



from the desk of . . .

Rande Wayne Smith
D.Min., Th.M., M.Div.

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IF I HAD ONE SERMON TO PREACH

John 3:14-17

When we think about well-known passages of Scripture, especially ones that are familiar to followers of Jesus & nonbelievers alike: the 23rd Psalm, the nativity narrative from the Gospel of Luke, & possibly, the Beatitudes, come quickly to mind.

But there's another passage, a verse that many of us memorized as children, which pops up all over the place. We see it on signs at most every sporting event. (X) ...



"God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life."

Theologian Martin Luther called this verse ...
"the miniature Gospel."

I actually knew a lady who kept a copy of this verse in a walnut shell in her purse, because she was taught as a child that John 3:16 was ... "the Gospel in a nutshell."



John 3:16 was the verse through which Dwight L. Moody (X) came to totally appreciate the greatness of God's love.

Moody had been on a trip to England in the early days of his ministry, & there he met a young British preacher, Henry Moorhouse. (X)



During one of their conversations, Moorhouse mentioned to Moody ... "I'm thinking of going to America."

"Well," replied Moody, "if you should ever get to Chicago, come down to my Church,
& I'll give you a chance to preach."

Now you understand, this is something we preachers say to other preachers as a way of being polite. But in most cases we assume, & at times even hope, that they'll never come. And that certainly was the situation with Moody ... since he'd never heard Moorhouse preach,
he had no idea what he'd say.

(We preachers are pretty protective of our flock.)

Well, not long after Moody had returned to Chicago, he received a telegram from Moorhouse ...

"Have just arrived in NY.
Will be at your Church in Chicago on Sunday."

Well, Moody didn't know what to do ... & to complicate matters; he was just about to leave for a series of meetings up in MI.

"Oh, my," he thought, "here I'm about to be gone on Sunday, Moorhouse is coming,
& I promised to let him preach."

Finally he said to his wife & to the leaders of the Church ... "Let's let him preach once ... & then if he does okay, you can decide if he should speak again." And with that, Moody left for his week of speaking engagements.

When he returned he asked his wife ...

"How did the young preacher do?"

"Oh, he's a better preacher than you are. ...

He's telling sinners that God loves them."

"That's not right," Moody replied.

"God doesn't love sinners."

"Well," she said, "go & listen to him yourself."

"What? Do you mean that he's still here?"

"Yes, he's been preaching every night, & he has only one verse for a text. It's John 3:16."

Well, Moody did go to the meeting that evening.

Moorhouse got up & began by saying ...

"I've been hunting for a text all week, & I haven't been able to find a better one than John 3:16.

So I think we'll just talk about it once more."

And He did.

Moody wrote of that night in his journal that for the 1st time I clearly understood the greatness of God's love.

And that's what we're going to be talking about today.

Good News as recorded by John, to you who have gathered here this morning for worship at C.C.R.M.

Within your hearing & seeing comes the Word of the Lord ...

(video ... begin at xxxxx & end at xxxxx)

As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior. (John 3:14-17)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

It's a common thing to say that God loves us. "God loves you, & so do I." But many people who think that fail to recognize that it's only because of Jesus Christ that we can totally understand that concept.

I mean, it's not because of nature that we know that God loves us. Now certainly, when we have great weather we're thankful to God for that.

And then, many of us have visited some incredibly beautiful places in our country & throughout the world that have taken our breath away.

Berchtesgaden, Germany ... (X)



Killarney National Park in Ireland ... (X)



Lake Louise in Alberta, Canada ... (X)



Theodore Roosevelt National Park in ND ... (X)



are 4 places did that for me. Awesome!

And we've all witnessed magnificent (X)
sunrises & sunsets



& wished they'd last for hours instead of just a few brief moments. How about a clear night sky that's filled with stars? ... (X)



The Psalmist proclaimed ...

"How clearly the sky reveals God's glory!" (The Psalms 19:1)

Each of those things, & possibly dozens more, help us to really appreciate God's creative genius.

But, even as I say that, there are also some barren, wretched places on this planet. The desert (X) in eastern CA is called Death Valley for a reason. ...



The same is true about the Dead Sea. ... (X)



Think about Siberia. ... (X)



There are some really desolate, horrible places.

And at times we have gloomy, overcast skies.
And there are floods, & droughts, & tornadoes, &
hurricanes, & earthquakes to contend with. So, nature
& our world tells us something about God's creation ...
but they don't necessarily reveal God's love.

