

For God So Loved The World

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
(John 3:16 ESV)*

*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.
(John 3:17 ESV)*

*Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.
(John 14:6 ESV)*

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John 3:16

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Introduction:

Good morning Redeemer. Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 3:16. Here at Redeemer City, as most of you know, we generally find ourselves walking through a whole book of the Bible. We have walked through Daniel, 1 and 2nd Thessalonians, parts of Leviticus and the Psalms, and most recently we have been making our way through the book of Acts. But this morning we are going to do something a little bit different. Today we are going to park in one of the most famous of all Bible verses: John 3:16.

But before we launch, I want to talk very briefly about wonder. Wonder is something that we tend to lose very quickly as we grow up. Recently, I visited a friend and I watched as his two boys ran back and forth from outside to inside his house playing with their paw patrols in the dirt and zooming in and out for snacks only to finally settle on the couch to watch some cartoons. I was fascinated by their joy, contentment, and wonder. And these little boys are not living in an extravagant house with all the amenities that you can think of. They live in a small and crammed house but find themselves being fascinated by the world before them.

That's what wonder does. It fills us with joy, contentment, excitement and hope. But for many of us, wonder is a thing of the past. And I would argue that we can use the text before us, John 3:16,

as a litmus test for whether or not we have lost something of the wonder that *should* characterize us as we think about what God has done to rescue us.

You see, for many of us who have grown up going to church every Sunday since we were a child, we have heard this verse recited almost every Sunday morning! And it would be natural for us to have lost sight of its magnificence. It would be natural for us to gloss over the scandalous love of God that John 3:16 speaks of. Natural, but not right!

But then there are some of you here this morning who have never heard this verse. Maybe you have never heard the Good News of Jesus Christ! And therefore you don't realize its beauty or its implications for you and the entire world.

But no matter what your background is, whether you are a Christian or not, the Gospel of Jesus Christ demands your attention. It demands your humility to see that it is your only hope, my only hope, and the only hope for this lost and dying world.

My prayer has been and is for us today that God would awaken us to the marvellous, wonderful, and awe inspiring, glorious Gospel as we see it in John 3:16.

With these things in mind, hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This verse, arguably the most famous in all the Bible, comes after a discussion between Jesus and an important Jewish religious leader: Nicodemus. Jesus had just explained that in order to enter the Kingdom of God, or, to become a child of God, you need to be born again. You need to have the Holy Spirit take your dead, rock hard heart, and replace it with a heart that is alive and pumping for the glory of God. In other words, you don't need a renovation, a repair, or an addition, you need a COMPLETE REBUILD. That's what Jesus said to prepare us for the glorious text before us:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 ESV)

A famous pastor and theologian by the name of Matthew Henry had this to say about the verse before us:

Here is gospel indeed, good news, **the best that ever came from heaven to earth**. Here is much, here is all in a little, the word of reconciliation in miniature.¹

John 3:16 is GOOD NEWS. It is the news that all the world needs to hear, believe, hope, and trust in. So this morning let's park here, and overlook the beauty and the wonder of the Good News of the Gospel, for the glory of God and for our good.

What do we see in this Good News?

Good news can come in different forms. Sometimes it is strictly one dimensional like when the married couple who has been trying for years to get pregnant find out a baby is on its way! Or when you find out you got that promotion you have been waiting and hoping for. But sometimes Good News comes with some bad news. Meaning you have to hear about the bad news before you get to the Good which will trump and nullify the bad. Well that is how the Good News comes to us in John 3:16. In this hope and wonder filled verse we first see:

1. The Depths of our Sin

“If your family doctor identified cancer at your last visit but decided not to tell you, you would switch family doctors, right? Because - in matters of life and death - ignorance is NOT BLISS. Well, in the same way, when we are dealing with matters of eternity, heaven and hell, our very existence, ignorance is NEVER BLISS! So John doesn't sugarcoat the message. His words are clear:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not **perish** but have eternal life. (John 3:16 ESV)

¹ Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary Series: An Exposition, with Practical Observations, of the Gospel According to St. John*, accessed via Olive Tree Bible Software.

