

The "Little Gospel"

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[0 : 00] Let's look at this very famous verse of scripture, John 3.16.

I don't think that I have ever really, truly preached a sermon or a series of sermons, because I think it would take a series of sermons, to really preach a message from John 3.16.

Now, I have done something similar to what we're going to do tonight. In fact, I've done it in prison ministry a couple of times, different prisons.

And we're just opening up to John 3.16 and we just take one word at a time and work our way all the way through. And that's basically what we're going to be doing here tonight.

And we better get to it or we're not going to have enough time. But let's just go ahead and look at these. I have 15, no, it's 16. 16 points to this sermon, all right?

[1 : 16] 16-point sermon. I don't think I've ever had a 16-point sermon. And no poem at the end. But, you know, that's kind of the old adage, you know, Baptist preachers.

Three points and a poem. And you've got it. There's a good Baptist sermon. But let's just walk through this great, very familiar, like I said in my prayer, perhaps the most memorized, quoted verse in all of the Bible, John 3.16.

And I don't even have to have you open your Bibles to it. I could quote it right here. And you could too. The way I learned it, it's going to be a little different than the version we have here, because I learned it with the good old King James.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The old King James.

Now, that's a beautiful verse, wonderful verse. And you remember the occasion when Jesus said those words. It was when he was witnessing to Nicodemus.

[2 : 25] And he said a number of things to Nicodemus that Nicodemus had a hard time getting his brain around. And this verse is really kind of the capstone for that entire passage of Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus, their one night.

And it is the most famous part of the verse, although there's a lot more in that particular passage that one needs to study. And some of what Jesus said before and after really does enter in to help us understand what he's talking about here in John 3.16.

So let's just walk through it tonight as quickly as we can. Number one, the greatest reason for love. The greatest reason for love.

How does it begin? For. For God so loved the world. And I say that's the greatest reason for love because the word for speaks of a plan.

It implies some kind of plan. For. I mean, that implies a plan. And so the reason for God's love begins with a divine plan.

[3 : 41] Something that had really no beginning, according to our way of thinking, because we're locked into time. With God, he has no beginning or ending.

And so his plan has no beginning. It's eternity past. And that's just the way that we can kind of describe it so that we have some concept of it.

But even in our description, even in that phrase, before. Before. In eternity past. In eternity past. What does that mean? Well, it's just you go back.

Infinity. And so the reason for God's love is because of a plan. It's a plan for God so loved the world. Second, the greatest source of love.

The greatest source of love. And so he says, for God so loved the world. So you just take every word and mine from every word a wonderful treasure and truth.

[4 : 47] Each word actually preaches a message. In fact, I'm telling you. You could, I could preach a sermon. A separate sermon for nearly every word of this text.

Because it opens, opens us to much of what the Bible has to say to us about the gospel. So the greatest source of love is, of course, God. And we should know that the source of this love is the person of God himself.

I didn't give you all these points in the note. You'll just have to make notes yourself as you want to. But we need to understand that the source, when I say God is the source of our love, it's not that God somewhere along the way decided to love us.

This love is really, is the person of God himself. It is very nature. See, this love of which Jesus speaks is not first an action on God's part.

[5 : 52] Now, it is an action. And we'll, we'll see another word a little bit later in the verse that speaks to that. But first and foremost, it's not some action of God.

This love that God so loved the world. This love of which Jesus speaks is not really a decision made in time.

So we need to understand about God. The more we understand about the eternal nature of God, the more we'll be blessed for one thing. But we need to try to understand the person and nature and character of God because this love that Jesus is speaking about is a quality of God's eternal character.

It is an eternal quality, an eternal aspect of God's nature. It is God's nature to love. In fact, love is what God is.

Now, that may sound like a neat way to put it, but nobody came up with that apart from Scripture because the Bible tells us in a couple of places that God is love.

[7 : 02] That's, that's, that's something more than, and something deeper than just saying that God does love or God loves. God is love. Love is what God is. And I'll give you a couple of examples, a couple of verses.

They're both found in the fourth chapter of 1 John. 1 John 4, 8, where the Bible says, He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

So love is what God is. And in that same chapter, a little bit later in verse 16, And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love. He is love.

And he who abides in love abides in God and God in him. Those are tremendous passages and speak to a couple of different issues. But the point I want us to see is that John says, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that love is what God is.

