

Rediscovering the Cross - Part #2

"Rescued"

Text: John 3:16

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on March 17, 2019, by Pastor Steve Edelman

INTRODUCTION: Good morning everyone. We are so glad you are here with us today.

STORY: "I had to call for help!" In the summer, I tend to hang out on the front lawn when the sun is out and inspect the landscape. Okay, so I have few quirks. When I was out on my front lawn, I heard a loud "BANG!" The kind of noise that makes your heart sink because you know something is really wrong. I decided to run towards the noise to see what was going on.

Just on the next street over, I saw a scene of a head-on collision. It was bad. A mother and her one child were trapped in their car. Another child was lying bloody on the curb and the father was running between the crumpled vehicle and his injured son, screaming for help. Neighbors and bystanders began to flock the scene. I remember thinking, "**I need to call for help!**"

I ran home and called 911 and got Megan who had just gotten home from a shift at the hospital. When we returned, the scene had changed slightly. The car engine was smoking, and there was a definite fear that it was going to catch fire. The other child, a baby, was now out of the vehicle. However, the mother, who was driving, was trapped under the steering wheel.

Megan started to inspect the kids on the sidewalk and realized that the baby wasn't breathing. She proceeded to do mouth to mouth resuscitation and the lungs of the babe started to fill with air again. The other little one was in great distress with broken bones. The mother was still trapped as a neighbourhood guy and I tried frantically to figure out a way to help her. We couldn't pull her from the car. When the emergency crew arrived on the scene, they had to use the jaws of life to eventually break her body free from the wreck. I will never forget the father, who spoke hardly any English, head in his hands, running between the three people he loved most in the world...unable to do a single thing for them. Totally helpless, terrified, and desperate.

Just like the family in the car, we too need to be rescued. **We need to call for help!** Our lives have collided with sin leaving us in a state of brokenness and desperation. Sin is a "silent killer" that destroys our relationship with God and others. We see this collision in our own lives in broken families, broken friendships, a broken image of self, self-love, self-hate, self-abuse, or self-soothing in all the wrong ways. From within comes disastrous evils like sinful thoughts (often people will share with me what they are really thinking in conflict with others), or sexual lust that keeps being acted upon, or your pride, and the list goes on. **We need help. We all need help! The Bible tells us where we can find this help and how we can be rescued. Are you looking for help today?**

We just started a new series called, "Rediscovering the Cross." Today, we are on Part 2 "Rescued" and we are going to be talking about what Jesus did in order to rescue us. This series is about what Christ has done to rescue us and why it matters today. We're going to see how Christ through love has a tangible rescue plan in the middle of our brokenness and our cries for help.

Today, I want to focus on our need for His rescue through three lenses:

1. **HIS NATURE (Who He is)**
2. **HIS OBJECT OF LOVE (Who He loves)**
3. **HIS GIFT OF LOVE (Who He sent)**

In our brokenness, we need to be desperate to experience God's rescue because of:

1. HIS NATURE

One of the best scriptures that describes God's nature is John 3:16. A football player named Tim Tebow said, "John 3:16 was the essence of what he believed. The essence of hope." So, he wrote John 3:16 under his eyes before playing a championship game. After winning the championship game he found out something

incredible happened- during the game: 94 million people Googled John 3:16 because they saw this verse under his eyes.”

Martin Luther called it “**the gospel in miniature.**” **John 3:16 is the response that Jesus gave to Nicodemus when he was asking an important question. How can I see or enter into the Kingdom of God?**

Look with me at John 3:16 which says, “*For God so loved...*”

If you were to define or describe God in a word or phrase, what would you say? Some people would say that God is a “wisp of fancy”, or someone who is distant, or a “crutch for the weak”. To quote an atheist, “**In my view, god is an imaginary person or drain to whom theists express their feelings. I do not require any such imaginary person/drain to share my emotions, sorrows, and happiness. I can handle my own feelings, control or express it.**” This seems to be the heartbeat of our culture. **It is the “I don’t need God mentality.”** How you define God is absolutely everything.

a. God is love.

The Bible says, “God is love” 1 John 4:8.

What does this mean? It means that one of His defining attributes is love. It’s also one of the defining characteristics of a good mother or father.

We can say we “love” coffee and chocolate, and we can pledge our love to a girl or guy until our dying breath. As you are going to see, God’s love runs deeper than the affections of taste buds or our romantic desires. Or that love we have for our family. Love is one of the most powerful emotions and actions we can experience. We crave love from the moment of existence. Think of new born baby who needs the human touch of love to survive. **And the Bible tells we need God’s love to survive.**

In the Bible, there are four unique forms of love. They are communicated through four Greek words: Eros, Storge, Philia, and Agape.