The Good News comes to a world that is perishing. Did you know that? Sometimes we read this verse and we rush past this but when we do so we miss a key point: the gospel of Jesus Christ is a RESCUE MISSION. It is a search and rescue mission because the world is sinking into ruin. The wrath of God lies heavy upon everyone who is trusting in anything else other than Jesus for their salvation. In short, the world is perishing! In fact, just a few verses later we hear this warning:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, **but the wrath of God remains on him.** (John 3:36 ESV)

Sin has so infiltrated the world so much so that every single person is under its reign and is its servant. Paul puts it this way in Romans 3:23:

For **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23 ESV)

All people from every nation are under this sentence. All are perishing and remain under the judgement of God for their rebellion. This is all part of the Good News of John 3:16. Jesus has come to save perishing sinners.

This past Spring, Krysta and I spent sometime in Nova Scotia to visit some of her family and while we were there we went to a small Titanic museum. Many things jumped out to us but one of the key things that did was that many of the passengers didn't even notice that there was a collision with an iceberg. Many were sleeping, and others felt a mere and light vibration. Little did they know that for many that was the beginning of the end.

We rub shoulders with men and women of various walks of life everyday who are unaware that they are on a road to destruction. No matter what they do, what they look like, where they are from: they are perishing. They are headed for destruction because they have rebelled against their Holy creator whether they acknowledge it or not. In order to reach the wonder and to see more of the glory of John 3:16, we must not look over the depths of our sin and the sin of the world. The Good News of Jesus Christ comes to a world that is perishing.

But after the revealing of the deadly prognosis, John 3:16 tells us of:

2. The Heights of God's Love

What is so staggering about John 3:16, about the Good News of the Gospel is that it comes to a *rebellious* people. God sets His glorious love NOT on a lovely and obedient people, but on a rebellious world who didn't want any part of Him. D.A. Carson sums it up this way:

When John tells us that God loves the world (3:16), far from being an endorsement of the world, it is a testimony to the character of God. **God's love is to be admired not because the world is so big but because the world is so bad.**²

Are you getting that? It's a lot easier to love obedient and loving children than it is to love disobedient, angry children who want no part of you isn't it? Well the world is full of the latter. That's why John 3:16 should fill us with wonder! Because in it we see the unfathomable love that God has for the world that has rejected Him. It doesn't make sense does it?

I know my own heart. Everyday I see how many of my best actions are riddled with ulterior motives. Everyday I see how many times I have failed to love God as I was made to. How I have failed to love my wife, my family, my co-workers and neighbors as I was made to. But God loves me. And God loves you. And God loves the world. Not because of anything intrinsically good about us, but because of something intrinsically GLORIOUS in Him! When God passed by Moses on the mountain He declared:

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and **abounding in steadfast love** and faithfulness. (Exodus 34:6 ESV)

That's who our God is. A God who loves His creation. And John 3:16 informs us of the heights of God's love as it was given to an unlovely, rebellious, guilty and wayward world.

Now I want to be clear here, Jesus was the greatest demonstration of God's love for the world. Yes and Amen. But we would rob him of glory if we forgot all the love He had shown to His people before this. When Adam and Eve sinned and sin entered the world, that's when the iceberg struck us, God did not destroy them down right then and there. Instead He promised to restore and

² Carson, D.A., *Pillar Commentary Series: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdsman Publishing Company, 1991) accessed via *Olive Tree Bible Software*.

redeem all that was lost. He promised to send a child who would undo all the mess they made in Genesis 3:15. The rest of the Old Testament is the story of our search - our longing - for this child of promise. Is it Abraham? Is it Isaac? Is it Jacob? Moses? David? It was into this search for the promised Son that Jesus declared "God so loved the world that He sent HIS only Son!

Jesus was the culmination of God's love for the world. If anyone ever doubted the heights of God's love and affection for the world Jesus put all of those doubts away! God demonstrated His love by sending His only Son-Jesus Christ. THAT'S how much He loved you. THAT'S how much we loved me. He saw us swimming in disobedience, daily falling short of His glory, and yet STILL loved and gave up His Son in order for us to be brought into relationship with Him.