It's part of his nature, an eternal nature. See, we start to love certain people and certain things. There's a beginning point for our love. And there's also a condition to our love.

[8 : 06] Any object of our love, we have a condition. But love is not what we are. You see, that's not an attribute of ours. A perfect attribute.

You see, God has many aspects to his nature. And it's not that he's part this and part that and this on this occasion and this on another occasion.

Each aspect of his nature is eternal. God is love. So, this little verse, the little gospel we're calling it here, the greatest source of this love is God.

For God so loved the world. Love is what God is. Number three, the greatest degree of love. The greatest degree for God so loved the world.

I mean, listen, John purposefully chose his words. Well, I say John did with the Holy Spirit that inspired him to choose just the words he chose for God so loved the world.

[9 : 12] That's the degree of his love. Not just that God loved the world, but God so loved the world. That means this is God's full love. His ultimate love.

And I guess it should go without saying that once we acknowledge the fact that love is what God is, then his love is full. It's perfect. It's not partial. Not only is it not conditional, it's not given by measure.

It's a full love. God so loved the world. Number four, the greatest kind of love. Well, God so loved the world. And we can, you know, heard this many times before, but I want to remind you again that there are, in the Greek language anyway, three words that are translated, usually translated love in English.

Three words. We have one word, love. All right? But the Greek language has three words. Now, one of them doesn't appear anywhere in the New Testament, but it is the word eros, which we get our word erotic.

So this is a sexual love. I hate to even say it, but that's what eros is. And it doesn't appear anywhere in Scripture. But that is a word in the Greek language that our New Testament authors had at their disposal, but God never inspired them to use it.

[10:39] The second word is found a number of places in the Bible, New Testament, that is phileo. Phileo, like Philadelphia, brotherly love.

It's the love we have for one another, kindred love, a brotherly love. And then the third one is, and you know it, agape.

Actually, in the Greek dictionary, agapao, but we never hear it that way. It's agape, agape. And the word agape signifies the highest kind of love, highest possible kind of love, because it is a sacrificial love, self-giving love.

It is first and foremost a divine love. In fact, I'm convinced that agape is a kind of love that only a true believer can express.

Now, that doesn't mean that there aren't those who sacrifice themselves, and they may be unbelievers. But in the truest sense of the word agape, it is a word that only a believer can express, because it is a divine love.

[11:53] And we know that. Don't wait from what Jesus has done for us. It's agape. It's a sacrificial love. All right, so the greatest kind of love.

Number five, we're going to move through these pretty quickly. The greatest object of love. For God so loved the world. The world.

Now, the word world comes from the Greek word kosmos, like the kosmos. Although it's not ever used in, well, I don't know, ever.

However, usually, more often than not, it's used not to describe, you know, the cosmos, that is in the physical universe. But rather, it is used to describe mankind or humanity.

Humanity. Verse 17 is a little bit more specific, because the word appears there, in fact, three times.

[12:56] Verse 17 goes like this. For God did not send his Son into the world, kosmos, to condemn the world. There it is again. But that the world through him might, or some versions have, should, be saved.

Now, we need to understand that this is not a proof text for universal salvation. That everyone is going to be saved, ultimately. Because, you know, the rest of verse 16 proves otherwise.

I mean, believers will have everlasting life. But unbelievers will what? Will perish. That it be condemned to eternal death.

That's in this verse also. So, the idea that God so loved the world, and to interpret that as being a proof text for universal salvation is ridiculous.

Because in the same verse, you have both those who have everlasting life and those who perish. In verse 18, if you go a little bit further, he confirms that with stronger language.

[14:00] He who believes in him is not condemned. But he who does not believe is condemned already. Because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

There's no way you can pull universal salvation out of that verse. But it's in the same conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. And so, every step of the way, it shows that.

So, when he says, for God so loved the world, he is speaking of the object of that love at the world, the kosmos, humanity. And really what Jesus is saying in verse 16 is, for sinners, there is only one Savior.

And that is Jesus. It doesn't mean that all are going to be saved. It doesn't mean that, you know, some will, you know, be saved, you know, by the gospel.

And others will be saved in other ways. But ultimately, you know, everyone is going to go to heaven. It doesn't mean that. It just means that Jesus is the only one who can save sinners.

[15:05] Number six, the greatest cause of love, that he gave his only begotten Son. See, every word has weight to it. That God he gave his only begotten Son.