We know that God loves us because He's given us His
Son to be crucified for us, & that act brings us back into
fellowship with Him. (X)



"This is what love is: it is not that
we have loved God, but that he loved us & sent his Son to
be the means by which our sins are forgiven." (1 John 4:10)

That amazing love is God's greatest gift.
It's through Jesus that we know God's love ... & love God.

And you understand what that means ...
God has initiated what's necessary for us to have a
personal relationship with Him.

I've put in your outline the words (horizontally) from
John 3:16. (I came across this a # of years ago.)

It's called "Christ - The Greatest Gift."

Please fill in the blanks:

God ... the greatest **lover**
 loved so much ... the greatest **degree**
 the world ... the greatest **company**
 that he gave ... the greatest **act**
 his only Son ... the greatest **gift**
 so that everyone ... the greatest **opportunity**
 who believes ... the greatest **simplicity**
 in him ... the greatest **attraction**
 may not die ... the greatest **promise**
 but ... the greatest **difference**
 have ... the greatest **certainty**
 eternal life ... the greatest **possession**

Have you ever, truly stopped to appreciate God's greatest gift to you ... the gift of Jesus Christ? ... This morning we're going to look at some of the reasons why He is the great gift & why we should believe in Him.

The 1st reason is ... Jesus is the **best** that God had to **give**. God loved the world so much that He gave the very best. That's obvious from the word "only" (μονογενῆ) that's used to describe Jesus in our Scripture lesson ... "God's only Son." The word means "unique." Jesus is the unique Son of God. There's no one else like Him!

There's no one who is His equal. He's one of a kind.

The very nature of love is to give the best & not hold back ... & the greater the object of love ... the costlier the gift. "Any old thing" isn't good enough.

So, when God gave Jesus
He gave the very best "gift" in the universe. (Romans 6:23)

God also gave the best gift in another sense.
For Jesus isn't just a creature made in the image of God
as you & I are (Genesis 1:26) ... He is God in the flesh. (X)

"Christ is the visible likeness
of the invisible God." (Colossians 1:15)



"The Word became a human being &
full of grace & truth, lived among us." (John 1:14)

Consequently, when God gave Jesus ... He gave Himself.

One of my professors at G.C.T.S. was also a
professional counselor. One day in class he shared about
a couple who were having marital difficulties. There was
much bitterness & hardness, & a lack of understanding.

At one point the husband spoke up in obvious
exasperation ...

"I've given you everything. I've given you a new home.
I've given you jewelry. I've given you a new car.
I've given you" And the list went on & on.

And finally, when he ended his tirade, his wife
quietly responded ... "that's true John,
you've given me everything ... but yourself."

We listen to that & we understand what's being said.
The greatest gift that anyone can give is **themselves**.

The 2nd reason why Jesus Christ is God's greatest gift is because this was planned **"before the beginning of time."** (Titus 1:2)

God had always intended to give Jesus.

"He gave us this grace by means of Christ Jesus before the beginning of time." (2 Timothy 1:9)

This is why so many passages in Scripture speak of God having put Jesus to death.

The Prophet Isaiah records words of God about the crucifixion 8 centuries before it took place. He wrote ...

"The LORD says, 'It was my will that he should suffer; his death was a sacrifice to bring forgiveness.'" (Isaiah 53:10)

Peter also recognized this truth.

On the day of Pentecost, he proclaimed ...

"In accordance with his own plan God had already decided that Jesus would be handed over to you; & you killed him by letting sinful men crucify him." (The Acts 2:23)

Don't ever think that when sin came into the world through Adam & Eve (Romans 5:12) that it caught God by surprise. Or that it caused God to go back to the drawing board to figure out what He could do to correct it. Jesus was not plan "B".

God knew what would happen (X)
 "even before the world was made."
 (Ephesians 1:4)



Consequently, before He set the universe in motion, before He created human beings, God had determined to send Jesus to die for our salvation. (1 Corinthians 2:7)

Maybe the best way to understand all of this is found in the story of Abraham, when God calls him to offer up his son, Isaac, on Mt. Moriah. I believe Jesus was referring to that event when He told the Jews of His day ... "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see the time of my coming; he saw it & was glad." (John 8:56) It was through that test that Abraham learned that God was going to give Jesus to be our Savior.

