

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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The Priceless Salvation

John 3:16

3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

This Thursday, March 16 is the “day of John 3:16”. John 3:16 is called a “small Bible” and the main theme of the Bible is summarized in one verse. In 2014, we had Sunday, March 16, so I preached from the verse. The next time we have Sunday, March 16 will be in 2025 and it’s pretty far away, so today, I am going to talk about John 3:16.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” In this Word, “gave” is used in English. In Japanese, it is translated as “is given”. The word “give” is commonly used, but when God gives his only Son, the word “give” must include very deep meanings. Today, I would like to learn together about three meanings included in the word “give.”

1. “Give Up”

Firstly, the word “give” used in John 3:16 has the meaning of “give up”. In the recent worship service, we learned when God ordered Abraham to dedicate his only son Isaac as a sacrifice offering. For Abraham, Isaac was his precious son he finally got when he became old. Abraham had put all his affection to him. Moreover, Isaac was the

son who was supposed to take over all the promises that God had given to Abraham, therefore, losing Isaac meant losing God's promise. For Abraham, Isaac was much more important than his own life, who he could not give up. But Abraham gave up his most important thing and let God handle it.

As Isaac was the only beloved son to Abraham, Jesus Christ was the only beloved Son to Father God. The Son had been with God since beyond eternity and received God's love and He loved God. God and the Son was one existence and united in love. For God, the Son was irreplaceable and He could not give up on him. But God forced Himself and gave His Son Jesus Christ to us. Abraham ended up not sacrificing Isaac, but God sacrificed His only Son for our sins on the altar of the cross.

I was looking up the ceremonial statement for the Lord supper and I found one translation of His word by using "give up." When Jesus gave bread to his disciples, He said, "Take this, all of you, and eat it: This is my body which will be given up for you." I was shocked to see this. I realized that the Lord "gave up" His life for us.

What God gave to us is not something He won't feel pain when giving it up. God gave up His only Son, the most sacred and precious existence which He could never give up, for our salvation. The Son Jesus also gave up his precious life. The word "give" used in John 3:16 teaches us that God gave up his most valuable thing for us with great sacrifice.

2. "Give for Free"

Secondly, the word "give" used in John 3:16 has a meaning of "grant"

or “bestow”. “Grant” usually refers to a grant-in-aid or subsidy given to research activities conducted at universities or fellowships to students, but this is not given as a result of successful accomplishment by the research institution. Instead, this is given to them at no charge, hoping that it will turn out to be something valuable. A fellowship is also a gift. You don’t need to pay back as a student loan. Therefore, “give” in John 3:16 has a meaning of “giving without asking the return” or “give at no cost”. As the Colloquial Japanese translation says, God gave us salvation and eternal life for free.

Among items we use, there are things that are cheap and good or expensive and no good. But most of the time, as for items or services, we can get what we want according to price. Therefore, some say free stuff is never good. But stuff that God gives to us is different. The reason why God gives us salvation for free is because it is too precious to put a price tag. As Jesus says in Matthew 16:26 “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”, a life of a man is heavier than the earth. If that is the case, how much can we put for the life of God’s Son or eternal life that we are given?

3. “Give Choice”

Thirdly, "to give" in John 3:16 means "to entrust" in English. The Cambridge dictionary defines the word, "entrust" "to give someone a thing or a duty for which they are responsible." God gave us his free gift by sacrificing his Son, and He expected that we would accept it. God entrust his precious gift of salvation through Jesus Christ to our decision to accept it or not. I hope all of us accept this precious gift

with the decision of faith.

There is a story regarding the decision of faith. Many years ago, David Morse - American missionary to India - became great friends there with the pearl-diver, Rambhau. The missionary spent time reading to him from the Bible, and explaining to him God's way of salvation.

