

The Gospel in Miniature

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[0 : 00] Well if we could, this morning with the Lord's help, turn back to that portion of scripture that we read. The Gospel according to John chapter 3.

John chapter 3. And I would just like us to read that well-known verse. Verse 16. 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.

If we were to choose one text, one verse from the whole of scripture, in order to define the purpose of the Bible, and what the Bible is all about, and the meaning of its existence in our lives, if we were to choose one text, it would be this text before us this morning.

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.

[1 : 19] This text of scripture that we have before us this morning, it's not only applicable to the individual, or to the particular party, or a certain grouping of people.

This verse is for everyone. No one is excluded from it, and everyone is included in it.

Because this verse speaks to every man, woman, boy or girl, young or old. It's for them. John 3.16 is everyone's text.

John 3.16 is everyone's text, because it applies to everyone, and it is for everyone. Whether you are converted or unconverted, whether you are saved or unsaved, whether you are in Christ or out of Christ, this is your verse.

And I want you to lay hold of it. I want you to take it to yourself. I want you to cherish it and own it. Because this is a precious verse.

[2 : 27] It's a precious verse. A verse with which I'm sure we are all very familiar with. Because there is hardly a place in all the world to which the gospel of Jesus Christ has gone, and this verse has not become almost instantly known.

It's the first verse that the translators of the Bible put into another language. And throughout many generations, countless millions have been taught to memorize it, and it has been inscribed on books and on buildings.

This great verse, with its emphasis upon God's love for a lost and sinful world, and the gift of his love in Jesus Christ, it's what makes this verse the heart of the Bible and the gospel in miniature.

That's what Martin Luther called it when he said that John 3.16 is the heart of the Bible and the gospel in miniature.

Because if we were to ask the question, what is the Bible all about? What is the gospel all about? What's the point?

[3 : 42] What's the point in gathering in this building, Lord's day after Lord's day, and trying to fathom out what this old book is saying? What's the point in it?

The answer is this one verse. John 3.16 is the answer. Because, my friend, the fullness of this one verse is that it beautifully summarizes for us what the Bible teaches from Genesis to Revelation.

It emphasizes to us what we are to believe about God and what God requires of us. It tells us what we are to believe and what we are to do.

And this well-known verse, it couldn't be any clearer for us. The Bible couldn't tell us any more plainly what we are to believe and what we are to do than the words of this verse.

And because this verse is everyone's text, belongs to everyone in here today, it's everyone's text.

And because it's everyone's text, I only want us to ask two questions.

[4 : 52] I only want us to ask two questions. There are two questions about the Bible which apply to every one of us. And no one is exempt from these questions.

And the first question which we need to ask when we come to the Bible is, what am I to believe? What am I to believe? Because the Bible tells me so much.

It has a lot of information. As you can see yourself, it has 66 books. There are over 3,000 chapters in it and numerous amounts of verses.

But what am I to believe? What am I to believe? And the second question which this verse prompts us to ask is what am I to do? What am I to do?

With all the information which I am given from the Bible and what I read and what I learn and what I've been told about by the preaching of God's Word and what I've been told about God and about Jesus Christ, what am I to do with it?

[5 : 51] What am I to do? And that's all I want us to ask this morning. What am I to believe? And what am I to do? What am I to believe? And what am I to do?

And so, first of all, we come to this verse and we ask, what am I to believe? And this verse tells us we are to believe that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

We are to believe that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. And what we see in that first half of the verse is God's universal love and God's unique gift.

The Bible says to us that we are to believe in God's universal love. God so loved the world. We're to believe in God's unique gift. He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, the gift.

So we're to believe in God's universal love and God's unique gift. God's unique gift. But just to put this verse into its context, because as you know, this well-known verse was a statement from the lips of Jesus and it was said during this night time meeting with a man called Nicodemus.

[7 : 14] And Nicodemus was, as we know, he was a Jew. But not only a Jew, he was a ruler of the Jews and therefore he was in a position of authority within his own community and within his own religion.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and he lived by the strictest possible rules of his religion. But when Nicodemus came to Jesus, he was seeking the truth.

