

God So Loved...

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 September 2020

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that short portion of scripture that we read, John chapter 3 and verse 16.

John 3 and verse 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. You know, John 3, 16 is everyone's verse.

John 3, 16 is everyone's verse because it applies to everyone and it's for everyone. Whether you're converted or unconverted, whether you're saved or unsaved, whether you're in Christ or still out of Christ, wherever you stand today in relation to Jesus Christ, John 3, 16 is your verse.

Because this is everyone's verse. You know, it's one of the most well-known verses in the Bible and it's one with which we are very, very familiar.

[1 : 16] In fact, one commentator said that John 3, 16 is the most memorised, most preached and most quoted verse in the entire Bible. It's the first verse that Bible translators put into another language as the gospel goes to other nations, tribes and peoples.

And you know, I read the other day of the occasion when the Bible Society of Zimbabwe, the Bible Society of Zimbabwe, they were distributing copies of the New Testament to the locals of a small rural African village during the 1990s.

And there was one man in particular who was very antagonistic towards the evangelistic campaign of the Bible Society. And he was especially antagonistic towards the General Secretary to the point that he told the General Secretary, this man told the General Secretary, if you give me that New Testament, I will tear the pages up and I will use them to make cigarettes.

But you know, the General Secretary of the Bible Society, he responded by just handing the man the New Testament. And he said to him, at least promise me one thing, read the page of the New Testament.

Before you smoke it. And you know, to the surprise of the General Secretary, the man, he agreed. He agreed to read the New Testament before he smoked it.

[2 : 47] And then they both went their separate ways. But you know, 15 years later, the General Secretary of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe, he was attending a Christian conference.

What's remarkable is that the man who said that he was going to smoke through the New Testament, he was preaching on the New Testament. And as this man stood on the platform, he spotted the General Secretary of the Bible Society and he pointed them out to the audience.

And he said, this man doesn't remember me. But 15 years ago, he gave me a New Testament, even though I told him that I would smoke the pages of it.

I would roll them up and use them as cigarettes. And he went on to say, I smoked Matthew's Gospel. I smoked Mark's Gospel. I smoked Luke's Gospel.

And I started smoking John's Gospel. But when I got to John 3.16, I couldn't smoke anymore. My life was changed from that moment.

[3 : 53] My life was changed from that moment. Now, if you're a smoker, I'm not encouraging you to start smoking the New Testament in order to be converted.

Nor am I encouraging you to take up smoking this morning. But, you know, I want you to be assured of one thing, that the Gospel, my friend, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

And, you know, as the reformer Martin Luther said, John 3.16 is the heart of the Bible and the Gospel in miniature. John 3.16 is the heart of the Bible and the Gospel in miniature.

And, you know, because of its emphasis upon God's love for lost sinners and the gift of God's love in the Saviour, Jesus Christ, because of that, I want us to consider everyone's verse this morning.

I want us to consider John 3.16 and see that it's everyone's verse. And I want us to see that it gives to us three things. It gives to us a declaration of love.

[4 : 58] It gives to us a demonstration of love. But it also gives to us a demand of love. A declaration of love, a demonstration of love, and a demand of love.

So, first of all, a declaration of love. A declaration of love. John 3.16, For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Now, the text of John 3.16, it finds itself within the context of this nighttime meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus.

Because you'll remember from last week when we looked at the opening verses of John 3, we saw that this man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus, he was a professor of theology, and he came to Jesus under the cover of darkness because he had a concerned conscience.

There was something about Jesus that bothered Nicodemus. And Nicodemus came to question Jesus and ask Jesus the questions that were concerning his conscience.

[6 : 08] And he engaged in what became for Nicodemus a confusing conversation. Because Jesus, you remember, he told Nicodemus that unless he's born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

And Jesus affirmed this to Nicodemus by issuing him a clear cross-reference. A cross-reference from Numbers chapter 21. And what Jesus was saying to Nicodemus was that if you want to be born again, if you want a new birth, if you want a new beginning, if you want a new heart, if you want to become a new creation, then you must look and live.

You must look and live. You must look away from yourself and look to the cross. You must look to Jesus because whosoever believes in him shall have eternal life.

