Believe Into Christ (part one)

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[0:00] So this is John chapter 3, verse 11 through 21. Jesus says, Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the servant in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.
For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
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. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already.
[1:07] Not because he has not believed in the name, condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. Verse 19. And this is the judgment.

The light has come into the world, and people have loved the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his works shall be exposed.
But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. This is the inspired, inerrant, infallible word of God.
Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Let's pray. Father, we come before you once again.
You know what is in man. You know what we lack. You know what we need today. So we ask, Lord, in the words of that ancient prayer, once again, as your people, this little congregation, gathered in the name of King Jesus, we ask that what we know not, you will teach us.
[2:32] What we have not this morning, please give us. And what we are not yet, make us, Lord, for your glory. Amen. Amen. Well, on January 6th, 1815, there was a snowy blizzard in England, and there was a young man who would normally walk to a church a bit farther away, and he grew up in a Christian home.

But this young man found himself not being able to go to his normal path, so instead, he went to this chapel that was a little bit closer. And for months now, he had felt so miserable.
He was under deep conviction of his sin. He had no assurance that he was truly saved. And in this little chapel closer to a home that he'd never been to before, there he sat.
Very few people showed up in that blizzardy morning. And it was actually not even the pastor. It was another member of the congregation, a lay man who had just prepared. He had one verse to preach, and it was Isaiah 45, verse 22, which says this, Look to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other.
And the man just kept repeating that over and over. Look to me and be saved. This is what Jesus says to you. Look to me and be saved. And he called the young man out in front of everyone.
[3:58] He said, Young man, teenager, you look miserable. You look miserable. Look to Christ. Don't live in fear of condemnation forever. Look to Christ and have eternal life.

Don't believe in your worth or all your shortcomings. Don't let Satan attack you. Just look to Christ. He promises you will be saved if you simply look to him. Well, this teenager felt the call to follow Christ.
Christ became Lord of his life. He started devouring his dad's and grandpa's libraries, reading the old Puritans, and he became a popular pastor in London, in the Victorian era, named Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

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That's how God saved Charles Spurgeon. And Charles Spurgeon said, Once a year, he wants to make it his humble practice to preach a sermon on John 3.16.
The reason is because he says, There is nothing I or any preacher can say on John 3.16 that has not been said already. And when, not if, but when, God moves by the power of his spirit through those words, he will know, and everyone will know, it's not the ministry of the people.
[5:10] It's the work of Christ. It's the gospel of Jesus Christ so that no man can boast or take credit. John 3.16 is our text for today. It's been described as an ocean of gospel truth in a drop of words.

Martin Luther called it the miniature gospel. And on his deathbed, Martin Luther wanted to hear John 3.16 over and over and over. It's the whole story of how God saves sinners in a verse.
There was a missionary named Henry Knott, and he traveled part of William Carey's mission movement from London as well. He traveled to the Polynesian Islands.
So picture going to Hawaii, you're in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, you go south. That's where Polynesian Islands are. One of the islands is called Tahiti. So it's basically between Hawaii and New Zealand, Australia.
That's where Tahiti is. And this missionary, Henry Knott, the first sentence he wanted to learn in the language of the Tahitians was John 3.16. And as they began that project of trying to now translate verse by verse into the language of the people of this island, the first verse he wanted to translate was John 3.16.
[6:25] Look in your Bible. In the ESV, John 3.16 reads like this. Now, in verses 15, 16, and 18, look at verse 15.

The phrase is, whoever believes in him. You see that in verse 15? Whoever believes in him. In verse 16, that's what we read. Whoever believes in him. And then verse 18, it's that same promise. Whoever believes in him. In the Greek, it's literally translated anyone believing into him. So believing in Christ is believing into Christ.
And that's significant because through faith, you are united to Jesus Christ. And his righteousness becomes your righteousness. His love with the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit becomes your love now.
You get pulled in to the work of Christ by being in him, by believing into Jesus. So church, that's really the message for today.
[7:41] And I want you to hear it from Jesus Christ. Jesus himself is the one who urges you this day. Look to me and be saved. Look to me and be saved.

