or that **simply overlooks** our sin. **God's love** DEALT with our sin **by giving us** Jesus as our Savior. **God's love understood the eternal consequences** of our sin **even if people refuse** to. GOD HIMSELF would **have to save us to keep us from "perishing."** **"God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten SON."** As Nicodemus sat and talked with this rabbi Jesus of Nazareth he was IN FACT talking with the **eternal Son** of God Himself. **Jesus of Nazareth is the Son** of God INCARNATE – IN THE FLESH.

God **"GAVE"** His Son – **sent Jesus** on the MISSION to be our Savior. **Born one of us** Jesus **took the place** of ALL people under God's law. **In our place** and **giving us** all the credit Jesus **actually lived** that life of PERFECT **love – trust – obedience** that WE OWED God but **never could** live. THEN CAME the time for Jesus to **"be lifted up"** on His cross – for Jesus to BE CONDEMNED and **punished** for the sins of the **whole world.** ALL **sins** of ALL **people** of ALL **time** **all placed on Jesus** and **personally paid for** by Jesus with His death that first Good Friday.

As clearly as the **Bible teaches** the UNIVERSAL NEED for Jesus the Bible **also proclaims** that Jesus was UNIVERSALLY GIVEN. **All people need** Jesus and Jesus **came as the Savior** of **all** people. **"God so loved"** **not just people** FROM ALL OVER the world but **the whole "world"** of people. **Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."** **"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,"** **John wrote** and **then added,** **"and not only for our sins but for the sins of the whole world."** There are **plenty more passages** that STRESS Jesus is the UNIVERSAL and ONLY Savior.

Because **God gave** Jesus to **"the world"** ALL people **can be sure** that Jesus is THEIR Savior – Jesus **paid** for all THEIR sins - Jesus **shares** His Easter victory over death with THEM. **Nobody** is EXCLUDED from **claiming Jesus** as their PERSONAL Savior.

III. Personally received by faith.

"God so loved the world that He gave" us **Jesus to be** our Savior **so that absolutely no one** NEEDS to **"be condemned and perish"** in hell. But **it's another** CLEAR BIBLICAL TEACHING that the **majority** of people will **"perish."** Jesus **tells** us that, **"wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to**

life, and only a few find it. God's UNIVERSAL love in Jesus must be PERSONALLY received by faith. ***"That whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."***

Believing – faith – is taking God at His Word – counting on God to keep His promises. Go back to that OT reading. God's remedy looked stupid and ridiculous. A FAKE metal snake ***"lifted up on a pole"*** to save people from REAL snakes biting them with REAL, FATAL poison! But God promised that ***"whoever"*** looked at that metal snake ***"would not perish but live."*** Those who didn't believe GOD'S Word – who rejected GOD'S cure – they died – NOT BECAUSE that bronze snake couldn't save them but ONLY BECAUSE they refused to believe God's promise and look at that snake. But ***"whoever believed"*** God's Word and looked in faith to that metal snake – ***"they lived."*** God's Word and promise DIDN'T FAIL **those who trusted** God.

That faith is PERSONAL. A person can only believe FOR HIMSELF and not for anybody else. God's love in Jesus is UNIVERSAL – for all people. God's love in Jesus is also PERSONAL – for EACH INDIVIDUAL person by himself. Notice how Jesus talks about God ***"so loving the WORLD"*** and then uses the SINGULAR ***"that WHOEVER believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*** Jesus repeats that truth. ***"The ONE who believes in Him is not condemned, but the ONE who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God."*** Notice too that this is not a ONE TIME once believing but an ON-GOING – continuing to believe that saves.

"Whoever" personally trusts in Jesus as his Savior is ***"not condemned – has eternal life."*** Trusting in Jesus as our Savior the holy Lord God sees ABSOLUTELY NOTHING to condemn us for. Our sins? ALL ***"washed away"*** in Jesus' precious blood. We've been clothed with Jesus' righteousness – HIS PERFECT life. Trusting in Jesus we ALREADY NOW ***"have eternal life."*** We don't have to WAIT UNTIL we go to heaven to ***"have eternal life."*** Because we already now ***"have eternal life"*** we are going straight to heaven when we die. NOT ONLY that – on the Last Day Jesus will raise our dead bodies back to life and with a glorified body and soul we will live forever with Jesus in ***"the new heaven and new earth."***

That is SO AWESOME. It's SO SAD to then hear Jesus explain that so many PERSONALLY reject God's love for them in Jesus. ***"The light has come into the world, yet people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. In fact, everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, or else his deeds would be exposed."***

HOW TRAGIC – God loves ***"the world"*** and people love ***"the darkness"*** and their ***"evil deeds."*** Rather than GIVE UP their sin they give up Jesus and with Him God's love – forgiveness – eternal life in heaven. They intentionally avoid God just to AVOID HEARING God rebuke them for their sin and call them to repent and return to Him. They END UP ***"condemned and perish"*** with no one to blame but themselves.

God's love in Jesus is UNIVERSAL – and please – TAKE THAT PERSONALLY! Amen.

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