

## BE AMAZED AGAIN

John 3:16 | Fourth Sunday in Lent | March 11, 2018

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

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Dear fellow sinners and fellow redeemed,  
  
It’s easy to get used to amazing things and forget how amazing they really are. Let me give you some examples. Your smartphone. Do you realize that your smartphone has a processor that is millions of times faster than the computers NASA used in the 1960s, computers that helped to put a man on the moon and return him safely to earth? This device that we carry in our pockets allows us to send texts, connects to social media, read books, keep records, do research, play games and take photos. Once in a while we even use them to have a conversation. They’re amazing! But we tend to take them for granted.

Here’s another example: Powered flight. In January I and several of your brothers and sisters in Christ boarded a 747 bound for Israel. Have you ever seen a 747? They’re huge! A fully loaded 747 weighs about 850,000 pounds. That’s 425 tons! Depending on the configuration it can carry up to 600 passengers, plus crew, plus food and supplies, plus the fuel needed to get them where they’re going. And – you don’t want to forget this – it flies! It flies at almost 600 MPH with a range of over 8,000 miles. So, of course, one boards one of these wonders, sits back and squeals in sheer amazement as

it powers into the sky, right? No. Most of us take a nap or watch a movie. I mean 747s are old, boring technology, right?

One more example: The gospel. It’s true, isn’t it? Admit it. The gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ the Savior of the world is a message unlike any other in the world, a message that is filled with the power of Almighty God himself, power that changes hearts and lives and eternities. It is without question the most powerful force in the universe. But often, from the likes of you and me, the gospel elicits nothing but yawns. Been there. Heard that.

Brothers and sisters, this is not right. This is not good. This must change. And the only thing that can change our often-less-than-excited reaction to the gospel is the gospel itself. Let’s BE AMAZED AGAIN. On the basis of the Bible’s most famous and beloved passage, I want to share with you the amazing grace of our God.

Let’s begin with context. It’s late at night and Jesus is having a conversation with a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council. He was a big shot, a PHD level teacher of religion. But he didn’t even know the basics of how to be saved. **“You are Israel’s teacher and do you not understand these things?”** Jesus asked.

Nope. He really didn't. So Jesus explained it all. He taught Nicodemus the way to salvation. And the heart and core of Jesus' lesson that night is found in the passage before us. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** It will be worth our time to walk through this well-known verse and chew on it, word by word, phrase by phrase.

**"God so loved the world."** Isn't it just amazing that God loves the world? John had a lot to say about the world, none of it very complimentary. The world loves darkness of sin and unbelief instead of the light of life found in Christ (John 3:19-20). The world refuses to recognize Jesus as Lord and Savior (John 1:10). The world hates those who belong to Christ (John 17:14). John wrote in his First Epistle: **Everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.** This sinful world is corrupted to the core!

By the way, before you begin to say, "Yeah, this world stinks," realize that you are a part of it. And so am I. By nature you and I prefer darkness to light. By nature we have no love for Christ, no devotion to his cause. In fact, our default setting is to hate God as our enemy. By nature our hearts are filled with all the foulness that we see all around us in this godless world. "There's something rotten in Denmark." If Shakespeare was talking about the human heart, he was absolutely right.

This rotten world and us rotten sinners – God loves. But, of course, talk is cheap. This world throws the word *love* around like a toy. To this world love is just an emotion and a cheap one at that. *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *The Bachelor* and *Bachelorette*, the latest sentimental ballad on the radio. And if it's not sentiment it's sex. Pornography is profitable, to the tune of about \$15 billion last year.

Our understanding of love isn't much better. We say we love God's Word but rarely pick up our Bibles. We say we love our fellowman but often won't lift a finger to help those in need and won't waste our breath sharing the gospel with a lost soul. We say we love our friends and loved ones, but often turn our backs on them or stab them in theirs. With alarming regularity we hurt those we love the most.

God's love is different. How much did God love the world? So much that he gave. God's love is not just an emotion, or self-serving sentiment. God's love is not just mere words or empty phrases. God's love is an action. A selfless action. God gave! And what did God give?

