

The Greatest Verse in all of The Bible

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John's Gospel, chapter 3, please. The Gospel by John 3 and verse 1. I want to talk to you tonight on the greatest verse in all the Bible and I've preached on John 3:16 many times and I make no apology for preaching upon it again, for this is the statement that God has laid on my heart. John 3:1,

1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. 3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. 9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Years ago an old preacher from the United States of America was driving down the highway from a meeting on a Saturday evening and as he drove down that highway on his way home, God impressed upon that preacher John 3:16, and God impressed this text upon his heart that this was the verse that he should lay with his congregation the next morning. The preacher began to contend and argue with the Lord and he began to contend with the Lord that he had already the message preached and the message prepared, and he felt anyhow that John 3:16 would be a statement too naive and too simple for his years of many ministry and for his congregation. And another 100 miles down the road, God impressed upon the heart of this old American preacher that he should preach on John 3:16 the next morning, and again the preacher began to make excuses. And another 100 miles down the road, the Lord began again to impress upon the heart of the preacher that this was the message for the next morning and at last the preacher said, "Yes, Lord."

This is the text that the Lord has been impressing upon my heart and mind this week and every time I come to this text, I become increasingly convinced that it's the greatest verse in all the Bible. My dear friends, infant lips repeat these words. Scholars cannot exhaust the meaning of these words. The preacher declares these words for here we have the greatest verse in all of Scripture.

Richard Weaver was an English coal miner. After drunken brawls he would go home to his mother at night, his face was broken, it was battered, it was bleeding. She would always receive him tenderly. She would take care of his wounds. She would bathe his wounds. She would help him to bed. And then she would whisper in his ear words that seemed inseparable from her voice, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

One day, Richard Weaver climbed into a disused sand pit, he was there to fight and brawl with another man, but he was in conflict with a greater adversary, and as he agonized in that sand pit, he was tormented by a thousand doubts and his mother's text came to his heart. "I thought," said Richard, "that 'whosoever' meant me. And what faith was, I could not tell but I had heard that it was taking God at his word and so I took God at his word and trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ."

Duncan Matheson was a Scottish stonemason. One day, he was standing in his father's garden when suddenly the words of our text took powerful hold upon his mind. He says, "I saw that God loved me for the very first time." He says, "I saw that God loved me personally for God loved the world. I saw for the very first time that 'whosoever' meant me, even me, and my load of sin was taken from my back. I could not contain myself for joy."

Can you think of another text in the Bible that is so comprehensive, so broad as this one? Here's the Bible in miniature. Here's the Gospel in a nutshell. Here is the cream of biblical revelation. This verse is like an art gallery stored with masterpieces of mercy. It's like a jewel case stored with gems of grace. It's like a medicine case opening up remedies of redemption. It's like a written part, an offering to all forgiveness of sins. Dr. John

Philips says, "No other statement in the Bible so aptly sums up God's redemptive purpose in Jesus Christ for the human race." The greatest verse in all the Bible.

Why do I say that tonight? Well, let me give you three simple reasons. I want to suggest to you tonight that this verse is the greatest verse in all of the Bible because we have presented to us here the greatest love that a person can ever know. The greatest love that a person can ever know, "For God so loved the world," and the greatest love, of course, is the love of God. Now, the Greeks had different words for "love." They had the word "eros," which meant "sensual or sexual love." They had the word "phileo," which meant "brotherly love." And of course, they had the word "agape," which meant "spiritual love," love to its zenith, love to its greatest degree, and that's the word that the Lord Jesus uses here.

You see, my dear friends, love is more than an emotion, it's a decision. Do you remember when you had a crush on someone? For some of us, that was a long time ago. Do you remember how your little heart would pitter-patter? Do you remember the poem, "Love is a very funny thing, shaped like a lizard. It wraps its tail around your throat and goes right through your gizzard." You've had the experience, haven't you? Love is an emotion but more than that, it's a decision. It's kind of like the letter that the old boy wrote to his girlfriend and he said, "Darling, I love you. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you." He said, "I'd climb the highest mountain for you. I would go through the deepest ocean for you." He said, "I would go through the worst snowstorm for you." And then he put at the bottom of the letter, "PS: if it doesn't rain on Friday night, I'll go over to see you."

