

## Good News for the World John 3:16-21

Spurgeon was the great London preacher from the last century. When he was **15 years old** and not yet a Christian, he found himself in a small Methodist Chapel with fifteen people. A huge snowstorm had hit the area, and so the preacher for the day was a layman, as the pastor was snowed under.

Spurgeon said, “A poor man, a shoemaker, a tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. **He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had nothing else to say!** The text was, ‘Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth’ [Isa 45:22]. He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in the text. He began thus:

‘My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, “Look.”

Now that does not take a deal of effort. It ain’t lifting your foot or your finger; it is just “look.” Well, a man need not go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man need not be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone can look; a child can look.

But this is what the text says.

Then it says, “Look unto *Me*.”

‘Ay,’ said he, in broad Essex, ‘many of ye are looking to yourselves. No use looking there. You’ll never find comfort in yourselves.’

Then the good man followed up his text in this way:

‘Look unto Me: I am sweating great drops of blood.

Look unto Me; I am hanging on the Cross.

Look: I am dead and buried.

Look unto Me; I rise again.

Look unto Me; I ascend; I am sitting at the Father’s right hand.

O, look to Me! Look to Me!’

When he had got about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes, he was at the length of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger.

He then said, ‘**Young man, you look very miserable.**’

**Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made on my personal appearance from the pulpit before.** However, **it was a good blow struck.**

He continued: ‘And you will always be miserable—miserable in life and miserable in death—if you do not obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.’

Then he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist can, ‘Young man, look to Jesus Christ.’ There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that moment and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the Precious Blood of Christ.” (TGC)

Spurgeon recounted this story dozens of times. He retold the story elsewhere with **John 3:14-15** in mind, where we left off last week:

I saw at once the way of salvation . . . like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, Look! what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun. (DGM)

**Amen. John 3 contains good news for the whole world! Look to Jesus and be saved.**

It's good to read of the good news.

**If you are here and you are exploring the faith, this is a good verse to consider, as it tells you much about what makes Christianity unique.**

**We begin with John 3:16 today.**

It is probably the most quoted verse in the Bible – although today's culture has made **"Judge not lest you be judged!"** perhaps even more popular.

- It's not uncommon to see John 3:16 written on a large sign at a **football game**.
- It's one of the first verses we teach to our kids.
- **Luther called John 3:16 "The Gospel in Miniature."**
- Among many things, we encounter the abounding love of God here.

**In understanding his love better, I pray that we will in turn love him more.**

While many people rightly love John 3:16, others **find it troubling -- at a heart level.**

Can we really be **certain** of God's love?

- I was talking with a well-known pastor just a few weeks ago who said to me, **"I have always struggled believing God actually loves me."** (He was sharing that after feeling particularly loved by God in the course of a particular trial.)
- Many believers go without the **assurance of God's love**, the kind of thing we read about in Rom 8:31-39 – that nothing will ever separate us from that love, if we are in Christ Jesus.

Some play the game, "He loves me, he loves me not" with God's love. Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

- "I got engaged!" – He loves me!
- "I have cancer" – He loves me not.
- "I got married" – He loves me!
- "I'm still single" – He loves me not.
- "I got a promotion" – He loves me!
- I got fired!" – He loves me not.

**Do you think about God's love like this? Is it based upon your circumstances?**

Or do you this kind of insecurity: You believe, yes, **God loves** – but you're not persuaded that **he loves you** – given your **moral failures, or your background?**

**Good news: You don't have to live with the uncertainty of God's love.**

This morning I want you to see the **glory and certainty of God's saving love** from John 3:16-21.

To be clear, this paragraph is not just about God's love – for we will deal with **God's judgment** as well. **But it's against the dark backdrop of sin and judgment that the saving love of God shines like a diamond.**

Let's consider this marvelous text in three parts:

- **God's Great Love (3:16)**
- **God's Saving Intention (3:17)**
- **The World's Mixed Reaction (3:18-21)**

### **#1: God's Great Love (3:16)**

A question that occupies scholars is when does Jesus stop talking and when does John start speaking? If you have a red-letter Bible, you see that this whole paragraph is in red. But it seems that this is John's reflection, **a summary of the Nic at Night story that precedes it.** **The Greeks didn't employ quotation marks.** And of course they didn't use red. So it's difficult.

