
THREE REASONS TO NOT LIKE JOHN 3:16

For GOD so loved the world that HE gave HIS one and only SON, that whoever believes in HIM shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:16 is perhaps the most iconic and oft-quoted verse in Scripture.

- It's the verse that we see on posters at sporting events.
- It's the verse more than any other that Christians can quote.
- It's the "Bible in a nutshell."
 - And that led me to ponder, "What I could say about this gospel reading that might be new and fresh?"

But in the interest of full disclosure, it occurs to me that if we look at this verse more closely, we might find that it's not all that we like to think it is.

- In fact, it might just prove for some to be their least favorite verse, and let me suggest three reasons why:

First, the bottom line is that GOD is fundamentally a GOD of love.

- Love is the operating system by which the Kingdom of GOD runs.
 - GOD's love trumps everything else.

I realize not everyone reads it this way.

- After all, JESUS says, "...everyone who believes..." will inherit eternal life.
- But what does that suggest for those who don't believe in JESUS?
 - Or don't believe in JESUS the same way you do?
 - Or...?

St. Peter takes a man on a tour of heaven.

- He points out the Methodist region, the Baptist section, the Roman Catholic area, and so on until they come to a huge wall.
 - "What's this?" the man asks. "I haven't seen any other walls up here."
- "Keep your voice down," Peter says. "That's the Lutheran area behind there, and they think they're the only ones up here."

Truthfully, most of us don't think this way, but there are Christians who spend a great deal of time talking about who's getting in, who isn't, and why.

- Without intending to, they are acting as sort of gatekeepers for who is given entry and allowed to live in GOD's house.

But look at v. 17: *For GOD did not send HIS SON into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through HIM.* Period.

- Now, I'm not advocating universal salvation that claims that everyone goes to heaven.
 - But if you like to point fingers at others and argue that they're out (and thereby argue why you're in), you're not going to like John 3:16.
 - Because the message of this verse is that GOD comes in love to redeem our loss, turn our tragedy into victory, and demonstrate true power through vulnerability and sacrifice.
 - Our GOD comes, not to condemn, but to save through the gift of unconditional love received through faith alone.

So, if you want to decide who gets saved and who doesn't, you're not going to like John 3:16.

And that leads to the second reason you might not like John 3:16: self-sacrificing love.

- I said a moment ago that GOD's true power is demonstrated through sheer vulnerability and sacrifice.

If we really stop to think about it, our world—and in many cases our lives—operates according to the belief that security comes through power and might.

- And while we probably don't go around wearing t-shirts that say "MIGHT MAKES RIGHT," we tend to live according to that idea.
- We live in a world that seeks security not only through power but also through wealth and influence.
 - We are taught at a very early age to avoid vulnerability at all costs.
 - So, sacrifice? Perhaps when we can afford to.
 - Love enemies? Maybe if we're sure we're safe from them.
 - Vulnerability? Only if there's no other choice.

The self-sacrificing love that JESUS offers is frightening to such a world,

- because it calls us to trust nothing other than GOD.
 - It's no wonder some run from it.
- Most of us find it hard to adopt JESUS' example of complete vulnerability and trust in GOD,
 - except when we are brought low by illness, or loss, or brokenness, or disappointment,
 - or in some other way that the world has taught us to avoid and reject.
- Yet, it is in these moments that we will find that GOD's love, shown in CHRIST JESUS, is the only thing that can truly secure our destiny and save our lives.

So, if you love and strive for the power and security that this world offers, you're not going to like John 3:16.

The third reason you may not like John 3:16 is because of GOD's claim on us.

- Notice that GOD doesn't first ask our permission or preference before sending JESUS to die for us.

Now, that may seem an odd detail to point out.

- But think of the claim a person has on us once they've saved our life,
 - let alone died doing it.
- In the face of such sacrifice, such love, we must surrender our claims on anything else.
 - We belong to the ONE who gave HIS life for us.

A father was putting his six-year-old son Benjamin to bed earlier than Benjamin wanted to go.

- Benjamin said, "Daddy, I hate you."
 - Benjamin's father exercised parental wisdom and replied, "Ben, I'm sorry you feel that way, but I love you.
- Benjamin's response to such gracious words surprised his father.
 - "Don't say that!"
 - I'm sorry, Ben, but it's true. I love you."
 - "Don't," the boy protested. "Don't say that again."
 - At which Benjamin's father increased the force of his message.
 - "Benjamin, I love you...like it or not."

Why was Benjamin protesting his father's love?

- Because he sensed he could not control his father or his father's love and twist it to his own advantage.
 - You see, in the face of such love, there is no bargaining and ultimately, no control whatsoever.

If his dad had said he could stay up later if he ate all his vegetables, or agreed that Ben could stay up later this night if he went to bed earlier the next, then Ben would have had some control over the situation.

- But in the face of unconditional love, he—and we, for that matter—are powerless.
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I think most of us like to have some control over what happens in life.

- But when GOD shows unconditional love by giving JESUS for us, the only control we have is to accept GOD's love or not.
 - We cannot influence it, manipulate it, or determine when or how it is given.
- There is nothing you can do to make GOD love you more.
- There is nothing you can do to make GOD love you less.
- GOD's love is unconditional, impartial, and everlasting.
 - All you can do is run from it, or not.

And if you choose to run, to reject GOD's love, you should also know that this love is tenacious.

- GOD's love will continue to pursue you, seeking to hold on to you and redeem you all the days of your lives.
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So, if it's important to you that some who don't meet your standards or values are condemned, or if you don't like the idea that there is tremendous power in vulnerability, or if you want more control over GOD's love and how and when you get to receive it,

- then you are not going to like John 3:16.
 - But no matter what you want, or how you feel about John 3:16, it will not change one very important thing:
 - GOD loves you...like it or not.