But you see, my dear friends, there was nothing indecisive on the part of God, "For God so loved the world." Here we see the great heart of God. When the young English preacher, Henry Moorehouse, came to Chicago, he went to redeem a pledge that D. L. Moody had made to him and Moody said to him, "Mr. Moorehouse, if you ever come to Chicago, I'll let you into my pulpit." And when Moorehouse knocked on Moody's door, Moody was a bit reluctant. He didn't know what the young English man was like. But he got into that pulpit and he preached for one solid week every single night on the love of God. In fact, he preached with such passion and power on the love of God that Moody was overwhelmed and Moorehouse became known as the man who moved the man who moved the millions.

And on the final night, Henry Moorehouse said this, "I've been trying to tell you how much God loves you." He said, "Suppose I could borrow Jacob's ladder, suppose I could ascend that shining stairway until my feet stood on the sapphire pavements of the city of God, suppose," he said, "I could find Gabriel, the archangel, the herald angel who stands in the presence of God, suppose I could say, 'Gabriel, tell me, how much does God love the world?' I know what Gabriel would say. He would say, 'Henry Moorehouse, for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.' That's how much God loves the world."

Isn't it incredible tonight, isn't it amazing tonight that the God who is eternal, the God who is unchanging, the God who is self-existing, the God who is all-powerful, the God who is in need of nothing, and yet the Bible says he loved the world.

Think of the origin of this love. You say to me tonight, "Preacher, what is love?" God is love. You say, "What's love?" Love is that selfless object that seeks the good. Love is that selfless quality that seeks the good of its object even at personal cost. You see, it doesn't say God so loved the world, that he felt romantic about it. It doesn't say God so loved the world, that he got a tingling sensation about it. It doesn't say God so loved the world, that he gave to charity. No, God's love is an act of self-sacrifice. It's got more to do with acting than feeling. It's not merely an act of emotion, it's an act of the will.

You know, when we think of love tonight, we think of the love of a mother. Mother loves her children unconditionally and unceasingly. What about a mother's love tonight? Surely, a mother's love would be a tremendous picture of God's love for us. No, my dear friends, a mother's love is not a measuring stick for the love of God. We think of a father's love, a father's love for his children. Addison said on one occasion, "It is certain there is no kind of affection so purely angelic as that of a father's love for a daughter." And yet, my dear friends, the love of a father is not the measuring stick of God's love. We think of the love of a spouse. We think of the love of husband and wife and yet this love is not the measuring stick of the love of God. God's love tonight transcends. It surpasses all human love.

When we think of a mother's love, we think of God's love surpassing that. When we think of a father's love, we think of God's love transcending that. When we think of the love that exists between husband and wife, we realize that God's love goes further than that. The Bible tells us that God is, that God is love, that God loves you. I wonder, have you ever thought of God like that? As a God of love? As a God of compassion? Maybe because of some of the experiences you've had in life, some of the problems that you've encountered, some of the trials that you face, this concept of God's love is foreign to your way of thinking. It's incredible, is it not?

"For God so loved the world." The origin of this love but look at the object of this love. He loved the world. It's not the world of creation, it's the world of sinners lost and ruined by the fall. It's fallen mankind. It's sinful mankind and its international aspect. Isn't it a wicked world in which you and I live? I mean, the Bible says the whole world lies in wickedness. I mean, when you hear of a father coming home in a drunken stupor and he kicks his little children's hand and he takes that precious little one's hand and he puts his fingers upon a stove and he burns the fingers of his own child, isn't it a wicked world in which we live? When you read the newspaper and when you think of a live-in boyfriend who has physical intercourse with a 6 year old child in that house and gives that little child AIDS, isn't it a wicked world in which we live? Then you begin to look into your own heart and you see the depravity, you see the corruption, you see the sinfulness of your own heart, isn't it incredible tonight that God loves us in spite of the way we are? You see, our sin he hates, but our souls he loves.

