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I got done doing my morning studies and devotions, and I went off to the gym for a workout. I got to the gym, and by this point my morning coffee had made its way right through me. I get into the restroom, and I'm standing in front of the urinal. I look down, and there's a piece of chewed up gum in there! I thought to myself... REALLY?! Some guy thought it was acceptable and appropriate to spit his gum into the urinal?! Some other guy is going to have to reach into this thing that all these other guys have been urinating into in order to get the chewed-up gum out of there?! Keep in mind, this thing is filled with all kinds of bacteria and germs and smells and God knows what. And again, some other guy is going to have to reach in there, take it out, and throw it into the trash bin. The trash is literally three feet away.

So, let's think this through. The guy who spits his gum into the urinal knew that someone else, other than himself, would have to reach into a nasty toilet to get his gum out. And he spit it in there anyway. He also knew that every single public restroom in the entire civilized world has itself at least one acceptable and appropriate trash bin that can be used, free of charge, to dispose of one's gum. And he chose to spit his gum where it does not belong. All he had to do was turn himself around, walk a few steps towards the trash bin, and spit his gum where it does belong... in the trash.

And so, I'm thinking to myself, who is this guy? Who in their right mind could be so incredibly selfish as to spit their gum into the urinal of a public restroom? Then, I start thinking about all the trash I saw in the parking lot on my way inside, and how incredibly selfish it is for people to litter. The nerves of some people!

Then, I start thinking about how I should probably stop thinking this way about other people, because I'm no better. And I start playing the tapes of all the incredibly selfish things I do. It's a good thing we have Jesus to save us from ourselves. Without him we're selfish. Selfish stinks. I don't want to stink. I want to not stink.

Let me back up and clarify that our real problem is not that we stink. Or that we're selfish. The real problem is sin. God's Word clearly defines our problem as sin. And the deal with sin is that it comes from within us. We manufacture it. Because we manufacture sin, we're not able to manufacture the solution for it. We need help. We need to be saved from ourselves. We can't do it alone. We, you and me, we're no match for sin.

Now, you might hear some people say things like, "Well, I'm a good person. I'm nice to people. I don't litter or spit my gum into toilets." And that's great and all, but Scripture reveals that despite our best efforts, we don't even come close to God's glorious standard. We all fall short. We all sin. And the wages of sin is death. This means that the ultimate penalty for our sin, is death. Wages are something that you get paid for the work you do. In other words, we earn our wages. And because we all sin, again and again and again and again, we've all earned the penalty of death. And what death really is, what the Bible's talking about here, is eternal separation from God. And another term for eternal separation from God is hell. And hell, my friends, is NOT good.

It's sad that we hardly ever give this part of the story the attention it really deserves. Instead, we're like, "it's all good. We're just gonna do whatever we want. Ya know, not a big deal."

But it is a big deal. It's the BIGGEST deal. Being separated from God forever flies right in the face of the very reason we were created. We were created to be with God. We were created to walk with God in the garden and receive His love. All this stuff about sin and death is a huge deal. It stinks. Actually, it goes beyond stinks. It sucks. It's not good news. It's literally the worst news ever.

But here's the thing, even with all this talk about sin and death, there is some really good news. God has mapped out a way of paying the penalties for us. He's made it possible for us to have a relationship with Him. He's given us an answer... a solution if you will.

The answer is Jesus. Because considering the fact we all deserve hell, that's what we've earned, nothing else really matters all that much. And because Jesus is our escape plan from hell, Jesus is the answer. Period.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life..." This is some really good news. This verse has been called the Gospel in a nutshell. It's probably the most well-known, most memorized, and most relied upon and taught verse in the entire Bible of over 31,000 verses. This is some important stuff.

Have you ever just sat back, shut off all the noise, gotten rid of all the distractions, and truly contemplated the depths of John 3:16? Have you ever really taken the time to understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ for that matter?

Let's break this verse down. Really try to grasp it. Let's see if we can get a better understanding of its significance in our lives. It starts off, "For God..." Right away we've got to try and wrap our hearts and minds around just who this is that we're talking about. We must acknowledge that this is the Creator of everything. He created you. He created me. Simply put, we wouldn't even exist if it weren't for Him.

You might've heard some of these great "Omni" words used to describe God. They are: Omnificent, or all creating. Omnipotent, which means all powerful. Omnipresent, basically meaning that He's everywhere all the time, always has been and always will be. And He's omniscient, which means that He's all knowing... there's not a whole lot that gets past God. But then there's this other "Omni" word. It's one that's often left out of the equation. Which is silly because we all know that GOD IS LOVE. And if God IS love, then why is the very thing that He is often left out of the equation of characteristics that make Him up? This other "Omni" word is Omnibenevolent. It means that God is all loving!

