

Could Somebody Hit the Lights?

John 3:14-21

Focus: God, motivated purely by love, gives up his only Son that we might have eternal life, living in the light.

Function: Show how God's love gives us life and light in the midst of dark world.

Prayer for Illumination

John 3:14-21

*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert,
so the Son of Man must be lifted up,
that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish
but have eternal life.*

*For God did not send his Son into the world
to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

*Whoever believes in him is not condemned,
but whoever does not believe stands condemned already
because he has not believed
in the name of God's one and only Son.*

This is the verdict:

*Light has come into the world,
but men loved darkness instead of light
because their deeds were evil.*

*Everyone who does evil hates the light,
and will not come into the light
for fear that his deeds will be exposed.*

*But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light,
so that it may be seen plainly
that what he has done has been done through God."*

Sermon

I've heard it said that John 3:16 is the gospel in miniature.

I imagine most of us **have it memorized** in some translation or another.

(and if you don't, I promise it is worth your while to do so!)

But there is **perhaps no single verse of the Bible that captures so much of the gospel** than this verse.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish
but have eternal life.*

It is **simple, straight-forward, hopeful** and also **quite profound**.

But the one thing that makes this verse so important for us is that that **reveals God's very motivation** for being involved with us humans here on earth.

For God so loved...

We must remember this is **not a fuzzy emotionalism**
or what we mean by "love" on Valentine's Day .

This is a very costly act of **utter selflessness**
for the sake of the other.

Whatever ideas we have about God, we must first affirm
that he loves us;

That he is invested in our well-being

That he acts on utter compassion.

As the Creator of the universe,

God is free to do whatever he wants.

He is free to flick us around like fleas.

Or free to crumple up this attempt and try a different
world.

As an all-powerful deity, **there is nothing that tells God
what to do.**

And yet, out of that freedom to do whatever,

God chooses to love; chooses to stick it out with us.

God dedicates his efforts to seeing us restored.

No notion that "God is out to get us" can survive to the end of
this verse.

Indeed, God **is** out to get us: our hearts, our souls, our
everything, and will stop at nothing to do so.

This cannot be overstated: that God's motivation is not
guilt, or any obligation to us, and most especially, because
we've done anything to entertain God's interest.

God's singular motivation is love.

We are then mindful of the scope of God's love.

...the world...

For the Jewish audience of his day (in particular, Nicodemus the Jewish leader to whom Jesus is currently speaking), this would have caused heads to turn.

To show that God is **not just interested in his chosen people**, but has the entire world in his purview.

That his **love includes all people and creation.**

That **no one is exempt** from the love of God.

One commentator says that in this verse,

we have the "width of God's love";

That is to say, a love that is available to everyone.

Next, this verse offers us what God has done to demonstrate this love.

...he gave his one and only Son...

There is nothing more dear to a parent than their children.

There is **no greater thing that God could give to us than the "One and Only"**

This part of himself.

Here, we can **look back at Abraham** who was asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

And **Abraham shows tremendous faith in his willingness** to "give up" his son.

God blesses that willingness by sparing the boy.

And so we see that not only does God show his faithfulness, but that **he does not ask anything of us that he himself has not endured.**

It is critical that we do not overlook that this verse is, first and foremost, a declaration about God.

In our haste to see what's in it for us, we can jump to the benefits that we receive.

But the passion of Christ is not first and foremost about us,

It is about displaying what kind of God we worship.

That **the very character of our God** is self-giving, freely offered sacrificial love.

And it is **from that recognition that we discover who we are.**

Discover that **we have had absolutely nothing to do to help out our salvation.**

This entire verse is God's doing.

God is the one at work.

We have done nothing to urge God; to help God out.

And he has done it so that we might not perish,

But have a peculiar character to our life.

"Eternal life" we call it:

A statement, not simply about the nature of time

But a quality about the way we live in the present
oriented toward God

A quality that only God can give.

Indeed, John 3:16 holds the heart of the gospel in its hands.

That the all-powerful Creator, out of his freely given love, gives up himself so that we might be free to live, and live forever.

It tells us precisely who God is, his motivation and the incredible results of that freely-given love.

But the next word is a word about us.

The Bible tells us first who God is.

But then **it tells us who we are and the word we live in.**

And that's not always good news.

There are two sections that orbit the nucleus of the gospel that is John 3:16.