God's divine love, see, caused him to give his Son for sinners. The greatest cause of love.

It was, see, for love that he did it. And again, not a love based on any condition or circumstance outside of himself.

It's not for love he did it for you because, you know, he just looked at you and he thought, you know, poor, poor fellow. You need some help. I really feel sorry for him.

I love him. So I'm going to save him. It's not for some condition or circumstance outside of himself that caused his love to send the Savior.

[16:02] But rather a love on the inside of himself. And really, you want to get right down to it, a love for himself. And you see, that's not good for any of us.

But for God, that's okay. That God could love himself because he's perfect. Perfect and glorious. And so his love caused him to give his only begotten Son because that love came from within himself and for himself.

Number seven, the greatest expression of love that he gave his only begotten Son. Now we get to the action part of the verb.

I mean, the verb love certainly speaks first and foremost of the nature and character of God. But love that does not act is not really love.

And so there is an expression of that love. It's an action word. Love is an action word. True love always acts. It always gives.

[17:05] Number eight, the greatest gift of love. That he gave his only begotten Son. Much debate about begotten.

What does it mean that Jesus is begotten? Begotten Jesus. And some different ideas out there. Was Jesus born? You know, was he created?

And there are those who are teaching that theology. The word begotten. Monogonese. Monogonese is the word.

But it does not mean that Jesus was birthed. You know, here's where the English is sometimes. The English translations sometimes lead us astray if we don't look a little bit deeper.

Because to us, begotten means you birthed somebody. Or someone came out of you. But actually, that's more true the meaning of the word.

[18:05] That Jesus came out from the Father. But the word monogonese really means, it speaks of, does not refer to the origin of Jesus.

The word literally means one of a kind. He's unique. The unique Son of God. We could even translate it that way.

That would be more of a paraphrase. But the word monogonese means unique. One of a kind. Now, let's think about this a minute.

By regeneration. By the new birth. I'm a Son of God. And we are all sons and daughters of God.

By way of the new birth. We're regenerated. Birthed. He birthed us. Into his kingdom. But we're not sons and daughters of God.

[19:03] We're not. I'm not a Son of God in the same way that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the unique Son of God. Came out from the Father. To be our Savior.

He's God the Son. Alright, so that makes, I think that makes the gift even greater than anything we could imagine. Kind of like Paul. When Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9, verse 15.

He said, thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. King James uses the word unspeakable. And really that, I think that's a good word.

Unspeakable. That means you just can't put it in words. Indescribable also captures the idea. When we get to thinking about the love of God for us.

And understanding that it comes from his nature. His character. And it's not conditioned on anything about us.

[20:05] That he would love us. Then becomes an indescribable thing. An unspeakable thing. And so, the greatest gift of love.

Number nine, the greatest demand of love. That, that, whoever believes in him. This is the demand. That, whoever believes in him.

So, this kind of love demands something of us. It's the command of the gospel. You see, the gospel is not only, I mean, in the sense, the truest sense of good news.

But it is also a command. It is something to obey. The gospel is something to obey. And so, there's a demand here of God's love.

And it demands everything of us. Like the last stanza of that great old hymn, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. I know you have that memorized.

[21:02] We could sing that, couldn't we? Well, as soon as I begin to quote these words, you're going to remember that. The English is kind of archaic, but listen to it very carefully.

Were the whole realm of nature mine. What does that mean? If everything in all of creation was mine, it belonged to me. Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small.

Love, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. That kind of captures the idea behind this part of the verse.

That whoever believes in him, it demands our belief. Number ten, the greatest recipients of love.

That whoever believes in him.

Whoever. Whoever. Or, you know, the word, the King James, whosoever. Whosoever. The word whoever or whosoever is at the same time both broad and narrow.

[22 : 11] It's broad and narrow. It's broad enough to include the vilest of sinners. The worst of sinners. But it is narrow enough to exclude all who reject Christ.

Both of those at the same time. So this is a promise. What this is. This is a promise to those who come. It's a promise given to those who will come to Jesus on his terms.

The terms of the gospel. By faith. Or through faith. So the recipients, you see, are promised by Jesus. Just like he said in John 6, 37.

The ones who come to me, I will certainly not cast out. There's a promise here. Is everyone going to believe? No. But everyone who does believe will be saved. He said, The ones, anyone who comes to me, I will not cast out.