He loves the world. All colors. All clans. All characters. All countries. Can you comprehend it tonight? A world of angels? No. A world of saints? No. A world of sinners. Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world. Older man tonight tottering to a Christ-less grave, God loves you. Young person tonight just starting out in life with all of life before you, God loves you. Businessman tonight with a full pocket and an empty heart, God loves you. Mother tonight struggling to bring up those kids in the home, God loves you.

When Nelson was looking for the North Pole, he was an explorer, he entered, his ship entered deep waters and each day he would gather up the rope in the ship and he would let down the plummet to measure the depth of the ocean at a given point. And one day he came to a place where the ocean was exceptionally deep and he let down the plummet and he wasn't able to sound the depth. And he began to gather up all the available rope on his ship and they attached it to the line and still it never reached the depth. And in his log, in his journal, he wrote the exact length of the rope, the length of the line, and then he added these words, "Deeper than that." Deeper than that. Are you in the quagmire of sin tonight? God's love is deeper than that. Are you in the depths of depravity tonight? God's love is deeper than that. Are you in the clutches of drink tonight and drugs and immorality? God's love is deeper than that. I tell you tonight, God's love goes deeper than that.

Many years ago in the city of Chicago in the United States of America, there were some Bible lectures that were being given by a famous Bible scholar and at one of these lectures, there was some discussion and there was some questions and so they asked this guy who knew the Bible thoroughly, they said, "Sir, what's the greatest thought that has ever gone through your mind?" He thought for a moment and he said, "The greatest thought that has ever gone through my mind is this: Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Dear unconverted friend tonight, you're loved. You're loved.

It's the greatest verse in all the Bible because it speaks of the greatest love that a person can ever know. But let's go a step further: it speaks of the greatest gift that a person can ever have. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." This gift tonight has no equal. His only begotten Son. This is God's supreme gift. You know, when you think of this gift tonight, it was an expensive gift. Salvation is free but it's never cheap. God gave his Son and that cost him everything.

Do you see the greatness of God's love for you tonight? John speaking of the Lord Jesus in this very passage says this, "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." He says this Lord Jesus, this Savior of ours, he came down from heaven. That was the Savior's condescension. My friends, the eternal place of Christ was a place without suffering, it was a place without sorrow, it was a place without strife, it was a place without sin, but the cost of God's gift was such that he had to leave that glorious place to come to this grievous place. What a step.

He came from the adorations of heaven to the abominations of earth. He came from the coronations of heaven to the condemnation of earth. He came from the delights of heaven to the defamation of earth. He came from the glory place to the gory place. He came from the majesties of heaven to the miseries of earth. He came from the hallelujahs of heaven to the hisses of earth. He came from the praises of heaven to the persecutions of earth. He came from the songs of heaven to the sneers of earth.

But he didn't stop there, for John says that Christ not only came down, but he tells us, verse 14, but he was lifted up. That was the Savior's crucifixion. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." God's gift was the gift of the only one without sin and the Son was crowned with thorns, dear unsaved friend, that you might be crowned with glory. He was stripped of his clothes that you might be robed in his righteousness. He was mocked that you might be honored. He was reviled that you might be blessed. He was cursed that you might be cleansed.

Is that not what Calvary is all about tonight? Paul says God spared not his own Son but he gave him up for us all. The Lord Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." He gave him up to the spitting. He gave him up to the scourging. He gave him up to the smiting. He gave him up to the slaying. You say, "Why?" That you might be saved from hell. That you might get ready for glory. You talk about amazing love tonight, "The love that Jesus had for me, to suffer on the cruel tree, that I a ransomed soul might be." My friend, it's more than tongue can tell.

