

For God So Loved

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[0 : 00] We are going to go back to a foundational verse tonight to remind ourselves of the basics.

! It's a verse that most of us have memorized in one translation of the Bible or another.! You know from the handout already that the verse is John 3.16. This is out of the New King James, as are most of the cross references tonight.

And in the New King James it says, For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3.16 is so familiar to us that we can sometimes overlook the significance of it. And as I said, I just read it from the New King James, and in a single sentence with only 25 words, John 3.16 summarizes the Gospel.

And when we truly understand the significance of the Gospel, we will also understand why Christians should be thankful in all circumstances. And we'll look at John 3.16 phrase by phrase tonight, and as we look at each phrase, we'll do several cross references to explore how the Bible supports itself.

[1 : 17] And we'll see from the cross references that both the Old and the New Testaments are completely compatible with what John 3.16 says. And your handout has every cross reference listed, so you can go back and review them later if you want to.

That way you don't have to flip back and forth. And when we look at just one verse, we have to be careful to avoid taking the verse out of context. So let's go ahead and take a minute to set the context of John 3.16.

The opening verses of John 3 document a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. So listen to John 3, verses 1-3.

They say, There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.

Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. So Nicodemus then asked Jesus what it means to be born again, and Jesus' answer to Nicodemus includes John 3.16.

[2 : 31] So as we look at John 3.16 tonight, we're going to divide it into five sections. We'll see the source, the motivation, the action, the response, and the result.

So let's go ahead and get started by looking at the source, and that source is God. So your first blank there is God. How fitting is it that John 3.16 begins with God?

That beginning reminds us that God is the source for all things. And as we start digging into the verse, let's review how the Bible describes God. First of all, we'll go to Acts chapter 17, and Paul describes God there to the Athenians.

Verses 22 through 28 of Acts 17 say, Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious.

For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription, To the unknown God. Therefore the one whom you worship without knowing, him I proclaim to you.

[3 : 45] God who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is he worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life, breath, and all things.

And he has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each

one of us.

For in him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring. So these verses show that God is more than just the beginning of John 3.16. God is the beginning of all things. And now let's go to the Old Testament and look at Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7, to hear how God describes himself.

And again, these verses are Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7. They say, As we move through the rest of John 3.16 tonight, Well, notice that the verse simply restates in the New Testament what God revealed in the Old Testament.

[5 : 28] God is merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sins, by no means clearing the guilty.

So we've talked about the source being God. Now let's talk about God's motivation for John 3.16. God's motivation is that he so loved the world.

So again, the motivation is he so loved the world. Are you starting to see the pattern in your handout here? But let's think about what that means.

God so loved the world, we really need to let that significance sink in. So let's talk about how God loved. In the original Greek, the word translated as so loved is agapao.

And when used about people like it is here, the word means to welcome, to entertain, to be fond of, or to love dearly. So again, one definition of that is to welcome, to entertain, to be fond of, and to love dearly.

[6 : 35] And love dearly is the sense of the word here. That's why most English translations say so loved. And be careful to avoid skipping over the word so.

That two-letter word helps convey the intensity of God's love. But even then, it can't convey the full sense of God's love for us. And now that we've talked about how God loved, let's talk about who God loved.

So whom does the verse say that God loved? You're right, it says, God so loved the world. And remember the context. Jesus has been explaining to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Pharisees, about the need to be born again.

And did the Pharisees believe that God loved the world? Exactly. The Pharisees believed that God so loved the Jews and didn't really care that much about anybody else.

So God so loved the world was an astounding statement in that context because particularly the Pharisees believed that God loved only Israel. And why is it so significant to us that God loves more than just the Jews?

[7 : 47] I don't think we have anybody who's a Jew here tonight. And that's very important that God so loved the world and more than just the Jews when none of us is a Jew.

Okay, so we have a part Jewish person there. And it said 2% European Jew. Still, I don't think it would quite round up to a whole person, though.

God so loved her little toe. The good thing for you is that God doesn't love just 2% of you. He actually loves 100% of you no matter what it is.

But had the verse said, for God so loved the Jews, that might make for interesting reading, but the verse wouldn't be pertinent to us. But because God so loved the world, we can be confident that the verse does pertain to us.

So we've talked about the source, which is God and God's motivation, His love for the world. Let's move on to the action. And the action was that He gave His only begotten Son.

[8 : 56] So that He gave His only begotten Son is what goes into your blanks there. And of course, that is a powerful way to demonstrate His love. I looked up the definition of gift in the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, and it says, something voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation.

So think about that definition again. Something voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation. To a certain degree, we all understand the concept of a gift without that definition.