Rambhau enjoyed listening to the Word of God, but whenever the missionary tried to get Rambhau to accept Christ as his Savior - he would shake his head and reply, "Your Christian way to heaven is too easy for me! I cannot accept it. If ever I should find admittance to heaven in that manner - I would feel like a pauper there...like a beggar who has been let in out of pity. I may be proud - but I want to deserve, I want to earn my place in heaven -- and so I am going to work for it." Nothing the missionary could say seemed to have any effect on Rambhau's decision.

One evening, Rambhau invited the missionary to his house, and he began to talk that he was leaving for a pilgrimage. He said that he was going to Delhi, nine hundred miles far, on his knees. The missionary try to him not to do so and said, "Rambhau, my friend - you can't. How can I bear you to do it - when Jesus Christ has suffered and died to purchase heaven for you!" But he could not be moved by the words of the missionary.

Then he showed the missionary a small but heavy English strongbox, and said, "I keep only one thing in it. Now I will tell you about it. I once had a son. My son was a diver too. He was the best pearl diver on the coasts of India. Most pearls, as you know, have some defect or blemish only the expert can discern, but my boy

always dreamed of finding the ‘perfect’ pearl - one beyond all that was ever found. One day he found it! But even when he saw it - he had been under water too long... That pearl cost him his life, for he died soon after.” For a moment his whole body shook, but there was no sound.

“All these years,” he continued, “I have kept this pearl - but now I am going, not to return, and to you, my best friend - I am giving my pearl.” He worked the combination on the strongbox and drew from it a carefully wrapped package. Gently opening the cotton, he picked up a mammoth pearl and placed it in the hand of the missionary. It was one of the largest pearls ever found off the coast of India, and glowed with a luster and brilliance never seen in cultured pearls. It would have brought a fabulous sum in any market.

The missionary looked up quickly with a new thought: Was not this the very opportunity and occasion he had prayed for - to make Rambhau understand the value of Christ’s sacrifice? So he said, designedly, “Rambhau, this is a wonderful pearl, an amazing pearl. Let me buy it. I would give you ten thousand dollars for it.” “Mr. Morse,” said Rambhau, stiffening his whole body, “this pearl is beyond price. No man in all the world has money enough to pay what this pearl is worth to me. On the market a million dollars could not buy it. I will not sell it to you. You may only have it as a gift.”

“No, Rambhau, I cannot accept that. As much as I want the pearl, I cannot accept it that way. Perhaps I am proud, but that is too easy. I must pay for it, or work for it...” The old pearl-diver was stunned. “You don’t understand at all, Sahib. Don’t you see. My only son gave his life to get this pearl, and I wouldn’t sell it for any money. Its worth

is in the life-blood of my son. I cannot sell this - but I can give it to you. Just accept it in token of the love I bear you.”

Then, the missionary gripped the hand of the old man, and said, “Rambhau, don’t you see? My words are just what you have been saying to God all the time. God is offering you salvation as a free gift. It is so great and priceless that no man on earth can buy it. No man is good enough to deserve it. It cost God the life-blood of His only Son to make the entrance for you into heaven. In a hundred pilgrimages, you could not earn that entrance. All you can do is to accept it as a token of God’s love for you - a sinner.”

At that moment, great tears were now rolling down the cheeks of the old man. The veil was beginning to lift. “I see it now. I learned about Jesus for the last two years, but I could not believe that His salvation was free. Now I understand. The salvation is too priceless to be bought or earned. Mr. Morse, I will accept His salvation!”

God gave us his Son on behalf of us. He gave the salvation as a free gift. He gave this gift entrusting to our decision of faith. When we read, recite, and meditate John 3:16, let us accept God’s gift in deep humility. And on March 16, let share John 3:16 with someone. You can send it in your letter or email. We pray that we may believe the gospel that God entrusted to us, and live in it, then deliver it to our neighbors.

(Prayer)

Father God, You gave us your only begotten Son. You gave us the salvation as a free gift. Help us to accept it by our faith, and encourage us to share the salvation, that we accepted, with many people. We pray

in the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.