

24. The Gospel of John—3:16

“You Must Be Born Again” Pt.3

(3/25/18)

For the last couple of weeks in our study in John’s gospel, we have been looking at chapter 3 and in particular the first 21 verses—which many have called one of the greatest sections in the Bible.

It’s great because in it Jesus tells a very religious man named Nicodemus that his religious works cannot get him into heaven—and then proceeds to tell him the only way he and everyone else in the world can be saved and enter heaven.

In fact, we could broaden the impact of this conversation by saying—this section of Scripture is great because, in reality, it’s a conversation between God and mankind on the single most important subject of life—eternal life!

I’ve divided the first 21 verses of John 3 this way—

I. The Confused Seeker—v.1-12

II. The Condescending Savior—v.13-16

III. The Condemned Sinner—v.17-21

Last week we got as far as verse 15—saving verse 16 for this morning.

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16 contains only twenty-five words in the English—and yet so little has never communicated so much in the history of the world.

Martin Luther called John 3:16—“*The heart of the Bible—the Gospel in miniature.*”

Another pastor said—“*Of the 31,373 verses in the Bible, it may be the most popular single verse used in evangelism.*”

Now because this verse is one of the most, if not the most, beloved verses in the Bible—the sermons pastors have preached on it over the centuries could fill the library of Congress.

And as I was reading a couple of dozen of them by various teachers I quickly came to the realization that we could come at this verse from an almost unlimited number of directions, emphasizing a myriad of main thoughts to develop into a message.

I fought the urge to get super-analytical with this verse, choosing rather to keep it simple.

I mean, isn't that what the Holy Spirit, Who gave us this verse, did?

He took some of the greatest truths in the Bible and condensed them into a single verse that a child could understand—while, at the same time, the greatest theologians and deepest thinkers in the Christian church have studied for centuries while barely scratching the surface of what is contained in this one verse.

Now, let me stop and say once again that—John chapter 3 and primarily the first 16 verses basically revolve around two great ‘must’ statements given by Jesus.

These ‘must’ statements are found in verses 7 and 14 where Jesus said—

John 3:7 (NKJV)

7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (the ‘must’ of the sinner)

John 3:14 (NKJV)

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up... (the ‘must’ of the Savior)

And together they lead up to and climax in the single greatest message of love and hope ever given to mankind—John 3:16

I’d like to divide this verse into 4 parts—

A. For God so loved the world

The fact that God loves shouldn’t surprise us since the Bible says that it is His nature to do so, as John the apostle put it—“God *is* love.” (1John 4:8)

And so, the One loving isn’t shocking—it’s the thing loved or the object of God’s love that is shocking—the world!

Now, in the N.T. the phrase “the world” doesn’t mean the planet earth or nature—it is often used to denote the world of *fallen sinners*—those who are in rebellion against God.

And as such, there is nothing lovable about rebels that should cause God to love us—and not just love us, but so love us!

As you know, Billy Graham, whom many consider to have been the greatest evangelist that ever lived, died a few weeks ago.

As I watched the documentary on his life, what struck me was how over the course of his 60 plus years of ministry—that he always kept his message simple.

Billy Graham was a very smart man, graduating from Bible college and seminary, and yet the message he preached was never so deep and super-intellectual that the average person couldn't understand it.

Instead, Dr. Graham kept it simple choosing to emphasize the love of God for lost sinners, and how that no one, no matter how far from God they are and steeped in sin they might be—was beyond His love to save them.

And that is the message I want to communicate to you this morning—that God loves you regardless of the life you're living or the sin you're involved in—God loves you and wants to save you.

The fact that God loves the people of this world knowing what is in man is incredible in and of itself—

Matthew 15:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

Romans 1:29-31 (NKJV)

²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, ³⁰ backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;

And so once again, the fact that God loves the people of this world knowing what is in us is truly remarkable.

But listen, as beautiful as God's love for sinners is, and regardless of how much, because of that love, He wants to save them—understand that God's love can't save you.

In fact, God's love has never saved anyone—all it can do is provide a way by which you can be saved.

Of course, that **'way'** is Jesus Christ and His death on the cross.

And that brings us to our second main point—**For God so loved the world—**

B. That He gave His only begotten Son

It cost the Father His **"only begotten Son"** to be our substitute and sacrifice.

