

Call to Obedience #372
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Too Big for a Nutshell

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Modern society wants to reduce everything to its smallest and simplest component. We love that which is fast, small and easily pocketed, supposedly making us more efficient and productive. However worthy those goals may be to science and technology, they can harm the Christian. Reducing gospel truth to smaller and smaller “nutshells” has not produced a better man than the one driven from the Garden of God thousands of years ago.

Life with God can never be reduced to one pill that does it all. It will never fit into a nutshell. Jesus never said that John 3:16 is Christianity in a nutshell. Neither did Jesus ever reduce our mission in the world to Matt. 28:19, calling it "the great commission." God is not impressed by our cleverness in fitting everything into the confines of our little skulls. God mocks at the idea that He could fit into a temple made with hands (Isa. 66:1).

With this introduction I shall attempt to show you some of the damage that has been done by us presenting John 3:16 as the gospel in a nutshell. That John 3:16 is one of the great verses of the Bible is indeed without doubt. Millions of sinners have entered Christianity through this splendid gate of truth. But by us having over advertised this scripture at the expense of having under advertised others, we have produced masses of believers who spent their whole life living with a nutshell mentality. Spiritually speaking, their brains have never developed to take in or to understand what they were saved for, other than not to perish.

When you stand behind the pulpit and watch the faces of many church goers, invariably you see their dullness of spiritual mind through their glazed eyes being totally uninspired during the display of the finest delicacies of the Kingdom of God presented to them by a heaven ordained preacher. They are in a nutshell where the lights never go on. So again, the incorrect use of John 3:16 has produced nutshell Christians. John 3:16 is only a step onto ground level. We need another step after that to get us onto the porch or veranda of John's full gospel as he describes it so well in his first epistle.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; . . . That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full (1 John 1:1,3,4).

The full gospel of John stands out clearly here in two remarkable phrases.

- 1) *That ye also may have fellowship with us*
- 2) *That your joy may be full.*

John describes a relationship and the consequence of that relationship:

1) ***That ye also may have fellowship with us.***

"Us" here means John who wrote this letter and the rest of the apostles who also had handled and seen our Lord with their own eyes. The fellowship they had with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ is the fellowship they want us to have as well. It is a call to apostolic fellowship which is also bridal fellowship with our heavenly Bridegroom. We can't have one without the other. This kind of fellowship the Apostles had is clearly revealed in the Acts and in the epistles. There we see the intense daily contact between the Apostles and their Lord. There we see the price the Apostles paid to get it, and the price they paid to keep it. Are you in this pristine apostolic fellowship? Or are you still confined by the walls of that man-conceived "nutshell?" Do you merely believe so you will not perish in hell? My friend, look at John 3:16 in the context of this Apostolic fellowship – in that context, "not perishing" is not just restricted to the fires of hell, but also "not perishing" in the wasteland of Christian boredom, retardation, mediocrity, irrelevance and self-indulgence. For indeed if we really believe as the scriptures say, then indeed out of our innermost being shall flow rivers of living waters (John 7:38).

2) ***That your joy may be full.***

When something is full, it means it can hold no more. How much can you hold? What is "full" for you? My friend, your capacity to hold joy depends on your intimacy with Jesus. This one single factor, apostolic fellowship, is the only condition necessary to bring fullness of joy – no other condition is necessary for it to exist and to persist in the human heart. There need not be milk in the refrigerator; there need not be health of the body; there need not be dreams fulfilled; only one thing is needed – Apostolic fellowship. And whenever that fellowship is broken, the believer will be tripped and trapped. He will find himself in misery, discouragement, disappointment, disillusionment and dullness of soul.

Well, you may say at this point, "Pastor Schultze, you preach too high of a gospel for me." My answer dear saint is that I preach the Supernatural. The same Supernatural that created the universe in 6 days, the same Supernatural that brought water out of rocks and bread out of the sky, that made Israel to walk through the Jordan on dry ground, that made iron swim, that helped Peter to walk on water, that made the lame to leap and the blind to see, the damned to be saved and cleansed – that is the Supernatural I preach. I know people who live in this supernatural joy, and I live in it myself. You do not need pleasant circumstances to have this joy. Once you are there, my friend, you won't want to go anywhere else. Once you are there, you find yourself in what you were born again for – sitting with Christ in heavenly places, even though your feet are still touching this ground of sin and woe. And remember, wherever joy is missing, power is missing also (Neh. 8:10).

Now let us consider the condition under which John wrote this, *our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son*, and through that fellowship we have fullness of joy. Friend, John did not say this when all was well, but when all was bad. John was the only apostle who wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, after everything had turned to shambles.

Here are some circumstances in which he lived when he wrote, *that your joy may be full*:

1) All his fellow apostles had been murdered.

2) Rome had so destroyed the temple that not one stone was left upon another. Flavius Josephus, an eyewitness of this event wrote: "Accordingly, the multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever brought upon the world."

3) Many Jews and Christians became refugees. Many of them had lost loved ones: husbands, wives, children, and relatives at the wrath of the Romans. The average life expectancy was about forty and 25% of the people in Rome were slaves.

4) In this period, John himself lived as a condemned criminal on the Isle of Patmos. He had no earthly comforts; he had no assurance of living another day. At this time, when the cup of misery was full, God commissioned the aging John to write his first epistle, the Revelation and his gospel. It was when the Christian was deprived of all the comforts and blessings common to man that God wanted to show the world the absolute power and triumph of Christianity over everything through the life of a disciple of Jesus. So, in a special way, John became the last messenger to complete the Holy Scriptures. He was honored above all to give us God's final written word. His writings, in reference to our daily walk, put a capstone on all that heaven intended to reveal in the Word: if we have apostolic fellowship, our joy will be full. YOU DO NOT NEED PLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCES FOR THIS TO HAPPEN. Indeed the Psalmist says it best: *Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore* (Psa. 16:11).

Is John 3:16 the gospel in a nutshell? No, it is only a stepping stone to all that God has for you. Break your Christianity out of the nutshell. Enjoy apostolic fellowship with Jesus and let it grow into a tree of life planted by the ever refreshing living waters of God.

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