

John 3:16 | “The Incarnation Impacts Our World”
Preached on December 24, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to John 3:16. *[pause]*

Yep, we are going to look at probably the most well-known verse in all of the Bible tonight.

And although we probably all know this verse, it’s good to refresh our minds on the deep truths found in it that we often don’t always dwell upon. *[pause]*

As we prepare our hearts for tomorrow, we don’t necessarily need new information so much as we need to meditate on the simple, yet significant truth of why Christ came.

So don’t shut off your brain tonight because you know this verse, but allow this time to really cause you to reflect upon what this verse is saying. *[pause]*

I’ll READ the verse for you. *[READ]*

We live in a world that loves to talk about love.

We hear messages like, “Love yourself,” or “Love is love.”

There are numerous TV shows about people seeking to find their true love in some sort of “reality” TV show.

It’s all around us in our culture, yet amidst all of that, many people in our world don’t feel loved. *[pause]*

Divorce is rampant.

Kids grow up in home situations, and never feel the love of a parent.

Disloyalty between friends is common.

And cancel culture shows a culture that is extremely unloving and unforgiving when someone crosses culture’s line of acceptable things to do or say. *[pauseee]*

So amidst a world that loves to talk about love, we have myriads upon myriads of people who do not actually feel loved at all. *[pause]*

Maybe you are one of them.

You are no longer with the person, who said they would love you forever.

You have friends, who are no longer friends, though you thought you would remain friends for life. *[pause]*

Yes, you may feel glimpses of love from others, but not anything lasting or continual, as you feel distant from many of them.

You are longing to be loved, but feel like you are grasping at the air. *[pause]*

And no, Christmastime doesn't always solve your problem, for maybe you are missing someone you loved during this Christmas.

Or maybe you feel left out or disregarded in some way.

Well John 3:16 can help you this evening, for it reveals someone who loves you amid all of your sins, flaws, and failures.

And His love can sustain you through thick and thin, so that even if we live in a love-less culture, we can know that we are loved. *[pause]*

And even if you do feel greatly loved by family and friends, this love is deeper and better.

For we see here that God, the great, Almighty, Creator God is a God of love, for He loved the world and gave His Son. *[pauseeee]*

Now in order to understand this verse, you must know some things first.

The Bible is one long story, and so to understand what's being said here, the Bible assumes that you already know some things. *[pause]*

It assumes that you know that there is a God who created all things, and included in that is mankind. *[pause]*

You can't get around this fact: God is Creator, just look around you as you walk outside. *[pause]*

But it also assumes that you know what happened in the Garden of Eden.

That though God created all things good, mankind chose to rebel against Him, and as a result, the world is under a curse. *[pause]*

This is why we see so much evil and tragedy all around us.

It also explains why we sin and others sin against us, and why there's pain and toil. *[pauseeee]*

So because of Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden, disobeying God, we are all born sinners.

You don't have to teach your children how to sin, it just comes naturally, doesn't it? *[pause]*

And because of our sin, we are under condemnation, for we have sinned against the good and holy God, and He can't just let your sin slide or else He wouldn't be just or good. *[pauseeee]*

So I want you to get this picture in your mind.

We are all sinners, who have rebelled against a good, loving, and holy God, and therefore we stand condemned, *deserving* eternal death in Hell. *[pause]*

That is what we deserve.

We don't deserve life or anything good, for *we* are the guilty ones, not God.

And the problem is that we can't save ourselves, for our good works aren't enough to meet His standard of holiness. *[pauseeee]*

That's a bleak picture, yet an accurate, true picture of our world.

And in order for this verse to make sense, and also for you to feel the impact of it, you must have that picture of the world in your mind as you read it. *[pauseeee]*

Now you may be thinking, "Come on, man, this is Christmas Eve. It's supposed to be a joyous time, but this is all bad news, and kind of a downer." *[pause]*

Well let me say this...

There's nothing wrong with feeling the weight of the bad news because when you truly feel the weight of the bad news, you get to fully understand and feel the relief and joy of the good news.

It only makes the good news more joyous! *[pauseeee]*

So once again: we are all sinners, who have rebelled against a good, loving, and holy God, and therefore we stand condemned, deserving eternal death in Hell.