All the ends of the earth. For I am God. And there is no other. Believe into Christ and have eternal life.
My prayer is simply that you'll understand the meaning of our Lord Jesus with those glorious words. And I'm going to try to open this for you in just two ways.
The first one is the first part of the verse. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. And what I want to emphasize with that is what is true of God.
And that's the first half. The second half is what is true of you that whoever believes in him or into him should not perish but have eternal life.
[8:38] So what is true of God first? Second, what is true of you? What is true of God? For God so loved the world.

Number one, this is true. Jesus Christ came to reveal to you that God is love. Jesus reveals that God is love.
Look at verse 17 as confirmation. I'm pulling in these surrounding verses as context for verse 16. So verse 17 we read that God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world.
See, God so loved the world that's why he sent his Son. The very first cause of Jesus' mission is the love of God. And it's so significant because of two things.
Number one, the loveliness of God's love. Number two, the worldliness of the world. Both of those things make the love of God just something that's mind-blowing.
[9:37] So first of all, the loveliness of God's love. Well, we're told in 1 John 4, verse 16 that God is love. We know that God is, from his scripture, God is eternal.

So God is love and God is eternal. Therefore, God loves beyond measurement of time and space. We know from the Bible that God is infinite.

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You know what that means about God's love? God's love has no limits in Christ. We know that God is unchangeable. So he loves in an unchanging way all those who are united to Christ.
We know from the Bible that God is powerful. So God loves powerfully. When he displays his saving love through Jesus, it works powerfully on all those who will be believing into him because the Spirit's regenerating them powerfully.
We know that God is perfect. God is immeasurable. And God is wise. So the love of God shown to you in Jesus Christ is perfect.
[10:51] It is wise. And there's no measurement in human standards of the love of God. Do you see how lovely the love of God is? Now the verse says, God, this God we're talking about, so loved the world.

Well, the connotation for the word world, in the Greek it's cosmos. And so you can even picture that magazine as you're going to check out of the grocery store, cosmopolitan. It really means worldly. God so loved the worldly world. God so loved the cosmos. It doesn't mean to emphasize how big it is. It means to emphasize how bad the world is. That's how that connotation is always used.
So all nations, no matter what tribe you're from, Israel, Tahiti, anywhere else in the world, all are part of this fallen, depraved, dark world. And it's God divinely loving, perfectly, wisely loving, this fallen, worldly world.
To prove to you that this is how that word is normally used, the same author, 1 John, in 1 John chapter 2, verses 15 through 17. He writes, go ahead and turn there.
[12:02] Let's turn a few pages. 1 John chapter 2, verses 15 through 17. Every time I come to the word world, I'm going to say cosmos. So you get the picture.

It's the same word. 1 John 2, 15, 17. Here's what John wrote. Verse 15, Do not love the cosmos or the things of the cosmos. If anyone loves the cosmos, the love of the Father is not in him.
Do you get the picture? The world is worldly. If you're loving the things of this fallen, depraved world, then the love of God is clearly not in you. Those are incompatible.
Verse 16, For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, and the pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world.
Verse 17, And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. Now, if God is holy, but yet God loves this fallen, bad, dark world, how does that even work?
[13:05] How can it be that such a holy God would love the world? And that's exactly what Jesus shows us. It's only with the selfless, costly love of redemption that God can love those who are still in the world and love them to save them out of the world.

John Calvin put it this way, Jesus does not say that God was moved to deliver us because he perceived in us something that was worthy of so excellent a blessing, but he ascribes the glory of our deliverance entirely to God's love.
You see why it's important that this holy God shows his love to a fallen world? It's so that none of us can boast of anything worthy in us. Why did God save me and not the person next to me?
Why did he save my family and not this family on the other side of the world? It has nothing to do with how good you are. It has everything to do with the wise, powerful, perfect love of God to redeem anyone, any sinner out of this fallen world so that God gets all the glory.
See, left to itself, this worldly world is in death. And how is it that God loves the world? Well, think about it. Every one of these disciples and everyone who is truly united in Christ was of the world.
[14:28] So God loved you while you were yet in the world. That's how he loves the world. In John 15, 19, we read, If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own.