He wanted to know the truth. He was seeking the answer to which his religion could not provide. And yet Nicodemus wasn't a man who was ignorant of his Bible.

He was, as we read, a teacher in Israel. He was a professor of theology. He was one who knew what the scripture said and taught. But he had missed the one great theme that is running throughout this whole book.

God's universal love for sinners. God's universal love for sinners. And out of all the profound things that Jesus says to Nicodemus in this chapter and he says a lot of profound things to Nicodemus.

[8 : 25] But what stands out is verse 16. Because Nicodemus was going to get a lesson on the message of the whole Bible in one sentence.

And Jesus says to him, God so loved the world. And to the mind of a Jew, that statement, it was earth-shattering.

It was earth-shattering because in the first words of Jesus and his lesson to Nicodemus, the worldview which Nicodemus had completely fell apart.

All the theology of Nicodemus as the ruler of the Jews and his concept of who God is and his understanding of the God of the Bible, it all falls down around him and it's pulled apart when Jesus says, God so loved the world.

And the reason for this is because Nicodemus and all his misconceptions of the gospel, he believed that salvation was only for the Jews and for no one else.

[9 : 29] Because the Jews, they were known as the elect people of God. They were the chosen light in this dark world. They were to be God's covenant people. They were to be the light in darkness that would shine towards all the other nations of the world and the world were able to see through them the goodness and the love of God by the way that they lived their lives.

And ultimately it was to draw the world to worship the Lord. But the problem was that the Jewish people kept the light of God's good news to themselves and they shared it with no one.

They hid their light. They veiled their light because their privileged position had made them proud. They viewed themselves as a cut above the rest.

And their privileged position was because the Lord had told the people of Israel why he had chosen them. It wasn't because they were a large nation because they were a small nation.

It wasn't because they were special in any way or that there was anything good about them that differed them from all the other nations but the reason why the Lord chose them was simply

because the Lord loved them.

[10 : 43] the Lord loved them. And so when Jesus says to Nicodemus that God so loved that part wasn't a problem for Nicodemus. That part was okay because Nicodemus knew that the God of the Bible was a God of love.

He knew that the love which God had was of an eternal nature and that it was a love which had no restrictions. He knew that God's love had no beginning and no end.

He knew that it was an immeasurable and unfathomable and unlimited vast love in which no one can comprehend the breadth or depth or length or height.

It's a love that was so amazing and so divine. He knew that. But what Nicodemus wasn't prepared for and what Nicodemus never saw coming was that this message of God's immeasurable love was not just for the Jewish nation of Israel.

No, the teacher who had come from God emphasizes to the ruler of the Jews that God's love is universal, covers the whole world. It's a love which has been shown to both Jew and Gentile.

[12 : 01] And Jesus affirms to Nicodemus, God so loved the world. The world. Nicodemus could accept that God is love but his difficulty arose when Jesus said that God loves the world.

And many others have struggled with the idea that God loves everyone. Some people argue that the world can only refer to the elect because God cannot love those who are not in the elect.

But let's read what the Bible says. Let's read the verse because this verse which portrays to us the gospel in miniature, it has no reference to the elect or any indication towards it.

Instead, this verse explicitly states God loves everyone. And the reason God loves everyone, the reason God loves you, you, is because you are his creation.

You have been intricately formed and fashioned by him. You were made in your own mother's womb. He is the potter.

[13 : 14] You are the clay. You are the work of his hands. You have been made in his image and his likeness. You mean so much to him because he has created you.

And that's what this verse means, that God loves all the world, everyone, you, you. of course we must qualify it, that when you become a child of God, there is a different love that the Lord shows towards you as a child of God.

Those who have embraced Jesus Christ freely offered in the gospel, there is that difference. But that's not the meaning of this verse. This verse means that God loves the whole world without exception.

And this love is shown to the world each and every day. Because God in his love, he allows the world to continue despite its sinfulness.

