

# THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

## John 3:16

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

### INTRODUCTION

We can say without fear of contradiction that the verse we look at today is the best known and the most beloved of the entire Bible. *[How many have it memorized? Let's say it together.]*

But it is one thing to memorize a verse and to love a verse; it is another thing to understand a verse and to live a verse!

Before we look at verse 16, we need to review what Jesus has just taught Nicodemus in vv. 1-15.

[Comment on whether v. 16 continues Jesus' words with Nicodemus, or whether these are the Apostle John's comments on vv. 1-15. The verses sound like John's summary of circumstances surrounding Jesus' coming in the years following His death and resurrection—especially v. 19. Also, even v. 18 appears to present a portrait of a time when Jesus' claim as to His identity had been made much clearer and had seen various responses. At the time when Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus, He was relatively unknown to most people in Judea and even in Galilee. John often picks up and elaborates on Jesus' speeches; it is not always easy to tell when Jesus' speech ends, and John's analysis begins.]

Entrance into the kingdom of God [or eternal life as John prefers to call it elsewhere in this book] is not based on religious **privilege** or **practice**. Nicodemus had all of that. Yet, Jesus told him that if he was not “born from above” (again) that he could not even see nor enter the kingdom of God (v. 3). Physical birth does not qualify one for heaven—only for earth (v. 6). Nicodemus needed the divine seed (explanation of “water”—I John. 3:9) from the heavenly Father, and the spiritual work of the Holy Spirit in order to be born from above. Only the work of the Word of God (the divine seed—I Peter 1:23) could cleanse one from sin and corruption (Eph. 5:26—the “washing of the water with the Word).

Neither Nicodemus nor any of us should be amazed that Jesus requires us to be **born again** if we wish to be saved and go to heaven (v. 7). Just as the wind is sovereign, unseen, and effective in the physical world, so also in a much greater way is the Spirit powerful, sovereign, and effective in the spiritual world (8). Only the Holy Spirit can save a person.

Jesus knows and has borne witness of the things He speaks (v. 11). He could speak of even more profound truths of a heavenly nature, but we must first accept these “earthly,” elementary and essential truths as to salvation first (12). **Jesus is the only teacher who has been in heaven in the divine counsels of salvation, and who has come down to earth in order to make known with certainty these divine truths of salvation and eternal life (13). WE NEED TO LISTEN TO HIM!**

The only way to be saved—born again—is to look in humble and dependent faith upon the crucified Savior who died there on the cross as our substitute—paying the penalty of death for our sins (14).

Jesus said that **whoever believes will in him have eternal life (v. 15).**

Now, John begins verse 16 with “*for*”—he joins this wonderful verse with all he has just written in vv. 1-15. The reason this verse is so beloved, is that it shows us in an amazing and profound way the **LOVE** of God. God’s infinite love is here manifested in an “infinitely glorious manner” (Hendrickson).

## **HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE SAVING POWER OF THE LOVE OF GOD?**

### **I. ITS CHARACTER—SO LOVED**

“So”—in this way, in such an infinite degree, in such a “transcendently glorious manner” (Hendrickson).

“Agape love” is self-sacrificial love, demonstrated for the good and well-being of its object. It is the consistent term used in the NT for God’s love, for our love for Him, and for our love for one-another. John uses this word more than any other NT writer (35 times here, and 31 times in I John!).

This love reaches back into eternity past, it comes into fruition in time especially at Bethlehem and at Calvary, and it touches each individual in the present and future who responds to it in faith. This love is **rich, true, thoughtful, tender, and majestic.**

### **II. ITS AUTHOR—GOD**

See John 1:1—The Father is referred to here. He is full of **life** and **light** and He give that to His Son and sends Him into the world!

#### **A. The Supremacy of His love**

All human virtue is merely a weak shadow of His vast love—whose name is *LOVE*—I John 4:8.

