

Advent 2022: Love - John 3:16-17

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[0:00] Good morning. Please turn in your copy of God's Word to John chapter 3. John chapter 3.! In the past couple of days, my voice has been going in and out.

! And so I've tried Thieves Tea, I've tried Elderberry, I've tried Firesider, and if you know what those three things are, that tells you a lot about who you are.

So, including myself and my wife. So, today we'll be looking at John chapter 3. I'll be reading 1 through 17, but there are only two verses in this time that we'll be taking a look at.

So, join me and I will be reading in chapter 3 of John, verse 1. Now, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God.

No one, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. Jesus answered him, truly, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

[1:23] Nicodemus said to him, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, truly, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus said to him, how can these things be? Jesus answered him, are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 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. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. So really, if you're going to shrink this thing down from 13, where it says, no one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 and 15 explain that, and so do 16 and 17. So you have recurring words. In just 16 and 17, what we'll be looking at specifically this morning, you have God, and you have Son, the Son, and you have world and those who believe, and you have these recurring themes. And John, what makes John's gospel so easy to read is because he uses the same words, same characters over and over and over again. There's repetition, there's patterns, and we'll even see that as we go through 16 and 17.

So if you have your notes, if you write things down, on the back of the bulletin, there's actually some space to write something down if you want, because if you write it down, you'll see that 16 and 17 flow very beautifully, and they preach themselves. So that's our goal this morning. But if you're holding a baby like I usually am, I'm going to repeat myself, just like John, so that you will get the main point and outline just by repetition. So if you're writing something down, I'll end with this.

[4:29] B, there's three points. God loved, and that's his, God loved the world. That's the first point, God loved.

Two, God gave his Son. Second point, and the verses under that would be that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. That's the second point, God gave his Son. Third and last point is God sent his Son, and that includes all of 17. So the Gospel of John, and John specifically, uses the word for love more times in his Gospel than all the rest of the Gospels combined. So it's an easy pointing to, you can point to the Gospel of John, the first John, for the advent of love this morning. Pretty easy, but this is a major theme in his Gospel. And John reuses the same words over and over again, as seen in our text. Again, to remind you, there's repetition here. I want you to catch that. And for context, before we begin, know that it's Jesus talking to Nicodemus, and that will become more and more important as we go on. Because my goal for this is that for you to not look at, especially verse 16 as a bumper sticker, or a billboard. I want you to have a fresh take on

John 3.16. And part of this is I want you to take John 3.16 together with verse 17. So instead of a period at the end of 16, I want you to put a comma. And I'll show you why I do that as we go on. So first off, first thing that you may, may, maybe not disagree with me, but for God so loved the world is where it begins, right? Well, if you notice, if you have an ESV textbook, Bible, there's a footnote.

It's like a textbook, right? They have footnotes. And the footnotes are very important. Example, perfect example of this, is there's a footnote after the world. Because they say, for this is how God loved the world. And so maybe for God so loved the world that that emphasizes the intensity of God's love, which may be a part of it, but it's not the main emphasis that should be in the text. It's, for this is how God loved the world. So that's, that's an important point, because it's linking, that word is linking back to 14 and 15, describing verse 13. Hopefully it makes sense. But it's, I propose to you that is, for this is how, or for in this way. It's not intensity, but it's a manner in which, or a way something has been done.

[7:38] So what this is, is in the, if we look at 14 and 15, he talks about a serpent. And he talks about Moses. And this comes from Numbers 21, verses 4 and 9, or 4 through 9, about the bronze serpent. And so for background, for story, for the background, I'll read you that story. You can turn with me if you want. But for Numbers 20, chapter 21, verse 4 through 9, there's a small story in Numbers that John, or that Jesus uses to lead to what he says in our text today in 16 and 17, to point to himself. So it's important for us to get that context. So Numbers chapter 21, verses 4 through 9. From Mount Hor, they set out by the way to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. This is Israel. And the people became impatient on the way, and the people spoke against God and against Moses. Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food. Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to

Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole. And everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.

So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. And flip back to John chapter 3, 14 and 15. 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. So that's all introduction to the next two verses, 16 and 17. So for our first point, God loved. God loved the world. We already said, For in this way, that's an introduction. First point, God loved. God loved the world. This is the heart and the center of the text. We could say the next few points are sub-points of this main point, is God loved, which is our theme for Advent this morning, is love. The Advent of love and God loved. And we'll see how and why God loved. So talk about grammar here. You have, for a sentence, you have a verb and you have a subject and you have a direct object.

You don't have to have that direct object, but you have a verb and a subject. And we have that here. The verb is loved. And I, again, this is a popular word for John to use. He uses it over and over.

And this describes what God did and what he continues to do. He loved. And that's connected to the subject, God. God loved. The God of Moses is the same God here. In Numbers 21, John chapter 3 is the same God.

[11:06] And this is important for Nicodemus because he's speaking to a specific person. And that's easy to be lost in. We can always forget about that because there's a break here, but it's in a conversation with Nicodemus. And he is a ruler of Israel, and that's important. And the direct object is the world.

So very simple. It's very basic. And it's no wonder why this verse is so popular. But it's God loved the world. So we have to ask, who is the world? So this gets, the world is pretty vague, right? So we have to do work to define the world well. And does the world mean everyone in the world without exception? Is it without exception? Everyone ever? It doesn't seem that way because in the exact same verse, there's a limitation. That would mean that Christ died for everyone without exception. And as we get into the verses, even in 16, later half 16 and 17, we'll see that cannot be true because you have this idea of potentially true and actually true.

Potentiality and actuality. And we'll see this a couple more times before the end. Those who believe in Christ are secure by his blood because this doesn't mean all without exception.