The majority of scholars believe 16-21 is *John's* writing.

- Notice Jesus' death is referred to as a past event.
- Much of the vocabulary doesn't appear in the speeches of Jesus, only in the writings of John.
- **At any rate, it's all God's word. A more important question is this:**

#### **What makes God's love so great?**

3 characteristics:

##### **A. God's love is great because it's *unearned***

We see this in **two ways**. Notice the word "**For**" and the word "**world**."

First, the word "**For**" links it with the previous verses **14-15**. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness.... (Numbers 21. Shane talked of this last week).

Jesus is like a snake on a poll? Yes. But he's not a poisonous snake.

**It means sin's venom and its consequences were absorbed in Him that we may have life.**

- **Jesus became the curse for us. (Gal 3:13; cf., 2 Cor 5:21)**
- We don't earn this love. We are ill-deserving.

**What motivated God to take such an action?** According to John 3:16 – **love**.

God's love is so **unique** in this way.

If you are a single guy and you are really interested in a particular lady, then you are in a very real sense trying to earn her love, aren't you? And if you do win her over, why does she love you? On what basis? It's because of your looks, your personality, your warmth, your companionship, or the way she feels around you, etc. **There is something that is meriting love. Love has been drawn out; it has been earned.**

God doesn't love like this. His love is unique.

- **Romans 5:8** – why we were sinners/ungodly, Christ died for the ungodly. **God doesn't love you not because you have made yourself loveable.**
- **Deuteronomy 7:7-8** – why did God set his love on Israel? It wasn't because of their worth:  
<sup>7</sup> It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup> but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

**God loves you ... because He loves you!**

It wasn't based on earning – not based your morality, personality, wealth, etc.

Second, notice the word “**world**.” It's used 186 times in John.

- Many people read “world” as **vastness/bigness**.
- But you will miss the greatness of God's love if that's all you think.

**World** – for John – is **the fallen, sinful world**.

**What makes God's love for the world so stunning is not the world's *bigness*, but the world's *badness*.**

**The emphasis is not on the width of God's love, but with how *low God stoops in his love*.**

Imagine saying to your son, “I need you to do something for me. There are some people who are my enemies that deserve to perish, but I want you to go die for them in their place, so that they can have eternal life.” And it's a million more times amazing than that. (Piper)

God loves this rebellious world, ***which includes you individually as well***.

**B. God's love is great not just because it's unearned, but because it's also *sacrificial*.**

- This love is not **sentimentalism**.
- God's love is not a **cliché**.
- His love was **demonstrated**.
- Love always acts.
- Notice, For God so loved the world that he .... ***gave***.

Further, notice this little word “**so**.”

- What does this mean? Does it mean intensity? “***It was soooooo great***”

- Probably not. It has to do with **demonstration**.
- Technically, the word simply means “**in this manner**” – “**in the following way**” (CSB)
- “For God loved the world in this way ... that he gave his only Son.”
- **This is how God loved the world! HE gave.**
- Galatians 2:20 – he loved me and gave himself for me.
- Rick Warren, “We are never more like God than when we give.”
- Our father loves to give good gifts to his children (Lk 11)
- Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights (Jam 1)

Here is the ultimate gift of our loving Father. He gave his...

### “One and only”

- You here Genesis 22 here.
- There was no angel to save the sacrifice; Jesus was the lamb, the substitute.
- God’s love is so great because **of what he gave, of who he gave.**
- God not only **sent his son (v. 17)**, but he also **surrendered him (3:16)**.
- Why? **What motivated him? Love.**
- **If the greatness of God’s love for you is measured by the worth of his gift, then you can’t go greater than this.**

**Romans 8:32** tells us to remember that if God is going to do the big thing, then we can trust him to keep us until the end... He won’t let us go.

- He didn’t redeem us to leave us.
- The cross is the ongoing assurance of God’s love, his saving and keeping love.
- Augustine: “The cross is the pulpit from which Christ preached God’s love for the world.”

### Application:

- **This love is the paradigm for our love.**
  - It’s wholehearted love!
  - It’s selfless love. (Eph 4:32-5:2; 5:25)
  - It’s generous love.
  - Paul motivates the church to financial generosity by reflecting on the Jesus’ giving of himself (2 Cor 8:9)
- **This love empowers our love.**
  - We are selfish people apart from the gospel freeing us to be lavish in our love, in our service, in our giving.

