

*Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

**For God So Loved the World  
John 3:16  
Part 1**

It is a wonderful thing to know that we are loved. It is a wonderful thing to know that there is someone who truly is thinking about us and has our best interest at heart. This kind of assurance is a wonderful thing.

When we have someone like this in our lives we never really truly feel alone. They may not, at any particular point in time be physically right beside us, but we know that they are out there, somewhere. This can be very comforting.

Unfortunately, even if there is such a person or persons in our lives at this present time they may not always be there. They may be there today, but they may not be there tomorrow. This is just the way life is.

But I have some good news for you. There is someone who I know who loves you, who has always loved you. Who is near you at this very moment and who wants you to bask in His infinite and eternal love. Of course the one I am speaking about is God.

Someone might say but the love of God is not the same thing as the love of a friend or family member. And to this I respond, "Amen, you are right! It is not the same." The love of God is far better! His love is eternal and His love is infinite. Knowing that God loves us and wants us to bask in that love is a truly wonderful thing.

This leads us to the next passage that we will begin to examine in our study of the Gospel of John, **John 3:16-21**. Let me read this passage for you, "**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. (18) He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (19) And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. (20) For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. (21) But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.**"

This is a wonderful passage of Scripture which flows very nicely from John 3:1-15. Hopefully you remember that the emphasis of John 3:1-15 was the "new birth." John 3:1-3 emphasized its necessity. John 3:4-8 emphasized its basic components. And John 3:9-15 emphasized its focus, which of course was Christ. John 3:16-21 flows from this emphasis on the new birth.

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Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin had gone to Jesus at night, most likely in order to determine whether or not Jesus was the Messiah or was not the Messiah. I would think in doing this that he would have expected a very invigorating theological discussion. But this is not what happened. Rather he was personally confronted with the necessity of the new birth.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, believed that people like himself, through their own efforts could make themselves acceptable to God by conforming themselves to the Mosaic Law. This is what he believed and he apparently believed this strongly. He was not about to simply abandon these deeply held convictions easily.

So when Jesus confronted Nicodemus with the necessity of the new birth in John 3:3 it is not surprising that Nicodemus responded as he did in John 3:4 saying **"How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"** Nicodemus, I believe consciously chose to suppress the truth in unrighteousness rejecting the obvious meaning behind Christ's words in order to embrace the absurd. Jesus at this point in time could have turned His back on Nicodemus, but Jesus tried once again to impress on Nicodemus the necessity of the New birth but this time He provides more detail in **John 3:5-8**.

Did this further explanation of the new birth help Nicodemus to come to the point of acceptance? Of course the answer is, no! Listen to **John 3:9, "Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"** He continued to be resistant.

Jesus, in response to this continuing resistance, rebukes Nicodemus. Let us read **John 3:10 "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?"**

Had Jesus reached the end of his rope? Would Jesus now turn His back on Nicodemus? He certainly could have, but He didn't. He simply changes His approach. Jesus simply rather than choosing once again to focus Nicodemus on His message, or in other words on the necessity of the new birth, challenges him to focus on the reliability of the messengers, even in the midst of his continuing unbelief.

Listen to **John 3:11, "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and you do not receive our witness."** Jesus, I don't believe, expected what He had just said to dramatically change the unbelief of Nicodemus. Rather I believe Jesus was simply highlighting the absurdity of his unbelief in light of the very credible witnesses.

But even though Nicodemus was unable at least at this point in time to accept the necessity of the new birth even in spite of credible witnesses, Jesus goes on to spell out a message of hope. Let me read for you **John 3:12-15 "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (13) "And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man. (14) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; (15) that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life."**

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Jesus in these verses shares with Nicodemus some amazing things about His person and His work. He shares with Nicodemus heavenly things. Things that will make it possible for people such as Nicodemus to receive the gift of eternal life by grace through faith totally apart from human effort. This is where we left off. We left off at John 3:15 where Jesus concludes His remarks to Nicodemus concerning the new birth.

Beginning in John 3:16-21 Jesus is no longer speaking. John 3:16-21 are the reflections of the apostle John based on what Jesus shared with Nicodemus in John 3:1-15. Some of you might have thought that the Bible passage that we read earlier, John 3:16-21 was simply a continuing record of Christ's conversation with Nicodemus, but this probably is not true. It is very likely that Nicodemus never heard the words recorded for us in John 3:16-21. This is why I believe that we have to separate John 3:16-21 from John 3:1-15 in the course of our study of this gospel.

