



Lent 2A  
March 1, 2026  
John 3:16

## Savor the Sweetness

Last week, my wife and I were both in the greater Phoenix area for our other ministry roles. I had to run a meeting in Sun City for a congregation that is calling a new pastor due to a retirement. She had to present about Ministry Recruitment in Peoria. Because of the way the schedules worked out, we were able to worship with her parents and I was reminded about something I've enjoyed about worshiping with her dad: before the sermon he often pull out a little container of mints or hard candy and pops it in his mouth. He calls them "sermon sweets."

The Bible often uses that picture of something sweet as a description for God's Word. I think of Psalm 119. It's the longest chapter in Scripture, and arguably, verse 105 is its most popular verse. It's the theme verse that we'll be talking a lot more about as we consider our future move to Trail Drive, "Your word is lamp for my feet, and a light for my path." But just before the psalmist calls the Word a lamp, he basically calls it a piece of candy, "*How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*" (Psalm 119:103). And I don't know if there is a sweeter, tastier, honier verse in all of Scripture than the one that we heard Jesus speak in a private bible class to his eventual undertaker, Nicodemus. 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.*"

How do we savor the sweetness of this verse? Let's start with the verb: God so **loved**. In the original, this action word is placed in emphatic position. It's like John hits command-B, using bold font so this word jumps off the page to his readers. And why not? This is such a rich word. You may have heard or read numerous times before about the limitations of "love" for English-speakers. What is love? I love ice cream. I love my wife. Dare not mean the same thing. This love is that special *agape* love that appears in Scripture to describe a love so selfless, so not-counting the cost, so not-looking for anything in return, so willing to do whatever it takes. And maybe that's the key – it's an action word. Love does. Love does. And a little bit later, this sweet verse lays out what love did. But before we get there, let's take some time to appreciate the subject and object of this weighty verb.

Who loved? God loved. In context, this is really talking about God the Father. Knowing that, may lighten the weightiness of this verb just a bit in our minds. Of course, a Father is going to love his children. He made us. He protects us. Dads, nobody had to teach you to love your child. It just happened. But as much as I appreciate the term Father to describe our relationship with God in other places of Scripture or as we sang in our first hymn, "Father Welcomes," let's take some time to fathom the significance of the word choice here. Jesus doesn't say, "My Father so loved the world." He says, "*God so loved the world.*" God – the all-powerful being. A deity. That's different than a human father loving a human child. This is someone who is on a completely different level than us. It's like you loving a cockroach or an ant, but even more different than that. Not only is on such a different plane than us, think about the fact that God is all-knowing. He knows all of our faults. He knows the stench and seriousness of our sins. He sees the rebellion that we think we hide so well in our hearts. And yet, what does he do? That almighty, all-knowing God loves. Wow!

And what becomes even more "Wow" is when you consider whom he loved? The world. We just are coming out of the Olympics. And I know everything looks great and peaceful when the world's athletes are together at the opening and closing ceremonies or hugging each other on the podiums. But let's not kid ourselves. When one athlete says there's hatred between their team and their opponent – over hockey – gives you a small glimpse into the world. Or when there are countries not invited to the games because of how they have treated others in the world, gives you a glimpse into the world in which we live. Or outside of Olympics, when a state of the union address, isn't always expressed with a unifying tongue or received with unifying ears, it gives you a glimpse into the world in which we live. But God... God doesn't just love athletes flying a certain flag. God doesn't just love politicians on one side of the aisle. God loved the world. Think about what that means! 78 times in his gospel, John uses the term "world" and it's usually not in a positive light. The *world* refused to recognize Jesus (John 1:10). The *world* hates Jesus' followers (John 17:13). Yet, God loved the world. God loved the sin-filled world. Which means, God loves you. No matter how many times you've hated others. No matter how many times you've refused to recognize Jesus in your life. No matter how many times you've sinned, God loved you. Wow! Savor the sweetness of the reach of God's love.