That means all without distinction. All without distinction. It's important to note that. So D.A. Carson in his John commentary defines world as created human order in rebellion against its maker. See how specifically John uses it. And he takes that. How does John use the world in other places? It's never positive. It's almost always negative. Sometimes it's neutral. The world, when he uses that. That's important. So what this means is for Nicodemus, notice that what he doesn't say, what Jesus doesn't say, Jesus doesn't say God loved Israel. He does not say that. He says God loved Jew and Gentile alike.

[13:37] That's what that means. That is a big pivot for not only Nicodemus, but for the gospel as we see this transition from Israel to the Jew and Gentile alike. That's important. So the questions we should ask, how should we love the world? Or how should we love our neighbor? We should mirror the character of God, and we can use this text as a model for that. We can look at how God loved, and we likewise preach the gospel to all people without distinction. Careful to preach the gospel to all peoples without distinction.

The world needs to hear God loves the world through his son. The world needs to hear the gospel. And so as we move on to the second point, we have God loved. God gave. Second point. So that he gave his only son.

This could be rendered so that he gave his only son. But this shows how God loved the world. This is the how portion. We'll get into the why in the next portion. But this is how God loved the world. And so another thing that you should note about your text is it could only, or you may have in your text, only begotten.

God emphasizes the uniqueness of his son. Has uniqueness in mind. So that's the key word there. Only, only begotten emphasizes uniqueness. So only his unique son he gave.

Because he loved the world. It was then God gave the serpent to Israel in Numbers 21. That was then. And then now God gave his son to the world. See the shift that's happening?

[15:53] Even in Nicodemus' interaction, like this is towards the end of his interaction with Jesus, you never know what Jesus is going to say. If you just read through it on your own, he doesn't have, Nicodemus doesn't come to him with a question. He comes with a statement.

And then I'm sure Nicodemus is super confused where he's going, and especially where he ends up in our verses here. So then it was Israel God gave the serpent to, but now God gave his son to the world.

It's important to see that shift. And then now to the why. That whoever believes in him, that's the why. The why God loved the world.

And so it could be rendered in order that everyone who believes in him could be rendered that way. The why of loving God, of God loving the world. Remember, it's not everyone without exception, but it's in him.

That's an important connection, because that's connecting in him with the last words of 17. In him, now, through him at the very end.

[17:14] Now verse 17. In Christ alone. The display of the love of God to us in Christ alone.

And now there's a point and a counterpoint set where it's not this, but that. That's next. Should not perish, but have eternal life. This is not this, but that.

There's another point and a counterpoint set later. But here's the first one. Again, a repetition. Not perish, but have eternal life.

And that's hinging on believing in Christ alone. Not destruction for those who believe, but eternal life for those who believe.

Not this, but that. Again, this is not a potentially true statement. It is a certainly true statement.

[18:17] It is not potentially true. It's actually true that whoever believes in Christ alone will have eternal life. Those who believe in Christ are secure by his blood.

And we can say this with certainty. So we could go many different directions in the application of this point here that God gave his son.

But let's just take husbands. I'm talking to you. So does your love reflect the kind of love God has demonstrated? Do you love your wife in a way that glorifies God?

This could feel overwhelming. And I know it does for me to live up to this high standard. But we think about even we are always thinking about, it seems like in speaking about Ephesians 5.25, where Paul writes the command from Paul to love your wife just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

It seems overwhelming. But I'm giving this to you husbands, using and thinking and meditating on John 3.16 and 17, to use this as a model and encouragement that we should look to God for the way we should love our neighbor and our closest neighbor, our wife.

[19:47] We are called in the testament to love our wives and our wives to respect their husbands. So it's not love, love. It's for us to love our wives.

And that's important for our text today. And so this is a reminder of the triune God's sacrificial love to his people, John 3.16 is.

And so we as husbands are commanded to sacrificially love our wife and our children as the triune God has loved us.

And 3.16 is a model for that and how we can do that. In Stuart Scott's massive book, talking about overwhelming, but it's big, The Exemplary Husband, he defines love.

And I'll give you his definition of love. Biblical love is a selfless and enduring commitment of the will to care about and benefit another person.

[20:52] By righteous, truthful, and compassionate thoughts, words, and actions. Think about that. I'll repeat it. The book of love is a selfless and enduring commitment of the will to care about and benefit another person by righteous, truthful, and compassionate thoughts, words, and actions.

It reminds me of looking to God and his son in the giving and the love. The hymn, there's a hymn, it's titled, Though a Church is One Foundation.

And they have this line. It's beautiful. I love it. There's a line that says, From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride.

From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride. Husbands, let our love reflect the way God has loved us through his son.

All right, third point. God sent. God sent his son. And under this point is all of verse 17. And this entire verse is a point, counterpoint.

[22:10] Not this, but that, set. And it's another, it's the second how God loved the world. This is a second how. For God did not send his son.

This is the how. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world. Or it could be rendered into the world in order that he might condemn the world.

But in order that the world might be saved. He did not send his son into the world to condemn the world. But in order that the world might be saved.

In order that the world might be saved is the second why God loved the world. There's two hows and there's two whys.

And again, but in order that the world might be saved. Now this is a potential. There is potentiality here.

[23:14] The world might be saved is a potential. But the last two words. Through him. This makes what was potential into actual.

Only through his son. Through Christ alone. Can the world be saved. And so the potential. The potentiality has crossed over into actuality.

Through the blood. Of Christ. Those who believe in Christ. Are secure. By his blood. By the son's blood.

By Christ alone's blood. By the son's blood. So in conclusion. God loved the world. God gave his son.

And God sent his son. Because God loved the world. Pray with me.