In his grace and his mercy and all his long suffering, God allows this world to continue despite its corruption, despite all the wars and the sin of mankind and their enmity towards God.

[14 : 31] And we all know that God would have every right to condemn us to hell in a moment without a word against his judgment. Because we've broken his law, we know it, we've committed sin, we know it, we are transgressors, we know it.

But in his love, in his love, he spares us and he keeps us on mercy's ground in order that we will seek him.

In order that we will seek him. And so when Jesus says to Nicodemus that God loves the world, the world refers to the entire fallen, rebellious human race that are sin-laden and exposed to the judgment of God.

And that's what the Bible teaches. All have sinned. Everyone. And they've all come short of the glory of God. That means you. That means me.

And if all have sinned, then sin is a universal problem that we have in which we are all born in guiltiness and sin and this world is at enmity against God.

[15 : 48] God. The world wants nothing to do with God. This world has no interest in the God of the Bible and the Christ of God and the people of God. This world wants everything and will do anything to stand in the face of God and prove that God does not exist.

And yet, and yet, this verse is telling us that that God, that God still loves that kind of world.

God. And Jesus says, God's universal love, it has met our universal problem by giving this unique son, this unique son.

So what am I to believe? I'm to believe, we are to believe God's universal love and God's unique gift. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

he gave his only begotten son. And what we're being told here is that the object of God's love is the world.

[16:56] And yet, God gave to this world his only begotten son. His only son, he gave him. He gave him.

But when John uses the term only begotten in this gospel, he's not only stressing to us the eternal nature of Jesus and that as the son of God, Jesus was not created, a created being, but is in fact God himself.

But by using the term only begotten, John is also affirming to us his uniqueness. His uniqueness in that there is no one else in all creation who is begotten of the father.

There is no one else like him. He is the one and only sinless son of God. And he is God's only begotten son. And yet the marvel of this verse is that it tells us that the love of God was such that he did not spare his beloved son but gave him up for us all.

He gave his one and only son. He gave this unique gift to the world. He gave the son of his own bosom. The one who had been there with him in the beginning when the world was created.

[18:21] The son who was in the beginning with God experiencing perfect union and fellowship and love with his own father. But in order for lost sinners, in order for us to experience the blessedness and the union and the fellowship and the love which the father and the son shared, God freely and willingly gave his only begotten son.

He gave and my friend, the unique son was given out of love for a lost world. And his uniqueness was such that no other could have performed the duty that was assigned to him.

no other could have died the just for the unjust. No other could have died our death. No other could have taken our sin upon him.

No other who knew no sin became sin. No other could have done it. No other. He was unique. And you know, John puts it so beautifully in his letter, when he considers what God has done in sending Jesus into the world.

1 John 4 verse 10, he says, here in his love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

[19:55] Here in his love, this is what love is. This is what love is. It's not that we loved God because we didn't. We didn't. There's nothing in our heart that ever desires God or ever wants anything to do with God or his people or his church.

There was a time when we had no interest in God and yet, says John, God sent his son. God sent his son to be the propitiation for our sin.

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. He sent Jesus to Calvary to be crucified, to die our death, to cover our sin, to remove God's wrath.

That's what love is, my friend. That's what love is. It's a sacrificial, selfless love. God so loved the world that he was willing to deliver up his only son so that you might be saved.

So that you might be saved. Are you listening to this? Are you hearing this? Are you listening to what this verse is saying to us? The love of God gave in order to save.

[21:09] The love of God gave in order to save. Greater love, says Jesus, has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Greater love. Where is the greater love than this? My friend, we have to confess that it doesn't matter how much we look to Calvary and how much we look at Calvary and see the love of God and the gift of God in Jesus Christ to a lost and sinful world.

It doesn't matter how many times we return to this same subject. We ought never to tire of its endless beauty and its unfathomable depths. because how can we truly understand this love? How can we fully understand the immeasurable love of God? How can we comprehend these things? We can't. We can't. We'll never know, as the hymn writer said, how much it cost to see our sin upon that cross.