For example, we also give gifts to the people that we love. But if we're honest with ourselves, we typically give gifts to people because we think they have done something to deserve the gifts.

But let's consider what the Bible says about whether we've done anything to deserve a gift from God. Think about the words of Genesis 6, verse 5.

Genesis 6, verse 5 says, Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

[10:12] So listen to that verse again, and notice how emphatically the verse describes the intent of man's heart. It says, Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thought of his heart was only evil continually.

So the idea that man is evil is also throughout the New Testament. Colossians 1.21 and Romans 5.10 are just two verses that remind us that we were once enemies of God before we became believers.

Listen to Colossians 1.21. It says, And then of course Romans 5.10 says, So put yourself in God's place for a second if you can.

Knowing that every intent of the people was evil, and that people were your enemies, how likely do you think you would be to give the people a gift? And thinking about it from that angle, almost all of us would have to admit that we wouldn't give a gift to an evil enemy, but God did, and God didn't give just any gift.

What gift did God give us? That's right, he gave his only begotten son. And some people can get hung up on the word begotten.

[11:47] Not all translations render the Greek to include the word begotten, but several do. Just in case yours, like the New King James, does mention begotten, let's consider what that word does and doesn't mean.

The Greek word for only begotten suggests a one and only son, just like it says in John 3.16, but it doesn't necessarily convey the idea of a birth.

The Son of God is the Father's one and only son, in the sense that he's the unique son. So earlier in the Gospel of John, John made it clear that the Son of God has always existed, so we know he wasn't begotten in that sense.

Just flip backward a few pages in your Bible to John 1, and we'll look at John 1, verses 1-5. John 1, verses 1-5 say, In the beginning was the Word, 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 nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

[13:00] Skip down just a few verses to John 1-14. John 1-14 says, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And the Word translated as begotten in John 1-14 is the same word translated as begotten in John 3-16. The Son of God has always existed, but he became a man when God gave him to the world. And we know from our study in Philippians on Sunday mornings that the Son of God was fully aligned with that plan. Remember Philippians 2, verses 5-8.

And here are Philippians 2, verses 5-8. They say, Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. The English Standard Version of these verses makes Philippians 2, 5-8 a little easier to understand.

[14:19] So I want to reread those verses, but this time out of the ESV. They say, Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2, 5-8 clearly show that Jesus agreed with God's plan, and the verses also emphasize that Jesus was always God, but he later became a man.

So Jesus, the creator of the universe and everything in it, became a man and humbled himself because God so loved the world. So when you think about that, do you see why we need to let the significance of that soak in just a little bit?

The creator of the universe humbled himself because God, and he also, so loved the world. So let's take a moment to just think about where we are in John 3-16.

So far we've reminded ourselves that the source was God, the motivation was God's love for the world, and the action resulting from that motivation was God giving his only son.

[15 : 41] Everything so far has been about God, and here's where we come in. Let's look at the response. And the response is in the part of John 3-16 which says, that whoever believes in him.

So once again, the response is, that whoever believes in him. And the purpose of giving his son was to make God's great gift of eternal life available to anyone, to whoever believes in him.

The word translated whoever literally means all, every, each, or any. So in other words, God's gift is available to anyone, and we can make the same comment here that we made earlier.

We said that the phrase, God so loved the world, was an astounding statement because most Jews believe that God loved only Israel. And when the verse mentions whoever, we again see that the words of the verse pertain to every person who believes, whether or not that person is a Jew.

What is the only requirement for receiving God's gift? Belief is correct. On man's side, the gift is simply to be received and not earned.

[16 : 57] A person is saved by believing or by trusting in Christ. And from other passages in the Bible, we know that even our faith itself is a gift from God.

Listen to Ephesians 2, 8 and 9. They say, For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Earlier in the Gospel of John, John said the same thing about the need for faith. And John also noted that faith is a gift of God. If you're still there, look again at John 1 and find verses 12 and 13.

We skipped over them intentionally earlier. But John 1 verses 12 and 13 say, Before we leave the phrase, believes in him, we need to look at one more word.

Because even the word translated as in is significant in this verse. And that preposition is really striking when you take a minute to look into it because the word ordinarily means into or giving the sense that genuine faith in Christ is taking the people into Christ so that they will be resting in and they will be united with Christ.

[18 : 27] So one commentator puts it this way, Not only do we Christians have faith in Jesus, our lives are in him. A fish is in the sea, a branch is in its vine, and a root is in the soil.

These cannot live without being joined to their respective spheres. So it is with Jesus' followers. We are spiritually united with the Lord and cannot survive outside of him.

And of course we know there are numerous other places in the Bible, particularly in Paul's writings, where it talks about the need to be in Christ. And that's the same concept there as well.

