

# John 3:16

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 27 May 2012

Preacher: Murdo Campbell

[ 0 : 00 ] Could this evening, with the Lord's help, turn back to the portion of Scripture that we read? In the Gospel according to John, in chapter 3. The Gospel according to John, chapter 3.

If you read again from verse 16. John 3, 16. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

What's the Bible all about? What's the Gospel all about? What's this good news that must be shared with everyone? What's the point to this book that we read in this place, Lord's Day after Lord's Day?

And if we're to choose one text from the whole of Scripture to define the purpose of the Bible and the meaning of its existence in our lives, it would be this text set before us this evening.

[ 1 : 18 ] Many of us have our favorite texts of Scripture found in the Bible. There are verses that they mean a lot to us. There are maybe verses that are personal to us. They have this relevant meaning to our life and to our situation.

Whether it's a text that drew you to the Lord or one that comforts you, or it's a daily prayer for you every day that you open your eyes in this world, or it's a prayer for your experience, or a text that reminds you to pray for someone else.

It's a text that is important to you. And if I were to ask you individually what your favorite text in Scripture is, maybe you could easily tell me and explain to me why it's so important to you.

And throughout history, there has also been many passages in the Bible which have been chosen by people as their favorite text. John Wesley, the famous preacher in England in the 18th century, often said that his favorite verse of Scripture was Zechariah 3 verse 2.

Is not this brand plucked out of the fire? David Livingstone, the missionary, he preferred the last words of Matthew 28 20, Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

[ 2 : 34 ] John Newton, the man who headed the slave trade for so many years and was later converted, and he said that his favorite text in Scripture was Romans 5 20, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

And the great reformer Martin Luther had his life's text based upon the words of Romans 1 17, the just shall live by faith. And if you know anything about the history of the lives of these men, you will know how significant these verses of Scripture were to each and every one of them.

And each of these texts spoke to them in their own particular condition and their own particular need, and became for them the greatest text in all the Bible.

But this text of Scripture that we have before us this evening, it's not applicable to the individual or the particular condition or for any certain grouping in the world.

This verse is everyone's text. No one is exempt from it. It speaks to every man, woman, boy or girl. It is for them. This verse is everyone's text.

[ 3 : 45 ] And there is hardly a place in all the world where the gospel of Jesus Christ has gone. And this verse has not become almost instantly known. This verse, John 3 16, is known the world over.

Millions have been taught to recite it. It's been inscribed on books and in buildings. This great verse with its emphasis upon God's love for a lost and a sinful world and the gift of that love in Jesus Christ.

It's what everyone finds so hard and so difficult to accept. For there is nothing more difficult for us to believe than that God actually loves us.

And we look around the world today with all its heartache and with all its sorrow, murder, war, pain and death. And yet, despite our failings and our absolute depravity before a holy God, He still loves

us.

And that's what the Bible says to us. That God so loved us so much and so amazingly that for us He gave His own Son.

[ 4 : 51 ] This text, as Martin Luther once put it, is the Bible in miniature because it tells you all that you need to know about your need of Jesus Christ and God's love towards hell-deserving sinners.

And yet, these words, they were initially said to a man who couldn't understand what Jesus was talking about. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, not only a Jew but a ruler of the Jews who came to Jesus by night.

And Nicodemus, he was fascinated by Jesus' miracles and he wanted to know more about the doctrines which he taught by asking all these various questions regarding eternal life.

But this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus led to Jesus' profound response that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

And therefore, this evening, I would like us to consider this verse and its context under three headings. The ignorance of man, the immeasurable love of God, and our immediate response.

[ 6 : 07 ] The ignorance of man, the immeasurable love of God, and our immediate response. So if we look firstly at the ignorance of man, there are only three passages in Scripture that tell us about the life of this man, Nicodemus.