But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world now hates you. So they are the world.
You are the world until God saves you through Jesus Christ. And it's the gospel that comes first to those in darkness, pulling them out now and giving them life eternal, life of the age to come now.
So what is true of God? It's true that God so loved the world that Jesus Christ came to reveal the love of God. It's also this, that Jesus was given.
See, our verse says that God in his love gave Jesus. That's our second truth of God is that Jesus Christ is sent on a sacrificial mission. We can confirm this with the second half of verse 17.
[15:30] Look at verse 17. We're told God sent his son in order that the world be saved through him. The mission of Jesus, it was sacrificial, being sent by the Father so that the world could be

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saved through him.

See, Jesus in the gospel of John is on the move. He is going and coming. He's ascending and descending and it's language of a trip. Scholars have noted how there are three times where John points out Jesus is taking a trip up to Jerusalem.
So he's singing those psalms of ascent going up through Jerusalem and it's really his way of journeying back to his Father. The fourth time when Jesus goes up to Jerusalem, it's on his trip to the cross.
And so the cross was one of the stations on his trip of ascending back to the Father. See, God gave his son. He said, Son, you go into that dark world and the way that you redeem sinners out of it is you will go through the cross and you will bring many sons and daughters to glory with you.
It was the active and passive obedience of Jesus in the body. That was his mission. And then through the cross, he leads us like a parade, ascending up to heaven to be with the Father.
[16:58] But before he could ascend in glory, first he had to descend. This is what all the New Testament is proclaiming. Philippians 2.8, being found in human form, he humbled himself.

himself. He's made low. He's descending by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. This is what the church has called the humiliation of Christ.
And Benjamin Keech's catechism in the 1600s, he summarizes scripture this way. Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born. Even his incarnation was him being made low.
That in a low condition, made under the law. He was born into Israel under this principle of works that they had to merit life in Israel. Under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life.
Have you felt miseries of this life this week? I'm sure every single one of us has. Jesus took on flesh so he could be your representative. There's not a temptation that you face, you'll face this upcoming week that Christ himself has not fought and conquered for you.
[18:08] And on the cross, he bore the wrath of God for sin, for your sin. And the curse of death on the cross, and being buried, and then continuing under the power of death for some time, three days, made low, as low as can be.

So what was the mission of Jesus? Please turn to Isaiah 53. We read, in our assurance of pardon, that by his wounds, we have been healed from Isaiah 53 as well.
So turn to Isaiah 53, and I want to show you the covenant of redemption in these verses. Isaiah 53, looking at verse 12.
So in your Bible, you can look, we read earlier, verse 3 through 5. He was despised and rejected by men made low. And then verse 5, it was the chastisement of Christ that brought us peace, and by his wounds we are healed.
How did this fulfill the Father's plan and the Father's will? Look at verse 12. The Father now says, I will divide him.
[19:25] So the Father will give to the Son a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong. So you need to understand the language Isaiah is grabbing here to paint this picture.

If you have a mighty emperor with a general, the general would be sent out by the emperor, you know, by the king, the supreme ruler, send out a mighty general. The general would conquer and fulfill the mission and bring back the spoils.
And the spoils would be divided with his soldiers and being brought back to the empire. So that's the language Isaiah is borrowing to say the Father sent the Son on a mission. He gave his Son sacrificially so that then when the Son returns, he ascends back to heaven victorious.
The Father rewards him. He lacked nothing, but he made himself empty so that his reward could be you. You who believe, you who are purchased by the blood of Christ, you are the reward that the Father gives to the Son for his mission accomplished.
Look at the rest of verse 12. Why? Why can this be? Because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors.
[20:41] He put his lot with yours. He was humbled and he said, those who have offended the mighty God, I am with them. I'm among them and from their midst I will redeem them.

And now where is Jesus? Because he bore the sins of many, he makes intercession for the transgressors. So he loved the world and he bore the sins of, what's the next word?
He bore the sins of many out of the world. See, his love is wise and not a drop of Christ's blood is wasted and God is powerful and when God saves, he actually saves.