### C. His love is unearned, sacrificial, and ... transformative

Notice the intent/the purpose of this love: **eternal life** not **perishing**.

Eternal life is both **quantity** and **quality** of life.

- Right now – we have eternal life. It has already begun.
- We are alive spiritually!

If you “**believe**” ... in “**Him**”

- Not – if you believe in general.... In Buddah, Allah, etc.
- John Hick was the Godfather of “All roads lead to God... a friend ask Hick this: “So you said that when you should come through evangelicalism but don’t stay there.” (The idea that when you mature you basically become a pluralist). “What do you say to the person who stays in evangelicalism?” He said, “I would call that person “stupid.”
- **Go with John the Apostle not John Hick!** This is not whoever believes in whatever god they want...

Whoever believes **“in Him”** has eternal life.

- God has made a way – it’s in Christ. **It’s the narrow gate, the narrow way.**

**Many hate the idea of saying there’s only “one way,” but what we should be amazed at is that there even is a way!**

- Given our sin, rebellion, idolatry, God could leave us to ourselves... but he has made a way in Christ.
- **He loves the world enough make a way. He hasn’t loved the world in such a way that you can ignore and reject his way.**

The rest of the paragraph unfolds the importance of this choice to believe in Him. If you do believe, this love is transformative.

## **#2: God’s Saving Intention (3:17)**

John builds on verse 16, notice the word “**for**” again to articulate God’s intention to save, not condemn sinners. And verse 16 begins with “**for.**” So we are all the way back to verses 14-15.

Why would God send the Son to be lifted up for sinners?

- He loved, verse 16.
- And, he wanted to save it! Verse 17.

**God – in his great love -- sent the Son to save sinners.**

**He would have been justified to send the Son to judge it!**

- But Jesus came to save sinners. (1 Tim 1:15).

**Is this your view of God? Or you see him as an angry old man?**

**In great love, God the Father authored our salvation, Christ accomplished it, and the Holy Spirit applied it to our hearts.**

**Jesus’ crucifixion wasn’t designed to change God’s mind, but to reveal it.**

**Jesus displayed God’s great love by dying for sinners.**

And why does God not come and judge right now?

- **It’s his patient love, giving people time to repent. (2 Pet; 1 Tim 2)**

- A pastor friend's dad, who lives with his son... "He doesn't believe he's a sinner."
- Christ came to save sinners, but you need to repent!
- What good is a Savior if there's nothing from which we need to be saved?
- This is the divine offer of salvation to the whole world – to a world of sinners.

### #3: The World's Mixed Reaction (3:18-21)

How do people respond to God's divine provision? There's a mixed reaction.

#### A. Two Options: Belief or Unbelief (18)

Notice "condemned" and "not condemned" are not in the future tense – when you die... These are **present conditions** – "condemned already"

Remember eternal life is a present reality – **it's a quality of life, not just a quantity of days.**

- It's not that we merely live forever, but we are alive with God – *now* and *forever*.
- We are God's child *now*, and *forever*.

But if you are outside of Christ, you don't have this kind of life. You actually have condemnation now and forever.

- What is present condemnation "now" mean?
- **It is guilt, shame, restlessness.**
- You are in a vault now, awaiting execution later.
- Disbelief is not just a little mistake – it has eternal ramifications.

But you can believe and be free!

**There's no third group** – every single person in this room is only in one or two: condemned or not condemned.

What's the difference? Not religiosity, morality, geography – **it's belief.**

- Notice v. 16 and v. 15 – believe and verse 36 -- believe – in Him.
- You can't escape condemnation after death, but right now, present condemnation is **reversible!** You can go from condemned, to justified!
- Acts 2 – many of these people once yelled, "Crucify him!" but then they believed, and their status was reversed.
- **This is why we sing, and other religions don't! Condemnation has been removed!**

#### B. Your Choice Reveals What You Love (19-21)

Why do people reject this divine provision for salvation?

