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Resurrection Message / Resurrection; Gospel; Love; God's Love; World; Jesus; God; Crucifixion
/ John 3:16

John 3:16 is the greatest summary of the gospel in the entire Bible.

Introduction

Every Easter, churches worldwide see a noticeable increase in attendance.

That is true for our church as well.

Why is that?

Why do so many people attend church on Easter Sunday and not on any other Sunday?

Perhaps it is because for some that is the religious thing to do. Family members expect them to attend at Easter and so they do.

Perhaps some people attend Easter services because they are hedging their bets. There may be something to the resurrection of Jesus and they want to be seen doing the right thing.

Perhaps some people attend Easter services out of guilt. They wish that by attending an Easter service their guilt may be assuaged.

Perhaps some people attend Easter services to find hope. They know they are struggling in life and they would love to have hope for today—and for the future.

Whatever the reason that brought you here today, on behalf of our church family, I want to say, “Welcome!” I am so glad that you have joined us today.

Today, I want to examine a verse in the Bible that you probably know by heart. It is the best-known verse in the entire Bible. I am, of course, referring to [John 3:16](#).

The context for [John 3:16](#) is when a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus came to see Jesus one night.

He had heard of Jesus' teaching. He had also heard of Jesus' miracles.

Perhaps Nicodemus had even heard Jesus in person and seen Jesus perform miracles.

Regardless, Nicodemus could not wrap his head around what God was doing through Jesus.

Almost certainly, Nicodemus was like the crowds in that he sensed that there was something unique about Jesus but he had an inadequate theological understanding that Jesus was the Savior of sinners whom God had sent to the world.

Nicodemus and Jesus engaged in a conversation about what God was doing through Jesus.

Then, in [John 3:16](#), Jesus gave the most famous summary of the gospel in the entire Bible.

Scripture

Let's read [John 3:16](#):

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.”

Lesson

[John 3:16](#) is the greatest summary of the gospel in the entire Bible.

I don't know who first came up with the following outline, but I want to use it today:

1. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Lover
2. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Degree
3. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Number

4. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Act
5. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Gift
6. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Invitation
7. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Simplicity
8. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Person
9. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Deliverance
10. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Difference
11. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Certainty
12. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Possession

I. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Lover

First, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest lover: “**For God....**”

The Bible begins with these words in [Genesis 1:1](#), “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” We soon learn that God created the world and everything in it.

God created Adam and Eve as the pinnacle of his creation. They enjoyed a wonderful friendship with God who loved them.

Sometime after God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, they fell into sin.

Their fellowship with God was broken because of their sin and they were banished from his presence.

But, because God is a God of love, he purposed to have a relationship with men and women.

So he set into place a plan to send his very own Son to reconcile sinful men and women with himself.

Of course, that did not happen immediately.

It took thousands of years before God’s Son was born in Bethlehem to a teenage girl named Mary. She named the boy Jesus.

Jesus grew up in obscurity in a village called Nazareth in Galilee.

When he was thirty years old, Jesus began his public ministry.

Jesus quickly attracted a lot of attention because of his teaching and his miracles.

That is when Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. He wanted to know all about Jesus.

That brings us to where Jesus summarized who he was: It all began with the greatest lover, his Heavenly Father, **God**.

II. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Degree

Second, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest degree: “...**so loved**...”

The Greek verb “**loved**” (*egapesen*) is in a prominent position in the Greek text.

Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know that God’s motive for sending him was because God “**so loved**” the world.

God’s attitude toward the people he created is not “ho hum.”

God loves the people he created. And that is why he sent Jesus.

More than thirty years ago, Dennis Prager noted that high school students in America were asked, “In an emergency, would you save your dog or a stranger first?”

This question had been asked of students for more than fifteen years. The vast majority of students answered that they would not save the stranger.

Why?

Their answer was, “I love my dog. I don’t love the stranger” (Dennis Prager in Good News, July/Aug., 1993, quoted in Christianity Today, Oct 25, 1993, p. 73.)

People are not strangers to God. He created people. Every one of us.

Therefore, he deeply loves the people he created.

III. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Number

Third, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest number: “...**the world**...”

As you know, Jesus was Jewish. The Jewish Scriptures affirmed that God loved the children of Israel.

So, Nicodemus must have been surprised when Jesus stated that God's love was not restricted to ethnic Jews. Instead, Jesus said that God loved **“the world.”**

The astonishing—but wonderful!—truth is that God's love was for **“the world”** and not only for the Jews.