That's what Jesus said to Nicodemus. But, you know, as we said last week, the question which was left hanging over Nicodemus was, did Nicodemus believe in Jesus for eternal life?

Did Nicodemus look and live? Did Nicodemus come from darkness into the light? Did Nicodemus experience that new birth? Did Nicodemus enter the kingdom of God?

[7 : 28] And as we said, John doesn't tell us. But the reason John doesn't tell us is so that the question will just stay hanging there. And that the question will stay hanging there, not just about Nicodemus, but about you and about me.

Because, you know, my unconverted friends, John wrote his gospel for the purpose of asking you, do you believe in Jesus? John wants us. Have you experienced eternal life?

Have you come from darkness into the light? Have you looked and are you living? Have you been born again? John wants us to ask all these questions. He's asking us all these questions because you must.

You must, you must, you must, you must be born again. You must be born again. But then we come to this verse, everyone's verse, John 3, 16, and begins with a declaration of love.

And the question may be asked, well, who made this declaration of love? Did Jesus say it to Nicodemus? Or did John write it as a commentary or a comment on the conversation of Nicodemus and Jesus?

[8 : 43] If you're using one of those red letter Bibles which have the words of Jesus in red, you'll see that John 3, 16 is written in red because they believe that it was spoken by Jesus to Nicodemus.

But most scholars would ascribe these words to John, saying that the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, it actually ended at verse 15.

But you know, it was the 19th century theologian, B.B. Warfield, he said, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter because what difference does it make to me and you whether the Lord speaks to us through his lips or through his sermons?

What's important, says Warfield, is not the instrument of the message, but the message itself. And what a great message it is, a message of the greatness of the love of God.

For God so loved the world. It's a declaration of love. My friend, the greatest love which has ever been known and displayed to this world is the love of God.

[9 : 53] And no human can compare with God's love because no one can compare with God. No one can compare with the length and breadth and depth and height of God's love because the very nature of God is love.

Which means that God not only loves, but God is love. It's who he is. It's what he's like. It's his character, his nature. It's his being.

God is love. But you know the catechism, it teaches us that God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

But you know what that means? It means that because God is love, God's love is infinite. God's love is eternal. God's love is unchangeable.

God's love is wise love. It's powerful love. It's holy love. It's righteous love. It's good love. It's true love. But more than that, God's love is faithful love.

[10:58] It's steadfast love. It's covenant love. It's unconditional love. It's unrestricted love. It's unlimited love. It's unreserved love. It's unmerited love.

My friend, no one can compare with the length and breadth and depth and height of God's love for you because God is love. And the wonder of wonders is that there's nothing you can do to make God love you any more than he already does this morning.

And there's nothing you can do to make him love you any less. For God so loved the world. My friend, you are the object of God's love.

You are the object of God's love this morning. God so loved the world. Now, some want to say that God so loved the world. They want to say that what it really means is that God so loved the Jews or that God so loved the elect.

But read the verse. That's not what it says. Because this is everyone's verse. And it says that God so loved the world. God so loved the world.

[12:11] You know, it was my good friend J.C. Ryle who said, we must beware of narrow and contracted opinions that say that God only loves the elect. Let us not be wise above that which is written or more systematic in our statements than Scripture itself.

For Scripture affirms God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God is not willing that any should perish. God would have all men to be saved. God loves the world, he says.

Therefore, we must not hesitate to tell any sinner that God loves him. He cannot love their sins, he says. But he loves their souls.

He cannot love their sins, but he loves their souls. And you know, my friend, you know, we can understand how two people love one another.

because their qualities attract them to one another. But you know, when you think about God loving the world, what we'll never understand or comprehend is that God so loves this sin-sick world.

[13:22] God so loves reviled, rebellious, and ruined sinners. God so loves you. Not because there's anything attractive or worthy of his love in you.

But God so loves because God so loves. He chooses to love. God so loves you because God so loves you.

That's why he says to us in his word, I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy. I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. God so loved.

It's a declaration of love. But you know, how can you describe the love of God towards sinners?

Because his love is indescribable. I'm struggling this morning to describe God's love to you.