But for us to understand the story properly we must begin by remembering that Abraham was an old man when God came to him & told him to offer Isaac. He was 86 years old when his 1st son, Ishmael, was born to Hagar, his wife, Sarai's, personal slave. (Genesis 16:15-16)

He was 100 years old when Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

Now the story takes place when Isaac is a young man ... & Abraham loves him very much.

The 2 of them have had a # of years to build a relationship. There was a bond of trust between them.

Abraham loved him, not only because he was the son of his old age, the result of a miracle, but also because he was the son of God's promise. "Your own son will be your heir. ... Look at the sky & try to count the stars; you will have as many descendants as that." (Genesis 15:4-5)

So, here's Abraham enjoying his son Isaac ... believing that God is going to bless him with an abundance of grandchildren. And then God calls out ...

"Abraham!" And Abraham answered, 'Yes, here I am!'

(I'm guessing he's expecting something good is coming.)

"Take your son ... your only son, Isaac, whom you love so much, & go to the land of Moriah. There on a mountain that I will show you, offer him as a sacrifice to me."

(Genesis 22:1-2)

Okay, let's be honest, this is not something that you or I would give even the slightest consideration to. And we're not talking about Elias or Dylan or Emmett or Sean here. Isaac by this time would have been a young man, probably in his teens, like Gavin ...

& God was asking Abraham to offer him as a sacrifice.

This seems absolutely barbaric to us, doesn't it? ... But once again, we need to put ourselves into the mindset of that society. Human sacrifice was commonplace for all other religions. It was simply something that was accepted & done ... no questions asked.

Even so, I can't begin to imagine how this must have tested Abraham's faith ...

or the struggle he had to have gone through that night.

But, however deep it was, by morning the Abraham that emerged from his tent was a man committed to obedience. Scripture records ...

"Early the next morning Abraham cut some wood for the sacrifice, loaded his donkey, & took Isaac & 2 servants with him. They started out for the place that God had told him about." (Genesis 22:3)

On one level, Abraham's test concerned his commitment.

Was God really everything to him?

Or was something else ... even God's gift ... Isaac?

Abraham's victory was that he didn't put the **gift** before the **Giver**. "Isaac" stands for all the many things that have become quite precious to us.

But the basic reality is ... (& listen to this) ... we can do without "**Isaac**", but we can't do without **God**.

But this was also a spiritual test. God told him that the blessing wouldn't come through Ishmael, the son of a slave woman, but rather, through a miracle, his son Isaac.

Now, God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

Abraham had to have struggled with this.

Isaac is God's promise, for Heaven's sake.

And God has shown him time after time that He won't send the blessing through anyone else. Now, God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, to put him to death.

How can this be? ... If he obeys the command, how can God fulfill His promise? How can God do it? ...

The puzzle was real,
the mental & emotional anguish deep.

... But then the answer came.

The God who caused Isaac's birth through a miracle was capable of doing another miracle ... bringing him back from the dead! That's the solution that Abraham discovered during that long desert night. ...

I love this! This is good stuff!

So, the next morning, as Abraham heads for the mountain he's thinking ... "we're going to see a miracle! There's going to be a resurrection!"

Now I'm not just guessing about this ... it's what happened. The Scriptural story proves it.

As Abraham arrives at his destination he tells his servants, (grab the Bible out of the pew & turn to page 24 ... Genesis 22:5) ... "Stay here with the donkey. The boy & I will go over there & worship, & then we will come back to you." (Genesis 22:5) ... "We will come back to you."

Now in the book of Hebrews we find the N.T. commentary to this story, (turn to page 1461, 11:17ff), in which the writer echoes this understanding.

"It was faith that made Abraham offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice when God put Abraham to the test.

Abraham was the one to whom God had made the promise, yet he was ready to offer his only son as a sacrifice. God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that you will have the descendants I promised.'

Abraham reckoned that God was able to raise Isaac from death - & so to speak, Abraham did receive Isaac back from death." (Hebrews 11:17-19)

This means that Abraham looked for a **resurrection**. He went up the mountain, as God had commanded, & there tied Isaac to the altar.

"Then he picked up the knife to kill him." (Genesis 22:10)
And he would have ... but God intervened.

God provided a substitute, a ram caught in the bushes.