God gives us many gifts. He gives us a beautiful world in which to live. A world filled with light and color and music. A world of rainbows and rustling leaves and new-fallen snow. He gives us our daily bread, all that we need to sustain life, and then some. Not only does he give us what we need, but he makes it fun. I've always been amazed that God took something we have to do (eat), and made it a truly

enjoyable activity. Think about that the next time you smell fresh-baked bread or bite into a medium rare steak or sip a fine cabernet. God give us the people in our lives, family and dear friends. Just imagine how empty life would be without the people whom we love and who love us. When you consider what we deserve because of our sins, it's truly amazing that God gives us all these wonderful gifts.

As wonderful as these gifts are, it's not what Jesus is talking about in our text. No, Jesus has something much bigger and better in mind. In fact, it's almost too big to fit into our heads or hearts. Listen to the familiar words again: **"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son."** HE GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY SON! God's love for us is so great, so complete, so mind-blowingly over-the-top amazing, that he gave that which is most precious in the universe: His one and only Son! To a world that hated him, a world that was perfectly content to sink into the eternal abyss, God gave his one and only Son. How can we hear that and not be left with mouths hanging open in amazement?

And why did he give his Son? Did he send him as a judge to give us all what we really deserve? Did he send him as the self-help guru to teach us all how to lose weight or make millions? Did he send him as the perfect example to show us how to earn our way into God's favor? No, no and no! He sent him for one purpose and one purpose alone: to save the world.

Jesus himself said it: **"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and**

**to give his life as a ransom for many"** (Mark 10: 45). Paul's confession is our confession: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst** (1 Timothy 1:15).

And that's exactly what God's one and only Son did. He was on a mission to save us, so he did everything necessary to make our salvation a reality. He supplied what is lacking in us, the righteousness a holy God demands, the perfection we can't give him for even a minute. As our Substitute he fulfilled the whole law, he loved God and neighbor perfectly.

He took away that which we have in abundance, the sin that clings to us like filthy rags. He dressed himself in those filthy rags. He carried our guilt to the cross, and endured the punishment we deserve. The God-man shed his blood to pay for the sins of the world. **By his wounds we are healed** (Isaiah 53:5).

And we can be certain that what Jesus did really worked, that God accepts the life he lived on our behalf and the payment he made for our sins. Jesus rose. Jesus lives! Our victory is won!

And keep in mind, Jesus did all this for a world of hell-deserving sinners. Prompted by nothing in us, prompted only by the perfect love that is in him, he saved us. Doesn't it just blow your mind! Doesn't it just take your breath away! Aren't you amazed!

Prepare to be amazed even further. Listen to this: **"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever**

**believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**” That little word *whoever* is so beautiful, so full of comfort for sinners like you and me. First, let’s remember that God loves the world. Are you a part of the world? Absolutely! Which means that – beyond any doubt – God loves you and sent Jesus to save you. God didn’t send Jesus for the good people, the deserving people. They don’t exist! God sent Jesus to save the world and that means you and me!

But in case you missed it Jesus throws in that little word *whoever*. You’re having a party, a back-yard barbeque. A friend asks you, “Who’s all invited?” You respond, “Whoever.” What you’re saying to your friend is bring whomever you’d like to the party. But you don’t really mean whoever. You don’t mean the stranger off the street, the prisoners, the outcasts, the wretches of the world. You don’t want them at your party. God does. When he says whoever, he means whoever. Let there be no doubt that God loves you, that he sent Jesus to save you, that Jesus lived and died and rose for you – even for me! The entire world is invited to believe in Jesus and be saved. No conditions. No small print. No asterisk. Jesus lived, died and rose for you. Believe it and live!

And when you believe what do you receive? **Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** The eternal death we deserve is gone. Hell is out of the picture. All that remains is eternal life! Life that never ends. Life to the full. Life the way God always intended it to be. A life of perfect peace and joy

that never ever ends. And what do we have to do to get it? Absolutely nothing! It’s God’s free gift in Christ, received by faith. Isn’t that amazing!

My friends, never tire of hearing this message. Study it, read it, learn it, memorize it, inwardly digest it, take it to heart. Live it, breath it, rejoice in it, revel it. Never take it for granted. This truth is everything. This truth is your life. Hear it again and be amazed. **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** Simply amazing! Amen.

**S.D.G.**