

The sermon

Intro

John 3:16 is widely considered the most popular verse in the whole Bible. It's the most searched verse on Google. Athletes like Tim Tebow wore it under their eyes. John 3:16 signs at sporting events became a cultural phenomenon in the 1970's.

But what's it all about?

READ PASSAGE

BIG IDEA: Jesus Came to Save the World

Body

Passage Focus

Last week we learned Jesus came for the sick. For sinners. Something's not working right in the human heart.

This morning we'll see what God did for the sick.

Point 1: The Father sent the Son to save sinners (3:16-17)

For God so loved the world

There's debate as to whether or not these are Jesus' words or John's words. See the ESV note. Is this a continuation of Jesus' words to Nicodemus or John's editorial comments?

This doesn't affect our interpretation. I take it as John's reflective comments. One reason is the cross is portrayed as a past event ("*he gave his only Son*").

For God

God is. God acts. The God who created us and our world from nothing remains intimately involved with his creation.

so loved

So indicates the degree, intensity of God's love.

God's love indicates God's affection, God's attitude, God's stance towards the world. God acts for the world because God first loves.

God's love is a giving love, a generous love, and a costly love.

the world

- 1) World = all people.
- 2) World = both Jew and Gentile.

The Jews expected a Messiah who would wipe out the Gentiles and restore Israel to their glory, not a Messiah who came to save Gentiles.

- 3) World = people characterized by darkness = sin and unbelief.

The sick.

- 4) World = a people who hate both Jesus and his disciples (John 15:18).
- 5) World = a category of people Jesus' disciples once belonged to (John 15:19).

God set his affection on sick, broken, rebellious people.

that he gave his only Son

God gave his Son up to be crucified on a cross.

God gives freely. God wasn't under any obligation. There was no higher authority imposing its will on God. God gave his Son because he wanted to. We often give Christmas gifts because we're obligated to. This isn't that. God gave his Son because he loved the world.

God's gift is odd. God's gift is shocking. God's gift is costly. God gave his Son (Jesus) to be lifted up on a cross to bear the weight of our sins.

This isn't because God despises Jesus. This isn't because Jesus did something naughty. A human father might take out their anger on a child. A human father might react sinfully to the disrespect of a child. This isn't that. No the Father loves the Son perfectly. Later in John's gospel Jesus speaks of the love he and the Father had before our world was created. A perfect love not contaminated by sin.

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. – John 17:24

This isn't something human fathers do. Human fathers favor their children. They care about their own children more than the neighbor's kid. Or the kids in Africa. Human fathers act to protect their children. Human fathers give their best Christmas gifts to their own children.

God's gift is shocking because of who he acts for: the world. Those who've rebelled against his law and treated him like garbage. God's gift is shocking because he inflicts his wrath on the one whom he loves: his only (unique, one of a kind) Son. The Father gives up what he loves (Jesus) for benefit of those who hate him (the world).

God acts in shocking and surprising ways. God's love is costly.

Human fathers don't give up what they treasure to serve those who despise them. God did!

that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Why did God give his Son to be tortured on the cross? To rescue sinners from the fate they justly deserve (perish). And to give sinners a fate they don't deserve (eternal life).

Jesus was sent on a rescue mission: to save sinners from perishing. Meaning a location called hell, weeping and gnashing of teeth, the outer darkness, destruction of both soul and body, the fiery furnace, eternal punishment, eternal destruction, gloomy darkness, the 2nd death, the lake of fire. A place to be avoided at all costs.

Perish is contrasted with eternal life. A quality of life: free from death and sin and suffering. A duration of life: forever and ever. A location: in God's presence in the new heavens and new earth.

Who perishes? Those who do not believe. Who has eternal life? Those who believe.

What is belief?

- 1) Believing Jesus died in my place to rescue me.

My sins sent Jesus to the cross!

- 2) Counting the cost.

Am I willing to be ridiculed for believing and following Jesus?

3) Confessing your sins to God.

Believing I'm a sinner.

4) Asking for God's forgiveness.

Believing God is merciful to sinners who trust in Jesus.

5) Believing God's promise.

Trusting I am totally forgiven and have eternal life because I believe. For God promises everyone who believes has eternal life!

3:17 restates 3:16 negatively.

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. – John 3:17

Jesus did not come to pour out God's wrath on the world. Jesus came to rescue the world.

Application

There's only two responses to God. Belief or unbelief. There's no middle ground.

The cross is the proof of God's goodness. What person in power would allow himself to be tortured for the benefit of those who hate him? What person in power would give what he loves the most (his Son) for the benefit of those who hate him (the world)?

God offers eternal life. Choose life.

Point 2: The Father sent to Son because we were already condemned (3:18)

Whoever believes in him is not condemned,

Those who believe are not condemned by God. Christian, nothing stands between us and God and eternal life. Our sins are forgiven. God no longer holds our sins against us. Because Jesus took the punishment we deserve.

but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Those who do not believe are under God's condemnation. God still holds their sins against them. Perishing awaits. Jesus came for the world because the world "*is condemned already.*" Jesus came to rescue condemned people.

We can only move from condemned to not condemned by belief.

Application

Condemned is the lot of the entire human race apart from belief. We come into the world condemned, in Adam. When we trust in Jesus, we move from in Adam to in Christ.

If we could be saved by being good people, there's no reason for Jesus to come. If God just loves everybody in such a way that he accepts all, there's no reason for Jesus to come.

Jesus had to come because we were condemned. The only way a holy God could both be just and pardon sinners is to have a worthy substitute take the sinner's punishment in the sinner's place.

