



*'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' (John 3:16).*

These words spoken by Jesus are probably the most famous in the Bible and certainly the most widely preached. This isn't surprising, because there's so much to learn from this verse. It's no exaggeration to say that there's enough truth here, if properly understood and acted upon, to gain you a guaranteed place in heaven!

The verse tells us of two parties—God and the world. It also tells us a most important thing about these parties: God loves, and the world perishes.

## God loves the world

What do you think of that? A man who had not been to church for many years turned up one Sunday, and afterwards he was asked what he thought of the sermon. He

answered, 'It was the same old stuff of God loving us.' Is that how you feel about God's love? That it's to be expected; that it's what God is supposed to do. The same old stuff. But actually, there is no more amazing or astonishing statement than this. Let me prove it to you.

Could *you* love someone who went around telling lies about you, blaming you for all their troubles, ignoring you, using you at their convenience, acting as if you didn't even exist? That's how the world treats God; remember that the world is only you and me plus millions of others just like us.

## Why do we treat God like that?

The Bible tells us that it is because we are sinners. Some people might say, 'Here we go again. Christians always go on about sin.' But wait a minute. It was Jesus, not Christians, who also once said that men love darkness instead of light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). Who was Jesus talking about then? It was those *who do not believe*. And *believe* means what it always does in the New Testament: to trust, have faith in, and come in repentance to Jesus.

It's easy to see that the world is full of evil people: rapists, drug-pushers, paedophiles, mass murderers. We may not be 'evil' like them, but the evil that Jesus was referring to is the evil of unbelief, of ignoring and

rejecting God. Are you like that?

Listen now to what else Jesus said. He went on to say, 'This is the verdict ...' What does that suggest to you? Doesn't it suggest that a trial has already taken place? The evidence has been considered and the verdict declared. This isn't something reserved for some unknown date in the future. Jesus said it has already taken place. He said, too, that 'whoever does not believe stands condemned already'. That's why he said the world is perishing. 'Perish' means facing God's holy anger and judgement upon sin.

It's easy to say, 'I don't believe that.' But that's our problem: we don't believe God. This is the clear teaching of Jesus concerning you, me and our relationship with God. We really are in a terrible situation. We are condemned already. We have been found guilty, and the verdict has been declared.

## What hope is there for us?

Our only hope is in the fact that God loves the world. God loves those who deserve no love. This isn't 'the same old stuff', but the most amazing thing of all—*God loves sinners*.

God's love has found a solution to the problem of human sin—he gave his one and only Son. What does this mean? It is a direct reference to the death of Jesus on the cross.

This is the heart of the gospel. The Bible says that Jesus became our scapegoat, our sin-bearer. God put all our sin on Jesus, and he became our substitute. He carried our sins to the cross of Calvary and there God punished them. Divine wrath fell upon Jesus as he bore our sin and guilt. God's holiness dealt with sin as it deserved, and Jesus died in our place.

It was God's love that planned this and made it possible. The holy and glorious God loves us so much that he was willing to give his only Son to die in our place. We were guilty and condemned; our sin deserved death and hell. But God cried, 'No. I love them. I want them in heaven.' But that was impossible because the verdict was in, and God has said that the wages of sin is death, and that no one who sins in any way will enter his presence.

'I will make it possible,' said God. But what a cost! The gospel tells us that the cost was the death of Jesus. This is the amazing love of God to sinners who deserve nothing.

The response that God demands from us to this amazing demonstration of love is that we should believe in Jesus. 'Believe' means to trust Jesus *alone* to deal with our sin, and to look to him *alone* for salvation and forgiveness.

## Have you heard of Halley's Comet?

Halley's Comet orbits the sun once every seventy-six years, which means that this remarkable sight can only be seen from earth every seventy-six years. The last time it appeared was in 1986, and for several reasons the best place to see it was in the southern hemisphere. In March 1986 I was in Australia and so was able to see the comet. I was preaching in a church in New South Wales where there was a man who was very enthusiastic about the comet, and he was anxious that I should see it. He gave me a drawing of the night sky and showed me exactly where to look to see this visitor in the sky.

Not only was I in the best place to see it, but I had a friend who was pointing me in the right direction and providing every means for me to see this 'once in a lifetime' phenomenon. There was only one problem: I had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to see it! This didn't appeal to me, but I knew I'd never have the opportunity again, so up I got. I still don't know if I saw Halley's Comet. If I did, it was a great disappointment because it was not as spectacular as I'd expected.

There is another visitor from outside this world whom it is very important that you see. That visitor is Jesus. He came from heaven to seek and save those lost in sin. Because by reading this you are considering the gospel, you're in the best place to see him. Faith in

Christ comes not through literally *seeing* him, but through *hearing* the gospel. To look to Jesus means to believe who he is and to trust him to deal with your sin and make you acceptable to God. Do that and you will not be disappointed; and neither will you have any doubt at all that you have met with him.



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