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And now he intercedes and he's wise and perfect. He doesn't waste his prayer because when he prays, it happens. And that's what our hymn captures. We sing, before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea.
Who is it that prays powerfully this strong plea? That's a perfect plea. What Jesus prays happens. It comes from the lips of the high priest whose name is love.
[21:58] And like Hebrews says, he ever lives and pleads for me. Can you find comfort that the Father in his love gave Jesus to redeem you, to ransom you out of the worldly world?

And he gave his only son, our verse says, so Jesus Christ is the promised son. And we hear son of God and son of man.
Scripture uses both to describe Jesus. Both are fulfilling prophecies. Our catechism captured that. He must be fully divine and without sin. And he also must be a representative head.
He must become one with the transgressors to redeem us. So one person, the son, according to his human and divine nature, Jesus Christ, fully satisfying the will and the wisdom of the Father.
Verse 13, look at that. Jesus says, no one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the son of man. He's most likely alluding to Daniel chapter 7, verse 13.
[23:05] Daniel has this vision. Listen how both are combined. In Daniel's vision, he says, behold, with the clouds of heaven, so a heavenly spiritual being with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a son of man.

See, he's a son of man. He's identifying with the transgressors, but he's from the clouds of heaven. He's from the spiritual, eternal realm where God dwells. Jesus says, you can believe me.
I'm trustworthy because I'm from heaven. That's why I'm here. And he says, no one can share with you unless they've ascended. You know, you have to know God in heaven in order to make him revealed on earth.
And so to ascend to heaven means that Jesus alone is the pure knowledge of the mysteries of God. and he is the light of spiritual understanding.
We know Jesus, his permanent dwelling is with the father because Mark 16, 19 says, then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to the disciples, so there's again, according to his human nature, even after the resurrection, speaking with them, he shared food with them.
[24:15] So Jesus, in the glorified body with his disciples, so that's the son of man, he was then taken up from them into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, who is spirit.

See how glorious our Christ is? Jesus' return to the glory that he had with the father before the world began was accomplished by him being lifted up on the cross.
And it is this exaltation now that draws sinners to him. In the book of John, just like in the book of Isaiah, is the suffering servant who's also exalted.
It's through his humiliation that he's been lifted up on high so that all can behold him. To be lifted up means that he's set on display so that all the world can see and believe in him.
And that's why Christ now, from heaven, urges you this morning, church, look to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other.
[25:21] Believe into Christ and have eternal life. You might be thinking, it's hard for me to accept such glorious truth. And it is, unless the Spirit gives you a heart to believe.

But I want to share with you a story from missionaries in the 1700s of a very dark, worldly part of the world. So we could read this verse like this, For God so loved the Tahitians.
And this comes from the biography of Henry Knott that I mentioned a moment ago called The Herald of the Love of God to Tahiti by Eugene Meyer Harrison written almost a hundred years ago.
There were reports from Captain Cook who had traveled the Pacific Ocean that there's a people in Tahiti that were a warring people. They're always at war. They idolized revenge.
And they had this weapon and it was specifically to be used for revenge. So we go to war, one tribe against the other. The losing tribe, you'd have a few that win and they flee into the mountains.
[26:25] They would not leave them alone. They would go hunt them down. And they made a special weapon taking the tail of three different stingrays and they loosely attached it to a long pole.

And they would chase their enemy and they would spike it into their body so that it would come detached from the pole. And those stingray tails, they have barbs on them so it goes into the flesh and does not come out easily.
These Tahitians, they had a very strong sense of their own judgment that they would receive for their wickedness. But they did it by appeasing these gods. So they fashioned gods out of birds,

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turtles, and sharks.
And these animals, and also the sun and the moon, these gods that they made idols out of, they had axes and swords and hammers that were used to punish you if you did not pay them for your sins.
So they had that, you know, Romans 1, that sin was imprinted on their heart. They killed two-thirds of their babies upon their birth. They would make alcohol out of this fruit called kava.
[27:28] And they were said to be almost universally drunk and acting more like demons than human beings. There was a special, like, religious class among them that would paint their bodies in dark charcoal and then make their faces white.