If we believe, our sin has been paid and we're forgiven. If we refuse to believe, our sin remains and we'll perish.

Point 3: Some choose to remain in their sin (3:19-20)

Here unbelief is explained. First, people do not believe because they love their sin.

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. – 3:19

Jesus came into the world and people chose darkness instead of him.

“the light has come into the world” = Jesus.

The people of Israel made their choice. They chose darkness instead of Jesus. Physical darkness symbolizes sin and evil. John is saying they loved their sin. They enjoy their sin. They long for their sin. Their hearts are set on sin.

Why? *“because their deeds were evil.”* This is interesting. People rejected Jesus in favor of sin because they were people who did sinful things. Here they loved sin because they were already sinning. This is a little confusing if we don't understand the historical context.

Historical context

Who is John speaking about? Jewish people who were living at the time Jesus arrived on the scene. When Jesus came, they were confronted with a choice. Will I believe this man? Or will I reject this man?

At the time Jesus arrived, some of the people were engaged in evil (*“their deeds were evil”*). These people were already evildoers who loved their sin at the time Jesus came, so when Jesus shined on them they chose sin over Jesus.

This explains Jesus being rejected by Israel. They rejected him when confronted with the truth because they already loved their sin. Following Jesus would require a change of lifestyle. They didn't want that. So it is when we share the gospel. Some will reject the gospel because they love their sin too much. Love for sin explains unbelief.

Second, people do not believe because they don't want their deeds to be exposed as sinful.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. – 3:20

Jesus arrives on the scene. Again we have people who are already doing wicked things hating the light (Jesus) when exposed to him. They refuse to come to Jesus (believe) because they don't want their deeds exposed. The last phrase can be literally translated **“in order that their works might not be exposed.”** They don't come to Jesus because if they did their sinful actions would be exposed. Meaning contact with Jesus would result in sin coming to light. So they stay away from Jesus.

If they stay away from Jesus they won't be challenged by his words. If they stay away from Jesus they won't have to deal with the unpleasant fact that their sin is contrary to God's word. Better to be in the dark than know God's not happy with my way of life. Better to stay with sinners who will approve my life choices than consider what Jesus says about my behavior.

Or maybe it's self-righteousness. People who think they're good people without God don't want to be exposed to God's word. Well I don't steal or curse or lie. I'm a hard worker. I help people out. But what about hatred? What about unforgiveness? What about jealousy? What about coveting? What about greed? What about selfishness? What about pride? What about loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Do you put God's desire above your own?

We see this when fellow Christians begin staying away from the church. A man having relations with a woman they're not married to stops coming to church because he doesn't want anyone exposing the matter.

Not trying to shame you if this is you. If we're ever going to come to Jesus we need to deal with the unpleasant fact of sin exposed. Before I believed, my drunkenness, etc. had to be exposed to God's word. And yes I loved my sin. There were a number of things I didn't want to give up. I needed to count the cost. But I found myself being attracted to Jesus despite my love for sin.

Application

Why do people refuse to believe? Because they love their sin. Because they don't want their sin exposed. Christian, maybe it's not because you're a poor evangelist. Maybe it's not because you're a poor witness. Maybe it's not because you didn't answer that question perfectly. Maybe it's because they love their sin and they don't want their sin exposed.

Christian, we can do the same. Is there a sin you love too much to give up? Christian, do you avoid certain parts of the Bible because God isn't who you want him to be in those parts of the Bible? Do you avoid certain parts of the Bible because they speak to your sin? Do you intentionally ignore certain truths about your sin you don't want to face?

Jesus exposes us to set us free!

Point 4: Some choose to follow Jesus (3:21)

But whoever does what is true comes to the light,

Here it's good works ("*does what is true*") before coming to Jesus (the light). Remember the historical context. This 1st century Jews at their first exposure to Jesus.

Were people saved before Jesus came? Yes. How were they saved? By faith in God's promises. So there were Jews who had saving faith and were born again at the time that Jesus arrived. Jesus spoke of people being born again before Pentecost in his conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1-8). That's people who believe and are born again who do not yet have faith in Jesus. Because they had never heard of him yet. These already saved people were already doing good works when Jesus came.

In other words, John's saying the way to distinguish an evildoer from those with faith is their response to Jesus. Those who were already saved came to Jesus when exposed to him. Those who were unsaved ran from Jesus when exposed to him. That's not to say no one was being converted. Some evildoers came to Jesus when confronted with his message.

so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God."

The one who comes to Jesus is recognized to have deeds that come from God. "*his deeds have been carried out in God*" means godly behavior that springs from God's presence, power, and work on the human heart. Any true spiritual good we do stems from God.

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. – John 15:5

Apart from being in Christ, it's impossible to do good works. If we're in Christ, we're indwelt by the Holy Spirit. So all true good works spring from the Spirit.

The proof that their deeds arise from God's work is they believe in Jesus. If they didn't believe, their works couldn't be from God. You can't have God without belief in Jesus!

Application

We aren't people who were alive when Jesus came. But the same is true for us. Our deeds are shown to be produced by God if we believe in Jesus.

Here's the confidence of the new birth. God does something inside of us so that new life flows out of us. Humility replaces pride. Self-control replaces anger. Contentment replaces greed. Gratitude replaces jealousy.

Eternal life isn't just a future hope. God has affected our quality of life today by making us new creations who do what is true.

Conclusion

Jesus Came to Save Sinners. God acted in love for rebels. God gave at great cost to himself. God sent his Son on a rescue mission. Do you believe?