Not much is known about him apart from what John tells us in his Gospel. All of the synoptic writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they do not mention this ruler of the Jews who came to Jesus by night. And it's only John that records for us this nighttime meeting with Jesus and the other two occasions in chapters 7 and 19 where Nicodemus comes again onto the stage of history to play his part in the story of redemption.

But it is on these two other occasions in chapters 7 and 19 that John tells us again, just in case we think it's another Nicodemus, he says it was the Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night.

And that tells us that this nighttime meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus is significant.

Nicodemus was, as you know, a Jew. But not only a Jew, he was a ruler of the Jews and therefore in a position of authority within his own community and within his own religion.

[ 7 : 25 ] Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He lived the strictest possible rules of religion. But not all the Pharisees were like the hypocrites who would stand on the street corner and pray.

Most were sincere about their religion and their quest for the truth. And Nicodemus, when he came to Jesus, he was seeking the truth. And as John records for us this nighttime meeting with Jesus, he wants us to take away with us that there is no type of person that is too much for the Lord.

No one is exempt from the message of the gospel, no matter who they are or what they have done. And here Nicodemus is going to make this very significant discovery in the life of faith and in his relationship with Jesus Christ.

Nicodemus is searching for the truth. And that's what leaves him coming to Jesus, cloaked in the darkness with all of these questions. Now, the darkness is important.

One of the greatest, one of the great themes of John's gospel, it's there in the beginning of this gospel where he opens, John opens his first chapter and says, in him was the life.

[ 8 : 36 ] And the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness. And then again in this chapter, at verse 19, John tells us that light has come into the world.

But men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. And when John brings us to the cross, he explains to us that Calvary was shrouded in darkness because for John, the themes of light and darkness are important.

So when John tells us that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night under the cover of darkness, he's more than telling us the hour of the day or of the night and at what time this meeting took place.

It reminds us that there is another kind of darkness that covered the soul of Nicodemus. It was a reflection of his spiritual condition before God. Nicodemus came to Jesus in the darkness of the night and came to Jesus in the darkness of his own soul.

And it is this great meeting with Jesus that is going to bring light into his soul. And my friend, that is at the heart of the gospel, that there can be no light in our soul apart from a meeting with Jesus.

[ 9 : 53 ] And here Nicodemus is searching, searching for the truth. Jesus knows what's in him, but Nicodemus doesn't know what's in himself. And maybe today that's what you need to discover, that Jesus knows you in a way that you don't even know yourself.

And what you need to discover more than anything else in this life is that Jesus is actually what you need. You know, some people like to come to church to read their Bible.

And it's a good thing to read your Bible and to meditate upon it and to consider what it says. But maybe some of you only come to church to have the Bible read you and tell you of your need and what you need to discover in this book and what this book is telling you about yourself and your state before God, that you need to be right with Jesus.

Because there can be no light in our soul apart from a meeting with Jesus. And Nicodemus was fascinated by Jesus as many other people were.

There were many who believed in his name when they saw all the miracles that he did and heard the words that Jesus taught. But Nicodemus, he hadn't heard.

[11:09] He said, Rabbi, we know you're a teacher come from God. For no man can do the miracles that you are doing except God be with him. Nicodemus was so enthralled by Jesus and wonders what this remarkable power that he has is and what this remarkable authority that he has is.

He can see that Jesus is absolutely unique. And Nicodemus, he wants to know why. Why is he so different? But there is something deeper that drives Nicodemus to Christ in order to know about life and its meaning.

And Nicodemus wasn't the first person. And he won't be the last person who searches for the truth about life. And Nicodemus comes to Jesus with so many questions and so many thoughts, but Jesus rolls it back to one burning question.

He says, Jesus says to him, Nicodemus, there is just one vital issue. Get this one thing right and everything else will fall into place. Don't start with the wrong question.

Start with this right question and this one burning question that is set before us on the pages of Scripture. Nicodemus, except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

[12:32] And Jesus reduces all of Nicodemus' questions and all of his issues to one problem. Nicodemus, are you born again? You have questions that your religion cannot answer, an interest that the world cannot resolve for you, and issues that you will never find a resolution for.