You know, there was the pastor and author, Max Lucado. he once tried to describe the love of God towards us. He said, if God had a fridge, your picture would be on it.

[14:28] If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Face it, he's crazy about you.

And of course, Max Lucado's words, they're helpful to an extent. But the truth is, the only way a declaration of love can be described is by a demonstration of love.

The only way a declaration of love can be described is by a demonstration of love. And that's what I want us to consider secondly. A demonstration of love.

A declaration of love and a demonstration of love. A demonstration of love. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. You know, it's one thing declaring our love for a person.

[15:34] But it's another thing altogether demonstrating our love for that person. You know, marriage counsellors, they say that as human beings we have five love languages.

Five ways in which we demonstrate our love towards someone else. Whether the person we love is our spouse or our siblings, our children or our parents, our family or our friends.

And the five love languages are words of affection, acts of service, quality time, personal touch and receiving gifts. The five love languages are words of affirmation, acts of service, quality time, personal touch and receiving gifts.

And you know, there are times that we can actually misunderstand someone we love because we get their love language wrong. We might give the person we love, we might give them lots of gifts but what they really want is just quality time with us.

But you know, when it comes to God declaring and demonstrating his love for us, he appeals to all our love languages. He declares to us words of affirmation.

[16 : 48] He says in Isaiah 43, Fear not for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. He shows us his acts of service towards us by his provision and his protection.

He gives to us quality time by promising us eternal life. He assures us of his personal touch by graciously dealing with us all individually.

And he has demonstrated his love towards us by giving to us the gift of his son. He has given to us the gift of his son. And you know, that's why John wrote his letter to the churches.

1 John, he says in chapter 3, Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God.

John was asking us there to consider God's love language towards us. God's love language towards us, John says. He says, See how great a love.

[17 : 48] See what kind of love God has demonstrated towards us. See what kind of love he has demonstrated. And you know, that was the theme of John's letter.

The theme of love. That's the theme of John's gospel. The theme of love. In fact, John is regarded as the apostle of love because he's always writing about God's declaration of love and God's demonstration of love towards us in the person of Jesus Christ.

You go on to read 1 John chapter 4 and John says, Beloved, Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. And he goes on to say, 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, to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

And we know and believe the love that God has towards us because God is love. My friend, God so loved, he so loved you that he gave.

[19 : 04] He gave. And this word gave, it speaks of sacrificial giving. It's sacrificial giving at the greatest cost to the giver.

Those who love much, my friend, they give much. Those who love much give much. And love that gives everything and spares nothing is selfless and sacrificial love.

My friend, how great is the love of God? God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. And what greater act of selfless love could God have demonstrated to us?

What greater sacrifice could God have made on our behalf? What greater gift could God have ever given to us than the gift of his only begotten son?

What more could God have done for you than give his only son? This was the Father's love gift to the world, to you. God so loved this sin-sick world.

[20 : 09] God so loved reviled and rebellious and ruined sinners. God so loved that he gave what was his. he sent his only begotten son.

He sent his only begotten son. And as we're told in verse 17, God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

You know, what kind of love is this? What kind of love is this that God the Father would give what was his? He would send his only begotten son.

What kind of love is that? But sacrificial love. And you know, when you see the word only begotten, he gave his only begotten son.

Don't think that there was a time when Jesus didn't exist and that he was created by the Father. that's what Islam teaches.

[21 : 16] That's what Jehovah Witnesses teach. But this phrase only begotten, the only begotten son, it's one word in Greek, monogenes, and it means God's one and only son, God's unique son, God's one of a kind son.

He's the only begotten of the Father. In other words, there's no one like him. There's no one like him. There was no one who was willing to live the life we should have lived.

There was no one who was willing to receive the punishment we should have received. There was no one who was willing to die the death we deserved to die. No, he's the one and only son.

He's the unique son. He's God's one of a kind son. And there's no one like this sinless son of God who became the suffering saviour of sinners.

My friend, there is no one like the sinless son of God who became the suffering saviour of sinners. And this is the glory of the gospel.

[22 : 20] God did not spare his own son, but delivered him up for us all. God demonstrated his love towards us in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ died for us. You know, I love how the Puritan John Flavel, in his works, he describes the love of God for the world.