I heard the story some years ago about a father who was employed on this drawbridge and the father's job was to raise the drawbridge to let the boats pass below and then to lower the drawbridge as the train would pass above. And one day, this father's little boy visited him and as little boys are, he began to be very inquisitive and he began to go places that he shouldn't have gone and he peeked into a trapdoor that was always open so that his father could keep his eye on the great machinery that would raise and lower the bridge. And suddenly the young boy, this little boy lost his footing and tumbled into the gears and as the father reached down and tried to pull the little boy out, he could hear the whistle of the approaching train. He knew that that train would be full of people, it would be impossible to stop that fast moving train, and a great dilemma confronted him: if he saved the people, his son would be crushed in the cogs. Frantically, he tried to pull the little boy out without success and finally he put his hand to the lever that would start the machinery. He paused for a moment and then with the tears coursing down his face, the giant gears began to move and that bridge came down just in time to save the train. The passengers got out below and they were laughing and joking and jeering and yet that bridge-keeper had chosen to save their lives at the cost of his son.

That's what happened at Calvary. I should have been on that cross but he took my place. I should have borne that punishment but he bore it on my behalf. I should have suffered that judgment but he took it for me. I should have endured those pangs of hell but Christ bore it all for me.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." Oh, it was an expensive gift. My friends, it was an expedient gift. If you're ever going to get gifts at Christmas and you say to yourself, "Why did my mother ever buy that for me? Does my mother ever think before she buys things for me?" You see, my friends, God gave this gift not merely because he wanted to, but he had to give this gift. Do you know what God's official pronouncement on the human race was? Sinners. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The Bible says, "There is none righteous, no not one." I wonder tonight, have you ever realized that you're a sinner? A sinner by choice. A sinner by birth. A sinner by nature. A sinner by practice. You see, the condition of man brought about the condemnation of man and the only hope that you and I had was one taking our place and bearing the punishment of our sin and yet, my friends, it had to be someone who wasn't guilty. The problem was there was no one on earth. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." And out from the glory place he came. The sinless, spotless, Lamb of God. The one who was the Father's delight in eternity. The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. This one who did no sin, knew no sin, in whom was no sin was cursed on Calvary that you and I might be cleansed.

A boy some years ago whose parents had died, went to live with his married sister and she treated him terribly, causing him great grief. And that boy loved his sister and he worked. He worked his fingers off and when he reached the age of 50, he went out and bought an expensive gift for his sister whom he loved very much. He handed it to her and he said, "It's for you." He hoped that somehow that sister would love him in return. She glanced at the gift. She threw it on the floor. She put her foot upon it. She smashed it. I just wonder tonight, is that the way you're treating God's love gift? Are you here tonight and you're still despising your Savior, still rejecting the Savior, the one who loved you so much that he was willing to give his very life for you, that he was willing to give his life in sacrifice for you, that he was willing to shed his blood for you?

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." The greatest love that a person can ever know, the greatest gift that a person can ever have, the greatest choice that a person can ever make. "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." You know, life is full of choices. You have to choose what you do with your life, with your abilities, with your talents, with your money. And my dear friends, when you face the choice what you do with Jesus Christ, you're facing the greatest choice that you can ever make because it deals with the greatest person in history, and because it has the greatest effect in eternity.

Do you see how simple this choice is for you tonight? "Whosoever believeth in him." Anyone at any time can come to God through Christ on God's terms, but if there's no faith, there is no salvation. You say, "Preacher, what's faith tonight?" Look at the acrostic. It's forsaking all, I trust him. Forsaking all, I trust him. The Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Do you realize tonight that your sins will never be forgiven, that you'll never have a chance of heaven unless there is faith in Jesus Christ? Do you believe tonight that Jesus Christ who is who he says he is? Do you believe tonight that he died for your sins according to the Scriptures? Do you believe

