

WHAT IF GOD DIDN'T SEND HIS ONLY SON?**John 3:16**

INTRO: My Aunt Pauline was legendary in my family. Her driving skills were, well, how shall I put it, infamous.

In my teen years, her husband, Dick, took a job in the town of Milton, in the mountains of Central Pennsylvania, about 3 hours away. They would often visit on Sundays since Aunt Pauline's foster mom, my maternal grandmother, lived up the street from us to the north, and Uncle Dick's parents lived in the next property to the south. It was quite convenient for them – they could get a lot of visiting done with one trip.

One particular time, as Sunday evening wore on as Aunt Pauline talked interminably with my mother in the kitchen, Uncle Dick was getting more and more antsy about getting on the road. After all, he knew he had a 3-hour drive ahead of him. He called to her several times, something to the effect of "Pauline, we need to get on the road!" And as I recall, she acknowledged him, but kept talking to my mom. Finally Uncle Dick walked out into the kitchen, and said "Pauline, we really need to get going." To which she replied, "Oh don't worry, Dick, I'll drive, so that you can sleep." To which, Uncle Dick replied, "I can sleep better when I drive."

Uncle Dick was very patient with her.

As I said she was legendary. My dad often told the story of how Aunt Pauline's car wouldn't start one day. It was back in the day before manual transmissions and you could start a car with a dead battery by simply pushing the car, and getting some momentum and then "popping the clutch", which started the car. (I felt I needed to explain this to an automatic transmission culture) So Daddy took his car and began pushing her car in an effort to try to jumpstart it. He would push, and stop and give her a chance to engage the clutch, but the car just would not start. He also noticed there was no jerky motion in her car that indicated she had actually popped the clutch. The answer to the mystery came finally after about five or six miles when she yelled back to him, "Irvin, do you think I should leave out the clutch!"

Daddy was a patient man, which was good, because Aunt Pauline was a test of anyone's patience. But she was so lovable! So it was easy to be patient with her. Besides we've had many wonderful stories all these years of Aunt Pauline's exploits in our family lore.

God was very patient with humanity. He had created us and placed us in the perfection of the Garden of Eden. We didn't last long until we brought sin into the flawless garden. That original sin caused a separation with God that had not been there before. God patiently dealt with humanity. His patience was even evident when he destroyed all but one family with a flood.

Sin continued to infect humanity and God was frustrated but patiently put up with his ungrateful creation. A system of sacrifice had been provided and many an animal had been sacrificed for the sins of God's people. A once and for all remedy was needed, and that remedy was Jesus.

Humanity wasn't very lovable, but God loved us anyway, and sent his only son as the once and for all sacrifice. Think of it this way, *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.* John 3:16 (NIV)

But what if he'd never done that? What if God didn't send his only son?

What if he had just written us off after the Garden? Such a beautiful place. Perfection! And we'd thrown it back in his face.

What if he'd had enough of us, in the times of Noah? He could have just flooded the entire Earth and wiped us out and started over. What if he'd just left unfaithful creation languish in captivity to sin? What if he never spoke to us again?

As I pointed out a couple weeks ago, there had been hundreds of years of silence prior to the pronouncement of the birth of Jesus. God had not spoken through the prophets for upwards of 400 years. God had lost patience for sure, but he wasn't done with us. He hadn't given up as much as he was letting us stew on the situation a bit.

And then he sent his one and only Son. The perfect sacrifice. What if he hadn't? It's a moot point like all our other what ifs – he did. The ultimate gift. Just look at it . . .

For God so loved the world

- Were we worth it? Not really. We were disobedient, rebellious, and hateful. The snarling face of humanity was so twisted it was a face only a holy God the Father could love.

- That's the hardest thing to do, to love someone who doesn't love you back. Maybe even hates you. Or worse, doesn't acknowledge that you even exist. That kind of rejection is the worst of all. Loving someone like that takes supernatural effort – it's something only a perfect God can do.
- So, instead of writing the human race off . . .

God gave his one and only Son

- And this wasn't just any son, this is God's ONLY Son. God's perfect son. Never sinned, and never would.
- This son came into the world willingly to be the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. His death on the Cross, was the only one good enough and final enough to suffice for the collective sin of an infinitely sinful human race.
- This son didn't come as a conquering hero on a prancing warhorse – instead he was born in a stable with the smell of cattle, sheep, and donkeys as the first odors in his nostrils. A baby. A baby king, to be sure, but not the kind of king one thinks of when they thinking of a conqueror. But this baby would conquer sin, once and for all.
- God gave us this son. That son gave himself. So here's the promise . . .

Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life

- Yesterday we celebrated the life of Gail Steigerwalt. Oh yes, it was a funeral and there were tears and sadness because she had physically died on Friday afternoon, on December 11. That is natural. Joel, and Jess, and all her other loved ones and friends miss her desperately. But, to use an expression Jewel used after her husband Ray died just shy of six years ago, none of us would wish her back. Gail is enjoying eternal life. When she breathed her last here, she breathed anew in her newly acquired home in Glory. Gail is now enjoying eternal life because she believed in that one and only son. But she didn't just believe in him, she lived for him, and served him, and so she had abundant life while she was here, even though she struggled physically. But now, oh wow! Gail is not struggling anymore. She has eternal life!
- This is a rock solid promise, *Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*. All from a Savior who was an obedient son, who loved us THIS MUCH!
- How about you? Do you have that eternal life in your future? Do you believe in the son of God who loved enough to send his only son? The promise is for you. Don't waste any more time if you have not. Make him your Savior. Give him the keys to your life. If you need to know how to do that – you talk to me immediately after this service is over.
- Most of you have already taken that step of belief in Jesus Christ, the one and only son of God. Don't keep it to you self. We've seen in recent weeks, certainly over the past year, how fleeting life is. The message of peace, hope, joy, and most of all, LOVE, is too important not to share with those who have no hope.

Conclusion: What if God didn't ever send his only son? It's too terrible to even ponder. Fortunately for us he did. *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.* John 3:16. Thanks be to God! Amen.