And he does so by using this very imaginative conversation, a conversation between God the Father and God the Son. And he has this imaginative conversation where they speak about their love for the world.

And it's as always he makes the Father speak to his son and say, my son, here is a poor company of miserable souls that have utterly undone themselves and now lie open to my justice.

And the Father asks, what shall be done for these souls? And the son then responds to his father and he says to his father, oh my father, such is my love and pity for them, that rather than they perish eternally, I'll be responsible for them as their guarantee.

[23 : 41] I would rather choose to suffer your wrath than they suffer for it. Upon me, my father, upon me be all their debt. And John Flavel says that the father responds to the son.

The father responds and says, but my son, if you undertake for them, you must pay the last penny. If I spare them, I will not spare you.

And Flavel says that the son responds to his father and says, I am willing, father. Let it be so.

Though it will impoverish all my riches and empty all my accounts, yet I am content to undertake it. I am content to undertake it. Do you know, my friend, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

It's no wonder Jesus said, greater love has no man than this, but a man laid down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you.

[24 : 52] And what is the command, my friend? But to believe. That's the response that's required. God is looking for.

Because with this declaration and demonstration of God's love, there has to be a response. There has to be a response. And that's what we see lastly. A demand of love.

A demand of love. There's a declaration of love, a demonstration of love, and a demand of love. A demand of love.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

As we said, God has declared and demonstrated his love for this sin-sick world. God has so loved, reviled, and rebellious, and ruined sinners that he gave his only begotten son.

[25 : 52] And because of the declaration and demonstration of God's love, today the offer of salvation is to whosoever. Whosoever.

Don't you just love that word? Whosoever. Whosoever. It includes everyone. And it excludes no one.

It is, it asserts and affirms to us that this is everyone's verse. It's your verse because it's for whosoever. You know, my unconverted friend, God's loving offer of salvation, it's as wide as possible.

It's as wide as possible. Whether Jew or Gentile, religious or not, good or bad, male or female, rich or poor, young or old, whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever situation you are going through in life, the Bible is reminding you this morning, Jesus is for everyone.

Jesus is for everyone. God's love. Therefore, my friend, you have no excuse for not coming to him for salvation. You have no excuse because this is a full and free offer of the gospel to whosoever.

[27 : 07] Whosoever. The offer is as wide as possible. The offer is for you. The offer is as wide as possible, but then it becomes as narrow as possible.

Whosoever believes. My friend, there's one condition, one condition on accepting this full and free offer of salvation. Your love for God.

Your love for God. Because God here, we're told that he has so declared and he has so demonstrated his love towards you that he demands your love in return.

You know, is that not the greatest commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.

My friend, we are to love God because he first loved us. The demand upon our life is that we are to love God. You know, that's what the hymn writer Isaac Watts came to discover.

[28 : 13] When Isaac Watts considered the declaration and demonstration of God's love towards sinners, he knew that it demanded his love in return.

Because Isaac Watts, he wrote that beautiful hymn, when I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and poor contempt on all my pride.

And when Isaac Watts, when he considered the wondrous cross, when he considered God's declaration of love, when he considered God's demonstration of love in the cross of Jesus Christ, he knew there was a demand.

That's why he said love so amazing, so divine, a love that demands my soul, my life, my all. My friend, God's declaration and God's demonstration of love for you, it demands your love in return. It demands your love in return, it demands your soul, your life and your all. That's why Jesus asks us in the gospel, do you love me?

[29 : 25] Do you love me? He wants your love. God's divine declaration and God's divine demonstration of love for you in the person of Jesus Christ, it demands your love in return.

God's divine love. It demands your love. But how do you love God? Well, our text here, it says, you believe.

You believe whosoever believes. And as you know, my friend, John wrote his gospel with one passion and one purpose, so that you will believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.

salvation. But as we've said before, believing in Jesus Christ, it's not about knowledge, it's not about our knowledge of the Bible, it's not about our intellectual ascent, it's not about agreeing with everything that the Bible says.

No, believing in Jesus Christ is receiving Jesus Christ for salvation. Because my friend, Christianity is not a cause to join or a code to follow.