These verses tell you why: **they love something else.**

You see here that we **believe what we love, and we love what we believe.**

**Their rejection is not out of a problem with the Savior, but with their heart. Their loves are wrong.**

**v. 19 – This is the verdict/judgment”**

- This explains it.
- Some reject Christ because they **love** the darkness.
- **Light has come – it requires a response.**
- **Some love the light – like a moth, flying to it; others love the darkness, and scurry like a roach.**
- Our affections reveal how we react to the light.
- We choose what we love.

**Vs 20-21 contains more contrasts: wicked/hate/shameful works vs what is true/works carried out through God**

**v. 20 – “hates the light” – notice the intensity!**

- They also “**fear**” – “**lest his works should be exposed.**”
  - You love the darkness because you can sin there without any exposure.
  - You like to hide because you love the darkness.
- Choices reveal passions.
  - **Why do you sin? Because at one level, you love it.**

**We need something to happen to us to give us new affections!**

- **In our fallen condition, we love darkness.**
- **We choose in keeping with our nature – we need a new nature!**
- **We need to be born anew.**

**v. 21 – This verse shows us God’s divine grace that has rescued us from this problem.**

“whoever does what is true” – this is a Semitic expression

- What John means **is the act of believing in Jesus. Believing in the truth, in Him.**
- This person **loves the light.** They come into the light.

Why? “So that it may be clearly seen that his works have been **carried out in God**”

- That is, what this person has done, **“has been done through God.”**
- Meaning, **you come into the light so that everyone can see that your faith in Jesus and life of faithfulness to him is owing solely to the power and grace of God.**
- **Through God, our nature is changed, our affections change, we believe. We are changed.**
- **At one time we have all loved the darkness, but by the power of God, we have been changed.**
- **It’s not because we are superior to unbelievers; it’s a result of God’s gracious activity in our lives.**

**This is our hope in evangelism – that God would bring someone to life. We present Jesus prayerfully.**



- **Last week: When talking to the waitress, a delightful young lady, then she asked me what brought me to England. I said, “I’m a pastor.” You would have thought I just said, “I kill puppies.”**
- **Many not only think the Christian faith is dumb, but many think it’s harmful.**
- **What hope do we have in this post-Christian context?**
- **As we show hospitality, as we love our neighbors, we pray that God would work mightily in their hearts to believe on the Son.**

### **Application:**

- **Believe in Jesus Christ.**
- **If you have, give him glory for granting you the grace to believe.**
- **Marvel at his love.**

In the 1960’s the great theologian Karl Barth was speaking at Princeton. During one of the discussion times, a student asked, “Dr. Barth, what is the greatest thought that has ever passed through your mind?”

He paused for a moment and thought.

He raised his head and said with grace and childlike simplicity, “Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so.”

It is indeed a most glorious, life-changing thought in the world.

- **Don’t resist his love. Believe on Jesus.**
- **If you are a Christian, don’t doubt his love for you – his personal, particular and preserving love for you. It has been evidenced fully and climactically at the cross....**

### **Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible***

“So you’re a king, are you?” the Roman soldiers jeered. “Then you’ll need a crown and a robe.”

They gave Jesus a crown made out of thorns. And put a purple robe on Him. And pretended to bow down to Him. “Your Majesty!” they said.

Then they whipped Him. And spat on Him. They didn’t understand that this was the Prince of Life, the King of heaven and earth, who had come to rescue them.

The soldiers made him a sign—“Our King” and nailed it to a wooden cross.

They walked up a hill outside the city. Jesus carried the cross on His back. Jesus had never done anything wrong. But they were going to kill Him the way criminals were killed.

They nailed Jesus to the cross.

“Father, forgive them,” Jesus gasped. “They don’t understand what they’re doing.”

“You say you’ve come to rescue us!” people shouted. “But you can’t even rescue yourself!”

But they were wrong. Jesus could have rescued Himself. A legion of angels would have flown to His side—if He’d called.

“If you were really the Son of God, you could just climb down off that cross!” they said.

And of course they were right. Jesus could have just climbed down. Actually, He could have just said a word and made it all stop. Like when He healed that little girl. And stilled the storm. And fed five thousand people.

But Jesus stayed.

You see, they didn't understand. It wasn't the nails that kept Jesus there. It was *love*.

**It wasn't nails that kept Jesus on the cross. It was love.  
It's true. Believe it. Don't doubt it.**