And they were terrifying. There were these two sailors, one from Sweden, who landed there and they were translators because they just had to survive and so they learned the language. And they had made several observations.
They wrote down that they would take the infirmed or the weak or the elderly among them and they would walk them out to the ocean like these beautiful beaches of Pacific Ocean, huge palm trees, and they'd pretend like they're going to bathe them.
But instead, they had already dug out a hole in the sand and they would tip their own family members into that hole and kill them with stones and bury them and leave them there and then go back and steal all their possessions.
Now, hold on. We just read that God so loved the world. God loves the Tahitians? How could this be? They had a temple to these idols, these gods of theirs, and the pillar of one of the temples was made up.
[28:36] I'm not going to share more details, but it was made up of human sacrifices. And God loved, somehow, these Tahitians and he would save them? How could this be?

See, Jesus says that this way of the cross, going through the cross, before he ascends to be in the glory of the Father, in John chapter 12, verse 26, he says, whoever comes after me must take up his cross and follow me.
So the way of life in Christ is the way of the cross. And in John chapter 20, verse 21, Jesus says to all who are his disciples, as the Father sent me, so I am sending you.
And there was this man back in England at the same time who was a simple laborer, worked in the trades as a bricklayer. And his name was Henry Knott. And he, along with William Carey, they were part of a Reformed Baptist church like this one, the same confessions that we hold to.
And he went to be a missionary to the Tahitians. He saw three of his friends killed by the Tahitians the very first year that they got there. But he did not leave. There were several times over decades where he was the only missionary still there, somehow, still alive.
[29:51] Others kept leaving and others would arrive. Well, finally, after much prayer and persistence and trying to learn their language, on March 19th, the Lord's Day, it was a Sunday, 1797 was the year, under the cover of these enormous trees, they gathered to have their first public worship service.

And here's what Mr. Knott started that service off. He had a translator for the first part. He said, O Tahitians, I come with a message of infinite compassion to those in deep distress.
I bring glad tidings, glad news of salvation to those who are in sin's control. I proclaim a gospel of comfort to those in sorrow's gloom.
And then, he quoted the first verse he had translated and memorized into the Tahitian language. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
that's the truth for you today, church. Christ urges you from heaven, look to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other.
[31:30] Believe into Jesus Christ and have eternal life. see how the gospel is simply opening up to you what is and always has been true of God.

We're going to have to divide this into two parts so next week we'll see what's true of us. Let's pray. Oh Father, we believe your promise in Isaiah chapter 2 verse 2 that it shall come to pass in the latter days that your kingdom like a mighty mountain where you, O Lord, dwell from where you rule. Your everlasting kingdom shall be established as the highest of the mountains. Your kingdom shall be lifted up and all the nations will flow to you.

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Lord, I plead with Christ right now that none of our loved ones here today or around the world will be caught loving darkness, that none will be caught choosing death and despising your precious son Jesus Christ whom you sent because you so loved us in this sinful world.
May each one whom you have given spiritual ears to hear this very moment believe into Christ and have eternal life.
[32:53] We beg you. Amen. Amen. As you prepare your heart now to proclaim this gospel by taking the Lord's Supper, I want to share with you what Thomas Watson, one of the Puritans, wrote of the Lord's Supper, that it's a visible sermon in his words.

It's a sermon wherein Christ crucified is set before us it's a New Testament sacrament wherein our communion with Christ is signified for us in these elements.
It's a divinely instituted sacrament wherein Christ's death is showed forth by giving and receiving bread and the fruit of the vine.
Now listen to this. When you partake of Christ, you receive all the benefits that flow from the throne of God's glory to you through the mediation of your Savior, Jesus Christ.
So take a moment, still your heart, ask the Lord to prepare you for this celebration, this visible sermon, and by taking it, you are proclaiming this glorious gospel of Jesus.
[34:14] When you're ready, we're going to come through this center row right here and we can take the elements and then after you've taken them, you can go around the outsides back to your seat and we'll hold on to them and then enjoy together with the words of institution.

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