John 3:16 continues and says, "For God so loved..." I love the word so. He SO loved. This is an incredible use of language here because there's not a single word in all the languages of the world that can properly describe the intensity of God's love. It's been described using all kinds of big and powerful and beautiful words, but even then, they don't come close to adequately describing God's love for us. So Jesus simply says, "so loved..."

He so loved the world, and that's you, me, and everything around us. It's at our best and at our worst. It's whether we are with Him or against Him. It doesn't really matter, because God "so loves the world," even this fallen world that sins against Him all the time.

He "so loves the world that He gave His one and only Son..." This is where it gets really good. God Himself put on flesh and blood. He became 100% man. He lived a perfect, sinless, blameless life so that we don't have to. Not that we could even if we tried.

And then, He took our place. This is the part that should wreck us. He took our place and was tortured and murdered. He died like a criminal up on a Roman cross. The whole time He was thinking about you and me, and saying, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

It's Him. It's our answer. It's Jesus. Jesus was given to us that "whosoever..." It doesn't matter where you're at in life. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter what you haven't done. Or how good or bad or right or wrong you are. It's whosoever. It's a very all-inclusive statement. That's grace. That's mercy. It's whosoever.

"Believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life..." Once we believe, we stop dying. The old things have passed, and the new has come. Not only does this imply that we start living a new life right here and now, but it means that this new life goes on forever and ever and ever and ever in the presence of an Almighty God. And God's main concern with us is to restore us back into the full completion of His love and perfection and goodness. God hopes to give us all these wonderful things we don't deserve and spare us from a lot of the things we do deserve. This is some incredibly good news. It deserves a response.

I'll submit this for your consideration... Considering the sacrifice made on our behalf, there is absolutely no way we can come to any kind of real understanding and appreciation for Jesus and remain the same. So again, it deserves a response.

Now, what's the response? What's the practical application look like in our daily lives?

There's another 3:16... 1 John 3:16. But before we go there, let me remind us of a few things that also come directly from Scripture. One, Jesus says that if we love Him, we will obey His commands. Two, Jesus commands us to love God with everything we've got, and love others as ourselves. Three, He also says there's no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Is it any coincidence that John 3:16 says, "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," and 1 John 3:16 says, "We know what real love is because Jesus gave up His life for us. So, we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters."?

The first part of 1 John 3:16 declares we know what love is because Jesus laid His life down for us. This is our measuring stick for what love is. The ultimate act of love happened on a Roman cross when Jesus willingly gave Himself up so that we wouldn't be separated from Him forever. There is no love greater than or equal to that. Jesus is still the answer, and because this has such incredible implications, it deserves a response.

What's the response? If there were to be a pop quiz after this reading, here's the answer... We, just like Jesus, should love other people sacrificially. We're called to lay our lives down for others. This means we ought to sacrifice our own well-being to provide for the well-being of others.

Let me ask you a question. This is a question I've can easily get stuck on because I want to be a better more devoted man. What are you made of? What are you and I made of? Can we push aside our own selfish ambitions and devote ourselves to the purposes of God and the good of the people around us? Is it all about you? Or, is it all about He... and we?

This gets tough because just like you and me, people are selfish. So when it gets tough, do we have what it takes to push aside our own self-centeredness, and complaining, and say, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do?"

Because it's going to get tough. You see, laying our lives down for others means we're likely going to be putting ourselves in positions to get taken advantage of. And walked on. And treated poorly. With disrespect. But what it also does is creates pockets of dependency where only God can step in. And when there's less of us and more of Him, we get to experience a power that goes far beyond anything we can come up with on our own. When we love at some personal cost to ourselves, we enrich the Kingdom of God.

That's what we should all want to do. We should desire to glorify Him by building up His Kingdom through sacrificial love for others because when He hung on that cross, He looked at you and me and said this is worth it (that's an assumption). So, we should respond in such a way that says, "Yeah... He's worth it, too."

I'm gonna ask it again. What are we made of? Do we have what it takes to rise up and be about something bigger than ourselves? God comes after each of us with reckless abandon. He stops caring about Himself because He is so incredibly concerned with us. He became sin so He could beat sin so that we don't have to pay the ultimate price for sin. That's ultimate love. It's the same love that now lives in us, just waiting to be put on display. We receive the love from God, and it overflows from us to those around us. That's how it works. For God so loves you that you are to lay your life down for others. Again, what are you made of?