

God So Loved: The Gift, the Grace, and the Great Decision

Baptist • Three-Point Sermon

John 3:16-21 • Mixed congregation

Introduction

There is a verse so familiar that we risk reading it without feeling it. John 3:16 is the first Scripture many of us memorized in Sunday School, perhaps as children sitting in a Vacation Bible School classroom with a felt board on the wall. We know the words. But familiarity can be the enemy of wonder. This morning I want to ask you to set aside everything you think you already know and encounter this passage as if for the very first time — because the truth buried in these six verses is not simply a memory verse. It is the heartbeat of the entire Bible.

Jesus spoke these words to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, a man who came by night — perhaps hiding, perhaps afraid, perhaps just unsure. He had seen miracles. He knew something was different about this Teacher from Galilee. And Jesus, in response to his confusion, declared one of the most astonishing realities ever spoken: God is not your enemy. God loves you. God sent His Son — not to destroy you, but to deliver you.

In John 3:16-21 we find three truths that, if you receive them, will change the way you see God, the way you see yourself, and the way you see the decision that stands before every living soul. This morning we will walk through: first, the measure of God's love — what He gave; second, the mission of God's grace — why He gave it; and third, the moment of God's light — what you do with it. Let us open the Word with expectation.

John 3:16-21, John 1:4-5

Illustration: The Night Visitor

Nicodemus came to Jesus under cover of darkness. He was a man with reputation, position, and everything to lose. Yet something in him would not let him stay away. There are people in this congregation today who are just like him — perhaps you've been carrying questions you haven't dared to voice out loud, perhaps you've sat in these pews for months before walking through that door. The good news is that Jesus didn't turn Nicodemus away for coming at night. And He will not turn you away today.

Source: John 3:1-2, original illustration

Point 1: The Measure of God's Love — What He Gave

John 3:16 begins with three of the most important words in all of Scripture: 'For God so loved.' The Greek word translated 'so' here is *houtos* — and it does not primarily certainly includes that. It means 'in this manner.' In this way. To this degree. God's love is not a vague sentiment or a theological abstraction — it is measured by what it cost Him. And what it cost Him was His one and only Son.

Adrian Rogers, that great preacher of Bellevue Baptist Church, used to say, 'God loves you just as you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way.' That captures something vital about the love described in this verse. It is not a love that merely tolerates us from a distance. It is a love that moves — it crosses the infinite distance between heaven and earth, takes on flesh, and goes to a cross. God so loved the world — not a select few, not only the religious, not only the moral — the world. Whosoever. That word 'whosoever' is the greatest invitation in human history. It has no

asterisk, no fine print, no exclusion clause.

Charles Spurgeon preached on John 3:16 repeatedly throughout his ministry at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and he once declared: 'I would like to know who the world is. It seems to me it takes in a very great many. This whosoever includes everybody, from the highest to the lowest, from the worst to the best. There is room for you, my friend, whoever you are.' The priesthood of all believers means that no pastor, no deacon, no religious institution stands between you and this love. You can receive it directly, personally, right now.

So what? Here is the application: this love calls for a response in your personal relationship with Jesus. Not a relationship with a church, not a relationship with a tradition, not a relationship mediated through ritual — a personal relationship with Jesus Christ Himself. That relationship is nurtured through daily quiet time in the Word, through devotional prayer, through fellowship with a local church congregation. If you have never experienced this love in a personal way, that is the invitation before you today.

John 3:16, Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:9-10

Illustration: The Rescue at Any Cost

Tony Evans tells the story of a father who, when his young son fell into a fast-moving river, did not stand on the bank calculating the risk. He dove in. He didn't ask whether his son was worthy of rescue. He didn't weigh the cost. Love doesn't calculate — it moves. That is precisely what John 3:16 describes. Before you ever thought about God, God thought about you. Before you ever reached toward heaven, heaven reached toward earth. The Father dove in.