All Bible scholars agree from time to time that the Apostle John in this gospel introduces his own reflections rather than simply quoting the words of Jesus or others, but it is difficult to know sometimes where his thoughts begin and where his thoughts end. In the first century there were no devices like quotation marks to show the precise limits of quoted speech. We are always left to the probabilities and we must work out for ourselves where a speech or a quotation ends.

In John 3 it is clear that Jesus was speaking in verse 10. There is absolutely no question about this. Let me read for you **John 3:10 "Jesus answered and said to Him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?"** So we know that Jesus is speaking in John 3:10 but it is not absolutely clear when he stops speaking and the Apostle John starts speaking.

The most likely place this transition actually takes place is at the end of John 3:15. Why would I say this? I say this because John 3:15 ends with a reference to the "Son of Man." This title is used only by Jesus when referring to Himself throughout the gospels. We are therefore on fairly safe ground to say that John 3:15 are the words of Christ however this does not appear to be the case in John 3:16.

The words of John 3:16 were most likely spoken by the Apostle John. I say this first of all because the death of Christ is spoken of as past. And secondly because the Apostle John is the only one in the scriptures who refers to Jesus as the "only begotten" (MENEGENES) of God. Though John 3:15 seems to have been clearly spoken by Jesus it appears that John 3:16-21 were clearly the words of the Apostle John.

This means that John 3:16-21 are the reflections of the Apostle John in response to what Jesus had shared with Nicodemus. This leads us to the question that we will be seeking to answer over the next several weeks. What were the reflections of the Apostle John in John 3:16-21 that were generated by Jesus conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:1-15? What is the very first reflection?

In response to John 3:1-15 the Apostle John first of all reflected on the love of God for the world (John 3:16). Let us look at the very first words of **John 3:16, "For God so loved the world . . . "** Why would John in reflecting on **John 3:1-15** immediately be drawn to mention the love of God for this world?

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Just as the new birth was grounded in the ‘lifting up’ of the Son, which we have seen in John 3:14-15, the "lifting up" of the Son was grounded in the love of God for the world. In other words if God the Father did not love the world, Jesus would not have ever been sent into this world to be crucified so that people like ourselves might have the opportunity to be saved.

This reference to the love of God for the world in John 3:16 stands out from the many other references to love in the Gospel of John. How does it stand out? All we have to do is to review the many references to love in this particular gospel and it will become obvious.

We see references to the love of the Father for the Son. Listen to **John 3:35, "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand."** This same theme is repeated in John 10:17; 15:9-10; 17:23-24, 26.

We also see references to the love of the Son for the Father. Listen to **John 14:31, "But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do."**

We see references to Jesus love for His disciples. Listen to **John 14:21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him."** This same idea is repeated in **John 11:5; 13:1,33-34; 15:9-10,12; 21:7,20).**

We see references to the necessity Christ’s demonstrating their love for Him through obedience. Listen to **John 15:9-10, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. (10) If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love."** We see this same emphasis in **John 14:15, 21, 23, 28; 21:15-26.**

We see references to the importance Christ’s disciples loving one another. Let me read for you **John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (35) By this shall all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."** We also find this thought shared in John 15:12-13, 17; 17:26.

From this survey of references to love in the Gospel of John it is clear that John is very enamored by this particular theme of love and looks at it from a number of different angles. It is also clear from this survey that he will repeatedly revisit each of these different perspectives on love throughout his gospel. But this is not the case when John speaks of God’s love for the world. This reference to God’s love for the world stands out from every other reference to love in John’s Gospel because it stands alone.

Because this reference to the love of God for the world stands alone in the Gospel of John it should make it stand out to us as all the more wonderful. It is like we have a pile of precious and semi-precious stones all piled up in front of us, some of those stones being identical to other stones in the pile.

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But then there is this one particular stone that stands out from all the rest and is totally unique. This is how we should view John's reflection on God's love for the world at the beginning of John 3:16.

Therefore we need to consider it carefully. John will not share with us this thought about God's love for the world in such a forceful and succinct way again in the entire gospel.

Certainly we can easily grasp the love of God for His Son, the love of the Son for the Father, the love of Christ for His disciples, the love of the disciples for Christ and even the love of the disciples for one another. But the love of God for the world can be a much more difficult concept to grasp. The word "world" (KOSMOS) refers to the earth and by extension to the people who inhabit the earth. In the writings of John the world is considered *hostile* to God.

