

God-Breathed  
Part 6: Gospel Love  
August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Early in the summer, many of you shared with us places in Scripture that are strengthening and sustaining and ultimately shaping you to be more and more like Christ! So, we're taking the entire summer to look at many of those texts...

Today, we get to look at the most well known verse in all of Scripture, if for no other reason than that it shows up in the end zone at the Super Bowl every year. This verse is so well known because it is probably the most beautiful, concise picture of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**Please read John 3:16 out loud with me...**

*"For **God loved the world so much** that **he gave** his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16*

**It's beautiful, isn't it?**

**Sunrise:** Early in the week...I was driving over the Rourke Bridge around six o'clock in the morning when the sun is just beginning to rise and the fog is lifting from the river. Over the years, this beautiful view from an ugly, temporary bridge has led me to more spontaneous moments of worship and gratitude than any other place in the city.

But this week as I crossed the river, I realized it has been months since I've thanked God for that gift!

**Does that ever happen to you? It could be a sunrise over a river...or the soft, steady rumble of the ocean tide or a New England Autumn...**

These gifts are right in front of us every day, yet over time we begin to take them for granted...and as that happens, we lose our sense of awe and wonder!

**Then, one day...we wake up to their sound, crying out for our attention!**

Isn't it true that John 3:16 is one of those places where something so beautiful and breathtaking as the unconditional, unmerited love of God can become, with time, commonplace?

When the most beautiful news in the world becomes commonplace, we lose our sense awe and wonder.

**I believe that regardless of whether we are a Christian or not, each of us regularly needs a fresh vision of the good news of Jesus Christ offered us in this one verse.**

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You see...some of you are going to read John 3:16 for the very first time and when you do, it seem like you're catching a glimpse of an early morning sunrise for the first time...and it will take your breath away!

However, for those of us who love Jesus and have been walking with Him for some time...our tendency may be to think, *"Oh...I know John 3:16 very well...I've read it a thousand times...this is going to be a nice refresher."* But please hear me...the gospel is never a refresher. We don't refresh or 'update' ourselves on the gospel. We update the operating system of our Macbook, ok! And if you use a PC, you need to update to a Mac, but that's a different conversation! As Christians, we don't get refreshers on the gospel; rather, our hearts are constantly being wrecked and renewed by the gospel!

**Author Tim Keller describes it this way...**

*"The gospel is not the ABCs of Christianity, it's the A-Z. We never outgrow the gospel. We never grow past it or graduate beyond it. We never stop needing the gospel. The gospel is not only our entry point into Christian faith, it's also the way we grow in Christ and persevere until the end."* Tim Keller

Keller is saying that the way you grow in Christ is never growing beyond the gospel, but deeper into the gospel.

I believe John 3:16 can be more difficult for Christians to embrace than those presently outside of Christianity for one reason... **John 3:16 is so simple**, like the sun rising up from the river day after day after day...and our hearts grow used to its beauty! Keep in mind, this verse comes immediately after Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, a respected religious scholar and leader. Jesus is basically saying to a pastor, "You don't get the gospel!" You think you need deep, spiritual truth, but you have no idea how beautiful the gospel really is... There are many other places in the gospels where people who have never encountered Jesus before meet Him and are wrecked by his mercy and goodness and say, *"Jesus, my life is yours."* And yet religious people encounter Jesus and go, *"Uh...let me think about it."*

When the most beautiful news in the entire world becomes commonplace, our hearts becomes complacent!

**Which is why, regardless of whether you're a Christian or not, I believe that we ask God to allow our hearts to be captivated again and again by the gospel, captured in this one simple promise! (Read with me)**

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*“For **God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.**” John 3:16*

**In John 3:16 we find two things.** First, we find a picture of what I call Gospel-Love...the heart of God poured out for us through the person and work of Jesus Christ. At the same time, I believe we find a picture of love that, when we allow it to penetrate and change our hearts, will revolutionize the way we love our friends, neighbors, family, our spouse and children!

