

Mountain View 14 — The Level of Love

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Passages	John 3:16-21
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Introduction (Connection):

[Invite to John 3]

As you're turning there, I've got a quick video clip I want to show you.¹

[Video plays]

Praise God! God has worked to make 3:16 famous.

Yes, ladies, Tim Tebow is off the market... don't leave... and whoever that other guy is, don't know, don't care.

Tension:

Today we are getting to the most popular, most well-known, most quoted, most memorized, most loved passages of scripture in all of history: John 3:16.

God has used this one verse in scripture to draw millions of people to belief in Christ throughout the ages all around the world.

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILz_9KRwzB8

There is no way I can mine all the gold in this verse in just one Sunday, so I've wrestled with what all to say and not say.

But let me ask this: how many of you know what John 3:17 says? What about any of the five verses that follow?

I figured... that's because v. 16 is like that really popular kid that gets all the attention and everyone likes... I wouldn't know what that's like.

Today, we're going to get really deep into this passage as a whole and we're gonna find out just how much v. 17-21 enhances our understanding of v. 16 and make it all the more beautiful.

Exposition:

John 3:16-21 — "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ 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.

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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."²

Keep in mind that Jesus just told Nicodemus that the Son of Man, an allusion to the exalted one who slew the vile beast in Daniel 7, must be lifted up on a pole, a reference to the bronze serpent Numbers 21, in order for us to be born again by God through belief.

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 3:16–21.

All of that is true, because... ***“God so loved the world.”***

Let’s be clear: this is not a verse to prove that God is a radical environmentalist who chains himself to trees because he so loved the world, meaning in the natural sense.³

One commentator said that Nicodemus would have heard that God loves more people than just those of Jewish descent.

Think about it: Jews rarely ever spoke of God’s loving the world outside of Israel — Israel thought they were God’s favorite children.

It is a uniquely Christian idea to say that God’s love extends beyond the borders of a race or nation.⁴

But that’s not all Nicodemus would have heard, and that’s not all John intended, and I’ll warn you, this next part gets a little grimy.

The word “World” here is *kosmos*, but isn’t talking about the physical earth or the universe, it is more directly talking about *humanity* and *human affairs*.

Here’s the stink of the matter... this word “World” shows up many times in this book and none of them are good.

In fact, John paints this picture of the world being that part of humanity set in rebellion against God, those creatures that are set against their creator.

³ Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 118.

⁴ Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 118.

Therefore, you and I have to realize this world is not a neutral place, a place of safe, open inquiry and curiosity about God and life.

I hear people say it all the time: "Well I believe people are inherently good."

That is not a Christian perspective on the world; people are not inherently good.

We don't live in a world of people who sin every now and then by making bad choices once in a while... we live in a world that is in this constant state of broken sinfulness from which bad choices continually come.

If that's not the case, then why would God send his Son to save the world? We wouldn't have needed The Light if the world wasn't already a dark place.

One commentator said, "We do not live in a nice world that God desires to make nicer. We live in a world that repudiates the Truth and replaces it with fashionable truths."

Don't believe me? Let's jump down to...

vs. 19-20 — "And this is the judgment: (or verdict, as in we're to picture a courtroom, the evidence has been presented, and this is what the judge and jury have determined) ***the light has come into the world***, (Jesus has come) ***and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*** ²⁰ ***For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.***"

Does this sound like a morally neutral humanity? No.

The affections of humanity are corrupt; our desires are fallen, we are not naturally eager to be redeemed.

Instead, we naturally love darkness instead of light... in fact, we naturally hate the light, we wage war against it and try to tear it down.

Why? Because of v. 20 — Light exposes things, right?

Light exposes the true wickedness of things, and the world loves to be ignorant of the reality of its own depravity because for once they might have to be real with themselves about their own brokenness and weaknesses.

I've said this before: what if I could put up on the screen every second of your life in the last 24-48 hours; would there be things you'd want hidden?

