Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

If you were here last week or you listened to the livestream, you will have heard me explain that there would be just two sermons in connection the Second Head of Doctrine. So, last Sunday I preached to you about the doctrine of Limited Atonement under the theme of the Bride of Christ. We looked at passages that speak about a definite number of people chosen before the creation of the world, who will be presented to Christ, at the end of time, as His heavenly, spotless bride. And we saw that when He was on earth, He knew who all these were. And when He poured out His blood on the cross, it was for *them* and them *alone*. So, in this way, His work of atonement was not for everyone; it was ‘limited’ to the elect.

Well, I said at the time that if you talk about this with other Christians, many of them will not agree this idea. And you can count on them referring to John 3:16. They will say, “But doesn’t John 3:16 say that ‘God so loved the world’?”

And you will remember that the reason that the canons of Dort exist is because of a Synod that was held in Dort in 1618 to respond to the teachings of a group of ministers who were called Arminians. And here is what the Arminians believed on this point: “That in agreement with this Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world died for all men and for every man, so that he merited reconciliation and forgiveness of sins for all through the death of the cross.” And then they quoted John 3:16.

Now, there are actually seven places in the New Testament that speak about Christ’s saving work and the “world,” and 5 places that speak about His saving work and “all.” So, we will simply look at one of each of these passages to see what they are saying. And that will be the focus of this second and last sermon in connection with the Second head of Doctrine and Limited Atonement: What about the apparently universal passages? Did Jesus die for everyone? And what we will see, again, is that Jesus died only for His elect; His bride; the sheep.

1. So, let’s look firstly at **John 3:16**. And we want to see it in its context, so please turn with me to John 3:16. There we read, “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*.”
   1. Now, I said that we wanted to see this verse in its **context**. And this is very important, because, as we have noted before that a text without a context becomes a pretext for a proof text. And much error has been embraced because the context of a verse has been ignored. One very common modern day example of this is three words that Jesus spoke in **Matthew 7:1**: “*Do not judge*.” So, someone will express an opinion about someone else’s behaviour, and someone else will say, “*Do not judge*.” Have you heard this, before? Now, even apart from the fact that this is a failure to take into account the context of what Jesus was saying, to tell someone that they should not judge others is to judge them! So, it is a total nonsense! Another example would be **Matthew 23:9**, where Jesus says, “*Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven*.” So, should we all tell our fathers that we can’t call them Dad anymore? Of course not! That would be to ignore the context. So, what is the context of John 3:16?
      1. Well, at the **end of chapter 2**, we are told that “*Jesus knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in a man*.” And as we come to chapters 3 & 4, we are going to get two illustrations of this.
         1. The first is in chapter 3 and is a man named **Nicodemus**. And Nicodemus presents as the ideal candidate for a follower of Jesus – For a start, he was a man, which was a big deal in those times, and he was a Pharisee; a ruler of the Jews!!! So, that means that Nicodemus was son of the covenant and a Bible expert! And yet, despite all of these ‘qualifications,’ Nicodemus did not understand Jesus or put his faith in Jesus. And Jesus knew this about Nicodemus.
         2. And then in chapter 4, we meet someone who is the **least ideal candidate** to be a follower of Jesus. For a start, she was just a woman, which is how women were viewed back then. We are not even told her name. What we are told is that she was from Samaria, which was not in the Promised Land and was the most despised country of the Jews. And she had very little knowledge of the true God. And yet, she very quickly understood Jesus and put her faith in Him! And Jesus knew this about her.
         3. So, that’s the big picture context of John 3:16.
      2. But let’s **zoom in** a little. Nicodemus called Jesus good, and Jesus responded by talking about the need to be born again. And Nicodemus thought Jesus meant physical re-birth, which he knew was impossible. So, Jesus rebuked Nicodemus for being a teacher of Israel and not understanding what He, Jesus, was talking about. And then, in **verses 14-15**, He said that just as Moses lifted up the serpent, so must Jesus be lifted up, or crucified, “*that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life*.” And then we get verse 16. But we can’t stop there. For the language of verses 16 is also used in **verse 17**: “*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him*.”
         1. So, let’s think first about what Jesus was *not* saying here. He was not saying that He came to save absolutely every human being that ever lived. That is the view known as **universalism** – everyone shall go to heaven. But the Bible is very plain: there will be some who go to heaven and some who go to hell. Yes? Yes.
         2. So, what *was* Jesus saying here?
            1. Well, with our **current church booking system**, the Deacon’s list all the names of those who could possibly come to each service, but only those who book get to come. And that is basically the Arminian understanding of John 3:16. They believe that on the cross Jesus **made it possible** for the whole world, for everyone, for all people, to be saved. But only those will be saved who choose to believe in Him.
            2. Now, they are right that only those who choose to believe in Him will be saved. But where they go wrong is to believe that Jesus died to make it possible for everyone to be saved. Listen to what Jesus said in **John 17:6**: Father, “*I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world … I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours*.” And as saw last week, from John 10, Jesus spoke about laying down His life for His sheep. The saving focus of Jesus was always and only on the elect; His sheep; His bride; those given to Him out of the mass of fallen humanity, or the world.
            3. So, what is meant here by “*the world*”? Well, if we look at the end of verse 17, where we see that the mission of God was to save the world through Jesus, and if Jesus tells us that everything He did was for those given to Him out of the world, then what the world means in John 3:16-17 is people of every tribe and language and nation.
            4. You see, Nicodemus thought that God loved only the Jews! And in Old Testament times, God did focus His saving grace, almost exclusively, upon the Jews. But that time was finishing. Now that Jesus had come, the gospel was to go out to all the nations of the world. And this is a major point of the New Testament. The church is to go and make disciples “*of all nations*.”
            5. And John immediately demonstrates this exact point in the very next chapter by telling us about the Samaritan woman; a woman from the world becomes a follower of Jesus.

