

2026 John 3.16

John 3:16 is so well known we often overlook it. This verse shows up on signs in between the goal posts on football games. It's on cards, on pictures on our walls. We know it so well, "for God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." And we think, "Everyone knows it, we should talk about something else."

But why is it so beloved? Why is it in our end zones and on our walls? Why don't we put the verse from 1 Kings where Elijah is making fun of Baal because the false prophet's altar won't light up – "Is he relieving himself?"

Why not that one? It's a funny one! Why this one?

And, I think we know: it's because it is a short, simple, concise, and yet still powerful explanation of the Good News, the Gospel, and - even deeper - God's loving heart for the world.

It's beautiful.

So let's resist the urge to gloss over it and look at it today.

"For God so loved the world." This is significant for a number of reasons. First and foremost is because we *don't* love the world. We love things *of* the world, and we love *certain* people in it. But there are people we can't stand. People who deserve justice for their evil and crimes and we really want them to get their come-up-ins. But God says, "No, I love them too." Does that mean he approves of their sin and crimes? Not at all. Does that mean he won't give justice if they don't repent? No, he will. He will set it all right. But his love is still for them to hear the word, repent, and have life!

And that might seem a miscarriage of justice, “after what they did they just have to say ‘sorry’?”. But we know true repentance is more than that, a falling on the knees, “Lord I am wrong, forgive me, I should have never done it and don’t ever want to do it again, and can I make it right somehow?!” Furthermore, it *has* to be this way. Because if he did *not* so love the world, if his love was based on certain levels of goodness or evil and that balance, then... where does that leave you? Have you done enough? Are you “Pretty good” enough? Hard to be sure.

But if he *so* loves the world, then that means you, yes you, with your doubts and fears and sins, no matter where on the balance of good and evil you are, you are included in the rest of this verse, and even more, in his love!

This line is significant in more ways – the Greek word for world is kosmos – is God’s love just for this rock spinning here? Or for all creation? Yes, this God is not just a regional manager, but the God of all and he will make it all, *all*, new.

“That he gave his only begotten Son.” Forgive some nerdy definitions at the outset. “Begotten” is a significant term. To beget something is to produce something of the same nature. So, we do not beget tables, or pulpits, or pews, we make them. We, as humans, beget humans – children. And lizards beget lizards and so on. God, we see here, begets, the Son of God. Which means he shares the same nature as the Father – as mind boggling as that is – because that means if the Father is God and Divine the Son is of the same nature so therefore he is God and Divine, and sharing the same nature he is therefore: omnipotent and eternal. And that eternal nature has to have always been around – eternally begotten. Because if he was not eternal and made, then he wouldn’t be begotten and therefore not God.

And if your head is in a pretzel because of that, don't worry, because the point in John 3:16 is not just that Jesus is true God, it is also that this one, more powerful and important than any senator or president or king, is *given* in exchange for you.

We already talked about how there are people in this kosmos we don't "so love." And we might bristle and say, "No I really do love them, and I want what's best for them and so I want justice to come to them and so they'll repent." Good, great! That is exactly how we should view our enemies. That is a great way to begin to love our enemies. But how might one "so love" them? God so loves that he gives... So what might we give for that person we can't stand...

convenience, time, money, would we give our lives for them? Jesus says, "There is no greater love than someone lay down their life for their friends." But what about enemies? Would we lay our lives down for them? That's a tough one isn't it... And yet God so loves that he gives...

And that isn't even the end of this exercise, because the Father does not give himself to so love the world, he gives his Only Begotten Son.

Who is giving their child for your enemy? For the liar, the cheat, the abuser, the murderer? And imagine then an only child. Who is giving that for someone who is broken, ugly, angry, sinful? Show of hands? Oh – sorry that's frowned upon in Lutheran preaching isn't it?

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. To die. For us who lie, abuse, manipulate, hold prejudice, and murder (Oh yes, read the sermon on the mount and 1 john if you think you don't murder in your heart).

And now perhaps we are feeling a bit guilty. But do we put this verse on our walls because it makes us feel guilty? No! Because it reminds us of the depths of God's love for even broken people like us – he still gave his Son! What depths of love must God have for us! It's a fountain

overflowing for us, and yes, for the world, even those we don't like. May that change us and how we view others. Even as it comforts us as we struggle to do just that.

“That whoever believes in him...”

Uh-oh, and now it's not so nice. “There is a requirement, a catch, see, nothing in life is free! God says you have to do this, ‘believe in me’ (whatever that is - pass a test at the pearly gates? Have a head knowledge or a feeling?) And then and ONLY THEN will this gift apply to you, otherwise he will snatch it away from you.”

Is that how this works?

Luke 14:16-20 “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. 17 And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ 19 And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ 20 And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’”

Is God, who so loves the world, enough to give his Son, is he the One keeping people out because they don't fan his ego enough or something? Or has he given a gift, the invite, to all, and they refuse it? And why else would someone refuse such a great gift unless... they don't *believe* the gift is that good or real and so they don't open it. Conversely, whoever believes in him, whoever recognizes this gift of life in Jesus – has it already! And those who are too busy, too distracted, not-interested, or reject it... well how could they ever receive it when by definition they have refused to open it? But does that mean God did not so love them as to purchase a gift,

an invite for them in the blood of the Only-Begotten? No, he did. He so loved the world to purchase this gift of life...

And that's more of the beauty of this verse, no? "Will not perish but have eternal life."

Beautiful promises.

But to not perish? What does that mean? We do funerals here all the time? Is this a promise that every disease and ailment will be miraculously healed as a believer? Or is it a promise that not even death will destroy you, be the end of you? Yes, and so the scriptures speak of those who have fallen asleep in Christ. They talk of "today you will be with me in paradise." They talk of a white-robed multitude coming out of the great tribulation.

Which means that this verse is *not* condemning you when you are sick as if "you don't believe enough in the only begotten Son so now you will die!" But just the opposite, in time of trouble and fear and yes, even death, no matter how tragic, we can proclaim boldly and take great confidence, because of this promise here, that you will be just fine.

Yes, even in the valley of death God's promise stands, you will never perish and you will have eternal life. You will be kept safe and sound and brought to everlasting life in a Kingdom where all is made right.

And this is true. He said it, he promised it. This promise has already been sealed in the blood of the only begotten, it is sure.

This chapter, John 3, has intrigue with Nicodemus coming at night, it has difficult teaching that even he struggles with, but it has great clarity as well – shown here in John 3:16, and don't sleep

on 17 -what beautiful truth about God's intention not to come to hurt us, he could do that real easy, but to save us.

So in time of trouble, don't be ashamed to fall back on the tried and true, the well known, this verse and others like it in scripture are so well known for a reason, they are time tested comfort givers to Christians just like us in a broken world.

For God so loved the World He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Amen.