The first form of love is Eros (Pronounced: AIR-ohs) This is the Greek word for sensual or romantic love which God designed for marriage. The term originated from the mythological Greek god of love, sexual desire, physical attraction, and physical love, Eros, whose Roman counterpart was Cupid.

The second form of love is Storge (Pronounced: STOR-jay) This is a term for love in the Bible that you may not be familiar with. *This Greek word describes family love, the affectionate bond that develops naturally between parents and children, and brothers and sisters.*

The third form of love is Philia (Pronounced: FILL-ee-uh) This is the type of friendship love in the Bible that most Christians practice toward each other. **This Greek term describes the powerful emotional bond seen in deep friendships.**

The fourth form of love is Agape (Pronounced: Uh-GAH-pay) is the highest of the four types of love in the Bible. This term defines God’s immeasurable, incomparable love for humanity. It is the divine love that comes from God. **Agape love is perfect, unconditional, sacrificial, and pure. It’s a love that “squanders itself” to turn evil towards what is good.**

It’s only in God that you can fully experience Agape love which brings us into a place of knowing God. It’s in God’s nature, we see **this perfect love playing out. His love brings this connectedness between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It’s through love that we the church develop community and togetherness with God and others. It’s His Agape love that rescues us.** It’s because of Agape love, we can experience God’s rescue from our disaster.

Next, because God is love, His love has activity!

- b. God’s love acts.** It expresses itself. Love does not sit still, doing nothing. It is not dormant, complacent, inactive. If love actually exists, it has to act and express itself; it has to do something good. Love is *loving*; that is, love is always demonstrating love to others. **Therefore, God’s love acts and reveals Himself to be love. Agape love.**

Because God’s nature is love, we can see the love of Jesus in action through:

- i. Jesus healed the sick in love
- ii. Jesus raised the dead in love

- iii. Jesus fed the hungry in love
- iv. Jesus preached in love
- v. Jesus prayed for his disciples in love
- vi. Jesus sent the church in love
- vii. Jesus gave His life for the world in love

God's love "in action" is affirmed over and over in scripture.

ILLUSTRATION: Can you imagine what the car accident would be like if no one helped. If there was no love shown? If there was no action or care given? God doesn't stand back and do nothing because He is love. Jerry Bridges says, **"It originates in the very nature of God, who is love, and it flows to us through our union with His beloved Son."**

To summarize, God is love by nature and because He is love, He acts.

Secondly, in our brokenness, we need to be desperate to experience God's rescue because we are:

2. HIS OBJECT OF LOVE

Let's look at the text, "For God so loved the *world*..."

What does the word world mean? The Greek word for '*world*' is *kosmos*. In general, it refers to all people groups, of Jews and Gentiles. When God says He loves the world, he means that all of humanity is the object of His love. The object of God's love is the totality of fallen humanity.

We need to make a distinction between God loving people and God loving what people do. God loves people not their sin. Sin will always lead us to disaster.

For example, Greg Laurie says, "A whole new audience is discovering the music of famed rock band, Queen, and it's remarkable front man, Freddie Mercury with the hit film *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Along with world-wide fame, Freddie found himself living the life of luxury with unlimited funds, and he found himself diving head-first into the pursuit of pleasure and fulfillment. He was the quintessential party animal, with stories that have become the stuff of legends in the histories of rock music. Elton John, who was a friend of Freddie's, once said that Mercury was the only person that could out party him, describing his appetites as "unquenchable".

Freddie was quoted as saying, **"Excess is a part of my nature. To me, dullness is a disease. I need danger and excitement. Straight people bore me stiff. I love freaky people. It has been said that the best cure for hedonism is an attempt to practice it. Freddie attempted to practice it, but one day, the party was over, and it came to a screeching halt."** Despite his global fame, wealth and power, Freddie Mercury lost it all, and eventually, that will be true for every man and woman on earth. We don't know the day or the time, but at some point our party will be over, and then comes eternity. **Ultimately, Freddie realized that in his attempt to become a star, he instead created a monster. "The monster is me," he said. "Success, fame, money, sex, drugs, whatever you want. I can have it all, but now I am beginning to see that as much as I created it, I want to escape from it. I'm starting to worry that I can't control it as much as it controls me."** Freddie's excessive partying lifestyle eventually caught up with him, and he passed away of complications due to AIDS in 1991 at the age of 45."