But Nicodemus, you're missing the one central and vital point of genuine biblical Christianity. You need to be born again.

This was not a man ignorant of his Bible. He was a teacher of Israel, a professor of theology, and yet he missed the one great theme that is running throughout this precious book, salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

Nicodemus' religion had led him the wrong way. But here Jesus, he points him in the right direction, and he tells us that we need a new birth, and we need to have a new beginning.

We need to have a new heart. We need to become a new creation. We cannot be fit for heaven by religion. Knowledge or theology doesn't make us fit for heaven. It is only if a man is born of the Spirit of God, cleansed with the washing of water, puts his faith in Christ, discovering that he is nothing, and Christ is everything, and he is then and only then a new man.

[13:59] We were conceived in iniquity, and from the very beginning we were fit for hell and not for heaven. Fit to be damned, not to be blessed.

Fit to be lost, not to be saved. But, says the Bible, it is possible for a man to become a new man. It is possible for a woman to become a new woman.

It is possible for a sinner to become a saint. For all things are possible with God. Nicodemus, Jesus was saying to him, you're missing the point.

You need a new heart. You need a new beginning. You need to be made all over again. Sin has undone what you were created to be, but grace has remade us into what we will become, and what we could have never done ourselves.

And that's what it means to be regenerated, and to become a Christian, to be in Christ, to be a new creation. And Nicodemus is searching, and searching for the truth, shrouded in darkness, darkness of the night, as well as the darkness of all his ignorance.

[15:09] But his searching takes him to the only person in the world who can scatter this darkness, and shed light upon his need, because there can be no light in our soul, apart from a meeting with Jesus.

And from all the profound things that Jesus says to Nicodemus, this is the one verse that stands out, not only for you and for me, but for this man, Nicodemus.

For God so loved the world. But who is the world? Who is the world that Jesus speaks of? Who is he talking about?

For Nicodemus, in all his ignorance and misconceptions of the gospel, he believed that salvation was only for the Jew and for no one else. They were the elect people of God, the chosen people who were chosen to be a light in this world.

The Jews, they were meant to be a light in darkness that would shine so that all the other nations would be drawn to them by the way they lived their lives. But the Jews, they kept their light to themselves and shared it with no one.

[16:19] They were proud that they were the elect and chosen race of God, set apart to be the children of the living God. And God had said to them in the Old Testament that he had chosen the people of Israel not because they were a large nation, because they were the fewest of all the surrounding nations, not because they were special or that there was anything different about them, but the Lord chose them because he loved them.

But here Jesus turns everything that the Jews held to and believed so rigorously, Jesus, he turns it all on his head and Jesus declares that this message of salvation was not just for the Jewish people of Israel.

It was not just for them. He reminds Nicodemus that salvation is for both Jew and Gentile. The gospel is not to be preached to the elect, but the whole world.

It is for everyone. I've heard some people say that the word world, it only refers to the elect because God cannot love those who are not in the elect.

Strange word that we don't often want to talk about, the elect, but this verse has no reference to the elect or any indication of that sort. God loves this world.

[17:41] That means everyone in it. Every single one of us created by God in this world is loved by him because they are his creation.

That's what this verse means. He does not only love those who are his, but all the world, everyone. Of course, there's a difference of the love of God towards his own children, where they are his, redeemed by Christ, and they have put their trust in him.

That's the difference. But there is also this love towards all sinners. What we call common grace is shown to all people as God in his mercy and in his long suffering allows the world to continue despite its own sinfulness.

And God would have every right to condemn us all to hell without one word against his judgment. We have broken his law. We have committed sin. We are transgressors.

But in his love, he keeps us on mercy's ground until we find him. For God so loved the world.

[18:52] But here the word world refers to an entire fallen and rebellious human race who are sin-laden and exposed to the judgment of God.