And amidst all of that, what do we find in our passage?

"God so loved the world." *[pause]*

I mean just think about that!

He made everything good, and we turned against Him, sticking our nose up at Him, yet in spite of that, He *loves* us? *[pause]*

It's not that He just puts up with us, like that co-worker at your job, who you can't stand, and you just determine to put up with them.

No, although He could have justly wiped each and every one of us off the face of the earth, He actually loves us. *[pause]*

Talk about radical love!

Talk about love that loves even the unlovely!

Talk about love that loves someone even though they are enemies and sinning against them!¹

Yet that's God for you.

He is the very definition of love², and His love is an *active* love, for what do we find?

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.” *[pause]*

This is where the incarnation comes in, that is, where Christ took on flesh and became a baby.

You see...

I. God loves the world, and proved it in Bethlehem.

For some people, we wonder if they love us.

Usually it's because we haven't seen evidence of their love for us, or seen their love in action.
[pause]

Well God has proven and displayed His love for us in giving us His unique Son. *[pauseeee]*

His love was a sacrificial love.

It wasn't that God had an extra item that He didn't need, and He gave it to us.

No, His love was a sacrificial giving of His own Son. *[pauseeee]*

We can more easily sacrifice time and money, but imagine sacrificing a family member.

And this wasn't just some random family member.

This is God the Son, the second person in the Trinity. *[pause]*

He had a perfect, loving relationship with the Spirit and the Father from eternity past.

And to think that we didn't deserve anything, and in fact, were rebels against God, yet He lovingly, sacrificially gave us His one and only Son?! *[pauseeee]*

Jesus Christ is a love gift for the world.

No Christmas gift this Christmas that you will give, or that anyone else will give you can match the gift of love that God has given the world. *[pauseeee]*

So when you remember Jesus this Christmas, remember that He is proof of the love of God for you.

¹ A reference to Romans 5:8.

² See 1 John 4:8.

He came, not because it was required of Him to do so, but out of the loving heart of the Father.
[pauseeee]

The incarnation is a result of and therefore evidence of God's love for the world. *[pause]*

Some people see God the Father as angry and hateful and Jesus as caring and loving, but this text combats that idea, and shows us that it was out of God the Father's love that Jesus came.
[pauseeee]

There are some people in your life, maybe it's a boyfriend or girlfriend, maybe it's a family member or friend.

And you wonder from time to time if they actually love you. *[pause]*

Well you never have to wonder if God loves you because all you have to do is remember baby Jesus in the manger. *[pause]*

Jesus in Bethlehem is the proof of God's love.

He came because God the Father gave Him to us out of the depths of His great love.

So whenever you think of Jesus, you can think, "God loves me! He loves me! He loves me!"
[pause]

But that's not all that John 3:16 teaches us, is it?

No, for we see that...

II. God loves the world, and provided the way to be saved.

Sometimes we give a gift to someone to merely show them that we love them.

So we give them a thoughtful gift, and the person thinks, "Wow, they really do love me." *[pause]*

There's absolutely nothing wrong with that, we should do that.

But that thoughtful card and decoration that you gave them isn't going to drastically change their life, so now their life is completely changed because they got a decoration and a card. *[pauseeee]*

Well if you think about God's gift of love in Jesus, it not only signals and proves His love, but it does so much more than that.

God's giving of Jesus wasn't *just* a way to signal His love, it was the way for Him to save by His love. *[pause]*

God didn't just say, "Hey guys, I love you, just wanted you to know that," and then just leave us in our sins and under condemnation.

No, He loved the world and gave His Son for what purpose?

It says, “that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” *[pauseee]*

The incarnation is a part of God’s saving plan for the world.

It is a gift given to us for our eternal good, and therefore it’s a gift that completely changes our lives. *[pauseee]*

Remember earlier how I said that we were all sinners and deserving of condemnation?

Well that comes into play here.

We were all on our way to perishing, yet God intervened by sending His Son, so that we could have eternal life. *[pause]*

What a gift!

It is a gracious, merciful, and loving gift! *[pause]*

It is a saving gift that gives us eternal life. *[pause]*

Talk about a gift that lasts!