First is **an old story from the days of Moses** (found in the book of Numbers).

Jesus looks back to the story of the **children wandering in the wilderness.**

The **present hardship** of life in the desert has **overshadowed their memory of God's miraculous rescue** from slavery in Egypt.

Sick of this manna gunk God gives and tired of being on the road they grumbled and complained against God and Moses

(sound like any road trip you've taken with your kids?)

Rejecting God's bread was **like rejecting God himself.**

So God sent snakes in to get the people's attention.

And crying out in desperation, they ask Moses to pray to God for them and have God remove the snakes.

So God instructs Moses to make a bronze snake and hoist it up on a pole

And everyone who looked upon it, they would survive the snake bites.

It's my belief that what's uncomfortable about that story is not that God sent snakes to get the people's attention, but the mirror that this passage holds up to our lives.

It's frustrating not to understand your life,
where you're going, and what's going to happen next.

And even more, when you've been waking up to the same monotony day in and day out,
it can make you wonder what God is up to.

And out of that frustration and disappointment that life isn't as easy as we wish it was,
we can start sounding like the kids in the back seat.

Wondering why we aren't "there" yet.
sick of being stuck in the car

Jesus points to this to show the ways that **God provides rescue.**

That **God is ultimately interested in saving us from ourselves; our rebellion against God.**

And **is willing to be lifted up on the cross** for all to see

To show how serious he is about it.

As the Israelites were to look upon the snake and live,
We too look at Jesus on the cross
Lifted up to save us from ourselves
And see a love that overshadows everything else.

For Moses people, the snake on the pole offered physical salvation, which only lasted for a time.

With Jesus, he himself is lifted up for spiritual salvation, which lasts forever.

The next section, after 3:16, offers another window into the human condition.

Jesus **sets up a comparison** between **those who believe** and receive the gift of God's love and live in the light.

Those who do not.

And we get this unsettling word, "condemn"

*Whoever believes in him is not condemned,
but **whoever does not believe stands condemned already**
because he has not believed
in the name of God's one and only Son.*

This could put in mind preaching of years back,

That was meant to scare you into faith.

"Repent and believe in Jesus or you will be condemned to hell!"

Were they right?

While life is not always black and white, perhaps it is indeed simpler than we've made it out to be.

When we watch the news, do we find ourselves reassured that all is right in the world?

Or do we have something in our gut that says,

"This isn't right. This isn't how it is supposed to be."

This reaction is felt by Christians and non-Christians alike.

Of course, we know that God has created the world and intended it to be good.

And yet, there is so much wrong that is going on.

Civil war; rampant disease and starvation;

corrupt businesses getting what they need to continue in
greed

children dying way too soon.

Revenge, murder and other senseless and degrading acts

No, at the end of the day, there is light and dark.

And at some point, we all must choose where we will live.

This is the verdict:

Light has come into the world,
but **men loved darkness** instead of light
because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light,
and will not come into the light
for **fear that his deeds will be exposed.**

But **whoever lives by the truth comes into the light,**
so that it may be seen plainly
that what he has done has been done through God."

John's gospel often talks about the dichotomy
between light and dark.

It is John's Gospel where we hear Jesus proclaim,

*"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk
in darkness, but will have the light of life..."*

In Jesus, God's Son, we get the light of life.

We see there is a connection between the two.

We either spend our lives reaching for the light or we dwell in
the darkness that conceals the parts of us we do not want to
look at and most especially do not want others to see.

So on this level, life is simple.

And our hearts know the difference, whether we are willing
to admit it to ourselves or not.

And that's the condemnation of verse 18.

We know in verse 17 that God has not come to condemn.
He's come to save the world.

whoever does not believe stands WILL be condemned by God

No, it says that

*whoever does not believe stands **condemned already***

It is us who have condemned ourselves by choosing darkness
over God's light,
which is his One and Only Son.

So often we blame God for being harsh
or having too many commandments.

But it is not God's doing.

It is us who rebel.

We're the grumbling children at some point.

It is God who loves and saves.

So it is in the light of that love that we are saved.

The condemnation is what we do to ourselves.

And so the choice is ours.

***But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light,
so that it may be seen plainly
that what he has done has been done through God."***

Will we live by the truth?

Are we willing to shed the blanket of darkness

That we use to hide the shameful parts of our lives?

Are we willing to trade it in for the eternal life God has to give?