

John 3:16-21

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[0:00] I'm Kent, and I feel like I'm really loud. I'm a member here, and I'm not sure exactly what's going on.

I had problems with this last week. Next time I'll learn and print out my sermon notes, but here we go. So, if you were here last week, I preached from John chapter 3.

Actually, starting in chapter 2, verses 23, all the way through verse 15 of chapter 3.

If you weren't here, I'm going to give you a quick synopsis. So, the idea of that passage in John chapter 3, starting in verse 1, or again, 2:23, going through verse 15.

So, John shows that fallen man, no matter how religious and moral he is, needs a heart transformation performed by God.

[1:06] So, that is the main idea of that text. And in John chapter 3, verse 16, and this might be something that you've never heard.

I came across this, and I'm convinced that this is true. But John chapter 3, verse 16. So, if you turn there with me. And in your Bible, these words are probably in red.

Probably have quotes around them showing that Jesus said these, right? He said these words. So, have you ever seen an ancient manuscript? Most of us, probably not.

But if you've ever seen an ancient manuscript, one of the things that's missing is punctuation. It's also quotation marks. So, it can be difficult to know who's speaking when.

And so, here is one of those times. And context is usually a key. But it seems like here, that there's a change. There's a change in the verbs, and the verb tenses.

[2:10] And it seems like Jesus is no longer talking to Nicodemus. Okay? So, notice, for God so loved the world. Right? So, we see a slight change here.

And it seems like this is not actually the words of Jesus, but the words of Nicodemus as a commentary to this story from verses 1 to 15.

Kind of commentating this conversation. And I just want to throw that out there at first. And I firmly believe that this is true. And I think by context, we can say that.

But either way, we believe that every word of Scripture is from God, no matter what. Right? So, this is the word of God, whether Jesus said it in this instance or not.

So, here we are. The commentary on chapter 3, 1 through 15. And so, in John 3, 1 through 15, including 2, 23 and 25, it's a picture of God's love for us.

[3:16] So, Jesus is portrayed as the one who descended from heaven and will ascend to heaven again. And that is not a throwaway statement.

It's actually really important. So, he has the authority and knowledge to communicate spiritual truths because he is Yahweh in the flesh. Right? He is Yahweh who was in heaven.

And he is Yahweh who has come from heaven and dwells among us. So, here in 1 through 15, he is graciously and lovingly explaining spiritual truths to Nicodemus who is spiritually blind.

And he is showing him the love of God, the love that God has for the world, which is displayed through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

And then in verse 14 and 15, the death of Christ on the cross. Alright? So, with that in mind, let's read starting in verse 16.

[4:16] And we are going to go through verse 21. So, it says, For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting 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, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and people love 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 should 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. So, let's pray.

God, we open your word now, and we pray that you would speak to us, and through the truth of your word, that you would change our hearts, and that you would change our minds, and that you would do that for your glory.

[5 : 34] We pray these things in Christ's name. So, we see a couple things. I've only got two main points, so hopefully today I won't go quite as long as I did last time. But, we're going to start out with the demonstration of God's love.

And I'd like to tell you a story about the demonstration of my love for my wife. Not to brag, but everybody loves a good engagement story, right?

When you get engaged, everybody loves to hear it. And it's usually encouraging when you tell it, because everybody, usually the ladies, will say something like, And it's like really cool.

You know, it's like a big deal. And I kind of do expect that when I finish. So, just a heads up. I want to hear that. It'll give me that, you know, that nudge to push me over the hump here.

But, so me and Allison were engaged in 2013, in January. And I had the ring for six or so months. And I'll skip the drama with that and go straight to the main point.

[6 : 39] It was January 12th. I remember it because it was a national football tournament. Or, actually, the championship game and Notre Dame lost to Alabama, which was really sad.

But that's how I remember. That says a lot. Yeah. It says a lot about me, maybe. But, so, I had the ring.

And I take the ring. And I go to a friend. And I say, hey, can you do me a favor? Can you take this ring and go to Allison and ask her if she will marry me?