**First, let’s look at this Gospel-Love.**

**The essence of gospel love is the generosity of Christ...**

**John writes...God loved...so he gave!**

Consider for a moment the people in your life who love well, or the people you look up to because of the way they love others. **True love is always rooted objectively in generosity of some form! In fact, it’s impossible to love without also being generous.**

**How do you recognize a parent who loves his/her children?** They’re generous with their time and affection!

**A good and loving neighbor is someone who opens their home and shares their food...**

**Guys...how will you communicate love to your wife’s heart?** In spite of what you believe, doesn’t she feel most loved when you shower her with honor, encouragement, and support? As you tend to the needs and desires of her heart, her heart is filled?

**And ladies...**isn’t it true that your husband feels loved when you are liberal with respect, encouragement, and loyalty!

**How do you know if you really love the poor?**

The Apostle John wrote that the only way to know if you love someone in need is if you’re doing something about the need!

*“We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion*

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*– how can God’s love be in that person? Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.”*

1 John 3:16-18

**Love is made most visible when we freely give!**

**Culture:** This is why, young men and women, the culture almost always gets it wrong when it tries to define love! Most of what the culture espouses as love is not rooted in generosity, but selfishness. It’s not about giving, but taking. Ladies...if a young man really loves you, he won’t ask you to give him your body until he’s ready to give you his whole life. Men, true love is not merely about having sex! Please hear me...sex is certainly a gift from God for two people to share together in the context of marriage! But listen, anyone can have sex. In fact...you can have a lot of sex and never really love. The problem with a modern-day vision of sex is that it dissects a whole person into a few body parts and says that if you share those with another person...you’ll get love! It’s a distorted vision that falls short and leaves young men and women feeling dissected and torn apart...

**No, true love...gospel love is rooted in generosity! My life, my time, my energy for you, my priorities, my strength...my words for the good and joy of others!**

**And there is no greater picture of love than the cross where Jesus poured out his life for our good!**

*“We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us.” 1 John 3:16*

Now...if true love is seen most clearly in the generosity of Jesus Christ, then the way we grow in our love for others is to have our hearts captivated by the Person and work of Jesus Christ!

John Stott – British theologian and pastor...

*“If only the blindfold could be taken away from our eyes. If only we could see Jesus in the fullness of who he is and what he has done. Why then, surely we would see how worthy he is of our wholehearted allegiance, and faith, love and obedience would be drawn out of us, and we would grow into maturity. **Nothing is more important for mature Christian discipleship than a fresh, clear, true vision of the authentic Jesus.**” John Stott*

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Stott is implying that the gospel not only opens our heart to the love and generosity of Jesus Christ, the gospel is what changes our hearts to love more and more like Jesus Christ!

So...with our last few moments, I want to give you some very practical application!

**First...all of our love problems are in fact gospel problems! If you want to love better, the gospel must go deeper into your life!**

**My Story:** For example...I've shared with you that for much of my young adult life, I was a terribly critical, judgmental person. I finally came to see that I was constantly criticizing and condemning others to escape my own sense of self-condemnation. I wasn't living in the freedom that only the perfect love of Jesus Christ can bring.

If you're a critical, self-righteous person, the only way you'll others is to rest in gospel-love.

*"God sent his Son into the world, not to judge the world, but to save the world through Him." John 3:17*

Jesus Christ loved us so much that He was judged for you. Therefore, bring your self-condemning and self-judging heart directly to Jesus and say, *"Here, take it all. You were judged and died for me sin so that I can be free!"*

**Our marriage problem is a gospel problem.** The primary reason marriages break down is because gospel-love breaks down. In Ephesians 5, Paul instructs husbands and wives to love one another with the love of Christ! **Jesus Christ loved us by dying for us when we were unlovely!**

Husbands...die for the beauty and wholeness of your wives. Wives, respond with a Christ-like respect and loyalty! It is impossible for a marriage to split apart if both spouses are committed to loving one another like this... **So...if your marriage is in a hard place, first go to Jesus. Say, "Jesus, you died for me...teach me to die to myself so that I can love my wife...my husband with a gospel-love!"**

**Our forgiveness problem is really a gospel problem –**

*"Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." Colossians 3:13*

If you're struggling to forgive...your heart must first be melted by the forgiveness of Christ (past, present, future).