* + 1. And that, congregation, is the focus of every one of the seven “world” passages in the New Testament. To those who thought that salvation was just for the Jews, or for any other particular nationality, the response of Jesus is, No, “*For God so loved the world* [meaning people of every nationality], *that* *He sent His only Son, that whoever* [among all these nations] *believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*.” That is what “the world” in these seven passages means.
  1. Now, this is a very minor and secondary point of application, but what we have seen about the gospel being for every nationality is why there should not be churches with the name of a country or a particular language above the door. The church is about Christ and the gospel, not about any one country or language. Culture and language are beautiful things. So, by all means, there is a place for special services or fellowship or evangelism for those with English as a second language, but the first priority of a church should be reaching people of every nationality for Christ.

1. But the principle of these “world” passages extends out into other areas of life also. For at different times in the history of the church, there have been those who have viewed Christianity as only for men, or only for women, or not for children, or only for the rich, or only for the poor, or only for slaves, or not for slaves, etc. And these wrong ideas are the reason for some of the “all” passages, which is the second section of our sermon. Jesus Christ did not die for one group or class or category of people, but for people of all ages and sexes and economic positions and marital status, etc. Think of Galatians 3:28, for example, where we read: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” And that is what many of the “all” passages of the New Testament are about. But I do want us to look at one of them more closely. So, turn with me to **2 Peter 3:9**. There we read, “*The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*.”
   1. And the perspective of the Arminians is that “*all*” means all. According to them, i– In God’s ideal scenario, none would perish but all would come to repentance. And so, again, they hold the view that Jesus died to make it possible for all to be saved, but only those will be saved who choose to believe in Him.
   2. But brothers and sisters, that is *not* what this verse is saying! Let’s see that together as we begin again with the **context**. Peter is writing to reassure believers that even though it had been 30 long years since Jesus ascended to heaven, He hadn’t forgotten His promise to come back soon. And that makes these words very relevant for us, doesn’t it, because it is now 2000 years since Jesus ascended!
      1. So, Peter first points to all the promises and prophecies of Scripture about Jesus’ first coming. Did they all come about? Yes, they did. Every single one of them!
      2. And then he reminds his readers that many people did not believe Noah’s warning about a coming flood. But did the flood come? It certainly did!
      3. And then He tells his readers in verse 8 that God’s time is not our time. For us, a year is a long time; for God, it is blink of an eye.
   3. And then he comes to his **main point** in verse 9 – our text. “*The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*.” And his emphasis here is God’s amazing grace or patience.
      1. So, what word in this verse reveals who Peter is talking to? It is the word “*you*.” So, if we want to understand who the “*all*” is, we have to know who the “*you*” is, because the “*all*” is connected to the “*you*.”
      2. And if you want to know who any letter is written to, where do you look? To the addressee; the name of the person or people at the beginning. Dear Bob… Dear elders at Avondale… So, turn back and look at **chapter 1:1**: “*To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ*.” So, Peter addressed his letter to believers. And he had a particular group of believers in view, but the Spirit intended this letter for all believers.
      3. So, now skip ahead to **1:10**: “*Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure*.” So, Peter addressed his letter, by the Holy Spirit, to the elect of God.
      4. And now turn back to our text in 3:9: “*The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you [all you elect believers], not wishing that any [of the elect believers] should perish, but that all [meaning every single one of the elect] should reach repentance*.”
      5. Peter’s point? Christ will not return until all God’s elect have been gathered into the household of God.
         1. Have you got someone at work or a relative who is a total pain in the neck? They are just so obnoxious or loud or rude, that you can only put up with them for a short time or you avoid them if at all possible. And you might even change jobs so you do not have to be near that person.
         2. Well, think of what God has to put up with in humanity day after day after month after year after decade after century after millennium. He patiently endures the unbelief and immorality and idolatry and injustice and hatred of Himself, in the world, and all of our half-hearted worship and mixed allegiances. Why? Because He will not allow Christ to return until every single one of the elect have come. And only then, when the bride of Christ is complete, will Jesus come to claim her.
         3. What amazing patience! What amazing forbearance. What amazing grace!
   4. So, the main point of 2 Peter 3:9 is not that it is possible for all humanity to be saved but that God is patiently waiting until all the elect have been born.
   5. And as we draw to a close, I trust you can see what that means for you and me? Has Jesus come back yet? No. So, what should we be doing? We have to preach the gospel, we have to evangelize our neighbours, we have to plant churches, and we have to send missionaries. And we have to pray that the Holy Spirit would use us to bring more elect ones to faith in Christ. And of course, we don’t know who the elect are. So, we just say to absolutely everyone who will listen, If you believe, you will be saved!

To God be all the glory for His amazing grace and patience, in Christ our Lord. Amen.