Perhaps the hours you spend in front of your screen, or that click that took you to that raunchy website, or that guy you sleep with who you know doesn't really love you...

We want to hide that away; the world doesn't want to step into the light... they are rejecting the light.

Now, I may sound cynical... but doesn't his make more sense? Doesn't it make our view of the world a bit more realistic?

This explains why we have corrupt governments in Venezuela extorting its own citizens for the greedy gain of those in power leading to economic collapse.

This explains why 70.8 million men, women, and children have been displaced from their own homes worldwide due to civil war between

governments, violent persecution from religious extremists, or human rights violations.⁵

Therefore, **when John tells us that God loves the world, God's love is to be admired, not because the world is so big, but because the world is so bad.**

And because humanity is fallen, broken, and sinful, v. 18 says if we don't believe in Jesus, we're condemned already.

Again, go back to a courtroom, and on trial stands one who has been charged with rape and murder, the evidence presented is overwhelmingly against him, and the verdict finds him guilty.

The judge then says, "You are condemned to this sentence: 30 years in prison."

The same is true here.

We are inherently found guilty of loving and doing wicked things, and we are condemned because of our wickedness.

And what is the sentencing? John 3:16 says it is "to perish."

Just like being bitten by a venomous snake: the venom is running its course throughout veins and we wander aimlessly until it has its final way: the destruction of cells within the body, eventually leading to death.

The world is condemned to perish because of its sinfulness and love for the darkness.

⁵ <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>

And the only way anyone can be saved from such condemnation and peril is for them to be born again through belief in the Son of Man who has been lifted up to conquer the vile beast of sin and destruction and remove its venom from our veins.

Enter, God's only Son: Jesus Christ, whom God gave to the world.

The word "gave" in v. 16 literally means "offered up in sacrifice."

Remember the story of Abraham being told by God to offer up his only son Isaac in sacrifice, and Abraham is about to do it and God stops him and provides the Ram in the thicket? Jesus is the Ram... Jesus is the sacrifice offered up by God in our place.

Normally when we see someone convicted of the most heinous crimes, we're repulsed by them.

Not God, no, he came to our rescue! He leaned in, he sought us out, he came after us!

Too many of us have this poor view of the trinity that would look as God the Father as this angry judge sitting on his throne who sacrificed his only Son to placate his anger, and that Jesus is our ally while God is our adversary.

This proves that wrong: the work of Christ is God at work, God saving the world.

v. 17 tells us what God's mission is:

v. 17 — 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.

This is the mission of God. Jesus' arrival didn't bring condemnation, that was already ours long before he showed up according to v. 18.

No, **the mission of God is to save the world**, to rescue it from its condemnation to perish. He's the world's greatest hero!

God himself sent his Son.

God himself went to the cross.

God himself laid down his life.

God himself is for us, not against us!

God himself came after us!

God himself wanted his creation reconciled back to him.

And so he sent his only Son; he fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law that we could never fulfill and made salvation available to us just by simple belief, looking to him as the rescue from our condition of perishing.

Which is why anyone who believes in the Son escapes the condemnation their sin brings, is no longer lost unto destruction, but has eternal life as a born again new creation.

Which then explains...

v. 21 — “But whoever does what is true (which means “to act faithfully” believing in Jesus) **comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”**

Those who come to the light have seen the depravity of their own condition, and they're willing to let the light expose them for who they are because in Christ there is no more condemnation for Sin, only salvation.

I read an article about a young man named Danny Holmes, who shot and killed a 30-year old man after breaking into his home and demanding drugs and money.

In the first few minutes of his trial, Holmes, to everyone's utter shock, pleaded guilty of the murder, knowing it condemned him to a life sentence in prison, which he said he would "wear as a badge of honor."

Why? Why didn't he just fight it and see if he could get away with it?

