

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

The Incentive and the Extent Behind God's Saving Grace

Introduction

This morning we are going to start a mini-series on John 3:16. What is the big deal about this verse that makes it so popular? No other verse in the Bible so succinctly summarizes God's relationship with humanity and the way of salvation. Some consider [John 3:16](#) as the "theme verse" for the entire Bible.

"Commentators are divided as to whether vv. 16-21 are a direct continuation of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus or whether they represent only the author's comment on Jesus' words. In either case, they express the most important message of the Gospel (emphasized elsewhere in many ways)-that salvation is a gift received only by believing God for it."¹

"Verse 16 of John 3 is surely the best-known verse in the New Testament. Many Bible versions put this verse in red to indicate that these words were spoken by Jesus. In my opinion, this verse should not be in red . . . It's difficult to tell where in this chapter Jesus' words end and John's editorial comments begin, but most commentators see John 3:16 as written by John, and I agree with that assessment."²

Text: My text is the first part of the most familiar verse in the Bible. It is this:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16, ESV).

Our focus is those two little words in this first part of the verse that are amazingly important to our understanding of the Gospel. The first word is the word "for". The second little word that is earth-shattering important is the word "so".

What is the "For" there "for"?

That word "for" is written to provide an explanation as to what has just been written. "For" connects to v.15 and explains what would motivate a holy, transcendent, glorious God to come and suffer and die; and why God would give eternal life to those who simply believe on Him. What have we learned about salvation in this conversation with Nicodemus, so far? Let me summarize:

¹ *Expositor's Bible Commentary, The*, Pradis CD-ROM:John/Exposition of John/II. The Public Ministry of the Word (1:19-12:50)/A. The Beginning Ministry (1:19-4:54)/6. The interview with Nicodemus (2:23-3:21)/b. The author's comment (3:16-21), Book Version: 4.0.2

² R. C. Sproul. *John (St. Andrew's Expository Commentary)* (Kindle Locations 670-673). Kindle Edition.

1. Jesus has stated with repetition that the salvation of anyone and everyone occurs “through” the New Birth of the Spirit.
2. Secondly, Jesus has affirmed that salvation occurs to those who believe – who believe His testimony. He is the Son of Man come from heaven with divine authority.
3. Thirdly, Jesus shows us that salvation occurs because of the death, burial and resurrection of this Son of Man, the Christ of God.

What in the world would motivate God to show mercy to sinners like us? Why would God, who is under no obligation, provide a sacrifice for sins through His own Son; cause us to be born from above and give eternal life based on faith – and faith alone? Why? This is the question answered by the little word “for”. From now on when you recite the word “for” in John 3:16 we need to be thinking:

- Why would a holy God seek out sinners and sovereignly, by his own initiative and grace, create in them a heart that loves Him and seeks to obey Him? Why?
- Why would a holy God dispatch His glorious Son to take on the form of a servant, be born in the likeness of men and humble himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:7–8)? Why?
- And why would a holy, righteous God grant eternal life to those who simply and only place their faith in His Son? Why?

The evangelist and songwriter John Moore penned these words:

1. Why did they nail him to Calvary’s tree;
Why, tell me why was he there?
Jesus the helper, the healer, the friend,
Why, tell me why was he there?

CHORUS:
All my iniquities on him were laid;
He nailed them all to the tree.
Jesus, the debt of my sin fully paid,
He paid the ransom for me.

2. Why should he love me a sinner undone;
Why, tell me why should he care?
I do not merit the love he has shown.
Why, tell me why should he care?

Oh, the riches and wonder of that little word “for”.

What is the “So” there “for”?

“For God **SO** loved,” our text says. It becomes readily obvious to us that this little word “so” speaks of degree or intensity. It’s like we might say, “The fire in the furnace was “so” hot.” It clearly emphasizes the degree of God’s love. Please notice a few things about this love.

The verse proclaims that “God so loved”. You read the tense accurately, when you see that it is past. But in Greek it is aorist, meaning past and completed. It is also in the indicative meaning it is a fact. This is so profound. From the moment we are born, sinful in nature and in behavior, God so loved us – loved humans – sinful humans. It is a given, accomplished fact. Listen to the Word of God:

- *“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8, ESV)*
- *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—” (Ephesians 2:4–5, ESV)*
- *“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:9–10, ESV)*

John Calvin has suffered much slander at the hands of his opponents. But please note what this man writes who has suffered much inaccuracy says, “Both points are distinctly stated to us: namely, that faith in Christ brings life to all, and that Christ brought life, because the Heavenly Father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish.”³ Please understand that I can say without fear of contradiction that the God of heaven and earth has loved humanity with such intensity that he sent the Son of Man to come and be lifted up, so that the people of this earth would not perish. **When we wonder why Christ would come and die for sinners, the answer is summed up in the word “for” – for He loved. When we wonder how much he loves sinners it is summed up in the word “so”.**

Application

Let me just offer, in conclusion, two side notes for all the deep thinkers out there. I have not the time nor the ambition to unpack these points here, mainly because the text does not. But I say with all the biblical conviction that I can muster these 2 things:

- a) The fact that God loves sinful humanity and is not willing for any to perish DOES NOT stand in contradiction to either God’s sovereign election; and
- b) The fact that God loves sinful humanity and is not willing for any to perish DOES NOT stand in contradiction to God’s holy wrath.

Another day and another time will address that. What is important for us to focus on in this message is this reality: **God’s love does not save you.** There are literally multitudes of people that believe that the world can be saved by the love of God. You might be here this morning and that’s what you believe. I

³ <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/john/3.htm>

invite you to repent and believe the Gospel, but you refuse. You say, "It's going to be OK, God is a God of love." People misuse this aspect of God's love, when they claim everyone will go to heaven regardless of what they do or who they believe in.

Salvation comes to those who believe and obey the Gospel. God's love is the motive of the Gospel, not the means of the Gospel. God's love is never separate or in violation to His justice, righteousness or holiness. But God in His great love has sent His Son to be our Savior and if we believe in Him, we will not perish but have eternal life. The question that humanity must face this morning is this: "*how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation*" (Hebrews 2:3a, ESV)?