

That He Gave

3/7 of Series 3:16

John 3: 16

08-16-2009 Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

Introduction

Today we are continuing a worship series simply entitled **3:16**. We are investing seven weeks into an in-depth study of John 3:16. The verse has been called “*the gospel in miniature*.” The passage represents the beginning and ending point of the Christian faith.

By the conclusion of the series, my hope is that God’s children of all ages will have engraved this verse upon our minds, hearts, and souls. Let’s recite it together: “*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.*” (NIV)

Last week we looked at the first phrase of the verse: “*for God so loved the world.*” Today we turn our attention to the second phrase: “*that he gave.*”

“*That God gave*” could serve as a subtitle for the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures reveal the gracious, generous, giving nature of our God. There is a basic “given-ness” to life in general and eternal life in particular. Although we often forget, ALL that we have is a gift from our Lord’s own hand.

I. Creation

“*For God so loved the world that God gave*” . . . from the very **beginning**. The Bible begins with the words of Genesis 1:1: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” Out of the formless void, the Lord spoke **creation** into being. On the sixth day, the Creator formed man and woman. The Almighty appointed humanity as stewards of all creation.

Last week we discussed how God’s divine fingerprints are found on creation. Those with sensitive spirits discern THE Spirit’s work all about us. We sing the hymn:

*This is my Father’s world, and to my listening ears,
All nature sings, and round me rings, the music of the spheres.
This is my Father’s world: he shines in all that’s fair,
In the rustling grass I hear him pass; he speaks to me everywhere.*

Oftentimes, however, we simply do not notice.

On a cold, January morning in 2007, a young man in jeans, long sleeve t-shirt, and baseball cap entered a Washington DC Metro Station. He opened up a **violin** case, threw in a few dollars for seed money, and began to play. Over the next hour, he played six classical pieces. A few people stopped for a moment or two to listen—some even tossed in a dollar or some change—but most hurried past on the way to work and school. The man earned a total of \$32 for his public appearance. Here’s a small portion of his performance:

The violinist was **Joshua Bell**—one of the most accomplished violinists in the world. Two days beforehand he sold out a Boston theater where enthusiasts paid over \$100 for good seats. He played a Stradivarius violin valued at \$3.5 million. Most

commuters walked past without notice. There was notable exception—every single child who walked past tried to stop, look, and listen. However, their busy parents drug them past without pausing.

You've got to pay attention—God is all about us: in the flickering of fireflies, laughter of children, roll of thunder, touch of a hand, etc.

From a micro to a macro level, the gift of creation reminds us of the Lord's grandeur and love. God IS in the **details**. During their high school careers, I have helped both of my children study for their ninth grade biology classes. I found the textbooks fascinating. The subatomic structure of matter holds the universe together. The amazing detail of our bodies on a cellular level is fascinating. The rich diversity of life on earth creates biomes within a biosphere. Human beings along with all of life are "*fearfully and wonderfully made.*"

God is also in the **big picture**. The cosmos is larger than our imagination. Concepts like "infinity" and "eternity" dangle beyond our grasp. The nearest star outside our solar system is Proxima Centauri which is 4.2 light years away—the starlight takes over four years to reach the Earth! Our sun is one of 200 to 400 BILLION stars that make up the Milky Way Galaxy. The Milky Way is one out of 100 BILLION galaxies in the observable universe! That's BIG.

Gazing upon the night sky, the Psalmist wrote (Psalm 8):

*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor
O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

The Lord both creates and sustains the cosmos. This is not a clockwork cosmos that God wound up and allowed to run on its own. Each new moment is a fresh work of creation. Every breath we take is a gift from the Almighty. Each morning we awake to a new day. The world is because God is. For God gave . . . creation and life.

II. God's Word

"For God so loved the world that he (also) gave" his **Word**. God's Word reveals the divine nature, character, and will. In the beginning, God SPOKE the cosmos into being. Genesis records how the Lord strolled through the Eden's garden in the cool of the evening to enjoy conversation with Adam and Eve. YAHWEH spoke to the Old Testament patriarchs and matriarchs, promising them a future people and land.

God called to Moses out of the burning bush, sending him to Egypt to set his people free. On Mount Sinai, Moses received the Law, including the Ten Commandments. These commands were much more than a social contract, dictating

religious and interpersonal relationships. They revealed the very heart of our heavenly Father. Later God inspired the prophecies and other writings of the Old Testament.

When John wrote his gospel and sought a way to describe the incarnation of the Christ, he chose to write: *“The WORD became flesh and dwelt among us.”* Jesus Christ was God’s Word in the flesh. The Holy Spirit inspired the New Testament writers to record their experiences and encounters with God.