We'll never know how much it cost. But it's to accept it as the truth. And to believe it in our heart. And to lay hold upon it.

[22:29] That's what's fundamental. To believe what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. To believe it. To believe it.

And you know this beautiful verse of John 3 16, it always reminds me of when I read about that Swiss theologian Carl Barth.

He was asked the question, what is the greatest thought? What is the greatest thought that has ever crossed your mind? And bearing in mind Carl Barth was a man who studied theology all his life.

He was a teacher of theology, but when he was asked that question, he paused for quite some time to think of an answer. He had to come up with something and he raised his head and said with childlike faith, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. And my friend, that's all we need to know. That's what we, and that's what we need to believe.

[23 : 46] that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. What am I to believe? What am I to believe?

I'm to believe in God's universal love and God's unique gift. But secondly, we see that this verse places a responsibility upon us.

Because with all this information and the explanation that the Bible gives about our sin and our lost condition and God's immeasurable love for this world and the display of his love and giving his only son, the second question we need to ask is, what am I to do?

What am I to do? What am I to do? I am to respond. I am to embrace the universal offer which is made to whosoever.

And by embracing it, I am promised that I will experience the unique outcome of eternal life. What am I to do? What are you to do?

[24 : 52] What are we to do? What are we to do with God's universal love and God's unique gift of Jesus Christ? We are to embrace it. Embrace the universal offer and experience the unique outcome.

We are to embrace the universal offer, an offer which is addressed, read it, to whosoever.

Whosoever. And if the lesson of God's universal love came as a shock to Nicodemus, the call to embrace a universal offer of salvation would have been more of a shock to him.

Not just because Nicodemus thought that salvation only belonged to the Jews, but as a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus believed that the only way to be saved was to uphold the law perfectly.

Nicodemus believed that the only way to heaven was to keep all of God's laws and earn favor in God's sight and work your way all the way to heaven. Nicodemus believed that the only way for God to love him was by keeping the commandments and doing what God was asking him.

Nicodemus believed that the only way to find favor with God was that if God looked at his good works and then saw that he was somehow worthy to get to heaven.

[26 : 19] And what I find so sad is that there are still so many people who are like Nicodemus because they think that their good works, their good deeds, their church attendance, their position in the community, who they're known and what they're known as, that it will somehow earn them favor with Almighty God.

but it only shows the reality of the darkness of their soul. And that's how dark Nicodemus' soul was. Nicodemus, like many others, they still have a desire to know the truth.

He wanted to know more about Jesus and to find more out about this teacher who had come from God. And that's what left Nicodemus coming to Jesus. Cloaked in darkness with all these questions in his mind.

Now the darkness is important because it's one of the great themes of John's gospel. Because in the beginning of his gospel in chapter 1, John says about Jesus, in him was life.

And the life was the light of men and the light shined in the darkness. And in this chapter at verse 19 it says this is the condemnation. That light is coming to the world but men they loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

[27 : 47] And then when we're brought right to the cross, John explains that Calvary is shrouded in darkness. And so for John the themes of light and darkness are important because when John tells us that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and under the cover of darkness, he's more than telling us the hour of the day or of the night and at what time this meeting took place.

He's showing us that there is another kind of darkness that covered the soul of Nicodemus. It was a reflection of his spiritual condition before God.

And Nicodemus came to Jesus in the darkness of the night. And he came to Jesus in the darkness of his own soul. But it's in this great meeting with Jesus that it was going to bring light into his

soul.

And my friend, that is what is at the heart of this gospel. That there can be no light in our soul apart from a meeting with Jesus. And maybe today that's what you need to discover.

That Jesus knows you in every way. That you don't even know yourself. And what you need to discover more than anything else in this life is that Jesus is what you actually need.

[29 : 13] But in this dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, which we have throughout chapter 3, Jesus reduces all the questions and the issues of Nicodemus to this one problem.