Sinners are not just murderers and pedophiles. The Bible says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It means you and it means me.

And because we have sinned, this gospel is for all mankind. It is for all lost, sinful, hopeless human beings who are incapable of the righteousness which God requires.

And we are all born in guiltiness and sin. This world is at enmity against God. The world, it wants nothing to do with God. This world has no interest in the God of the Bible and the Christ of God and the people of God.

It wants everything and will do anything to erase God and stand in the face of God and prove that he does not exist. And this is the world that showed its real nature at the cross.

[19:55] They had the glorious Son of God in their midst and yet they chanted, crucify him, crucify him, away with him, away with him. And this world will do anything to erase God and take him out of the picture.

With atheism, secularism, and all the other religions of the day, God is being ignored. And yet, although this world is at enmity against God, this text tells us that this is the kind of world that God loves.

God's love extends so low to our level, it goes right down into the depths, so much so that he sent his only Son. My friend, the ignorance of man was met by the immeasurable love of God.

For God so loved the world. And more than any other New Testament writer, John describes this loving relationship that existed between God the Father and God the Son.

And this is seen time and time again throughout John's Gospel in order to emphasize the love that existed between the Father and the Son, but also to show that it is this love that has been shown to the world.

[ 21 : 13 ] And it's also seen in the construction of this word, loved, which emphasizes the intensity of God's love towards a sinful world. The verb loved is used in a form which tells us that this love has no time restrictions.

It has no beginning. It has no end. The love that God has shown to this world, it began before the foundation of the world. It began before the realm of time even existed.

This love existed in eternity past because God is love. It is part of His being. It is, He is the one who loved the world before it was even formed.

Before He said, let there be light. But how can we ever understand a love that gave so much?

Would you be willing to part with your beloved?

Maybe the son or daughter of your own bosom, the child maybe that was formed in your own womb, nursed by you. You watch him or her grow up to become a man or a woman.

[ 22 : 24 ] How could you ever give them up? And maybe for some of you here tonight, you've had a difficult experience to bear and you carry a constant reminder of your loss, of one whom the Lord has taken from you through some providence or other, whether a parent or a grandparent, a husband or a wife or even your own child.

And for you, this is hard to bear and it's hard to come to terms with and hard to accept the trial that you've had to face in your own experience through your experience of loss and bereavement.

Maybe it's not been an easy road for you and your providence, maybe you wish it had gone another way or it happened at a later time, but not just now. Or even what had happened to them would have happened to you instead.

And your heart today is all because of your love towards those whom you have lost. And in a sense, that will never change. And I know tonight that if you had been asked if you would give your loved one up for another, if you would give them up for someone else, you would say no.

Not because of greed or of anything selfish in you, but for the simple fact that you love them so, so much and that you would move earth and sea just to protect them.

[ 23 : 47 ] And there is nothing in this world that would ever make you give them up. And yet we come to this verse in Scripture and we see that that's what God did.

For it seems that in a sense, God loved, He so loved this sinful and fallen world more than His own Son because He gave Him.

He gave Him. And the story has often been told of the fondness of parents towards their own children and how a famine in the Middle East had reduced a family to absolute starvation and the only possibility of preserving the whole family was to sell one of the children into slavery.

And as the pinch of hunger became unbearable with the sound of their children pleading for bread and something to drink, it tugged so painfully on their heartstrings.

The parents, they had to decide which son to sell into slavery in order to save the lives of the rest of the family. And so they began to consider it.

[ 24 : 54 ] They had four little boys. But which one of them could be sold? The starving parents, they considered their eldest son. But it couldn't be the first.

How could they spare their firstborn child? And when considering the second, he was so strangely like his father that he seemed to be a reproduction of him. And the mother said that she would never part with him.

But the third, he was like the mother. And the father said he would sooner die than to see his dear boy go into bondage. And then having considered these first three sons that they've had together, they thought of the fourth.