Because just over a year ago, Danny Holmes heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, that Jesus died to save sinners from condemnation and offer new life; Danny believed, was born again, and was made a new creature who would rather stand in the light than hide in the darkness.

And we see what God has done: made a new creature!

That's the hardest thing about the gospel: it exposes us for who we really are.

It outs every single one of us as broken human beings bent towards wickedness.

Which now means I don't have to pretend I'm anything I'm not for you.

I don't have to play a part.

I don't have to be a puppet.

I don't have to do any of that.

Standing in the light lets me be free to say, "I'm messed up, I'm not ok, but Jesus has set me free, and I'm no longer condemned for my pride or lust or hatred; in fact, God is working in me to cleanse me of those tendencies."

Danny Holmes experienced the joy of freedom in Christ, and led to his standing in the light, all because God gave his one and only Son.

Application/Challenge:

By God's grace, I have one son; I cannot begin to fathom the depth of my hatred for anything that would try to steal him away from me, not even Chuck Norris could contain me.

But for God, to look at an utterly depraved and wicked world that hates him and rejects him, and still say, "I want you back. Here's my only Son; He's the only one I have," completely overwhelms me.

I was thinking about this yesterday, weeping over this.

How can this be? How can it be that God would offer up his only Son?

"Because God so loved..."

Everything about this conversation: from being born again, to the lifting up of the Son of Man to save a guilty world, all of this is motivated by one thing...

God's mission is motivated by love.

This is the crux of everything in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus; the initiating cause of everything good that God has provided for us in His son is God's overwhelming, never-ending, never-failing, unstoppable, amazing love.

It was love! But not love like we know it... The English language is terrible in this regard.

When I can use the exact same word to measure the level of my affection for my wife or an NFL quarterback that I've never even met like Tim Tebow, somethings messed up.

John 3:16 should really start out, "For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son."

Yes, you have my permission to go back to your Sunday school teacher and tell them they taught you wrong.

But what John is giving us here is how to measure true love that can speak to every language and every culture around the world.

So if there is one thing I want you all to take away from today, it is this:

Love is measured by the level of self-sacrifice.

This is the measure, the standard of love: he sacrificed himself for a depraved, rebellious humanity.

Romans 5:6-8 — “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”⁶

This is scandalous love, and it changes everything.

Who do you really love like this? God? Your spouse? Your kids?

Want to figure that out? Ask yourself this question, “Who am I willing to give up everything for?”

“For whom am I willing to die to myself so that they can gain?”

This is why so many marriages fall apart, because we don’t love with this kind of love.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 5:6–8.

When you're looking for someone to marry, you often start with questions like, "Who am I most compatible with? or who makes me feel this certain way."

Wrong question. You want to know who you should marry?

Marry that person you'd be willing to sacrifice everything for their benefit.

When looking for friendships, don't start by asking the question, "does this friend give into the relationship as much as I'm giving? Because you know you're not supposed to spend more time investing in somebody than they're willing to invest in you."

Does that sound like this? Did God wait for us to invest enough in our relationship before he came after us?

We don't even know how to love one another because we're all just sitting back waiting for everyone else to give something to us, and until they make a deposit, we won't.

Love doesn't wait.

Love doesn't create expectations.

Love doesn't condemn.

Love doesn't indulge itself.

Love initiates.

Love sacrifices.

Love gives of itself.

Love saves.

Love sets free.

And this type of love which God demonstrated for us by sending His Son allows us to be reconciled back to God.

And believing that alone brings eternal life, it makes you a new creature, it fills you with the presence of Jesus' Spirit, and you get to start your life with Jesus now and forever!

Conclusion (Cast Vision):

So may God continue to shout John 3:16 throughout the ages!

This is the simple gospel, and it is so good. Amen?

If today, for the first time, God is opening your eyes to see the reality of your condition, and the desperate need of a savior, and the overwhelming love of God for you, then don't delay.

All you need do is look. I'd love to talk to you about it; please don't leave today without Jesus.

[Pray]