The truth is, God loves Freddie Mercury who described his own lifestyle as the monster he created. This is what makes John 3:16 so necessary and essential. It describes the way God is acting towards the monster inside of us to rescue us from our condition. Once our nature is conformed to His nature, we have the ability to love like Christ.

The fact that God truly loves every person created seems outrageous to many. When you think about all the hurt and pain people have caused how can you love? We may believe that God doesn't love someone who has really hurt us because we don't love them. We may believe that they are not worthy of God's love. We may believe that we are not worthy of God's love.

As Paul said, God is generous beyond all measure in offering this same means of salvation to Gentiles. We see such faithfulness and generosity to prove God's love (Rom. 5:8), and the greatness of that love is seen in the means through which God's gracious salvation of the undeserving is accomplished: Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6), giving his very life to reconcile with God those who at the time were God's enemies (Rom. 5:10).

Can anyone find the ability to love all people? No! In fact, most people find it difficult to love all their relatives. Someone said, "But God has found it possible, with His great heart of love, to love each individual in the entire world in spite of his or her faults. God loves preachers - but also murderers, gamblers, bartenders, and prostitutes. God loves ALL - ALL colors, ALL individuals, ALL social groups, ALL." He loves the sinner not the sin, the criminal not the crime, the gossip not the gossip, the Westerner not the greed. This is the heart of the rescuer!

The problem is that the fallen world or broken people do not naturally love God back. The majority don't want to be recused. The culture tells us that the problem is 'external', and you will figure it out if you will be 'true to yourself'. The Gospel tells us that the problem is 'internal', and the answer is Jesus Christ.

Dieter F. Uchtdorf says, "**Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without a compass, God's love encompasses us completely. He loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken.**"

When we realize that we are fully loved by God we don't have to feed the monster. We can start to pursue what is better. What is best. We start to pursue God. We start to realize that we are deeply loved. Our ability to love others is enabled through God's love. Because we are the object of His love.

Lastly, in our brokenness, we need to be desperate to experience God's rescue because of:

3. HIS GIFT OF LOVE

Look with me at the text which says, "that he gave his only Son.."

a) God gave His Son

How does God accomplish his mission? God sends (e.g., Gn 1:27; 3:23,8-9; 11:8; 12:2; Ex 6:7). God loves by sending his Son (Jn 3:16). He compels us to love him (Mt 22:37-38). And he expects us to love each other (22:39). Yes, God's mission is all about God's love. "**For God so loved the world, that he gave. . .**" **He didn't give us a gift basket. He didn't drop it off at the door with an I love you card. God sends Jesus to give his life!**

Verse 17 replaces the word *give* with *send*. "For God did not *send* his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." So, the *giving* of verse 16 is God's *sending* his Son *into the world* on a mission from heaven **to rescue us from the disaster that we are in.**

b) Whoever believes

Next, look at the text which says, "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Whoever believes, literally means "everyone believing in Him..." It says "every" or "**all the believing ones...**" That's what is being communicated. It is saying that there is no such thing as a believing one who does not receive eternal life, but who perishes. Though our English translation says "whoever believes," the literal rendering is accurately translated as "**every believing one**" and the emphasis is **NOT AT ALL** on the "whosoever," but on the belief.

The ones BELIEVING **will not** have to face the consequence but will be recused. They will not perish but will have everlasting life. Why? Because of the main verb – God GAVE His Son.

c) Should not perish but have eternal life

Look with me at the text which says, "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 actually speaks of a limitation of who will experience God in heaven, rather than a universal redemption. In other words, **not** everyone will be saved. Only those who believe and call on the name of Jesus.

The word perish does not mean simply the end of physical existence or annihilation. There is this forever and eternal aspect to perishing. However, there seems to be a juxtaposition between God who loves everyone and God who lets people perish. On one hand, it is true that God's Spirit is drawing people to Himself and on the

other hand, we are fully responsible for our choices. John 3:17 indicates that we will have to give an account for how we live our life.

Which brings up a big question - How can a just God send people to an eternal hell for their sin?

To borrow some thoughts from Vince Vital, “We vastly underestimate our sin and the consequences of our bad decisions. The standard is not someone on the six o’clock news. The standard is a perfectly Holy God who loves us very much. What does our sin look like from His perspective and the multiplying and expedient results that come from it? The consequence is perishing or hell. **What is hell? The best way to understand hell is through a relational framework.** A relationship can only be entered into when both people want to enter into the relationship. Jesus invites us into a relationship with Himself. Jesus is the only way to heaven because He is heaven. Jesus is eternal life. Eternal life is not a ticket to a theme park for a good time. A flourishing relationship with the God who created you for eternity is eternal life. It’s the relationship. This is why someone like Christopher Hitchens said at one point in his life, “heaven would be hell for me.” Why? Because he doesn’t want to be with God.