One commentator notes, “God's love is to be admired not because the world is so big and includes so many people, but because the world is so bad: that is the customary connotation of *kosmos* [the Greek word for world]” (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991], 205).

In his Gospel, John often notes that it is **“the world”** that is in opposition to God (see [John 1:10](#); [7:7](#); [14:17](#); [15:18-19](#)).

So the astonishing truth is that God has set his love upon people in **“the world”** who are in rebellion and opposition to him.

IV. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Act

Fourth, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest act: **“...that he gave....”**

God's love for the sinful, rebellious people that he had created was not merely sentimental.

Rather, God's love led to a very specific action: **“...that he gave....”**

God did not sit in heaven and say, “Let those rebellious people take the first step. They are the ones who have rebelled against me. I did nothing wrong. I created them. I loved them. I gave food, clothing, and shelter. And how did they repay me? They have rebelled against me. They have turned their backs on me. So, let them take the first step to reconcile with me.”

No. God knew that rebellious sinners like us would never take the first step.

So, God took the first step. **“He gave.”**

And what did he give?

V. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Gift

Fifth, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest gift: “...his only Son...”

God sent his Son Jesus on a rescue mission.

Jesus came to Earth to save sinners. He came to rescue us. He came so that sinners like us could be reconciled with God.

It was a mission fraught with danger.

Jesus had to obey the Law of God perfectly every moment of every day for his entire life. One sinful act, one sinful word, or even one sinful thought would have resulted in failure.

Not only for Jesus but also for all people.

Some of you may have seen the movie *Saving Private Ryan*.

It is set in 1944 toward the end of World War II. Three of the four Ryan brothers are killed in action in World War II.

Captain John Miller is ordered to take a squad of soldiers from the 2nd Ranger Battalion to find the fourth brother, Private James Francis Ryan, and return him home to his mother. The U.S. military did not want the mother to lose all four of her sons in the war.

Eventually, the squad locates Private Ryan. Initially, he does not want to leave his unit because he does not believe he deserves to go home more than anyone else.

A vicious encounter with German troops leaves almost the entire squad dead.

Captain Miller is also mortally wounded. As he dies, Captain Miller tells Private Ryan to earn the sacrifices made to send him home. And then he dies.

God sent his Son Jesus to rescue lost sinners like us. God wants us to come home to him.

Jesus eventually died on the cross. He did that to pay the penalty for our sins. He gave his life so that we can go home to God the Father. And we don't have to do anything to earn our way home because Jesus did it all for us.

Three days later, God the Father raised Jesus back to life again. He fully accepted Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf.

VI. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Invitation

Sixth, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest invitation: “...**that whoever...**”

Nicodemus must have wondered about this. Jews believed that God loved only the children of Israel.

But now Jesus was saying that “**whoever**” could be saved.

A person did not have to become a proselyte to be saved.

A person did not have to become a Jew to be saved.

The invitation was extended to “**whoever.**”

Each one of us is a “**whoever.**”

You have come here today for who knows what reason.

May I say to you with all the authority invested in me by God himself, “You are invited to come home to God through Jesus.”

You may say, “But you don't know what I have done.”

That doesn't matter. “**Whoever**” may come.

You may say, “My shame is so great.”

That doesn't matter. “**Whoever**” may come.

You may say, “My sin is so great.”

That doesn't matter. “**Whoever**” may come.

God's invitation is the greatest invitation ever.

But what must you do to accept this invitation?

VII. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Simplicity

Seventh, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest simplicity: “...**believes....**”

That's it! You simply believe that you are a sinner in need of a Savior and that Savior is Jesus.

He died to pay the penalty for all your sins. You turn from your sin and believe that Jesus paid the penalty that you should have to pay.

Did you know that there are nearly 4,000 recognized religions in the world?

And did you know that 3,999 religions say that to go to heaven you must do something? You must earn your way to heaven. Or, you must work your way to heaven.

There is only one religion in which you do not work at all. You simply believe in the work that Jesus has done on your behalf.

Isn't that glorious?

The hymn writer put it so well:

Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill the law's demands,
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Vile, I to the fountain fly:
Wash me, Savior, or I die

(Paul Eckert, *Steve Green's MIDI Hymnal: A Complete Toolkit for Personal Devotions and Corporate Worship.*, Electronic ed. [Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1998]).