Do you believe that? Friend, maybe you need to be reminded afresh of this. God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son-Jesus Christ. John Calvin captures the beauty of this so well.

The word only-begotten is emphatic, **to magnify the fervor of the love of God towards us**. For as men are not easily convinced that God loves them, in order to remove all doubt, he has expressly stated that **we are so very dear to God** that, on our account, he did not even spare his only-begotten Son.

Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that staggering? Sometimes we are so filled with doubt because we see the depths of our sin that we doubt the love of God don't we? Sometimes we think about what we have done and we rightfully say, 'how could I be loved and forgiven after all that I have done?' When we feel that, we are feeling the holiness of God and the depth of our sin, and friends that is a good thing. But we CANNOT stay there. Because John 3:16 says this:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 ESV)

We are meant to see our sin yes, but then we are meant to be drawn to repentance through the love of God as seen in the gift of Jesus Christ.

Have you experience the heights of God's love? Have you believed that He truly loves you? God sent Jesus so that you would know this, that you would rest in it, and that you would have peace.

In our rebellious state, God demonstrated the height of His love for us by sending His only Son Jesus Christ to be our rescue. Thirdly, the Good News shows us:

3. The Breadth of Jesus' Sacrifice

As we said earlier, the Good News of the Gospel is a rescue mission. It is not merely another option for someone looking to find fulfillment in their lives. It is not something that you can take or leave. It isn't something that just *works* for some people. It is the ONLY OPTION for the problem we *all* have. So God sent His one and only Son to undo all that Adam and Eve had brought upon the world. He sent Jesus to do away with the problem of OUR SIN. That's why John the Baptist upon seeing Jesus said:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, **who takes away the sin of the world!**” (John 1:29 ESV)

John saw that Jesus' would be the one to rid us of our greatest problem: sin. How would he do this? By giving Himself up as a sacrifice in our place. In John 3:14-15, the two verses preceding our main text this morning, Jesus told us this:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, **so must the Son of Man be lifted up**, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15 ESV)

Jesus was rooting what He came to do in a previous act of God's grace in the lives of His people. While the people of God were wandering in the wilderness, as they had done several times, they began to doubt and grumble against Moses. And on this one occasion, God's judgement was the sending of fiery serpents that bit the people of Israel so that many of them died. Once the people had realized what they had done, they confessed their sin and God directed Moses this way:

“Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. (Numbers 21:8-9 ESV)

Jesus was pointing back to this story and saying that that event was ultimately pointing to HIS DEATH. Jesus was 'lifted up,' that was a way of pointing to the act of crucifixion, just as the bronze serpent was lifted up by Moses as a way to be saved from the fiery snakes. You see, the

fiery snakes were actually killing the Israelites and they really needed an escape. They needed to have a substitute in their place. The bronze serpent was that substitute. So when Jesus compared himself to the bronze serpent, He was saying that He IS the ULTIMATE SUBSTITUTE for us. He is the only way to be saved from the judgement of God.

Jesus was sent by God the Father to not merely serve as a nice example to follow but to bear the sins of the world. Jesus came to live and die and rise again in your place! That's what His mandate was and that is what He did! He came to be lifted up, crucified, sacrificed in our place so that we could be saved!

Because of humanity's rebellion through the ages, because no one had ever been able to live the life that God had created us to live, all of us are under the judgment of God. We have talked about this already. Adam and Eve sinned. Israel sinned. You and I have sinned. But Jesus never did! As He walked the earth, every single moment of His life was in conformity to His Father's will. Can you imagine that? Every breath, every day, year after year, through suffering, while dealing with people persecuting Him, Jesus always loved the Father and He always loved the people around Him PERFECTLY. His life was flawless before God the Father.