Aw. No, what? No, aw. No, that's not true. I did not do that. And, sadly, people are thinking that that's true. Especially you two, Andrew and Karen.

It's like, you know me better than anybody. And you're like, oh, yeah, I could see Kent doing that. No, no. Of course, I did not do that, right?

[7 : 39] I took the ring and I asked her myself. I got down on my knee and I asked her. Because matters of the heart are personal. Matters of love are personal.

And we see God demonstrating his love. As awkward as that may be to flow into this. God demonstrates his love by sending his son into the world.

And that is what John 3.16 is telling us. And the main idea of this text is that God demonstrates his love by sending his son to save everyone who believes in him from the punishment our sin rightly deserves.

So this is the main idea of John 3.16-21. And it focuses on God's love for us. And this can be a difficult topic.

God's love is abused, right? Especially in the church. We forget that he loves us. We know that. But we forget that he is also holy as well.

[8 : 48] And this demonstrates, John 3.16 demonstrates this balance between God's love and his holiness and his hatred for sin. But God, he did not send someone in his place alone.

He did send prophets. But he came himself. Because matters of love are personal. So God, the first truth that demonstrates God's love is that he sends his son into the world.

So let's look at the text. And actually we're going to look back at chapter, or verse 13. So it says, No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the son of man.

Again, I already mentioned this, but this is Jesus who is in heaven, which is the dwelling place of God. And he comes down from heaven to earth.

Who is in heaven? God. It is his dwelling place. So he's very clearly telling Nicodemus here that, hey, I am Yahweh in the flesh. My authority, I have authority.

[9 : 53] I have authority over you. And then also in verse 17. So 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.

So his, again, sending the son into the world. And then verse 19. And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world. Who is the light?

Jesus is the light. So what we believe is that this is the unique son of God who was with God and who was God from the beginning.

And this is what John says. Like this is the testimony of the disciple John. And in chapter 1 it says, In the beginning was the word. That's Jesus.

And the word was with God. And the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made.

[10:51] In him was life. And the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it. And then verse 14. And the word, Jesus, became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory. Glory of the only son from the father full of grace and truth. And right, this is the staggering claim of Christianity.

That Jesus of Nazareth was God made man. That is shocking. It's staggering. That he took humanity without loss of deity.

So that Jesus of Nazareth was truly and fully divine. As divine as he was human. That is a staggering truth.

And it is a clear demonstration of God's love. So God came in the flesh. And that's the first thing that I want to point out. And then God came for the world.

[11:56] So listen to what it says. Verse 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. And then verse 17. For God did not send his son into the world.

And then verse 19. And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world. So this shows that God's love is wide enough to embrace all people. It is not any particular group.

Right? And this would have been shocking for Nicodemus. God's love. His covenant love is for Israel. But no. That is not what God. God is about all people.

So Nicodemus would have found this really, really tough. It is for all people. For the world. I'm going to keep going. Because I've got a limited amount of time.

But it's not for believers alone either. In verse 16. Although only believers receive eternal life. God's love in sending Christ is directed to the fallen realm of humanity.

[12:57] That is the whole world. So when we speak of God coming to the world. We mean that God's love is directed toward fallen humanity as a whole.

Fallen humanity that is hostile to God. So look again. Verse 19. And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world. And people loved the darkness rather than the light.

Right? That. Oh man. The light has come into the world. And people loved the darkness rather than the light. Because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light.

So they prefer darkness. And then here they hate the light. And this is the picture that we saw at the beginning of chapter 3.

That being born again is for all people. That our hearts before God are wicked. That's what the testimony of the Old Testament is. And the testimony of the New Testament is that we are dead in our trespasses and sin.

[14:05] John says that we are blind. That the light came into the world and we didn't even recognize it. It's shocking that Nicodemus doesn't believe in Christ.

I mean it might have been strange to hear the things that Jesus spoke. But it is clear that Nicodemus doesn't believe because he's not born again. That he doesn't have spiritual eyes.