#### **B. The Priority of His Love (I John 4:9, 10, 19—**Read**; Rom. 5:8)**

### **III. ITS OBJECT—THE WORLD**

#### **A. Not here the Flora and Fauna**

**B. Not the “World” that is in open hostility to God—he does not love evil; we are not to “love the world” (I John. 2:15-17).**

#### **C. The World is Fallen Mankind—both Jew and Gentile**

**This is a distinctively Christian idea. The Jewish teachers of that day would NEVER have made such a statement.** God loved Israel. But, Jesus has just shown Nicodemus that physical ancestry “doesn’t cut it.” (3:6; See 1:12-13)

D. It is Mankind—laden with Sin, exposed to Judgment, in need of Salvation—yet the object of His love. Men still partially reflect the “image of God” in which they were created—though it has been greatly damaged and blurred. God still recognizes His own works.

E. I Cannot Accept the Limitation of His Love to the Elect—otherwise why the statement that “whosoever believes”? The two groups would be identical, and the verse seems to clearly distinguish them. See especially vv. 17-21 where a two-fold response to His invitation is given.

**I CAN HONESTLY GO UP TO ANY PERSON AND SAY TO THEM THAT  
“GOD LOVES YOU” AND THAT “HE INVITES YOU TO HIMSELF TO BE SAVED”.**

Let us not be in the habit of forming our theological systems and then forcing the teachings of the Bible to fit into our theological systems. This verse clearly says that God loves the WORLD, and the next verses elaborate upon the world he loves—most of which will reject His love. See v. 19—light came into the *world*, and men loved darkness rather than light.

**IV. ITS GIFT—GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON**

A. The Actuality of the gift—“So that”

B. The Generosity—“He gave”

Notice the difference here (“gave”) from the usual word “sent”.

This word shows His **grace, kindness, generosity, sacrifice, and yes, love.**

C. The Greatness of His Gift—“Only Begotten Son”

Literally—“the Son, the only begotten”—**very emphatic** in wording

Not a servant, not a friend, not an angel, but His Son!

A unique, one of a kind Son (see at 1:14)

*Recalls Genesis 22:2*—“Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love.”

**God’s gift cost Him dearly! He gave what was most important to Him!**

D. The Destination of His Gift—Death (cf. vv. 14-15)

**V. ITS PURPOSE—MAY NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE**

A. Negative purpose—“May not Perish”

Does not refer to mere physical death

Does not refer to annihilation—not the destiny of anyone.

Refers to eternal spiritual and physical death in hell (Lake of Fire)

Involves divine condemnation, punishment, and the loss of the divine presence and fellowship. **Separation from God forever!** Opposite of eternal life.

B. Positive Purpose—“Have Everlasting Life”

Life (see 1:4—“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”)

“Life” here is **salvation, fellowship with God, enjoying His presence forever,**

**being rewarded and being given privileges to serve Him (John 17:3).**

Notice that this *life* is **everlasting**. John uses this word 17 times—always with “life”. Thus, this life is *qualitatively* different, and *quantitatively* different than mere human life.

#### VI. ITS CONDITION—WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH

A. “Whosoever” means just what it says—even **YOU!**

This promise is not limited to any one *race, gender, age, nationality, religious background, social status, intelligence, capability etc.*

But, “whosoever” is limited by one thing:

B. “Believeth”

1. This is **continuing** and **persistent** belief—not a fickle and false faith

2. Faith is a confiding and trust—a commitment of one’s person to Him.

3. Faith is accurate in content—in His person, as He is presented in the Bible.

**Believing *into* Christ is to enter into a living relationship with Him—to have a continuing living faith in His person.** This expression is a favorite one for John.

#### CONCLUSION

It is great to know this truth—but what will you do with it? What have you done with it?

- **IF YOU ARE NOT BORN AGAIN (SAVED), YOU WILL NEVER AGAIN BE THE SAME AFTER HEARING THIS MESSAGE.**

**If you reject His invitation to salvation after hearing it presented from His word, you hold a much greater accountability than before. You have no excuse.**

God loves you—He has told you so. He offers you His salvation—His gift of eternal life. What will you do with His offer?

- **For you believers, I have one comment: WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THIS TRUTH?**

**For many we might have to change the title of the message to: *THE GREATEST STORY NEVER TOLD.***