



From the pen of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther:

“God So Loved the World” (John 3:16)

These are astounding words. God has every reason to be angry and to wipe out the world as a frightful enemy, and yet there is no greater lover than God and no more desperate scoundrel than the world. To love the world and wish it well is beyond me. If I were God, I would give it hellfire. But instead of consuming the world in anger, God loves the world with such unspeakable and overflowing love that He gave His Son. My powers are not adequate to reach to the bottom of this tremendous affirmation. This love is greater than the fire seen by Moses [in the burning bush], greater even than the fires of hell. Who will despair if God so loves the world?

“That He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

The words read so simply but are so mighty. They are greater than the heavens and the sun. God will give us eternal life. If He offered a dukedom or a kingdom, we should dispute and say: ‘It cannot be. He would not give me a kingdom.’ We think we are not worth more than twenty gulden, for what is man compared with God? But see now what God has in mind, that He should not strangle, terrify, and harass mankind, but rather should give life, even eternal life. Compare life with every other gift on earth. Would one give his life for the kingdom of France? Hardly, nor even for the whole world. But now God is going to give life which is better than all the treasures of the world, and not only life but eternal life. What is the reason? It is that God so loved the world. These are overwhelming words.

God’s gifts are inexpressible. What does He give? His only begotten Son. This is not the gift of a groschen [a small Austrian coin], an eye, a horse, a cow, or a kingdom. No, nor heaven with the sun and

the stars, nor the whole creation, but His Son, who is as great as Himself. This should kindle sheer light, yes, fire, in our hearts, that we should ever dance for joy. If God gives His Son, He withholds nothing, for He gives Himself.

“All things are yours,” as Paul says, “whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s,” (I Corinthians 3:21-23).

This treasure is not given as a reward. It is a gift. It is your own. You have only to accept it [that is, take hold of it!]. It is not a castle, but God’s Son who is given. Hold out your hand and take, but the world is so possessed of the devil as to be unwilling to be simply a receiver. God certainly has to be a great forgiver in order to forgive the world, which so reviles Him. When, then, God gives so much to the world, gives indeed His very self, how can the world hate Him? Think of what I have done myself! For fifteen years I said Mass, crucified Christ, and practiced idolatry in the cloister [Please note: in the Roman Catholic tradition the Mass was a reenactment of Christ’s crucifixion, a bloodless sacrifice done by the priest in the Mass, which Luther here admits was wrong and sinful], and yet God sent His Son for me and forgave me everything. O Lord God, ought we not to rejoice and not only serve gladly but suffer and laugh at death for the sake of Him who has given us such a treasure? If I believe this, should I not be willing to be burned at the stake?

(From, “Martin Luther’s Easter Book” edited by Roland H. Bainton, Augsburg Press, copyright 1983, pp 28-30.)