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“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

JOHN 3

¹⁶For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.



No other verse presents the Gospel in its simplicity as this verse does. No other verse is so memorized by millions as this verse. No other verse has been used to bring people to Jesus Christ like John 3:16. It's full, so full, of essential biblical truth that, if this were the only verse we had left in the Bible, we could find our way to the Father in heaven forever. We could still find forgiveness of sins and salvation. Twenty-five words can change a person, change a life, change a home, change a church. Welcome to the Mt. Everest of hope, the Mississippi River of grace, the Pacific ocean of love, the beating heart of God's good news.

How do you figure all these things about this verse? It was made with love. I repeat: The world's salvation was made with love. This helps with even the tiniest gift, because, where love and friendship dwell, the gift is not looked at nearly as much as the heart. God is our Three-in-One God—one God, three Persons, One heart, meaning one singular salvation purpose. Where we fail, this Supreme Being succeeds. Today we soak in this verse as ...

THE BEATING HEART OF GOD'S GOOD NEWS

We want to learn 1) the love that goes into God's saving work, and 2) the universality of it.

1. The love that goes into God's saving work

You can barely take John 3:16 out of context, but it would be wise to notice when and where it was said. Jesus was teaching a teacher (again), which He had been doing since boyhood. Even in the temple, boy Jesus had taught the teachers. This time, however, it was one-on-one, and He met with a teacher of the Law named Nicodemus. Jesus highlights our special verse for today as a

teaching from heaven that Nicodemus should have known. The very meeting, however, was ***late at night and in secret***. Why?

This was because of the world. Nicodemus was one man, frightened by a world of men. As a friend of Jesus, Nicodemus did not know who threatened his health. And the writer of our account, John, explains this world rather often. John used the word “world” (*cosmos*) more than any other New Testament writer. It’s not even close, like 105x in John to 79x from all the other writers combined. “World” means “the known world extending to the unknown world wherever there are people.” Often John used *cosmos* in the context of sin: The world refuses to recognize true God made true man at Christmas in John 1:10; the world is in love with darkness in John 3:19-20; the world hates those who belong to Christ in John 17:3; the world requires aggressive action on God’s part if it is to have any chance; the world appeals to believing hearts and naturally threatens the love of God residing there. God’s perfectly ordered human world has gone sinfully mad and disordered as it rages against its Creator.

And it is upon “the world” that God declares His active and saving love—just for “the world.” Because of what God saw when He looked down upon the world of humanity, Jesus Christ paid the price. This determined and heroic act on the part of Jesus Christ was the Father’s answer to the need of all humanity He observes when He looks upon the children of men today. When God views with a sweeping glance the nations of the world, He discovers that people who, by reason of today’s means of technology, communication, and transportation have become next-door neighbors to one another; that people are thoroughly aware of one another’s needs and heartaches; that people, who by reason of their social standing do understand better than any foregoing generation the inescapability of human interdependence ... people still hate one another, envy one another, and in the spirit of undisguised selfishness and undiluted greed are at each other’s throats like snarling hellhounds. “*Men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil*” (v. 19). “*Sinful flesh gives birth to sinful flesh*” (v. 6). Disjointed hearts, divided persons, and ...

Not a person in all the nations of the world can solve it.

“Now wait a minute, preacher, how could you say that? I happen to be one of those people, and I happen to have a family made up of a few people!” Yet if God focuses His eyes somewhat more closely and looks within the *cosmos* upon the individual home—your home—what then does He see? Only too often the

sight is one which does not delight the eye, for more arguments take place behind closed doors than we would dare to share among our church friends. Too numerous are the instances when parents are irritated by the presence of children and children are openly disrespectful of their parents. What should be a haven of refuge and peace—what should only sound like “home sweet home”—only too often is converted into a place of strife and bitterness where the ugliest traits of human character are allowed to run their full range without constraint.

But now if God focuses His sight still more closely and looks not upon a family but upon the individual soul, upon you, what does He see then? When He looks into your heart and explores the deepest recesses of your soul, what does He behold? Love? Purity? Selflessness? Or is He more likely to find the very opposite? (You can answer that question honestly. Don't worry, no need to raise your hands.) Hatred. Rage. Spite. Gossip. Greed. Theft. Robbery. Worse?

These are sins. They were brought into the world from an outside Enemy. It may seem that they are harmless at times, and, even if harmful to others, harmless to ourselves. But they lead to ultimate death.

2. [The universality of God's saving work.] So the Father formed the most sacrificial plan for our salvation. It started out as an impulse in Him, a clemency and willingness to cancel punishment; then it turned into a point-by-point plan, uttered in inspired prophecies shaded with nuance, detailed this way and that like puzzle pieces scattered over the carpet of time; then it became something you could spell out in a whisper, but only at night. Finally it became a Lenten reality, an actuality, a horror of horrors that the Son of God suffered. Jesus Christ was tortured and died in order that He might pay for your sins. He met the enemies of your immortal soul in mortal combat so as to wrest you free from the clanking chains of spiritual slavery and death “that you might be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” That's because the horror ended in a sprawling friendship, a love, that embraces all.

If you need a price check on that aisle of love, if you think God's love isn't big enough to include you because of your great and terrible sins, look at the words before you! God outright states that He so loved “the world,” that He “so loved the world,” and that “whoever believes in Him.” He wasn't talking about cows and geese. “The world” does not mean King David, saints Peter and Paul, and Mary the mother of God, but the entire human race all together. No one is

excluded here. God's Son was given for all. *All* should believe, and *all* who do believe should not perish. Check your own nose to determine whether you are (or are not) a human being (that is, a part of "the world"), and, like any other human, belong to the number of those comprised by ALL. If you and I did not have to apply these words to ourselves, they must have been spoken falsely and in vain. Don't leave yourself out. Don't exclude yourself and give place to thoughts like: "Who really knows if God's love is given to little me?" This would be charging God with a lie in His Word. Instead, think of what Jesus was given over to death, and repeat: "Although I'm not St. Peter or Paul, King David, or Mary; I am, after all, part of the world."

The *cosmos* hurts because of its sin. So God feels with you, part of the *cosmos*, in your every need. It's as if invisible strings going out from you were attached to the heart of Jesus. Each pain you suffer, each sorrow you bear is a tug at these heart strings, producing a sympathetic response in the heart of Jesus Christ. He feels for you and is ready to help you as He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, fed the hungry, and blessed the little ones in the brief days of His life. He wanted to embrace those who are deaf, weak, unlearned, ungrateful, and thoroughly useless. Jesus Christ in love embraces all without making a distinction—even His enemies. He loves as brothers those unworthy of love.

Jesus went not only part of the way, but all the way. He suffered all of it, even death, a disgraceful and dishonorable death on an instrument of torture, a cross. He went to death so that you did not need to go. He died so that you did not need to die. Put your trust in Him and commit yourself body, mind, and soul into His care. Learn of Him as your Savior ... and then live. Live so courageously and fearlessly that you close your eyes one day in the sleep of death. For you know that through Him you will safely pass through the dark valley into the realms of light, life, and everlasting salvation.

It started out as an impulse and feeling, then turned into a quiet hope, then a plan uttered in prophecies, then a whisper you could spell out, but only at night ... Then it grew out, louder and louder, until it was our battle cry! **For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life!** There are no other words. Amen.