[30 : 32] it's a Christ to receive. It's a Christ to receive. And in order to receive Jesus Christ for your salvation, you need contrition of sin.

You need confession of the Son. You need commitment to the Saviour. You need to believe.

Because as your text says, if you don't believe, you will perish.

If you don't love God, you will perish. If you don't respond to God, you will perish. The Bible says that if anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let them be accursed.

Let them perish. Let them be condemned. That's what John says in verse 18. Whoever believes in him is not condemned. But whoever does not believe is condemned already.

Because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

[31 : 38] John tells us that whosoever believes will experience life, liberty, and light. But whosoever does not believe will experience death, destruction, and darkness.

death, and sin, and John says they're condemned already because they prefer death and sin to life in Christ. They prefer destruction of the body to liberty of the soul.

They prefer the darkness of hell than the light of heaven. You know, that's what it is to perish, my friend. That's what it is to perish.

Because to perish, my friend, is to enter into the eternal death in hell where it will never end. It will never end. As Thomas Watson said, in hell you are always dying, but never dead.

In hell you are always dying, but never dead. That's what it is to perish. It's eternal death. death.

And it will go on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, for all eternity.

[32 : 56] That's what it is to perish. But you know, God's declaration and God's demonstration of love towards you this morning, it's an offer that you shouldn't refuse.

It's an offer you should not refuse because it's a full and free offer of eternal life. And it's not eternal life when you die.

It's eternal life now. Eternal life today. You have the full and free offer of eternal life today. Therefore, my friend, you must believe. You must receive. You must come to Jesus Christ for salvation because your only hope in life and your only peace in death is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nothing else will do, my friend. Nothing else will do. Everyone's, this is everyone's verse. And it gives to us a declaration of love, a demonstration of love, and a demand of love.

[34 : 06] And my friend, God's declaration of love and demonstration of love for you. It demands your love in return. It demands your love in return.

It demands your soul, your life, your all. And Jesus is asking you this morning, do you love me? Do you love me? John 3.16 is everyone's verse. My unconverted friend, John 3.16 is your verse. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever, whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Do you love me? Do you love him, my friend? Do you love him? Because he's asking you today to respond in love and follow him.

[35 : 16] But may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Heavenly Father, we give thanks to thee this morning for that precious verse, a verse that we have all become familiar with, even in our youth, a verse that we might know off by heart.

But Lord, help us to know that verse in our heart. And we thank thee that in it we are able to behold the wondrous cross upon which the Prince of Glory died.

And that when we look, we see there on the cross a declaration of love, that greater love hath no man than this, that a man laid down his life for his friends.

We see also a demonstration of love, that God was demonstrating his love towards us, and that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. But Lord, we know that that cross, it gives to us a demand of love.

that God is calling us to respond, to respond in love and faith and obedience, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

[36 : 27] And Lord, we pray even this morning that we would respond, that we would respond in love, because that love which is so amazing and so divine, it demands our soul, our life and our all.

O Lord, hear us then we pray, bless thy truth to us we ask, and forgive us, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for his sake. Amen.

Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing the words of Psalm 100. Psalm 100. This is a psalm that's very familiar to us, but it's also a psalm that reminds us that this gospel is for whosoever.

Because the longing of the psalmist and the longing of the Lord's people is that all people that on earth do dwell will sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

That's the vision that the psalmist had, that's the longing the psalmist had, that people will come to know the Lord, that they will know him as their shepherd, and that they will follow him as the sheep of his pasture.

[37 : 37] So we're singing in Psalm 100. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell. Come ye before him and rejoice.

The whole psalm to God's praise. O people that on earth do sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell.

Come ye before him and rejoice.

■■■■ of my banner is, the Lord with■■ climbed into bread. J onboard hisOH musstots ■■■■ We are this rock, he does not see, and for his feet, he does not see.

[39 : 16] O, let's earn him his grace with grace, and rose with joy his poor son too.

Praise God and bless his name always, for it is in his soul too.

On why the Lord the God is good, his mercy is forever true.

His truth at all times firmly stood, and shall promise to which they do.

Amen.