But also savor the sweetness of the action of God's love. Remember what I said earlier? Love does. What did God's love do? God so loved the world *that he gave his one and only Son*. How do you fathom that? Every once in a while, and we should do this more often, you'll see a clip that acknowledges people giving up something. Sometimes, it's even a parent "giving up" their child. I've heard that expression when it comes to moms giving up their children military service. I've also heard it applied to ministry. Think of the biblical example of Hannah. She gave up her little boy, Samuel, to live at the temple, and train under the priest Eli, and should we just come for visits. Such things are noble. But they are nothing to what God did. He gave his one and only Son where he knew he would be rejected. He gave his one and only Son to scourged and crucified. He gave his one and only Son to suffer in our place. Love does.

But what about the significance of these adjectives, “one and only.” I’m not sure we always grasp the significance of those words. At least in my mind, I’m tempted to say, ‘Man, it had to be rough for God since Jesus was his one and only son.’ Would it have been easier if he had three? Walkers, you have four sons, would it be easy for you to give up a son to die on a cross because you have three others that could come home with you? Ach, it’s only 25% of your sons. Of course not? Whether you have one, three, or a dozen sons, giving up a son would be heart-wrenching. So what’s the significance of these adjectives? “One and only” don’t so much stress the emotion that God was going through. They stress the necessity of what God had to give. There’s nobody else who had to be lifted up because there’s nobody else like him. He’s the one and only true God and true man. He’s the one and only who could live under the law in our stead and die, yet at the same time have his blood be precious enough to cover the sins of the whole world. He’s the one and only who could conquer death and walk away from the grave. He’s the one and only who could earn and give eternal life to whoever believes in him. Savor the sweetness and uniqueness of who the Son is.

And savor the sweetness of how accessible he is to you. The last time I preached on this lesson, I stressed the “whoever” of this verse. My theme was, “Find Definite Confidence in God’s Indefinite.” Obviously, I’m not spending the whole sermon on this word today, but it’s worth noting, especially in context. Remember who Jesus is teaching at this time. Nicodemus. A Pharisee. A member of a group of people that thought they were special and had an advantage to eternal life because of their pedigree and their performance. How it must have rocked Nicodemus’ world to hear, “Whoever believes in him, shall not perish but have eternal life.” You mean eternal life has nothing to do with my background or ethnicity? No. But aren’t you glad, but how would you know if were part of the club? You mean eternal life has nothing to do with my performance? No. But aren’t you glad, because how would you ever know if you had done enough? “Whoever” points us to the freeness of God’s grace. And ultimately, it points us to the value of his one and only Son.

As Jesus says, “Whoever believes *in him* shall not perish.” Through faith in Jesus and Jesus alone, we will be rid of sin. Through faith in Jesus and Jesus alone, we will not be rejected by God. Through faith in Jesus and Jesus alone, we will not suffer eternal death. But... and note how strong of a contrast this is. Whoever believes in him shall not perish *but* have eternal life. Savor the sweetness of that contrast. To perish means to be separated from God. To have eternal life means to see God face to face. To perish means to live where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. To have eternal life means to live where there will be no more tears, sorrow, or pain. And that’s not just something we can look forward to savoring. We can savor it today. By God’s grace, the Holy Spirit has already worked faith in your hearts, connecting you to Jesus, and by so doing he has already place the candy of eternal life on the tip of your tongue. Savor the sweetness. Amen.

#### EYEDROP DEVOTION

Warm chocolate lava cake breaks open, molten center spilling over vanilla ice cream, silky sweetness mingling with caramel drizzle and toasted hazelnut crunch. Are you heading to the kitchen yet? Sometimes we can taste a dessert just by the description. Did you know the psalmist also describes God’s Word as being “sweet.” Perhaps there is nothing sweeter than John 3:16. Before you go to bed tonight, enjoy the sweetness of this verse one spoonful at a time. “God so loved the world.” So much is packed into that sentence. Really, the almighty, all-knowing God loves the world? That he gave his one and only Son. Can you imagine? “That whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Whoever? Yep – that means you. God’s blessings as you savor the sweetness of this verse.