tonight that he rose again to be your Savior? Have you trusted him to do so? My friend, don't let the devil complicate it for you tonight. It's forsaking all, I trust him.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever said, "Jesus, I will trust thee, trust thee with my soul"? Do you see how simple this choice is? Do you see how solemn this choice is? My friend, there is the possibility of ending up in hell tonight. Do you hear the hiss of hell in that word "perish"? Do you realize tonight that if you're here without Christ you're perishing? Every day you're getting closer to the abyss. Every day you're getting closer to the edge and, my friend, if you die without Jesus Christ, you'll perish in hell. If you look at that word perish, you'll see flames leaping up. If you listen to that word perish, you'll hear the weeping and gnashing of teeth. If you smell that word perish, you will smell the fire that's never quenched.

You say, "Preacher, that's harsh tonight." No, it's not, for the tenderest man who ever walked this planet spoke more in his ministry about hell than he did about heaven. The Lord Jesus who spoke about the danger of hell fire. It was Christ who said, "Ye generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?" It was the Savior who said it's a place where there would be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

My friend, the good news of the Gospel tonight is you don't have to go there. You don't have to perish for there is the prospect of ending up in heaven and have everlasting life. It's a new quantity of life, sure it is, but it's a new quality of life. This is life eternal. Said the Lord Jesus, "that they may know thee." It's knowing God. It's having communion with God. A new quality of life. A new quantity of life. Everlasting life. If Jesus Christ doesn't come one day, this body will crumble in death, but this life, this eternal life, it's not lost. It outlasts the span of human life. It's not timed to die. It's forever.

I heard about an old Christian who was stricken with paralysis and his life on earth was drawing to a close and his family were gathered around his bed and his paralysis had robbed him of his speech and his family, they were longing just for one final word just that would stay with them after he had gone. They hoped that his speech might be restored and he was asked if there was anything that he could say and he could say absolutely nothing with his lips, his mouth, but he had learned to sign. So he began to spell out with his fingers one word and that family were, they were gathered at the bedside and they were just eager just to see that word. And he spelled out these words: g-l-o-r-y, glory. Glory.

Is that your destiny tonight? Where will you be in eternity? Enjoying everlasting life or enduring everlasting punishment? The greatest love that you can ever know, the greatest gift that you can ever have, the greatest choice that you, my friend, can ever make.

Years ago, a young man quarreled with his father. He left home. He continued to keep in touch with his mom through writing. He desperately wanted to come home for Christmas but he was afraid of his dad, that his dad wouldn't allow him. His mother wrote to him and urged him to come home but he felt that he couldn't make that step or take that step until his dad had forgiven him. Finally, there was no more time for letters. His mother

wrote and told him that she would talk with his father and if he had forgiven him, she would tie a white rag on the tree which grew alongside the railroad tracks near their home which he could see before the train reached the station. She said, "If there's no white rag on the tree, you'd better move on."

So the young man started home at Christmas and as the train drew near the tree, he became very nervous and apprehensive. He said to his friend who was traveling with him, "I can't bear to look. You sit here at the window and you look and I'll tell you what the tree looks like and you tell me if there's a white rag hanging on the tree." And so the friend changed places and he looked out of the window and after a bit he turned and said to John, "I see the tree." John said, "Is there a white rag tied to it?" For a moment, that friend didn't say anything and then he turned and in a gentle voice he said, "John, there's a white rag tied to every branch of that tree."

That's what God is saying in John 3:16. God has removed the condemnation. He has made it possible for you to come freely to him at the cross. The place called Calvary, the wrath of God that was my due, upon the Lamb was laid, and by the shedding of his blood, the debt for me is paid. There is a white rag tonight and it's hanging from Calvary and the Lord is simply saying, "Sinner, come home."

Will you come? Will you say tonight, "Lord Jesus, I no longer resist you. I trust you with my soul. I believe the promise of John 3:16 that, 'Whosoever believes in Christ will not perish, but have everlasting life.' Lord, just now, I receive the gift of eternal life."

Let's pray.