Nicodemus, are you born again? Are you born again? You have questions that your religion cannot answer. And you have interests that the world cannot resolve for you.

And you have issues that you'll never find the resolution for. But Nicodemus, you're missing the central and vital point of genuine biblical Christianity.

You must be born again. You must be born again. And here Jesus points not only Nicodemus, but he points us all in the right direction.

And he tells us that we need a new birth. We need a new beginning. We need to have a new heart. We need to become a new creation. Because we can't be fit for heaven by religion or by our religious duties.

[30 : 21] Knowledge or theology doesn't make us fit for heaven. It's only if a man is born of the spirit of God, he says, cleansed with the washing of water and he puts his faith in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone, discovering that he is nothing and Christ is everything to him.

He is then and only then a new man. He is then and only then born again. And in their conversation, Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, you must be born again.

You need to be born again. You need to possess eternal life. And unless you are born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. And Nicodemus is asking, well, how can I be born again?

How can I be born again? Do I need to enter a second time into my mother's womb? How does it happen? What do I have to do? What do I have to pay? What do I have to say?

What ritual must I perform in order to inherit eternal life? And Jesus says, no, you must believe in the name of the only begotten son of God.

[31 : 33] Nicodemus, you don't have to do anything because God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. And whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

It's as simple as that, Nicodemus. It's as simple as that. All you have to do is believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ. all you have to do is believe that God loves you.

God has sent his only son to die on your behalf. That's all you have to do. All you have to do is believe that there is nothing you can do to save yourself, but that God has done it all for you.

That's it. That's it. That's all it is. All you have to do, he says, is embrace the free universal of God's love and salvation through Jesus Christ.

And it's offered to whosoever. Whosoever. There's no type of person, no type that is exempt from the message of the gospel.

[32 : 47] Doesn't matter who they are, what they have done, whatever their past is, no one is accepted. No one is excluded.

There isn't a certain criteria of passion that makes them acceptable to God. No, the universal offer is to whosoever. My friend, you don't need to attain a certain level of holiness before you can, you accept the gospel and become a Christian.

You don't need to be coming to church both ends of the day to become a Christian. You don't need to be in the prayer meeting to become a Christian. If you become a Christian, these things are expected of you, but doing them doesn't make you a Christian.

And this gospel of God's universal love and God's unique gift, it's offered to everyone. This is a universal offer. It's a free offer.

There are no restrictions, no boundaries, no constraints upon accepting this offer. This is a universal offer. It's for whosoever.

[33 : 58] That includes everyone. Excludes no one. It's as wide as possible. The offer is as wide as possible.

Whosoever, whether Jew or Gentile, religious or not, good or bad, male or female, rich or poor, young or old, whatever situation in life, Jesus is offered to everyone.

It's as wide as possible, whosoever. But then it becomes as narrow as possible. Whosoever believe it. Whosoever believe it.

There is one condition on accepting and embracing this universal offer. The condition is that you believe. In order to become a Christian, you must believe.

You must believe. You see, it's not enough to know the gospel. And it's not enough to be told about the gospel. It's not enough simply to hear the gospel and know that you need the gospel.

[35 : 07] But you must believe in the gospel. The good news that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. You have to believe it.

But this isn't just mental assent to the gospel. This is a life-changing experience. It's been born again, all over again.

And you might say to me, and tell me, I do believe. I do believe. I believe in God. I believe in Jesus. I believe that Jesus died for sinners.

I believe that the Bible is true. I believe everything it says. I believe it all. I believe everything. But my friend, your belief would be evidenced by your response.

Your belief would be evidenced by your response. And as far as I can see, there is no sign of a response. You need to respond.

[36 : 15] because your response is what matters. Your response is to embrace, to embrace the unique gift that God has lovingly sent.

Your response is to embrace Jesus Christ and no other. You must believe the promise that if you confess your sin, he is faithful, he is just, to forgive you your sin, to cleanse you from all unrighteousness because the blood of Jesus Christ, his son, cleanses you from all sin.