Talk about a gift that keeps giving, for His gift radically changes our eternities! *[pauseee]*

Because of the love of the Father in sending Jesus, we can receive eternal life, and not perish.

And that means that even though we physically die, yet shall we live with Christ forever. *[pauseee]*

You can have hope amidst a world of death, for you can have eternal life.

And that means that this precious gift of Jesus who gives us eternal life will matter even as you lay, taking your final earthly breath.

For in your final moments, you can know, “I have eternal life.” *[pauseeeeeee]*

Some of you in this very room are so fearful of death, and you live in slavery to the fear of death.³

Well you don’t have to fear death, for you can have eternal life through Christ.

This is why Jesus’ birth was such good news, for the Savior was born, and He would go on to save His people from their sins.⁴ *[pauseee]*

³ See Hebrews 2:15.

⁴ See Luke 2:10-11 & Matthew 1:21.

If you think about it: there are typically two things that humanity longs for and looks to: life and love.

We all want to be loved, and we all want to live.

And both of those things are given to us as gifts by God. *[pause]*

He gives us love by loving us with an active, sacrificial, saving love shown in Christ.

You never have to fret over whether God loves you, for Jesus is the proof.

And His love won't ever stop, for He has saved you, so that you can live with Him forever in eternity. *[pause]*

And God satisfies our longing for life, for He gives us eternal life through Jesus.

We will live into eternity with Him. *[pause]*

But the question remains: *how* do we receive this eternal life?

The verse says, "Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." *[pause]*

To receive eternal life, we simply have to believe in Jesus Christ.

Just right before this in verses 14 and 15, Jesus said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." *[pause]*

Jesus didn't just take on flesh and become born in this world.

No, He also went and was lifted up on the Cross and died for our sins, paying the penalty that we deserved.

He then rose again victoriously, 3 days later.

And so He's showing us how we can believe and receive eternal life. *[pauseeee]*

We deserve to perish, but if we would simply look in faith to Jesus Christ, who died in our place, we shall live.

We trust that He took our place, bearing the wrath of God for our sin, so we could be forgiven.

We trust that He alone is the way to be saved and to have life. *[pauseeee]*

You don't have to jump through a million hoops to receive eternal life.

You don't have to (nor can you) do a certain amount of good works to be saved.

You simply have to trust in Jesus as the way to be saved. *[pause]*

That's it! What a *gift*!

We simply receive eternal life by faith. *[pauseeee]*

God's gift of Jesus is truly a gift.

As Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." *[pauseeee]*

The truths we celebrate at Christmas are really a reminder that God has lovingly come down to us, so that we can have life.

So my question for you this evening is this: have you trusted in Jesus Christ? *[pause]*

He was given out of love for you, and He went so far as to come to this sin-cursed world, and then die the death that you deserved, so that you could go free and not pay the penalty for your sin.

He took what you deserved, so that you could receive what you didn't deserve: eternal life. *[pause]*

Acknowledge that you are a sinner and you deserve condemnation, for you sinned against God.

Confess that to God, and then trust that because of what Jesus did for you, you can be fully forgiven and given eternal life.

And the Bible says that if you do that, you will be saved. *[pause]*

The verse here says, "whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

And verse 18 says, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned." *[pause]*

What promise! What good news!

What a better time than now to receive the gift of forgiveness and life?

Do not delay, for you do not know what the rest of tonight or tomorrow may bring. *[pause]*

Do not neglect or turn away from Him, who saves.

But believe tonight and be saved! *[pause]*

You see...

Jesus was given to the world as a gift of love to save us!

You may not feel loved by others, as people have left you, who said they would always be there for you.

You may not feel loved by others, for some treat you badly or have been ignoring you.

But let me tell you, there is Someone who loves you and desires for you to know that love: God.

[pause]

John 3:16 is God's declaration of His love for you that He wants you to know.

There's a reason why He told us this!

He wants the world, and that means he wants *you* to know His love, and so He gave us Jesus.

And the truth of Jesus' birth is God's continual reminder that He doesn't want us to perish, but to have eternal life through His Son.

"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"⁵

⁵ 2 Corinthians 9:15.