

Why Me, Lord?

Country music artist and Rhodes Scholar Kris Kristofferson once wrote a song entitled “Why me, Lord?” The opening line is memorable: “Why me, Lord? What have I ever done to deserve even one of the pleasures I’ve known?”

Although I can’t speak for what Kristofferson had in his mind when he wrote this song, this first line is a reminder to me of God’s goodness and our helplessness — in and of ourselves — to deserve any blessings that God continually pours out on his children.

I began this series of articles on John 3:16 by sharing that the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is comforting news for the troubles we all face. God is a God of love, and it’s important that we don’t pick and choose, in some arbitrary fashion, those who we believe may be “good enough” or “deserving enough” to be accepted by God. We want to stress the love of God in the gospel call which goes out to all people without exception. But we need to be clear.

This verse does not teach that God’s love for everyone in the entire “world” is the same kind of love. God has a special, covenant love for his children by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. How can we know the difference between God’s common grace love for mankind in general that I wrote of in my previous article and his special saving grace love for his own children? We’ve briefly looked at love’s perfection; let’s look now at:

God’s Love: Provision

This verse goes on to say that God loves so much that “he gave his only Son.” Notice that God shows his love in the provision of his “one and only Son” (only begotten Son). Some have wrongly believed and taught that it was Jesus the Son who had to convince God the Father to love sinners as if it were against the will of the Father to give his love. But clearly, John is telling us that it was because of God’s love that his love gift of the Son was given.

No external pressure on God caused him to begrudgingly provide this gift, but, rather, it flows out of his perfect love. Unlike the mostly sentimental or milquetoast type of love that permeates much of our culture today, God’s love is a costly love. Clearly the blessings of salvation for sinners required the ultimate cost, the death of the Son — Jesus Christ.

Listen to these words from Paul in Acts 20:28 as he gives words of instruction to the elders of the church of Ephesus: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

God’s love is such that it required him to provide a costly sacrifice. God’s provision is exactly what sinful mankind needed. Because of our sin, mankind is completely unable

to save ourselves by our works of obedience. For anyone to be saved it requires a work of God's grace. God's greatest gift — Jesus Christ — addresses our greatest need. It addresses our lack of perfect obedience that God requires as well as forgiveness for our sins and brings us into a right relationship with God. What have we seen so far from Verse 16? First, love's perfection; God is perfect and has a perfect love. Secondly, love's provision. God provided exactly what was needed for sinners who are "dead in trespasses and sins." (Ephesians 2:1) What is one very important reason why God would do this? Let's look now at:

God's Love: Purpose

God "gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Notice with me that in this last phrase, John speaks clearly of two — and only two — destinations. The contrast is between those who perish and those who receive eternal life. There are no other options. Although it's not elaborated on here, we understand the word translated "perish" in the sense of eternal death — or eternal conscious punishment for sin. In the book of Revelation — also written by John — this is called "the second death" and the "lake of fire." (20:14) Along with two destinations, we're introduced to two groups of people:

- Those who believe in God's only Son. This group receives eternal life.
- Those who do not believe. This group will, ultimately, perish.

The phrase "whoever believes" here in verse 16 is not meant, I believe, to teach that Jesus died for everyone's sins, and now it's up to us to choose whether we'll accept this free gift. We need to humbly acknowledge that, because of our sin, none of us would ever choose Jesus Christ unless we're given new hearts.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6) Back in John 1:12-13 we're told, "But to all who did receive him (Jesus), who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor the will of man, but of God." So, then, those who're truly saved by grace; those who truly believe are those who are "born again," or "born from above." (John 3:3)

Salvation is a gracious work of God from beginning to end. We have nothing to be prideful about. There's nothing in us that caused God to choose us over someone else. This is a mystery that we must humbly acknowledge to be true. And there's more to this mystery. It's true that God is the one who chooses his people for salvation, and it's also true that we make real choices daily — choices to honor and obey Jesus, or not to honor and obey — and we're responsible for the choices that we make. This falls under the well-known biblical doctrine of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. The apostle Paul writes, "... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12b-13) The apostle Paul also wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this

is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

We can either “boast” about our worthiness and cleverness to believe in Jesus, in and of ourselves, or we can say, in effect, “Thank you God for saving such a wretched, miserable, sinner like me because I know I don’t deserve your love.”

Who would you rather give your praise to — yourself or God? The Scriptures are clear, and Kris Kristofferson was right, at least in the words of his song. God’s people can do nothing — in and of ourselves — to deserve all the pleasures we’ve known.

Along with the songwriter, every Christian can truly say, “Why me, Lord?”

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