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**Our selfishness problems are gospel problems –**

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45*

**Finally, our bitterness and resentment problems are gospel problems. The love of Christ has yet to penetrate our hearts!**

*“You have heard the law that says, Love your neighbor and hate your enemies! But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:44*

Do you remember what Jesus prayed on the cross? “Father forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing...” Jesus commanded us to love our enemies...and then He did it!

Here’s what we must see! When we fail to love, it’s because there are parts of our hearts that remain untouched by the gospel. Therefore, if we want to become people who truly love...we must preach the gospel regularly to our hearts over and over again...

**This is revolutionary for one simple reason.** If you’re having a difficult time loving someone today...it won’t work for you to wake up on Monday morning, grit your teeth and say, *“Everything is going to be different today...I’m finally going to love that person.”* Don’t do that because it hasn’t worked to this point...it probably won’t tomorrow...and you’ll grow discouraged and frustrated by your inability to get it right!

No! If you want to love...your heart must first be captivated by gospel-love! What is gospel love?

***God loved the world so He gave His Son –***

**Until today, I’m not sure how you would describe the love of God...how you would complete John 3:16!**

***God loves the lovely. God loves the put together. God loves the religious. He loves those with clean pasts...***

Every other major world religion says that you’re either born into God’s favor (cultural religion) or you earn God’s favor by following the law and observing the right traditions and customs.

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**Not Christianity...**The gospel says that God loves the world...regardless of your culture, language, ethnicity, social class or zip code...

When our hearts were unlovely, riddled with sin, and wicked beyond repair. God loved us! He gave His Son, Jesus Christ for us... to bring us back into His arms!

The gospel also says that you must choose to step into the arms of God...

*“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, **so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.**” John 3:16*

We don't earn the love of God...we receive it by believing, by placing our trust in the Person of Jesus Christ! And when we trust Jesus...God gives us eternal life, which certainly has to do with time (with the quantity of life) and what we think of as heaven. But even more so, it has to do with a quality of life. To have eternal life is to have our hearts transformed by the limitless love of Jesus Christ, such that we become the people we were created to be inside and out, free of sin and death! To know we are fully loved...and to love others fully!

**God loves you perfectly, but He won't impose His love on you...you must receive it!**

A Christian is someone who places his or her life into the arms of Christ and says, *“I need you and I want you! I believe that you died for me! I believe you're worthy of my life!”*

**Baptism – No greater picture of a person being immersed into gospel-love. The life and death of Jesus!**

Have you placed your trust in Jesus? You can do that today! (Connection Card – Celebrate faith in Christ thru baptism.)

If you're a Christian...remember, you never outgrow gospel-love!

**Jerry Bridges** (*Transforming Grace*) – *“My observation of modern Christianity is that most of us tend to base our relationship with God on our performance instead of on His grace. If we've performed well, whatever 'well' is in our opinion, then we expect God to bless us. If we haven't done so well, then our expectations are reduced accordingly. In this sense we live by works rather than by grace. We are saved by grace, we acknowledge that, but we are living by the sweat of our own performance. We give lip service to the grace of God but our unspoken motto is 'God helps those who help themselves.' The realization that my daily*

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*relationship with God is based on the infinite merit of Christ instead of my own performance is a very freeing and joyous experience."*

**Bridges is saying that if we want to walk in the freedom of God's love...we must immerse ourselves daily in the infinite merit of Jesus Christ...**

**How do we do this?** I would encourage you to establish a regular rhythm of pressing into the heart of Christ. Bring your life to him over and over!

**Gospel of Mark** – Interact...listen to him...watch Him spend time with people...let your heart be captivated by His goodness, mercy, integrity, generosity, and power...

As you do this...confess and re-confess your faith in Him. Bring all of your life...your work, home, relationships, character, parenting, money, romance, everything underneath His Lordship!

**Ask yourself...how would the love of Jesus Christ lead me to live differently in these places?**

**Gospel of Mark** – To help you do this, we've made journals and reading plans available in the café...

**Pray:** As we close, I want to pray and ask God to make His love real to our hearts in this moment... I want to ask God to infuse our relationships with gospel-love!

**Invite you** – As we pray, pray over a relationship where you need the capacity to extend gospel-love to a friend. Neighbor. Brother. Sister. Spouse.

**Ask God to give you a new love for that person... Ask God to make His love real to their hearts.**