I will not cast out. Number 11, the greatest response of love. That whoever believes in him. That's the response. Believes in him.

[23 : 16] Believes. The word is *peistuo* in the Greek. And it's found, by the way, 128 times in the four gospels.

128 times. That's not counting the epistles. And other letters. And the book of Revelation. 128 times. 10 times in the gospel of Matthew.

10 times in the gospel of Mark. 9 times in Luke. And guess what? 99 times in the gospel of John.

The word *peistuo*. Or some form of it.

Which means faith. Or translate faith. It's sometimes translated believe. Sometimes translated trust. It's all of those things. And really you have to put all those together.

The word lit basically means to be fully persuaded. To still. To be absolutely fully persuaded. No doubt.

[24 : 13] It's trusting Jesus. It's to place full confidence in someone. Or something. It can be used in that sense as well. To.

It means to completely rely upon someone. I'm just pulling these definitions out of a common everyday Greek lexicon.

It means to trust. Trust what? Well. 1 Corinthians 15. 1 tells us. That famous passage. Actually just starting with verse 1.

Following. Moreover brethren. Paul says here. I declare to you the gospel. Which I preach to you. I declare. I declare that to you. Which also you receive. And in which.

In this gospel. You stand. You stand. You have your full confidence in. By which also you are saved. Alright. That's. That's the power of the gospel.

[25 : 10] He says if you hold fast. That word which I preached to you. Unless you believed in vain. That is if. You didn't really believe. Or you're just paying it lip service. For I delivered to you.

First of all. That which I also received. That Christ died for our sins. According to the scriptures. And that he was buried. And that he rose again. The third day. According to the scriptures.

That's. That's what we put our full. Reliance upon. What Jesus has done for us. He died. Was buried. Was raised from the dead.

That in a nutshell. Is the gospel. And that is what we believe. Number twelve. The greatest deliverance of love. The greatest deliverance of love. That whoever believes in him.

Should not perish. Should not perish. Now. You know. I'm speaking to. The choir here.

[26 : 05] That. The word perish. Does not refer to physical death. That's not. What he's talking about here. But rather. Something far worse. Than physical death.

The Greek word. *Apolumi*. *Apolumi*. Means destruction. Means destruction. Shall not be destroyed. But. Yet.

Also. That word. Does not mean. Annihilation. If some. Come to that conclusion. Theologically. That there is no. Real place of hell. That when. An unbeliever dies.

He is. He is annihilated. He is destroyed. He is. Totally dissolved. That's the end. But. I don't believe that. Doesn't mean annihilation. It means.

Ruin. Ruin. And. And really. An everlasting. Condition of ruin. A. Destruction. That has no end to it. That's hard.

[26 : 59] For us to imagine. Something not having an end. Especially. If we're talking about. Something being destroyed. And that not having any end. But. You know.

The word. Perish. Though. Has to be put side by side. With the word. Everlasting life. They're juxtaposed. To one another. And so.

If. It is. The condition. Of the word. Perish. If. If. If. If. If. The life. Is everlasting. Then. The perishing. Is everlasting. In the same verse.

You see. Remember what Jesus said. In Matthew 10. 28. He said. Do not fear those. Who kill the body. But. Cannot kill the soul. But rather. Fear him. Who is able to destroy. Both body.

Soul and body. Where? In hell. In hell. Jesus is speaking. About a real place. There. Are. Places. In the new testament.

[27 : 54] That described that place. He's not. He's not speaking about. Some state of mind. He's not speaking about. Annihilation. A point.

In time. When God just simply. Destroys. And dissolves. The body. And there's no more to it. He's talking about a place. A real place. That unbelievers will go. When they die.

And. There's no end to it. It's everlasting. It's far more. Far worse than just physical death. I assure you. And. All right. So. The greatest.

Number 13. The greatest alternative. Of love. But. The word but. Have everlasting life. That's a great alternative. Made possible by the love of God.

And think about how wonderful this conjunction is to us. The word but. Let me give you a few examples.

[28 : 51] Romans 5.8. Perhaps one of the more famous examples. Of this construction. But. God. But. God demonstrates his own love toward us.

In that while we were yet sinners. Christ died for us. Romans 6.17. But. God. Be thanked. That. Though you were slaves of sin.

Yet. You obeyed from the heart. That form of doctrine. To which you were delivered. Gospel. But. God. See. First Corinthians chapter 10. Verse 13. No temptation is overtaking you.

