

Reaching the Lost The Greatest Thing That Ever Happened on Earth

Intro: It would have to be one of the most popular verses in the NT.
It is one of the most frequently memorized verses in the entire NT.
Its popularity among religious people is evident. We see it on signs suspended among the crowds in stadiums; and even displayed on people like Tim Tebow. It has been called the "golden text" of Scripture; everybody's verse; the gospel in a nutshell.
It appears to be a part of John's commentary on Jesus' conversation with the tradition-entrenched Nicodemus.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn. 3:16)

It describes without doubt the greatest thing that has ever happened on earth--in a word, the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Let's think about why this is the greatest thing that has ever happened in human history.

First because it begins with...

God--the greatest source

The greatest event on earth was initiated by the greatest of all beings, the Creator of all things. In fact, it could be said that this event was in His mind even before His first act of creation.

When Paul speaks of coming of Jesus into the world, he speaks of it in terms of God's "eternal purpose."

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. (Eph. 1:3-4)

Further we could say that the incarnation of Jesus was the greatest thing because it was brought about by means of the greatest motivation.

So loved--the greatest motivation

God's actions were motivated by His great love. It is a part of His character: The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 Jn. 4:8)

In view of our first point, God didn't begin to be a God of love when He acted in history for the salvation of mankind. Those who affirm the God of OT is not the God of the NT miss this important connection. His eternal purpose indicates that He was that great God of love from the very beginning; and His eternal purpose was motivated by that love.

The incarnation of Jesus was the greatest thing that ever happened on earth because of the beneficiaries of God's love.

The world--the greatest beneficiary

"The world" may refer of course to the created cosmos; but that would perhaps miss the more specific use of "the world" in John's writings. We only have to look a few texts to see that for John "the world" is realm of mankind in its spiritual blindness and sin.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (1 Jn. 5:19)

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 Jn. 2:15)

This makes the love of God the more remarkable. The object of God's love consisted of those who were disobedient to God's law and enemies of His kingdom.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom. 5:8-10)

Thus, we could say that the incarnation was the greatest thing to ever happen because it has the greatest beneficiary--the whole world.

But then again, the incarnation of Jesus is the greatest thing that ever happened in this world because it involved the greatest sacrifice ever made.

That He gave--the greatest sacrifice

John wanted his readers to see the magnitude of God's love and that this love was unprecedented in its greatness. God "so" loved; and that can only be appreciated when we what it prompted God to do--to make the greatest sacrifice in the history of mankind.

It is all captured in three words... "that He gave..." As Creator, God deserved to receive obedience and worship; yet not receiving these things, God became the greatest giver, making the greatest sacrifice for the world that disobeyed and dishonored Him.

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:32)

When we were empty handed and without means to offer a gift sufficient to appease God's wrath, He gave the offering that would accomplish what no human gift was able to accomplish:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. (Rom. 3:23-25)

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 Jn. 4:10)

And this is why the incarnation of Jesus is the greatest thing that has ever happened in this world.

The incarnation of Jesus is the greatest thing that has ever happened in this world because it prompts the greatest gift ever given.

His only begotten Son--the greatest gift

But if "that he gave" points to the greatest sacrifice, then "His only begotten Son" points to "the greatest gift" ever given.

The translators have chosen to translate the single Greek word μονογενης as "only begotten" son. However that might give a wrong impression.

Ordinarily the Greek term John uses would describe the only child of a parent, like the only son of the widow in Luke 7 or the only daughter of Jairus in Luke 8. Naturally humans come into being by being born or begotten; so the Greek word rightly preserves the idea of one who has come into being by physical birth. As such it describes an only child and who is unique or special to the parent.

So how would such a term apply to Jesus, especially in a book where John has affirmed that the Word was with God in the beginning and was the maker of all things created?

John surely does not mean to say that Jesus came into being when conceived in Mary's womb.

Instead we should focus on the unique relationship that Jesus has to the Father as His one and only son; but not with the idea that He has some moment of coming into being.

