



1. God's Passion for Us

(John 3:16-21)

John 3:16 "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. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

We have just come out of the Easter period and as we start on a new theme which shall fill our minds over the next few months, I find that this time of year helps us quite a lot as we come to our next theme. Over the last few months we have looked first at the theme of first worship and then fellowship. The origin of these themes link to what I've called in the past the five-fold ministry of the church in Acts 2:41-47 - worship, fellowship, discipleship, service and witness. I did a series just on these verses in my evening services when I first came and these have gradually filtered into morning series because these represent the foundation values of the church.

If we don't have valid foundations, then what we build will fall and the problem is with Christianity today is that many of the foundations on which we rely are a bit ropy to say the least. When I did the first series on worship I found my self titling the series The Heart of Worship as I wanted to explore the bottom line about what worship is about. And right at the heart was passion. We have a God who has a passion for us and the only appropriate response as we see His love and grace poured out on us is to have a passion for Him. So every sermon I did had the word passion in its working title. That will be no exception in this series on the Heart of Mission.

The word "passion" has been put around a lot this Easter because of the film The Passion of the Christ. As you probably know, we call this season of the year Easter after the Saxon goddess of fertility called Oestra or Eostre. Not very Christian is it?

The Greeks came to call Easter the *pascha anastasimon*. In the Latin, Easter always was *Festa Paschalia* and has led to the use of the word in most other European countries. In France, Easter is Pâques. In Portugal it is called Pascoa. A much older English description of Easter that drops the reference to the Saxon goddess was Passiontide or just The Passion of Christ.

The word is actually used by the translators of the AV, possibly as a response to what it was a term already in use to describe what Jesus had done on the cross:

Acts 1:3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God

In the NIV like most modern translations, it's translated as sufferings. *3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he*

was alive. The Greek word that is used for sufferings here is *pascho* - to suffer and its where we get the word passion from The passion of Christ - the Sufferings of Christ. At Passiontide we remember the sufferings of Christ and His triumphal resurrection. We use *pascho* for sufferings but its a much more general word to be vexed or deeply moved.

By coincidence, it sounds like the Aramaic and Hebrew words for the Passover for where we get the word paschal lamb which the Jews slaughtered on that first Passover night. It seems to be more a coincidence of language but quite a coincidence because it was on Passover that Jesus truly was the Lamb of God that in our case took away the sins of the world.

So the word "passion" is one of those words in our language that has been shaped by the Christian faith. When we consider that word "passion", we find it a strong word usually to represent a powerful emotion. That model emotion was the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ for me and you. His passion for seeing our sin dealt with so that we could walk free to become the children of God was the scourging, the crown of thorns, the beatings, the nails, the cross, the spear through His side. And that was because He loved you and me.

It's no surprise therefore that we often use passion for love. Sadly, most people's understanding of the word passion is something between a man and woman, but it is a much richer word than that. When we speak passionately or do something passionately, we do it with all our heart and soul with intense human emotion, whatever that emotion is. And that passion leads us to taking extreme action - the model being Christ Himself. His passion should result in our passion for Him. Christianity is a faith that should engender strong emotions because God's love for us is not just a love but a passionate love, His grace a passionate grace. It's a passion that led to the sufferings of Christ.

What on earth has this got to do with mission? As with Worship and Fellowship, it starts with the fact that God has a passion for us and that passion resulted in Him taking extreme action for our redemption. That's why the working title I have for this sermon is *God's Passion for us*. Let's read again the first verse we had read to us this morning:

"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. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

For God so loved the world He gave His only Son. God's passion for us sent the Son on a mission to save us. What is a mission you may well ask. Here's a definition:

The act of sending, or the state of being sent; a being sent or delegated by authority, with certain powers for transacting business; commission.

The Father sent the Son. Love was expressed by God in mission. You see, mission isn't something we as a church do. Mission is something that God does. God sent His Son. God had a mission, and in Christ still has a mission and Jesus here gives us some idea of what has sometimes been called the *Missio Dei* - the mission of God.

God's mission extends to the world

"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. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God's love is for the world. It's not for the few, it's for everyone. The world here means the human race, men and women. God loves people so much that He has sent His Son into the world.

All men matter. You matter. I matter. It's the hardest thing in theology to believe -G. K. Chesterton in "The Father Brown Omnibus"

Believe it. it's true Why?

God's intent is to bring salvation

Why send His Son? We are going to celebrate afresh His sufferings this morning as we meet around His table. Because it was through Him that salvation and eternal life was wrought. The passion of God is for each man and women and the mission of Christ was to provide a way to offer salvation to all.

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A common view of God these days is that somehow God is distant and lofty. He sits in heaven and if He cares about things at all, He's just spiteful and condemns people. How Satan has inverted the truths of scripture for lies. In Jesus we see God's love and God's passionate love for man being expressed in that broken body and that shed blood so that we could know Him and we could know salvation and eternal life. He came to save the world.

Salvation is a question of personal belief

One thing that is clear about the mission that Jesus undertook and that although it was for the benefit of the world, those benefits are entered into as a matter of personal choice.

John 3:18 "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

The Son came to save and not condemn. But in verse 16 and here in verse 18 we see that eternal life and salvation is brought about by personal belief: whoever believes in Him... The Greek here used for belief never just means that you just believe that something is true or not, but it always involves something you are prepared to place your trust in. It's rather like my favourite chair illustration. Belief isn't just believing the chair will hold me, but a reliance that it will as I sit on it. People receive salvation and eternal life by placing their trust in Jesus, God's Son. His mission here was to be given to us by the Father so that as we place our personal belief - our trust, our reliance - in Him we find ourselves entering into eternal life.

His mission is a way by which men and women who trust in Him can receive eternal life.

Unbelief has dire consequences

18 "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

The reason for God's mission in sending His Son is that people were already condemned and the exposing of their deeds showed that. God's passion was for a lost world - people who couldn't save themselves - all have sinned and come short of God's glory. God's love is for a lost world and His passion for that lost world resulted in a mission to save them. His burden is for those who are lost and still is: *2 Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

Such love. God's love. God's passion worked out in the sending of His Son. Worked out in the passion of His Son and we are going to remember in a moment. As we take of the bread afresh this morning and as we drink the wine, we remember His passion for us, that passion that brought Him to this world.

But there is one last point that I want to leave with you this morning isn't just to have an appreciation of God's mission to redeem us. It's not just to heighten our appreciation of what Jesus did for us on the cross. But it's to leave with you a command that Jesus gave His disciples after he rose - a command that applies to us too

John 20: 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you ! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you ."

I said earlier that God's mission isn't over. The work on Calvary is a complete one, but the task of redeeming the world isn't over until Jesus returns. Jesus was given a mission - God's mission. He was sent by the Father. He now sends us. The Father's passion is to save a world He loves. The Son's passion is to bring redemption to the world through His blood and as the father has sent the Son, so the Son sends us to bring that message of redemption to men and women now.

That's His command, that's His commission and it's to all of us! That's the challenge of the table this morning. He died for us, He redeemed us, He saved us, He made us God's people - and He sends us out from this table to bring the message to others. God's mission is our mission. This table is the mission of the church. To bring to a lost world, a world that sits in condemnation that Jesus has demonstrated God's passionate love for us in His sufferings that we might be free - but there is a decision to be made.

This is where all mission starts. Let's commit ourselves to Him afresh this morning as we come around His table.