John, after reflecting on what Jesus shared with Nicodemus immediately introduces to us the truth that "**God so loved the world.**" How would the Apostle John have viewed this particular truth he is now sharing with us. Would it have been rather ho hum? I don't think so. He would have viewed this particular truth with a sense of awe.

Jews were familiar with the truth that God loved the children of Israel but here the Apostle John recognizes that God's love is not restricted simply to the Jews. It was also extended to the Gentiles as well. To John this would have been an amazing thing. But I am sure that there was something even more amazing to John as he contemplated the love of God for the world.

The fact that the love of God for the world was not only being extended to Jews and Gentiles but even to *wicked* Jews and Gentiles would have been awe inspiring for John. Does God love Saddam Hussein? Does God love Osama Ben Laden? Does God love the most troublesome and hurtful person in your life? Yes. God loves them! He loves the world. We may struggle with loving the world but God doesn't. Why? Because the Scriptures tell us that God is love in 1 John 4:8.

Does the fact that God loves the world mean that the world can go on sinning and think that there will be no consequences? Let me read **John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."** Yes God loves the world but this does not preclude His wrath abiding those that continue to reject Him and His love for them. We can say that God loves the world even while His wrath abides on the world because the *Scriptures* tell us that it does (John 3:16, 36).

Let me share with you a couple of Old Testament passages that illustrate this tension between God's simultaneous love and wrath toward those in the world who reject Him. In **Ezekiel 18:10-13** the Lord gives us a list of sins that are common to man and then concludes with these words, "**Will he live? He will not live? He has committed all these abominations, he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head.**" Is God indifferent to the sins of men in this world? And the answer is absolutely not! His wrath abides on those who have transgressed His commandments and rejected His love according to John 3:36 and will be put to death according to Ezekiel 18:13 and who have sinned against Him. But Ezekiel 18 is not all about wrath and the punishment of sinners, it is also about love.

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Listen to **Ezekiel 18:23**, the Lord is speaking and He says, "**Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked; declares the Lord God, rather than that he should turn from his evil ways and live.**" Just like God is not indifferent toward the sins of men neither is He indifferent to the death of men.

We see the same thing in respect to God's dealings with the nations in the Old Testament. Consider the nation of Moab. In Jeremiah 48:26 He in His wrath pronounces judgment on the nation of Moab. And yet in **Jeremiah 48:31** and again **Jeremiah 48:36** the Lord declares "**Therefore I shall wail for Moab, Even for all Moab shall I cry out; I will moan for the men of Kir-heres.**" Kir-heres was simply a place within Moab.

In both of these cases in Ezekiel and Jeremiah a very definite tension existed between the wrath of God and the love of God as the judge of the whole earth.

Could a similar tension exist in a judge presiding over an earthly courtroom? And the answer is absolutely with two major differences. First of all the tension that God would experience would be far greater than anything a human judge could experience. Why? God is holy and the judge is not. And secondly God is love and the judge is not. And the second major difference between a human judge and God is the fact that the human judge cannot do anything about the tension that he is experiencing but God can.

Let me read the rest of the verse of **John 3:16**, "**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 world is hostile toward God and judgment awaits them. But it is also true that because God so loved the World He sent His Son on a rescue mission. We will concern ourselves with this rescue mission next week.

But to help you understand better the significance of this mission let me read for you **Romans 5:8-10**, "**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him, (10) For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**"

### CONCLUSION

It is a wonderful thing to have someone in our lives that we know truly loves us and has our best interest at heart. But even though we may have such a person in our lives today does not mean that we will have that same person in our lives tomorrow. This is just the way life is, but God's love has always been and will continue to be a constant.

This weekend I can tell you beyond a shadow of a doubt based on John 3:16 that God loves you, whoever you are, and that every person in this room has the opportunity to bask in that love. If you are not presently basking in that love the problem is not with God but the problem is with you.

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How can we bask in His love? How can we come to the place where we can be confident that His wrath no longer abides upon us and that He is now free to bless our lives both now and in eternity? It is by turning to Christ in faith believing that He is the Christ the Son of the living God who died for our sins according to the Scriptures. The love of man may come and go, but the love that is available to us in Christ is eternal (Romans 5:8-10).