So Jesus enters the world in his incarnation knowing that hostility will result. And that sacrifice will be needed in order to redeem the world.

So he didn't come into a world that would welcome him. He came into a world that despised and rejected him. And again John emphasizes this right here in chapter 1.

That Jesus is rejected by his own people. Not just everyone. The whole world. But his own people specifically. The ones that you would think would welcome him.

[15:04] That were looking for him. The prime example. Nicodemus. He was the leading scholar of Jerusalem. And he didn't recognize the Messiah when he came.

And he had constantly been on the search. Looking for the Messiah. Who would make things new. So this is how God loves us.

He comes. He leaves his throne. He sets aside his glory. And he comes as man in the likeness of fallen flesh.

Right. But he also. God also gives his son on the cross. So God's love for us is deeply sacrificial.

And in context. So verse 14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. So must the son of man be lifted up. And this is Jesus being gracious to Nicodemus.

[16:05] By explaining the gospel. Jesus being lifted up is him being lifted up on the cross. Right. And when we think of God's sacrificial love.

Is there anything better? Anything that could explain God's love more than this? The cross? In John chapter 19.

We see it in narrative form. Right. John. John wrote this. He says. Of Jesus. Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.

And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns. And put it on his head. And arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him saying. Hail. King of the Jews.

And struck him with their hands. And then in 19 verse 15. 14. He said. He said to the Jews. Behold your king. They cried out to him.

[17:02] Away with him. Away with him. And crucify him. Pilate said to them. Shall I crucify your king? The chief priest answered. We have no king but Caesar. So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus. And he went out bearing his own cross. To the place called the place of a skull. Which in Aramaic is Golgotha. There they crucified him.

And with him two others on either side. And Jesus between them. And then in verse 28. After this. Jesus knowing that all was now finished.

Said to fulfill the scripture. I thirst. A jar full of sour wine stood there. So they put a sponge full of the sour wine. On a hyssop branch. And held it to his mouth.

When Jesus had received the sour wine. He said. It is finished. And he bowed his head. And gave up his spirit. And this is our God. And this is our God.

[18:02] Who has demonstrated love for us in such a way. He came in the flesh. Into a hostile world. God became a man.

The divine son became a Jew. The almighty appeared on earth. As a helpless human baby. Unable to do more than lie and stare. And wriggle and make noises. Needing to be fed and changed.

And taught to like. Taught to like. Taught to talk. I'm sorry. Like any other child. This is Jesus. Right?

The one who holds all things together. All things depend upon him. And he became dependent. He became dependent on a mother and a father. On food.

On water. On rest. This is our God. God. And then he did not come just to live a life that we could respect or imitate.

[18:59] But he came to die in our place. He taking the wrath of God for our sin. This is the love of God. And it doesn't get any more beautiful than that.

So he bore the wrath of God. And the anger of God that was due to sin.

So in my place Jesus died. The spotless lamb laid down his life. The wrath of God was satisfied. In my place Jesus died. Nail pierced hands.

Bleeding side. His body bruised. My God crucified. A crown of thorns. Dying cries. His flesh was torn. My God crucified. Hallelujah.

What a savior. So we see that God's love is demonstrated in these ways.

[19:58] But we also see the result of God's love. Right? For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish. But have eternal life.

And so what exactly does that mean? What does it mean that he gives us eternal life through his work on this earth? Living the perfect life and dying the death that we deserve.

What does this mean? So the emphasis on eternal life is not on the eternal part. So the emphasis is on life itself. We often put the emphasis on eternal.

So the notion of time is there. Eternal life will never cease. But there is something else there too and something that is far more significant.

So God simply doesn't offer an unending life. He offers us unending life. Right?

[20:56] So in John chapter 17 verse 3. And this is eternal life. That they may know you. The only true God. And Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Right?

So eternal life is the quality or character of our new life in communion with God. So it is a personal relationship with the triune God.