So we've just looked at the appropriate response to God's gift, and that response is belief. And when we believe and respond in faith, we get the results.

And the results is summarized in the phrase, should not perish, but have everlasting life. So again, the result is, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

[19 : 30] The word translated as perish there means not annihilation, but rather a final destiny, a ruin in hell. The Bible clearly says that non-believers are subject to God's wrath.

And here are just three cross-references to emphasize that point. Romans 1.18 is the first, and Romans 1.18 says, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

And then back in Ephesians one more time, we see this in Ephesians 5.6. And Ephesians 5.6 says, Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

And just a few verses after our focus passage tonight, in verse 36 of John chapter 3, John wrote this, He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

Nobody likes to talk about the wrath of God, but why do we need to make that point to people?

Well, until unbelievers understand that they're subject to God's wrath, they can't realize their need for a Savior.

[20 : 55] So said another way, to fully appreciate the good news, we have to first understand the bad news. Unfortunately for us, John 3.16 says that believers will not perish, but what's going to happen to believers instead?

Believers are going to have eternal life, and that's just one of ten references to eternal life in John's Gospel.

Eternal life refers not only to the quantity of life, but to the divine quality of life. Eternal life is a life of abundant joy and immeasurable blessing in the presence of God forever, and those who believe in Christ have that eternal life already, and we are already seeing some of the blessings of that even as we live here on earth.

But yet we know that when we move on to the next life, we'll experience that fully and not just in part. So think about that again. Those who believe in Christ have that eternal life and are already experiencing its blessings in the present time, not yet fully, but in some significant measure. So we need to think about eternal life as something that will happen not just in the future, but happens to believers today.

[22 : 13] Eternal life is a new quality of life which a believer has now as a present possession and will possess forever. So to underscore the permanence of salvation, consider these two questions.

How long is eternal? eternal life forever. And the second question is, if we could lose our salvation, was it eternal?

So you can see why salvation for the true Christian is permanent. Listen to Jesus' own words in John 11, verses 25 and 26.

Jesus spoke these words to Martha shortly before raising Lazarus from the dead. Again, this is John 11, verses 25 and 26. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? So in verse 25, Jesus does not merely say that he will bring about the resurrection or that he will be the cause of the resurrection.

[23 : 25] Both of those things are true. But Jesus says something much stronger than that. He says, I am the resurrection and the life. Resurrection from the dead and genuine eternal life and fellowship with God are so closely tied to Jesus that they are embodied in him and can only be found in a relationship to him.

So let me reread John 11, 26 again. The question that Jesus asked Martha is the same question that he asked everyone.

He said, And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? So we know John 3, 16.

I imagine most of us haven't memorized. But do we really believe it? And if we believe it, do we act like we believe it? So now that we've made it through the entire verse, we've been reminded how John 3, 16 is a concise statement of the gospel.

And I want to use a quote from J.B. Bond and others to summarize John 3, 16. And they summarize it like this. And I know you've got a lot of blanks in your sentences, so I'll go slowly there for you.

[24 : 40] The greatest giver with the greatest motive provided the greatest gift so that those who do the greatest response can have the greatest deliverance and the greatest relationship.

Do you see a pattern in your blanks there? I'll read that for you one more time just in case you didn't get them all. The greatest giver with the greatest motive provided the greatest gift so that those who do the greatest response can have the greatest deliverance and the greatest relationship.

What was that last line? I think it was greatest, but let me go back and look one more time. Are you sure?

I'm pretty sure. I also stole some things from John Piper, and John Piper describes the verse and the gospel itself with four Ds, as in delta.

So the first D is the danger, which is perishing. So the first D is danger, and by that, the danger is perishing.

[25 : 52] The second D is the design, and the design is love. So the design is love. The next D is the duty, and the duty is faith.

So faith goes next to duty. And finally, we have the destiny, which is eternal life. So eternal life, then, is the destiny.

So let's think about how John 3.16 applies today. Everybody we know is in one of two situations. Unbelievers are in danger of perishing, so for them, John 3.16 is a clear call to repentance and faith.

And secondly, believers already know their ultimate destiny, and are already starting to experience some of that destiny, and that destiny is eternal life.

But when you think about it, what's going to happen to unbelievers, unless they repent, should actually motivate us even more to share the gospel with the unbelieving friends that we have.

[27:07] And we already, as believers, should be motivated by this verse in another way as well. It should motivate us to be thankful no matter what our circumstances are. In other words, we can join with the psalmist in Psalm 107.1 when he said, O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.

And then I'll leave you with one more cross-reference tonight. Look at how 1 John 4.10 mirrors John 3.16. 1 John 4.10 says, In this is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.