The term **'only begotten'** is *monogenēs* in the Greek and means that Jesus is the Son of God in a totally different sense from the rest of humanity who believes and becomes children of God.

Jesus' sonship is unique, one of a kind, for He is eternal and is of the same essence as the Father—in that He is God, the Second Person of the Trinity.

But also, because Jesus had an earthly mother (Mary) but no earthly father (God the Father was His Father)—the sin of Adam (original sin) didn't pass to Him.

This was significant because if He would have had an earthly father He would have been born a fallen sinner (impossible) which is why He had to be born of a virgin—it was the only way He could have been born one of us yet without sin.

And that was the only way Jesus could have died for us in our place as our substitute—the innocent dying for the guilty—He had to be virgin born and therefore sinless—

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

And remember, Jesus didn't die for His friends (for those who loved Him)—He died for His enemies (rebels).

➔ Talk about gang-banger Vince and how his friends would be willing to die for him

Anytime Satan tries to get you to doubt God's love for you because some sin has gotten a hold of you—remember God never did love you because you were worthy—He loved you when you were a sinner—

Romans 5:6-8 (NLT)

⁶ When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.

⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

Now look, just because Jesus died for *all* doesn't mean that *all* will be automatically saved and go to heaven.

That's called 'universalism' and its heresy.

God had a part in salvation, but sinners also have a part—not in purchasing our salvation of course—but in believing in Christ and receiving the gift of eternal life that He purchased with His own blood and is now offering to us.

C. That whoever believes in Him

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”—all of that is God’s part in our salvation.

However, to actually be forgiven for our sins and go to heaven someday we must do our part and—receive God’s gift by faith.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

John 1:12 (NKJV)

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

“I’m having a hard time believing God wants to save me—you don’t know the life I’ve lived (or am living)—how can I be sure?”

1 Timothy 2:4 (NKJV)

⁴ [God our Savior]...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)

⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Even though God is offering salvation to everyone, not everyone will be saved—not because God doesn’t want them saved, but because they don’t want to repent and believe in Jesus.

Notice once again that the invitation to be saved is not limited to any one group like the ‘elect’ or only for ‘nice’ people or those who don’t drink, smoke, do drugs or have a criminal record.

It is an open, universal invitation to the people of this world God so loved—to come to Jesus if they desire to be saved and adopted into His family.

Understand that His arms are open wide, and He is saying to you this morning—“*Come to me, I will accept ‘whoever’ will believe in My Son and receive Him as their Savior.*”

Romans 10:11-13 (NKJV)

¹¹ For the Scripture says, “*Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.*” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

¹³ For “*whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*”

D. Should not perish but have everlasting life

Once a person puts their faith in Jesus—they pass from death (judgment) to everlasting life and will never be cast into hell.

John 5:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

John 3:36 (NKJV)

³⁶ He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Matthew 25:46 (NKJV)

⁴⁶ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

One pastor had this to say—

“Although I know it is somewhat coincidental, I find it interesting that in our English translation of this verse, the middle word is Son. It is no coincidence, however, that those who have experienced God’s presence most powerfully are those who have made the Son the center of their lives. Just as Jesus is the center of the greatest verse in all Scripture, He must be central in our hearts and lives if they are to have meaning, purpose, and impact (Ephesians 1:10). This means that any person, pursuit, or passion in my life that cannot be centered on Jesus Christ has no place in my life.”

There you have a brief look at one of the greatest, if not the greatest, verses in the Bible.

When you read John 3:16—what goes thru your mind?

Do you cherish every word rejoicing in its truth?

Or do you mindlessly read it without giving it a second thought because you've heard it or read it so many times over the years that it no longer impacts you.

Many young people aren't going to church and don't even believe in God or in heaven, hell or eternal life—all they're concerned about is this life.

And so, when you share John 3:16 with them, it's like you're speaking a different language and they just want you to leave them alone.

But a gift, if it's going to be of benefit to you, has to be received by you—or else it's like it was never offered to you in the first place.

I'm convinced that the reason hell will be a place of weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth for all eternity is because for all eternity those there will be suffering under the weight of knowing that—they didn't have to be in that awful place.

God loved them and offered them the gift His Son purchased for them with His own blood—the gift of eternal life but they refused to accept it and now it is too late.

However, it's not too late for you here this morning—accept God's gift of eternal life today—while there's still time!