And John Piper, he says, eternal life is a personal, intimate knowing of God. It is not like an inoculation against the disease of death that works unconsciously like a spiritual antibiotic. It is a conscious experience of knowing and relating to God. And how often do we speak of the gospel in those ways that if you believe, you won't die.

You'll live forever. You'll go to heaven. And we emphasize the gifts that God offers. But really, the emphasis is not on the gifts, but it is on God.

[22 : 01] So in John 10.10. Jesus said, I came that they might have life and that they might have it abundantly. So Christ came to give us life to the full forever.

Who rejects that? Other than the spiritually dead. But who rejects that? If you want life to the fullest, who rejects that? Everybody wants that. So he gives us eternal life.

And this is the opposite of what we talked about last time, in a sense, where God initiates salvation. That salvation is 100% from God.

That we are dead in our trespasses and sin. That we are... If you remember the illustration that I gave of the waterfall. We are at the bottom of that waterfall, completely dead.

And Jesus dives in and drags us to the shore and gives us life. He doesn't resuscitate us, but he resurrects us. And this is the picture.

[23 : 12] But this is... There's also a part that we play, right? We have a responsibility. So last week, God initiates by bringing spiritually dead people to life. Here, man responds in belief.

So there's two sides to that coin, right? We... Our responsibility is not overcome. Is not... Not taken away by God. We still have that responsibility to believe.

And if we don't believe, we will not have that life. So believing on Christ unto salvation. What exactly does that mean? In chapter 2, we talked about this last week, very briefly.

23 through 25. And so this is a picture. Jesus was at the Passover. He had done many signs and taught... He was teaching. And it says in verse 23, Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

That sounds fantastic. But then you keep going in verse 24, and we see a contrast here. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man for he himself knew what was in man.

[24 : 23] And the idea there is that people saw Jesus and believed in his name. It even says believed in his name. But Jesus did not believe in them.

So this contrast. Jesus does not entrust himself, does not trust himself to these other people. And the idea is that these people did not believe unto salvation.

But they believed in his name. So what does it mean to believe in Christ unto salvation? So believing on Christ unto salvation has three points that we've got to be aware of.

So it's an intellectual knowledge. So it's a knowledge of who Christ is and what he has done. So you have to know what Christ has done. It's an agreement to those facts that they are true.

So it's not just knowing what Christ is or who Christ is or what he's done. But it is believing that those facts are true. And even that is not enough. It is receiving Christ as a treasured savior.

[25 : 29] That is belief in Christ unto salvation. And that is not what the people in Jerusalem, and it is not what Nicodemus had. So it's receiving Christ as a treasured savior.

It is selling everything we have for the riches of the kingdom in the book of Matthew. It is taking up our cross. It is dying to ourselves.

It is treasuring Christ. That is what faith, that is what belief looks like. And then it results finally in a transformed life.

So those who believe, verse 21. So, 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.

And so in verses 19 through 21, you see this idea that people loved darkness rather than light. Why?

[26 : 34] Because their works were evil. They were selfishly hiding their sins from the light because they didn't want them exposed. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

But those who believe in Christ, who have been transformed by his spirit, says, 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.

So we see this transformation. So those who believe in Christ come to the light and show that their works are through God's transforming power. It is no longer a selfish life, but a life that is dedicated to God's glory.

So knowing and understanding the love of God, living a new life in communion with God, will ignite in us a passion and a love for God and a love for good works.

So believing in Christ and taking him as your treasure transforms the way that you believe. And how could it not? When we consider the demonstration of God's love here, that he gave his son unto death for us, that would have to transform the way that we live.

[27 : 49] So when we say that God displayed his love for us by coming in the flesh, we are saying that he loves you so much that he pursues you into the deepest, darkest corners of his creation. When we say God displayed his love for us by giving himself on the cross, we are saying that God loves you so much that he did not spare his own son, but gave himself up for you.

God's love means that God eternally gives himself to others. He gives himself to you. So 1 John 4.10, And this is love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The sacrifice that satisfied God's justice for our sins. And then Romans 5.8, God chose his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Paul also speaks of the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me, thus showing an awareness of the directly personal application of Christ's love to individual sinners.