VIII. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Person

Eighth, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest person: “**...in him...**”

We are saved by believing in Jesus.

Jesus is the one who came to earth.

Jesus is the one who lived a perfect life.

Jesus is the one who died on the cross.

Jesus is the one who paid the penalty for our sins.

Jesus is the one whom God the Father raised on Resurrection Sunday.

Friends, belief is in Jesus.

As Luke wrote in [Acts 4:12](#), “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

IX. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Deliverance

Ninth, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest deliverance: “**...should not perish...**”

Every person will spend eternity in one of two places. Those two places are heaven and hell.

Heaven is reserved for those—and only those—who have saving faith in Jesus.

Hell is for all those who do not have saving faith in Jesus.

Although there are still millions of people around the world who have never heard of Jesus, the vast majority of people on planet Earth have heard about Jesus.

Many people know quite a lot about Jesus.

But knowledge of Jesus is not enough to be saved.

[James 2:19](#) states, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”

Why do the demons shudder?

Because they have an intellectual knowledge of God and Jesus but that is not enough to save them.

So, Jesus came to deliver people from perishing eternally in hell. And he is the only one who can do so.

X. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Difference

Tenth, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest difference: “**...but...**”

The word “**but**” is a coordinating conjunction linking two ideas that contrast.

Jesus is about to tell Nicodemus about a wonderful contrast between perishing and something else.

XI. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Certainty

Eleventh, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest certainty: “**...have....**”

Jesus was wonderfully precise in his discussion with Nicodemus. He did not say “may,” “perhaps,” “possibly” or introduce any lack of certainty.

Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know that what he was about to say was as certain as the sun rising in the east.

XII. [John 3:16](#) Tells Us About the Greatest Possession

And twelfth, [John 3:16](#) tells us about the greatest possession: “**...eternal life.**”

What is “**eternal life**”?

Let me explain it like this.

God created all people with two basic parts: a body and a soul. There is a material part and there is an immaterial part.

When a person dies, the body stops functioning. The body is buried and the process of decay starts. That is what happens to the material part of a person.

However, when a person dies, the soul of that person continues to live. The immaterial part of each person continues.

Now the soul of a person who does not believe in Jesus perishes, in the sense that the soul of that person goes to hell.

But the soul of a person who believes in Jesus goes immediately into the presence of God. That person experiences what the Bible calls **“eternal life.”**

W. B. Hinson was a wonderful preacher several generations ago. He said,

“I remember a year ago when a doctor told me, ‘You have an illness from which you won’t recover.’ I walked out to where I live 5 miles from Portland, Oregon, and I looked across at that mountain that I love. I looked at the river in which I rejoice, and I looked at the stately trees that are always God’s own poetry to my soul. Then in the evening I looked up into the great sky where God was lighting his lamps, and I said, ‘I may not see you many more times, but Mountain, I shall be alive when you are gone; and River, I shall be alive when you cease running toward the sea; and Stars, I shall be alive when you have fallen from your sockets in the great down pulling of the material universe!’ ” (Galaxie Software, *10,000 Sermon Illustrations* [Biblical Studies Press, 2002]).

“Eternal life” is the glorious possession of every person who believes in Jesus.

Conclusion

[John 3:16](#) is the greatest summary of the gospel in the entire Bible: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

Do you know what happened to Nicodemus after his discussion with Jesus?

Nicodemus is only mentioned in John’s Gospel.

Later in Jesus’ ministry when Jesus ran afoul of the religious leaders, Nicodemus defended Jesus (see [John 7:50-51](#)).

Then, after Jesus had been crucified, it was “Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight” (see [John 19:39](#)) to help bury Jesus.

Almost certainly, Nicodemus was one of those who saw Jesus alive again after his resurrection from the dead on that first Easter Sunday.

Nicodemus came to believe the gospel that Jesus had explained to him several years before.

It was on Easter Sunday in 1976 that the gospel was explained to me.

I had gone to church for many years. I had attended Sunday school. I had even memorized the entire third chapter in John's Gospel.

So, I knew [John 3:16](#) by heart.

But on Easter Sunday in 1976, like Nicodemus, I came to believe the gospel. By grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone I received the precious gift of eternal life.

I became a new creation in Christ.

And my life has never been the same since that day.

Today, I invite you to believe the good news about Jesus and receive the gift of eternal life.

You will never be sorry that you did so. Amen.