In 2 Timothy 3: 16-17, Paul wrote: *“For all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Note the phrase *“God-breathed.”* It recalls the Creator kneeling in the dust and breathing life into First Man. In the same way, the Holy Spirit *“breathes”* life and meaning into the ink and paper that records God’s Word. We talk about Bible study, but the Bible also studies us—and calls us to account for the way we live.

Christian teachers talk about the Bible serving as our *“canon.”* This is an Old English word that refers to a measuring stick. We measure our lives against God’s Word that is revealed in the Bible.

I often hear people talking and praying about **God’s will**. In many instances, I realize that people are seeking specific guidance with a detailed road map for what they should do. SOMETIMES the Holy Spirit makes the divine will quite clear in our lives. However, other times we are left uncertain what to do. We often ignore one of the greatest resources that God has given to us—the Lord speaks to us through Scripture and reveals his will. If you want to know how to live your life, then enter into a conversation with your Maker through the Bible.

III. Covenant

“For God so loved the world that God (also) gave” the gift of **covenant** to his people. *“Covenant”* refers to a relationship or agreement between two parties. A survey of the Old and New Testament reveals that we serve a covenant-making God. From the beginning, he sought to be in relationship with humanity. Each agreement includes divine promises and human responsibilities.

The book of Genesis is the story of God’s covenants with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Later God entered into a covenant with Moses and then the entire nation of Israel. The Lord promised and delivered to the Jewish nation the Law, the Promised Land, and the Messiah. In turn, they were called to love God alone and follow His Law.

In the *Disciple 1* Bible study, the Scriptures are summarized in this way. *“The Bible reveals a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God and a covenant-making, covenant-breaking people.”* Time and again God’s people rebelled, turning their backs upon their Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

A synonym for *“covenant”* is *“testament.”* The Bible is divided into two parts: the OLD Testament/Covenant and the NEW Testament/Covenant. At God’s time and place, he acted to form a new covenant with his people to create once and for all a way to enter into right relationship with the Almighty. During the Last Supper, Jesus took a glass of wine and said, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”* (Luke 22: 20)

God desires to enter into covenant with each of us. What he has done on a cosmic level extends to the personal level for each person here.

IV. Christ

“*For God so loved the world that he gave*” the ultimate gift. Our heavenly Father gave “*his one and only Son.*” The theological term is **incarnation**—God’s son born into the world as a human being. Matthew and Luke describe this divine invasion with their traditional Christmas stories. John simply writes: “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

The incarnation incorporates Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Each week in our traditional services we recite **The Apostles Creed** which is a summary of our core Christian beliefs. The creed describes the gift of God’s Son:

“I believe . . . in Jesus Christ his (God’s) only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

In Philippians 2: 5- 11, Paul wrote:

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God
Did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant,
Being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
And gave him the name that is above every name,
That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
In heaven and on earth and under the earth,
And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
To the glory of God the Father.*

One church father summed up the incarnation by saying: “*God became what we are so that we might become who God is.*” John 1:12 says the same thing in different words: “*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*”

V. The Holy Spirit and the Church

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” After Jesus’ resurrection and before his ascension back to heaven, Christ told the disciples to wait for God’s promise. Ten days later they were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem during the Jewish feast of **Pentecost**. God fulfilled his promise, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles. They were filled with the divine presence and power. They left that room to transform the world.

Sandi Patty has a song entitled *And the Gift Goes On*. One verse explains: *“The Father gave the son. The Son gave the Spirit. The Spirit gives us life so we can give the gift of love.”*

We celebrate Pentecost as the birthday of the church. We are filled with God’s presence and called to serve as God’s people in the world around us. In Paul’s letters, he often referred to the church as *“the body of Christ.”* We are literally the hands and feet of Jesus. If God’s will and work is to be done, then it must be accomplished through each of us. I don’t think it stretches a theological point to say that the incarnation did not end with the ascension but continues through the church’s ministry.

Conclusion

During Season 3 of the TV sitcom (Episode 8, *“Vanessa’s Rich”*), *The Cosby Show*, Cliff and Claire Huxtable’s daughter, Vanessa, discovers that her parents paid \$11,000 for a painting. When she makes the mistake of sharing this information with her friends, they all begin to tease her about being a rich girl.

Vanessa: “None of this would have happened if we weren’t so rich.”

Cliff: “Let me get something straight, ok? Your mother and I are rich. YOU have NOTHING!”

Sometimes we like to think of ourselves as self-made men and women. We take pride in our accomplishments and possessions. Hear the wise words of Cliff Huxtable: WE have NOTHING! All that we have is a gift from God. We are not self-made men and women—we are a GOD-made people.

The second phrase of John 3:16 reminds us of the basic given-ness of life and eternal life. The theological word for it is **“grace.”** From the beginning to the end and at all points in between, *“for God so loved the world that he GAVE”*