"The LORD called to him from heaven, 'Abraham, Abraham! ... Don't hurt the boy or do anything to him. ... Now I know that you honor & obey God, because you have not kept back your only son from him.'" (Genesis 22:11-12)

Now Abraham was only called upon to offer his son. But when the time came for God to offer His Son, the hand that was poised above Jesus fell. (Luke 23:46)
God put His Son to death. God's greatest gift was given.

The 3rd reason why Jesus is the greatest gift is that He **meets our needs**. We need to have knowledge of God ... Jesus answers that need.

Do you want to know what God is like? ... Look at Jesus.
(John 14:9)

By the way, this is one of the reasons why Jesus is referred to as "the Word" in John's writings.

If you really want to know what God is like ... you're going to find the answer in the pages of this Book.

2^{ndly}, we need a Savior. We need more than simply knowledge about God. We're sinners. Consequently, we not only need a sure word from God ... we need a Savior.

Jesus died to **save us**. (Romans 5:8)

Finally, we have needs that are part of life.

Psychiatrists tell us that we face 3 unsolvable dilemmas. The 1st is life vs. death. We want to live ... but we all die. Jesus solves that by giving eternal life to all who believe in Him. "I am the resurrection & the life.

Those who believe in me will live, even though they die."

(John 11:25)

2^{ndly} is the dilemma of our individuality & fitting into a group. Jesus has broken down all walls making us totally new persons. "But now, in union with Christ Jesus you, who used to be far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For Christ himself has brought us peace by making Jews & Gentiles one people. With his own body he broke down the wall that separates them."

(Ephesians 2:13-14)

We now belong to one another.

3rd is the dilemma coming from aspirations & achievements. We all fall short of what we hoped to be.

We have regrets.

Jesus is the answer to this problem also, for He promises to make us all that God created us to be in the 1st place. He sets us "apart to become like his Son."

(Romans 8:29)

Simply put, Jesus is the answer to all of our needs:
physical, emotional, relational, & spiritual.



(X) "He is our shelter & strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble."

(The Psalms 46:1)

And I know that many of you can give testimony to that.

Some years ago, in Pittsburgh, PA there lived a wealthy executive & his wife. Douglas Ferguson was a senior V.P. for Bethlehem Steel. He & his wife, Ann, had a good life & seemed to have everything, but ...
they didn't have any children.

They were a Godly couple, & prayed & prayed for a child. And one day, after many years, Ann found herself expecting. The couple was ecstatic. But tragedy struck during the delivery. Ann died giving birth to their son.

Well, from that moment on,
Doug devoted his life to his son; they were inseparable.

But again, tragedy struck. When the boy was 12 he developed a rare bone disease & within a matter of weeks, died. Doug was devastated, & sadly, passed himself a short time later, his family believed ...
of a broken heart.

Since he was a wealthy man the extended family gathered to divide the estate, but because the will couldn't be located, it was turned over to the courts.

There was a nurse/nanny, however, who had cared for the boy throughout his life. The family received permission to offer her something as a remembrance, in appreciation for her commitment.

At 1st she declined, but then said she'd like to have the painting of the boy (X) that was hanging in the living room.



Her request was granted. And when the painting was taken down, they found an envelope taped on the back. When the envelope was opened they found Douglas' notarized will, which was only 2 sentences ...

"This is my one & only dear son.

Whoever takes him receives all my wealth."

My friends, that's the message of the Gospel. God, our Heavenly Father, has given His greatest gift, His dear Son, His unique Son, His only Son ... & the promise is that whoever believes in Jesus, whoever comes to faith in Him, whoever takes Him ... will receive God's wealth.

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

For God loved _____ so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus, so that if _____ believes in Jesus, _____ will have eternal life.

As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior. (John 3:14-17)

Christ - The Greatest Gift

God ... the greatest _____
 loved so much ... the greatest _____
 the world ... the greatest _____
 that he gave ... the greatest _____
 his only Son ... the greatest _____
 so that everyone ... the greatest _____
 who believes ... the greatest _____
 in him ... the greatest _____
 may not die ... the greatest _____
 but ... the greatest _____
 have ... the greatest _____
 eternal life ... the greatest _____

Jesus is the _____ that God had to _____

The greatest gift that anyone can give is _____

This was planned _____

Abraham's victory was that he didn't put the _____ before the _____

We can do without " _____ ", but we can't do without _____

Abraham looked for a _____

Jesus _____

Jesus died to _____

For God loved _____ so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus, so that if _____ believes in Jesus, _____ will have eternal life