Source: Adapted from Tony Evans, 'The Power of God's Names'

Point 2: The Mission of God's Grace — Why He Came

Verse 17 is the verse we don't quote as often, but it is the verse that answers the question lurking in every honest heart: 'Is God angry with me?' Listen to the answer: 'For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.' The mission of Jesus Christ was not judgment — it was rescue. Not accusation — but salvation. The word 'saved' in the Greek, *sōthēnai*, carries the idea of being delivered from destruction, made whole. Jesus did not come as a prosecuting attorney. He came as a Savior.

And yet — verse 18 will not let us rest comfortably in a soft universalism. 'He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already.' The condemnation is not something God throws at the unbeliever like a thunderbolt. It is the condition of every soul that has not received the gift. We are not condemned because God is cruel. We are condemned already because we have sinned, and sin separates us from a holy God. The good news is that the Son came to address exactly that problem.

This is the heart of the Great Commission that Jesus would later give to His disciples — and through them, to every local church and every believer. 'Go and make disciples of all nations.' Witnessing is not optional for the follower of Christ. Our testimony, our personal story of what Jesus has done in our lives, is one of the most powerful tools in the arsenal of the kingdom. Every mission trip, every church planting effort, every act of faithful witnessing is an extension of this divine mission: not to condemn, but to save.

So what? The mission of grace has a practical demand on how you live this week. Someone in your neighborhood, your workplace, your family does not yet know that God sent His Son not to condemn them but to save them. They may believe God is against them. You have the testimony

that proves otherwise. Spurgeon was right when he said that every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter. Ask God to give you one name — one person — and begin praying for an opportunity to share your story of what it means to be born again.

John 3:17-18, Romans 8:1, Matthew 28:19-20, 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

Illustration: The Doctor Who Came to Heal

Imagine a community devastated by disease. The townspeople have heard rumors that a great physician is coming. Some are terrified — they've heard that doctors bring bad news, that an examination might expose the worst. But when the doctor arrives, he does not come with a list of condemnations. He comes with a bag of medicine. He came because he heard there was suffering — and he came to heal. Jesus walked into a world dying of sin not to catalog our failures but to cure our disease. The diagnosis was already known. He came with the remedy.

Source: Original illustration

Point 3: The Moment of God's Light — What You Do With It

Now we reach the climactic truth — and it is the most urgent one. Verses 19-21 shift the weight of responsibility from God's side to ours. 'And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.' This is one of the most searching statements in all of Scripture. The issue is not primarily intellectual — it is moral. People do not reject Jesus because the evidence is insufficient. They reject Jesus because coming to the light means their deeds will be exposed.

Tony Evans writes powerfully on this passage, observing that darkness is not simply the absence of light — it is the preferred environment of everything that doesn't want to be seen. Sin thrives in darkness. Addiction hides in darkness. Shame lives in darkness. And when the Light of the World appears, there is a choice: come to the light and have your deeds exposed, or retreat deeper into darkness and protect your way of life. The tragedy is that so many choose the darkness — not because they don't believe a God exists, but because they love their sin more than they love the truth.

But verse 21 is the invitation of hope: 'But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.' 'Doing the truth' means acting with integrity and openness toward God — being willing to be known, to be seen, to be changed. And when you come to the light, something remarkable happens: you discover that your deeds — even the ones you are most ashamed of — can be redeemed, transformed, done now in God rather than in hiding. Being born again is not just the beginning of eternal life in the future; it is the beginning of a new kind of life in the present — life lived in the light.

So what? The soul competency that God has given you — the God-given right and responsibility to deal with God directly — means that no one else can make this decision for you. Not your parents, not your pastor, not your deacon. The decision for Christ is yours alone. And today, as we close, the invitation stands open. The altar call is not a religious formality — it is the moment when a soul chooses light over darkness, life over death, the love of God over the condemnation of sin. Will you come to the light today?

John 3:19-21, John 8:12, Ephesians 5:8-14, 1 John 1:5-7

Illustration: The Man Who Lived in the Attic

There is an old story of a man who, out of shame over a moral failure, retreated from his family and lived in the attic of his own house for years — eating what was slipped to him through a crack in the door, hearing his family below but never joining them. The darkness of that attic felt safer than the exposure of the rooms below. Years later, when he finally came downstairs, gaunt and broken, his family — who had known all along where he was — embraced him with tears. He had wasted years hiding from a family that had never stopped loving him. That is the portrait of every soul who loves darkness rather than light. The Father already knows. He is not waiting to condemn — He is waiting to embrace. Come downstairs.