It’s interesting that the Bible uses the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” when it’s talking about hell. It may seem harsh... I also thought it was harsh. In our family, we had some estrangement. Two of my uncles didn’t speak to each other for 7 years. When I attended a wedding, I have a vivid memory of my uncles being there. When they had to be in the same room, on their faces I saw a gnashing of teeth and weeping. While in good families there should be love, sometimes our own stubbornness will keep us apart. The two uncles just needed to say sorry and let go of their stubbornness and it would have been over.”

We must note that most of the Bible’s teaching about hell comes from Jesus himself. Out of His deep love for us, Jesus’s teaching on hell is the loving sign that is waving and blinking to try and redirect our life. In the opening story, the mother was speeding and ran through the stop sign because she was in a hurry which led to her tragedy. This is why God sends his Son to show us that we are all heading towards a collision without a seatbelt on. In a sense, John 3:16 is the stop sign that lovingly warns us to STOP and redirect our life towards Jesus.

John Piper says, **“The misery of hell will be so great that no one will want to be there. But whatever one believes or does not believe, when they choose against God, they are wrong about God and about hell. He is not, at that point, preferring the real hell over the real God. He or she is blind to both. He or she does not perceive the true glories of God, and does not perceive the true horrors of hell. Nobody will be bored in heaven! We should all tremble before such realities.”**

So, what John 3:16 teaches is: ALL who do A (believe in Him) will not B (perish) but will have C (everlasting life). **EVERLASTING LIFE** – Is being with God. It’s defined by quality and quantity. Different in quality from the life characterized by this present age. Different in quantity – everlasting – never-ending life.

STORY:

I have so many great childhood memories of at the lake. Many of you know the feeling of the warm sand on your feet or the feeling of the cool water easing the heat of a hot summer. Some of my favorite summers were spent on the beach.

A friend was telling me a true story of a family who was taking a day trip to the lake on a similar day. When they arrived, the father set up a designated spot for the family with a number of lawn chairs to clearly mark their area. After they set up camp, the son says, “hey dad, can I go swimming in the lake?” As any good dad would say, “make sure to stay within the swimming boundaries that are marked out by floating buoys.” A couple of hours later the wind picked up quickly. The kind of wind that pushes you back and takes your breath away. As the weather changed, the crowd heard, “help... help... HELP!?” The father heard the cry and noticed that his son was caught in rough waters beyond the safe boundary. Without hesitation, the father jumps into the water to rescue his son. As he gets deeper and deeper into the water, the father struggles with the pull of the deep waves and confusion of the storm. Once within reach, the father reaches out and rescues his son by bringing him to the safety of the floating buoys in the boundary. However, in the struggle of the storm, the father realized that the

buoy cannot support both of them. In order to save the son, the father let's go and gives his life. We are all drowning in sin and need to be rescued.

A father's love is really being tested here. You know he loves his son when he gives his life. This is what Jesus did for us.

Billy Graham says, **“God proved His love on the Cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, I love you.”**

This all points to one question: Have you been rescued? Have you called for help? Have you reached out to God and asked Him to change you and save you?

In doing so, Jesus redirects your life towards God. Towards a relationship of a loving God and loving others in connected ways. As you begin to understand what He did for you Jesus transforms your inner self, your past, and your pain. Your perceptions, thoughts, affections, desires, actions, and attitudes because of His Agape love. This is how Jesus rescues you from the disaster you are in.

Maybe some of you need to rediscover what Jesus did on the cross because you are wandering away. The gospel is also for the broken Christian who has fallen away. This is good news for all of us. Either way, we invite you to meet with Jesus this morning. We are going to have a time of prayer and reflection. As the team sings these words, **“I called you answered. And you came to my rescue and I wanna be where you are!”** Invite God to change the parts of your life that are broken and hurting you. Call on His name.

We are going to have a time in which you can listen to God. I am going to invite the prayer teams up if anyone needs prayer. Then we are going to close in a song.

BENEDICTION:

So the greatest explanation follows the greatest illustration.

God	The greatest Lover
so loved	The greatest degree
the world	The greatest company
that he gave	The greatest act
his one and only Son	The greatest gift
that whoever	The greatest opportunity
believes	The greatest simplicity
in him	The greatest attraction
shall not perish	The greatest promise
but	The greatest difference
have	The greatest certainty
eternal life	The greatest possession

In him, we have everlasting life.¹

¹ Hughes, R. K. (1999). *John: that you may believe* (p. 86). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.