But he was their Benjamin. He was their last, their little darling, the one that they could never part with. And so in the end, the parents concluded that it was far better for them all to die willingly than to part with any one of their children.

And yet this verse tells us that God so loved us that he did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all.

[ 26 : 04 ] He permitted his son to die under the hands of men so that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Why did Jesus have to die?

Why did Jesus have to die? My friend, greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

It wasn't enough for God just to love this world, but he so loved this world. And I have to confess that no matter how much we look at the love of God, to a lost and to a sinful world, we will never tire of its endless beauty and its unfathomable depths.

How can we understand this love? How can infinite creatures governed by space and time understand the infinite, inestimable, immeasurable love of God?

How can we comprehend these things? We can't. We can't. Because there are depths of that love that we cannot and will not ever enter into our understand.

[ 27 : 17 ] And is that not what the Apostle Paul said himself? After considering the depths of theology and the character of God and the wisdom of God and the redemptive purposes of God, all he could do is stand back away from it and say, oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out.

We'll never understand it all. We'll never enter into it all. But we'll never even know it all. But it's to accept it as truth. That's what's fundamental.

It was in the 1970s that Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian who devoted his life to the study of theology, a story that's maybe often told, and it said that on his deathbed, after spending so much time in the depths of doctrine and the study of the Bible, he was asked what was the most profound thing he had ever learned in all his years of study.

His reply was short and simple. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

And that's all we need to know in this life, that God so loved that he gave, that the ignorance of man was met by the immeasurable love of God.

[ 28 : 49 ] And therefore, this action of God requires our immediate response, that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

The purpose of God's great act of redemption in sending his own Son is that man should not perish, but have eternal life.

Eternal death cannot reign in the life of a sinful man if their trust is in Jesus Christ alone. And our response to this act of redemption is addressed to everyone, whosoever.

Now that includes everyone and excludes no one. And the offer is as wide as it is possible, whoever, whosoever, whether Jew or Gentile, whether religious or not, good or bad, male or female, rich or poor, young or old, whatever situation they are in life, Jesus is for everyone.

And this is so important that no one in this audience today or in any audience where the gospel is preached or even any audience where the gospel is not preached, they are not exempt from this offer.

[ 30 : 11 ] And that, this Jesus cannot reach them and whom for this Jesus cannot be a saviour for them. If Jesus can be a saviour for Nicodemus, he can be a saviour for every other religious person in the world today.

And this message is addressed to everyone. No one is left out. No one has an excuse for not being told. No one has an excuse for not coming to Christ. None of this perversion of the doctrine of God's sovereignty where you say, if I'm going to be saved, I will be saved.

Find me that text in Scripture. You'll never find it. But you will find the offer of eternal life as to whosoever.

It is as wide as it is possible. Wide as possible. But then, it's as narrow as possible. Whosoever believeth. You see, it's not enough to know the message and be told about the message and hear the message.

You must believe the message of the gospel that Jesus Christ came to die for sinners. That you are a sinner. That if you believe and confess that His blood cleanses you from all sin and that you are in desperate need of a saviour, you shall be saved.

[ 31 : 29 ] That's it. That's all there is to it. You don't have to change your life and try and stop doing things before committing yourself to Christ. You just come. And you ask Him and He will help you change.

He will get rid of all your bad habits. Don't wait. Don't put it off. Just come. Because this message is for everyone. For everyone. Some even like to put their name in the place of certain words of this

verse in order to emphasize the love of God towards them personally.

This thought was also around in John Newton's day where he considered this text and said to himself, For God so loved John Newton that He gave His only begotten Son that if John Newton should believe in Him, John Newton would not perish but have everlasting life.

But the problem John Newton had with that, with doing that was what if there was another man called John Newton and the other John Newton was saved and this John Newton was lost.

But this text doesn't give any names. It's whosoever. And as I know what Jesus said time and time again, whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst again.