Except such as is common to man. But. God. Is faithful. He's faithful. Who will not allow you to be tempted. Beyond what you are able. But with the temptation.

Will also make the way of escape. That you may be able to bear it. Then I like this one. Ephesians 2. In fact. I want to give you five verses here. Because. You need to see what comes before it.

[29 : 49] Ephesians 2. 1 through 5. And you he made alive. Who were dead. In trespasses and sins. In which you once walked. According to the course of this world.

According to the prince of the power of the air. The spirit. Who now works. In the sons of disobedience. Among whom also. We all once conducted ourselves. In the lusts of our flesh. Fulfilling the desires of the flesh. And of the mind. And were by nature. Children of wrath. Just as the others. That's all bad news. Terrible stuff. But God.

Then he writes. But God. Who is rich in mercy. Because of his great love. With which he loved us. Even when we were dead in trespasses.

Made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. Marvelous passage. And there are other examples. In the New Testament. Of this construction. But God.

[30 : 44] And so we have it right here. The greatest alternative of love. But. Have everlasting life. Number fourteen. The greatest possession of love. But have.

Everlasting life. Have. That. Seems like maybe an insignificant word. But it's. Powerful. Verb have. Is.

In the present tense. All. All Greek verbs have a tense. And it's in the present tense. You've heard me say this many many times. Before. That points to a continuous action.

And so. We have it right now. This everlasting life. We have it right now. And continue. To have it. It's a continuous thing. So everlasting life.

Is not something we get. When we get to heaven. You know. We're just hoping to have it. When we get there. We're just hoping to get there. And. When we get in the door.

[31 : 42] And the door shuts behind us. Then we can breathe easy. We've made it. The everlasting life. Is not in heaven. It's right here. And continues on. Into heaven. You have it right now.

If you trust it in Jesus Christ. It's not something you will have. You have it. Right now. And. You can never lose it. If you have it. If you have the real thing.

You never lose it. We have it right now. The moment you believe. The moment you. Are. Are.

Saved. John 6 40. John 6 and verse 40. And this is the will of him. Who sent me.

That everyone who sees the son. And believes in him. May. Have. Everlasting life. Not will give. May hope to have. But have.

Everlasting life. And I will raise him up. At the last day. I will do that. You see. We have it right now. And. We can never. Lose it. You know.

[32 : 37] Someone has. Said that our. Our security. Our real. Eternal security. Is. When we get to heaven. That our security. Is in heaven. But listen. The devil.

And his angels. Fell from heaven. Our security. Is not in heaven. Our security. Is in Christ. It's in Jesus Christ. And. And so. We have. Everlasting life. That is the possession.

Of love. And then. That leads us to. The 15th one. The greatest. Extent. Of love. I really already. I've spoken of this. But. But have. Everlasting life.

All right. The word. Everlasting. By the way. Is also in the present tense. It's continuous action. And then. One more. 16. The greatest.

Fruit. Of love. Greatest. Fruit of love. But have. Everlasting. Life. Life is the greatest. Fruit. Of love. Everlasting. So.

[33 : 32] Let's just put all. All three of those. Words together. Have. Everlasting. Life. Life. What kind of life is it? Everlasting. Eternal life. And when does it begin?

Right now. Moment you have. The moment you believe. You have it. Have it right now. And when does it end? Never. Never ends. What if you.

Have this eternal life. For ten years. And then you've committed some terrible sin. And lost it. Well then you didn't have everlasting life. Whatever you had. You didn't have everlasting life. You had ten year life. Or I would say.

Fifty years. And then you know. You just turn away. Well you didn't have everlasting life. Because everlasting is everlasting. And so if you can lose it.

Then it's not everlasting. And the Bible is very specific about it. And Jesus promises. Everlasting life. To those who believe in him. I want to end with a quote.

[34 : 29] I think I put it in your notes. From good old Oklahoman. Herschel Hobbes. And he wrote this. If the remainder of the Bible. Were lost.

And only this verse preserved. It contains enough gospel. To save all who will believe. And yet probably fewer sermons. Are preached from this text. Than from any other.

Of the more familiar ones. The reason being. That when you quote it. You've said it all. Explain it. One may. But enlarge upon it. One cannot. It is the gospel of superlatives.

That's a great quote. About John 3.16. Thank you.