You have to believe it. You have to respond. But my friend, this universal offer to embrace Jesus Christ isn't just a warrant to come.

It's a command to come. Because you must come. You must believe. You must be born again.

Because as John tells us in verse 18, he that believes on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

My unconverted friend, you must come. You must believe. You must be born again. You must, you must, you must because the difference between commendation and condemnation, it's the difference between being saved and being lost.

[37 : 50] It's the difference between being in Christ or being out of Christ. It's the difference between life and death. It's the difference between heaven and hell. My friend, you must come.

You must believe because when you believe, he says, you will have a unique outcome.

What are we to do? Embrace the universal offer and experience a unique outcome. Whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

The difference in believing is life and death. Life and death, heaven and hell, it's as clear cut as that. Life and death, not just life and death, but eternal life, eternal death.

But my friend, what is it to perish? What is it to perish? It's to lose all hope in Christ, all trust in God, all light in life, all peace in death, all joy, all bliss, all union with God.

[39 : 06] To perish, my friend, is to enter into eternal death, where it will never end, and you'll be tormented in the presence of God's holiness forever. If you end up in hell, my friend, if you end up in hell, one, you'll never say to me that I didn't tell you, and two, you'll be dying but never dead.

You'll be dying but never dead. It's eternal death. It'll go on and on and on and on. And yet, this verse is saying to you, you can have a unique outcome.

You can have a unique outcome. And it's everlasting life. What is everlasting life? Life. The opposite of everlasting death.

Hope in Christ. Trust in God. Light in life. Peace in death. Joy, bliss, union with God throughout all eternity.

The universal offer of a unique outcome. The blessedness, the newness, the peace, the glory of everlasting life. By nature, we are perishing.

[40 : 31] We are dying in our sins. We've fallen short of the glory of God. But the gift, the gift, the unique gift, it's eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord, the unique gift.

My friend, is there a better message in all the world today? Is there a better message? Is there a better message addressed to all the world today?

Because it's to whosoever. Whosoever. What could be more important to you than your undying soul? What message could be clearer than this one?

This one verse tells you all that you need to know because it tells us what we are to believe and what we are to do. And I hope and pray that we're asking these questions this morning. What am I to believe? What am I to do? What am I to believe? I am to believe in God's universal love and God's unique gift.

[41 : 36] God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. What am I to do? I am to respond. I am to embrace the universal offer.

And by embracing it, I will experience and I am promised to experience the unique outcome. The promise is that whosoever believeth will not perish but have everlasting life.

this is the gospel in miniature. It's a gospel which is offered to you. Offered to you.

It's for you. It's for you. But what will you do with it? You must respond. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks unto thee, that the Lord, one who has given to us thy word, a word that is so precious, a word that directs us, directs us towards a saviour, a unique saviour.

[42 : 50] And enable us, Lord, we plead, to embrace him, to cherish him, to see that he is one who is altogether lovely, and that he is able to take away all our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Bless thy word, we plead, though other may find lodgment in our heart, and that thou in thy grace and mercy wouldst bring fruit through it. Do us good, then, we plead, keep us on mercy's ground until we find thee.

For Jesus sake, Amen. We shall conclude by singing in Psalm 63. Psalm 63 in the Scottish Psalter, page 295.

Psalm 63 singing from verse 3 down to the verse marked 8. As if the psalmist has embraced that universal offer, and experienced the unique outcome.

He says, Since better is thy love than life, my lips thee praise shall give, I in thy name will lift my hands, and bless thee when I live. Down to the verse marked 8, to God's praise.

[44 : 26] such which are For earth ■ are Brother alive, my lion's heart call to behold.

I am the thy Lord who will live I run un steam while I live email us fair O a great my hope shall fail with me Then shout my mouth with joyfulness, sing praises unto thee.

When I to thee upon thy birth remember which delight.

But when I meet thy man in tea, it pours its off the night.

In shadow all thy wings I joy.

[46 : 29] For thought might help us be. My soul, thy heart and me.

Thy right hand does us gain. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.

Amen.