[ 32 : 57 ] Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before his Father in heaven. Whosoever shall save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for my sake the same shall save it.

I am come a light into the world that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Whosoever will, let him come.

Whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have everlasting life. So what is it to perish? It is to lose all hope in Christ, all trust in God, all light in life, all peace in death, all joy, all bliss, all union with God to perish, my friend, is to enter into eternal death where it will never end and you'll be separated from God and continue in his presence of holiness forever.

For in hell, my friend, you'll be dying but never dead. Dying but never dead. It'll go on and on and on.

But the gospel says that this shall never happen to you if you believe in Christ and lay hold of this glorious gospel that Christ has come, that Christ has died, that Christ has risen again for sinners and whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

[ 34 : 35 ] Is there a better message in all the world? Is there a better message addressed to all the world today? And you might be a Christian sitting here thinking, well, what does this have to do with me?

My friend, out those doors is where you've got to tell this message. You might think it's for the unconverted, the whosoever, but the whosoever is in your workplace, the whosoever sits beside you as you study, the whosoever is one that sits across from you at the desk.

The whosoever is the one that you must bring this message to. And what could be more important to their undying soul?

What could be more clearer than this message, this one verse that tells us all that we need to know? What is the Bible all about?

John 3, 16. What's the gospel all about? John 3, 16. What's the good news that must be shared with everyone?

[ 35 : 43 ] John 3, 16. What's the point to this book that we read in this place, Lord's Day after Lord's Day? John 3, 16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

And what use is this message of hope to the city of Aberdeen if no one knows about it? Because as a church we must go.

As a church we need to go. As a church we are commanded to go. To go into all the world and preach the gospel. And if this verse is everyone's text then we must go and tell them.

We must go and tell them. We must go and tell them that there is a heaven to be gained and that there is a hell to be shunned. For if our gospel be hid it is only hid to them that are lost.

[ 36 : 48 ] If our gospel be hid it is only hid to them that are lost. That the ignorance of man it has been met by the immeasurable love of God in Jesus Christ and it requires our immediate response that except a man be born again he cannot he will not.

It is impossible. for him to enter into the kingdom of God. Therefore my friend if you are without Christ you must you must you must be born again.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Psalms in Psalm 103 Psalm 103 on page 135 from verse 8 down to the end of the psalm.

Psalm 103 from verse 8 The Lord is merciful and kind to anger slow and full of grace he will not constantly reprove or in his anger hide his face he does not punish our misdeeds or give our sins their just reward how great his love as high as heaven towards all those who fear the Lord.

We sing from verse 8 down to the end of the psalm The Lord is merciful and kind to anger slow and full of grace to the tune before the throne to God's praise.

[ 38 : 26 ] The Lord is merciful and kind to anger slow and full of grace he will not constantly reprove or in his anger hide his face he does not punish our misdeeds forgive our sins their just reward the greatest love as high as heaven towards all those who fear the Lord towards all those who fear the Lord as far as east is from the west so far his love has borne away our many sins and trespassers and all the guilt that o'er us lay just as the Father loves his child so God loves those who fear his pain for he remembers we are dust and well he rose our feet oh friend and well he rose our feet oh friend he rose oh friend he rose oh friend each human life is like the grass and like a meadow clouded cross this place will never be recalled and so where in the tent and so but everlasting is God's love for those who fear him and they see for those who keep his covenant and carefully his peace says he and carefully his peace sets he his love and he will never see what seemly ruin his world in heaven he has set his throne oh you his angels praise the Lord so once by whom his will is done oh praise the Lord you heavenly host his servants who bear from his word praise all his words throughout his breath and hear my soul oh praise the Lord and hear my soul oh praise the Lord the Lord gracious God we ask that grace mercy and peace from God the Father

Son and Holy Spirit may rest and remain with us all both now and forevermore amen to the and to the who in the and and the and to the and and and and and and and and and