Source: Original illustration, adapted from pastoral tradition

Conclusion

This morning we have walked through three truths from John 3:16-21 that the Holy Spirit wants to press into every heart in this room. First: the measure of God's love is the gift of His Son — whosoever believes will not perish but have everlasting life. Second: the mission of God's grace is salvation, not condemnation — the Son came to rescue, not to destroy. Third: the moment of God's light is now — the light has come, the choice is before you, and every soul must decide: darkness or light, death or life, condemnation or freedom.

Adrian Rogers said it plainly: 'You were not saved to sit, soak, and sour. You were saved to serve.' But before you can serve, you must be saved. Before you can be born again, you must choose the light. And if you have already made that decision for Christ — if you have already been born again and sealed that decision through believer's baptism by immersion as a public testimony of your faith — then the call today is to live in that light. To pursue your quiet time and devotional life with fresh hunger. To share your testimony with someone who is still hiding in the dark. To take your place in this local church congregation, in Sunday School, in the fellowship of this body.

But if you are here today and you have never made that personal decision — if you have been in and out of these pews and never crossed the line of faith — I want you to know that the invitation is open. The altar is not a place of condemnation; it is a place of light. As we sing together in a moment, I want to extend the invitation. You can walk down this aisle, take a pastor or deacon by the hand, and say simply: 'I want to come to the light. I want to be born again.' That is all. Heaven moves when one soul makes that decision.

God so loved the world. God so loved you. The question is not whether He loves you — He proved that at Calvary. The question is what you will do with the light that has come into the world. May God grant every soul in this place the courage to choose well.

John 3:16-21, Revelation 22:17, Romans 10:9-10, John 1:12

Illustration: The Last Revival Meeting

Charles Spurgeon, preaching one of the great revival meetings of the 19th century, concluded with these words: 'I have one message and one message only — Christ crucified, buried, and risen. Come to Him. Come now. The door is open.' The simplicity of the gospel is not a weakness — it is its power. Revival has never come through complexity. It has always come when the Word is preached plainly, the Spirit moves freely, and ordinary people make extraordinary decisions. This congregation — your local church — can be the site of revival when people in this room say yes to the light.

Source: Adapted from Charles Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, 'The Warrant of Faith'

Applications

- Begin or renew a daily quiet time — set a specific time and place to open the Word each morning before the demands of the day begin

- Write down the name of one person in your life who does not yet know Christ and begin praying for them by name every day this week
- If you have never been baptized by immersion as a professing believer, speak with your pastor after the service about believer's baptism — obedience to Christ's command is an act of worship
- Examine whether there is an area of your life you are keeping in the dark — a habit, a relationship, a secret sin — and bring it into the light through confession and accountability with a trusted member of your congregation
- Find one person this week to whom you can share your personal testimony of what it means to be born again — your story is your most powerful witnessing tool
- Commit to faithful participation in Sunday School and the regular fellowship of your local church, where growth in the light happens in community
- If God is stirring your heart toward a mission trip or supporting a church planting effort, respond to that call — the Great Commission belongs to every believer, not just vocational ministers

Prayer Suggestions

- Lord, open my eyes to the full measure of Your love — help me receive John 3:16 not as a familiar verse but as a personal declaration spoken directly to my soul
- Father, I confess that I have at times loved darkness more than light — expose the hidden corners of my life and give me the courage to bring them into Your presence
- God, give me one name — one person who needs to hear the good news that You sent Your Son not to condemn but to save — and open a door for me to share my testimony with them this week
- Lord, stir a spirit of revival in this local church congregation — may we be a people who walk in the light, who practice the truth, and whose lives make the love of John 3:16 visible to a watching world
- For any soul in this room who has never been born again — Holy Spirit, do Your convicting work today, draw them to the light, and may they respond to the invitation with faith
- Father, thank You that the condemnation that once rested on us has been fully and finally dealt with at the cross — let that assurance produce in us not complacency but gratitude that overflows in worship, witnessing, and faithful service in Your Great Commission