So it is God's nature to act that way to those who he set aside as his. And he will continue to act that way towards us for eternity.

[29 : 06] So God has set up the cross, his sacrificial death on the cross, as the model for our human ethics as well. Have you ever thought about that? This is the model of our human ethics.

No greater love than any man. Does any man have than this? That God gave his life up for his chosen people.

So this is the pinnacle of love. John Frame says, Frame goes on to say, He goes on to say, There it is.

John 15.13, Greater love has no one than this, that someone laid down his life for his friends. Highest of Christian ethics.

So we ask, Is this love of God for me true and real? Could this possibly be true?

[30 : 40] If so, Why do I ever grumble and show discontentment and resentment at the circumstances in which God has placed me?

Why am I ever distrustful, fearful, or depressed? Why do I ever allow myself to grow cool, formal, or half-hearted in the service of the God who loves me?

Why do I ever allow my loyalties to be divided so that God has not all my heart? So John wrote that God is love.

In order to make an ethical point, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. Could an observer learn from the quality and degree of love that I show to others, to my wife, to my husband, to my family, to my neighbors, to people at church, to people at work?

Could an observer see anything at all about the greatness of God's love for me? Those are incredibly tough questions to answer.

[31 : 58] And these are things that we must meditate on. And I pray that we would examine ourselves in light of God's love for us. So does God's love demonstrated in His life and death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins influence how you live your life?

Does it influence your goals in life? Does it influence your goals at work? Does it influence your desires?

And does it shape your choices? And I know that we have a lot of people that are in the midst of great choices that could change the outcome of their lives.

But one thing that I can tell you and the advice that I can give you is that God is so worthy of all our love, of our devotion, of our life.

So we make choices in light of that, right? For the glory of God. And consider the people across the world who don't know Christ, around almost 50% of the people groups in the world are not only lost, but unreached.

[33 : 40] unreached. That means that they have no access to the gospel. In John, or I'm sorry, Paul, in Romans chapter 10, he asks a question.

And I think it's good to think in light of God's love, it says in verse 14, how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

As is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. So in light of God's love, we know that there are millions of people who have never even heard the name of Jesus. And that does not mean that we pack up our bags right now, necessarily, and move to India. And that is not at all what I'm saying. But what I am saying is that God is worthy of being glorified and magnified among all nations.

[34 : 57] And that is the goal, the end goal of God. That is the mission of God, to bring all things around to glorify him. And in the end, we will.

But Jesus, he says in Matthew chapter 9, in verse 29, I believe it is.

No, 38. Starting in verse 37. Then he said to his disciples, as he's looking out over all these people, he says, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest. So we may not be able to pack up our bags right now, and maybe we shouldn't.

I obviously haven't. But Jesus does command not only to pray for the salvation of their souls, but he says, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.

[36 : 09] So in light of God's love and in light of the truth that there are many people who don't know about it, let us pray for laborers. And one thing that I've been praying is, God, let me love like you do.

Especially, he loves the world. Let me love the world like he loves the world. And he gave his life, he gave his son up for the world. So I pray that we remember that our lives are not our own. They were purchased by the precious blood of Christ, and they are to be spent however God pleases, not how we plan.

And I pray that that is our testimony as a church and as individuals. So let's pray. God, we thank you so much for who you are. I pray that you would just impress upon us the depth, the magnitude of your love.

That you would impress upon us this idea that you sent your son into the world who was hostile, knowing the end, and that you sent your son to die on the cross for the penalty of our sins.

[37 : 51] I pray, God, that we would be transformed by this truth, that you would move in our hearts, that you would spur us on to faithfulness, and that you would help us realize that the end goal is to magnify and glorify you in all things.

And that is what we say, right? That the chief end of man is to glorify God. I pray that you would just help us to understand that because you are worthy and this John 3.16 shows us your worth, God. I pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.