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. (1 Jn. 4:9)

God not only "sent" His son to earth; but sent Him for the purpose of dying for us. It is hard for humans to fathom the sacrifice of any child; but that is even magnified when thinking of an only child. But such was the sacrifice that God made for us.

The incarnation of Jesus is the greatest thing that has ever happened because it prompts the greatest invitation ever given.

That whosoever--The greatest invitation

There has never been another invitation this great. It is unlimited in its scope. It is not limited by age, gender, economic class, race, or any other human category.

"Whosoever" means that every accountable person is invited to receive the benefits of God's great love, sacrifice, and gift.

Reformed theologians contend that the atonement of Jesus is only for "the elect," a smaller number of humanity that God has arbitrarily chosen upon whom to shower His grace as a display of His compassion while reserving His judgment for the bulk of humanity.. But "whosoever" indicates that God seeks all people to be saved just as Paul said:

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:3-4)

The incarnation of Jesus is the greatest thing that has ever happened because it prompts the greatest terms ever given.

Believes in Him--the greatest terms

What would people have to do to receive the benefits of such an amazing gift? One might have imagined that God would make it incredibly difficult, since humans had been disobedient and resistance to His will.

Would he ask us to pay huge sums of money for the opportunity to receive His favor?

Would he ask us to make some huge personal sacrifice comparable to the sacrifice that He made in giving His Son?

No! He only asks that we put our trust in the sacrifice of His Son as the only sufficient atonement for sin.

That means that we rely not upon the merits of our efforts to obey God; but rather rely upon the grace manifested in the gift. Jesus indicated this to Nicodemus in the analogy is the serpent in the wilderness.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; (John 3:14)

However, it does not mean that we receive eternal life through some momentary act of recognition of God through a sinner's prayer or other humanly-devised altar call. Trusting in Jesus means:

Understanding and acknowledging who He is and what He has done for us (Jn. 8:24).

Repenting of the sins that alienated us from God (Ac. 2:38).

Confessing Him as the risen Savior and Lord of our lives (Rom. 10:9-10)

Being baptized in His name for the remission of sins (Ac. 22:16).

And with the eternal scope of John's words it might also suggest the continuing trust we show toward Jesus in walking in the light and confessing our sins. (1 Jn. 1:7-9).

The incarnation of Jesus is the greatest thing that has ever happened because it delivers us from the greatest loss ever possible.

Should not perish--The greatest loss

Sometimes you see people overwhelmed by the loss of earthly things--their homes, bank accounts, personal property. Yet these things can never compare with the loss of life or soul.

For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mt. 16:26)

God has acted so that we might not "perish." It is not a word that we may easily relate to. What does it mean?

First it is the recognition that the wrath of God due to our sin remains upon us

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (Jn. 3:36)

Second it the recognition that God's wrath will be manifested in eternal punishment.

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Mt. 25:46)

Third it is the recognition that the punishment will be eternal separation from God.

And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thes. 1:9-10)

The incarnation of Jesus is the greatest thing that has ever happened because it prompts the greatest reward ever given to mankind.

But have everlasting life--The greatest reward.

Could humans have imagined that there was so great a gulf between salvation and condemnation? "But" the greatest difference!

God's ultimate objective in all His actions was to rescue us from our selfishness and sin in order that He might give us a place in His eternal heavenly kingdom.

God offers to us as rebellious sinners the opportunity to be created once more (2 Cor. 5:17) and live forever in the new heavens and the earth for which He is now preparing us. John gives us a glimpse of that future world:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

That is the "eternal life" that John had in mind. And then God adds His own words of purpose, assurance, invitation, and warning.

*And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He *said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.” And He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. “He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (Rev. 21:1-8)*

Conclusion: What event can you think of in all the history of mankind that can begin to rank with this great event described by John? We can get so focused on some trivial event in our lives. We can become distracted by some important event and forget to pay attention to the greatest even that has ever happened.

Don't let that happen to you. Make it personal. God so loved me that He gave His only begotten Son that I in believing in Him should not perish but have eternal life.