

Call to Obedience #485
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Understanding John 3:16

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For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

As you well know, this is the most quoted verse in the New Testament. By it millions of sinners have found their entrance into the kingdom of God, yet other millions, through misunderstanding it, have forever lost their way to the city whose maker and builder is God. Let us examine John 3:16, the text in the context, as John wrote it. It appears that John was the only one who was with Jesus that eventful night when Jesus spoke these words to Nicodemus. Up to that point, we had the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon by the Sea, but now we are considering the Sermon of the "Night." Further notice that apparently Nicodemus kept these precious words in his back pocket and never shared them with the rest of the church, nor did John do so until he finally wrote them down in about 90 A.D., after the temple had become a pile of ashes and Judaism, as it had been known, had lost its life. Until then, the church was living off the gospel of Matthew written to the Jews, the gospel of Mark written to the Romans and the gospel of Luke written to the Greeks. It was then time for someone like John to write a gospel to the whole world without being burdened down by the cumbersome history of the Jewish world. Yes, out of the ashes of Jerusalem arose these glorious words: *For God so loved the world...* like the bright and shiny Morningstar. What was first given in the secrecy of a private home to Nicodemus, a Jew of the Jews, was finally blasted into every corner of the universe.

And remarkably, this universal gospel was written by John who had been a fisherman, but had now become a man to the universal church what Einstein is to the world of physics and Beethoven is to the world of music. John was *the disciple who leaned on Jesus breast, the disciple whom Jesus loved*, a disciple par excellence in the comprehension of what it means to be Christian and the disciple to whom God entrusted with *The Revelation of Jesus Christ...* (Rev. 1:1). Of the four gospel writers, John was the only one who knew with John Baptist that Jesus had not come to deliver the Jews from Rome but to *take away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). He traced all problems to sin.

And so is it any wonder that John does not begin his gospel crowded with Jewish history, but instead, he reached all the way back beyond Abraham to the dawn of time revealing Jesus as the creator of the universe: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made* (John 1:1-3).

Then observe that the first thing that Jesus had on His agenda was to go to a wedding. This aligns perfectly with the express purpose for the creation of the world, that He might find a bride amongst humankind. This was omitted by the other gospel writers. So from the first two chapters of John alone we can write the whole history of the church as three issues: Creation, the Divine Romance and the Consummation. This is what the Bible is all about. This is the background for John 3:16. Jesus wanted a love relationship with man that was not just formal, stiff, and doctrinal but one that was deep and passionate with all the bells and whistles. We have a picture of this relationship that Jesus was looking for between two lovers in the Song of Solomon expressed by the Shulamite woman saying to her bridegroom: *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—For your love is better than wine* (Song 1:2). And indeed, Jesus does not just want to kiss you, He wants you to kiss Him. He not only wants to keep giving to you of the finest of His dainties, He wants you to reciprocate by continually giving back to Him of your best. He gave His life for you, He wants the life He had given you at your beginning to be given back to Him. To get you to do this, He, being holy, was even willing to drink the bitter cup of the sins of the world. He had never tasted sin and hated sin with an unfathomable passion. In fact, the thought of Him having to drink it took Him to the very ground with His sweat turning as into drops of blood. Jesus had no enthusiasm during that awful night to drink this cup. But because of His love to His Father and His love for lost mankind and His desire to get His bride, He drank it.

Let us go on from here sticking with John who gave us John 3:16. Obviously, the next thing Jesus did after the wedding is that He went to church. Where else would He find His bride? But what did He find in the church? Nothing but that which provoked Him to anger. And with that, He hastily made a whip and drove everybody out of church. That was Jesus' first encounter with the church, a total collision that reached its pinnacle in the church crucifying the Lord. But before Jesus was hung on the cross, He made this startling statement about the church when He said: *I will build my church* (Matt. 16:18). By saying this, He placed a death sentence on any church that

would not be built by Him (Matt. 15:13). In fact, Jesus prophesied the destruction of the temple. He would only find His bride in a church built by Him. Are you in such a church?

It is also here during Jesus' temple encounter we see that the God who so loves the world has not become more tolerant toward sin. If anything, it is the very opposite because of God giving His Son, there is so much more at stake now. The proof for this is in Jesus introducing the strong language of an eternal hellfire for both transgressors and backsliders which is not found in the Old Testament (Luke 16:19-31; Matt. 13:42; Heb. 10:26-31). Observe from this that there is a time when God's patience with man times out because salvation is conditional. *God will not always strive with man*. Indeed, in your witnessing, give the sinner hope, but do not give him false hope. Blow the trumpet of good news to him that *God so loved the world*, but you must also sound the trumpet of the watchmen on the wall warning him of a judgment to come.

Because John 3:16 contains the words that man must *believe in Him* to be saved, this means that salvation is conditional. This restrictive requirement to believe in Him is overlooked by many. Jesus further emphasizes this by saying later on: *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me* (John 14:6). It means you cannot believe in any other god including the gods of materialism, sports or entertainment. It has to be Him and Him alone. With these words, Jesus debunks all other religions. To believe in Him means nothing less than you beginning to live your life together with Him (John 15).

But in order for this life together with Jesus to become possible, God has to make a new man out of the old. Jesus told Nicodemus that man must be born again, born of the Spirit. And then Jesus continues with these words just before John 3:16, saying that *the Son of Man must be lifted up to draw all men unto Himself*. By these means, the old man becoming a new man and lifting up Jesus, man alone is equipped to enter into a bridal love relationship, a reciprocal relationship with Jesus which allows him to maintain his state of salvation. This is also made evident by Jesus words: *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him* (John 14:21). In other words, you *must* love God back.

So then, God expressed His love affair with us through Jesus giving us a kiss from the Roman cross as we read in 1 John 4:19: *He first loved us*. But we must keep that love relationship alive by keeping His commandments. Only as

we do this will His love keep flowing into our hearts. God has no bridal love relationship with transgressors. Love cannot flow into a vessel that is not responding. Light has no fellowship with darkness.

Calvary love gets us started in our walk with Jesus and bridal love with Him keeps us going. The heart of the matter is that John 3 describes the necessity of a reciprocal love relationship between the bridegroom and the bride to the church. Again, when the bride stops kissing the bridegroom, the wedding is off. The church predominantly has preached a gospel of a one-sided love affair as being adequate to get us to heaven. That is not correct. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength is still the ultimate proof that you are a child of God.

Finally, let us go on to John 4. Here we have the words of John 3:16 become flesh as John expressed it with these words: *And he must needs go through Samaria* (John 4:4 KJV). Yes, Jesus first went to the Jews, but then after His rejection at the temple, we find Him going to the "Gentiles." He finds a woman at a well crushed, shunned, broken and guilt ridden who instantly believes that He is the Christ. Oh, how different a reception He had with her than what He experienced in Jerusalem. Immediately, this Gentile woman laid a whole city at Jesus' feet. Truly, truly, God so loved the world that He is willing to go anywhere and to go to great lengths at anytime to save anyone meeting His conditions and desiring to enter into a bridal relationship with Him. Now you have John 3:16, the text in the context. Jesus came looking for a bridal relationship. Only in it can you find salvation. To God be all the glory. For more articles, visit my new website: www.joyfulabiding.com

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