And then He was condemned as a criminal and nailed on a Cross where He bore the curse of sin NOT because of anything He did but solely for us. And as God laid on Jesus' our sins and our rightful judgement, you and I were having our guilty record completely exchanged for Jesus' perfect record. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says it better than we ever could:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

That is the great exchange. That is the hope of the world. That our sins could be traded for the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That our records would be swapped and we could be cleared of our guilt. And that is what Jesus accomplished for us. That is what Psalm 103:11-12 looked forward to:

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; **as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us**. (Psalm 103:11-12 ESV)

Jesus accomplished that for us. Hallelujah! But that begs the question, how do we receive it? How do we get to claim this hope and good news for ourselves? The answer is so simple a child can do it: repent and believe in Jesus.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, **that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.** (John 3:16 ESV)

Do you want to have your sins covered and to experience the love of God? Do you want to be adopted into the family of God? Repent and Believe in Jesus! Believe that He is your only hope of freedom from the judgement of God. Believe that His life is the life that you were meant to live. Trust that in Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven and forever removed from your account.

And as you repent and believe, your life will be transformed from a life of sin rebellion to a life of obedience to your loving God. Because what happens in salvation. We do not merely believe and live as we formerly did but by God's Spirit are TRANSFORMED into God's likeness. Moment by moment, by degree to degree, God ALWAYS transforms His people. Obedience and growth always follow true belief and repentance. Why? Because once you have truly seen the love of God displayed in Jesus' sacrifice, once you have truly believed and made that your hope and life, you are a child of God. And as a child of God, you are going to grow in resemblance to your heavenly Father.

And lastly, the Good News of the Gospel tells us of:

4. The Hope of Eternal Life

Look with me to our text one last time:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish **but have eternal life.** (John 3:16 ESV)

As we have seen, God sent Jesus to forgive and redeem you. He died so that you could have life and have it to the full. He came so that what had been broken could be restored. Jesus said:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. **I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.** (John 10:10 ESV)

The Gospel tells us that the only way for us to have true life is found in jumping on the lifeboat that is Jesus Christ. He is our only rescue and our only way to experience true life. How many of us here in this very room have experienced this? How many of us were rescued from the grips of sin and despair into the abundant life found in Jesus Christ? How many of us have tasted and seen that He is the only true source of LASTING JOY?

And Jesus' promise of eternal life looks past this life on earth. His promise points to the future glory that we will experience in the New Heavens and Earth. It points to a time when we will be engulfed in the awesome glory of God. When we will no longer experience any effects of the curse of sin. Eternal Life will be pure bliss as we love, savour, worship, and experience our great God. It points to the restoration of all that was lost in the garden of Eden: Paradise. Jesus came to give us this. Freedom from the curse of sin and the righteous wrath of God. Freedom from the chains of sin which once bound us. Freedom to live as we were created to live in obedience and worship to our great God. And a hope that goes far beyond this life or the power of the grave. That is the Good News of John 3:16.

And it is a glorious, wonderful and hope filled message that we are tasked with believing and declaring to the world! Matthew Henry put it this way. To those who have believed in the Gospel:

They are entitled to the joys of heaven: they shall have everlasting life. The convicted traitor is not only pardoned, but preferred, and made a favourite, and treated as one whom the King of kings delights to honour. Out of prison he comes to reign.³

Do we believe that? Do we preach that way? Do we live that way? The Gospel is GOOD NEWS. It is life for a world that is perishing. It is the Good News that God so loved the world. That is our hope and the only hope for a dying and perishing world.

And as we come to a close this morning, I want to ask you to pray that God would fill you with joy and wonder once again at this Good News! Pray that God would cause it to refresh and renew your zeal to see the lost around you finding rescue in Jesus Christ! Because if we have believed this, if this is our only hope, then it demands that we take it to the perishing world around us. Your

³ Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary Series: An Exposition, with Practical Observations, of the Gospel According to St. John*, accessed via Olive Tree Bible Software.

family needs to hear, your neighbors, your co-workers, all need to hear that there is an rescue available. They need to know that though they are perishing but there is a God who loves them so much that He put a wonderful and a glorious plan into motion. A plan which demonstrated His love for the world and a full proof way of redeeming and restoring humanity. They need to hear John 3:16:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Praise be to God! Let's pray.