

THE GOSPEL OF

JOHN

Read the
Word!

INTRODUCTION

John 3:1-21

In 1991, during the end of summer vacation, getting ready for my junior year of high school, a neighbor friend came home from Family & Youth Bible Camp on fire for Jesus Christ. When she walked into her kitchen, where a group of high school kids sat, she started right in to tell each of us how Jesus died for our sins and how we could have salvation if we bowed our knee to Him. Everyone laughed and walked out of the room; everyone but me, that is. I stayed and asked follow-up questions, and that night I submitted to the King of kings, and He changed my eternity forever! Even though the Lord plucked foul language from my mouth that night, nothing else really changed. Fast forward three years, and I found myself sitting in the living room on a long weekend home from MacMurray College. While my brother, Jeff, and I sat watching the Chicago Bears on that Sunday afternoon, we witnessed Kevin Butler kick one of his 21 field goals of the year; in the crowd, a guy was holding a large white sign that had the words “John 3:16” written on them. Knowing that I was confidently proclaiming that I was a Christian, my brother asked me a question that has had a significant effect on me since that moment. He asked, “What does John 3:16 mean?” Now, every Sunday school student and even many adults, Christian or not, can give you the gist of John 3:16. However, I had no earthly idea of what that verse said as I sat on that couch. I remembered that my Grandmother had given me a Bible for Christmas about five years before this moment. I went to the shelf, dusting off the layers of dust accumulated over the years, and opened the New King James Holy Bible. I didn’t know where to find it but was smart enough to realize that there might be an index at the beginning. Bingo! I found the index and found John...but then I got confused when I saw a few other books titled John. I tried the first one in the list and found the third chapter, and then I started reading out loud to my brother, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”¹



I don’t remember who won the football game. I don’t know what I ate or even what my brother’s response was to reading this single verse. I remember that the Holy Spirit summoned me to start studying His Word. When I returned to school, I started reading five chapters from the Bible nearly every day. By the time I reached my junior year of college, I had found myself attempting to retype the entire Bible (the computer program of the Bible cost too much, there was not an Internet version back then, and I could type pretty fast). I never finished retyping the Bible, but I did fall in love with the Word, and it has become my guide ever since.

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OPEN IT

1. Have you ever written a Bible verse reference on a sign, shoe, or something else to share God's message?

READ IT

John 3:1-21

EXPLORE IT

2. Who was Nicodemus a leader of? (v.1)
3. How can someone see the kingdom of God? (vv. 2-3)
4. How did God show His love for the people of the world? (v. 16)
5. Why did God send His Son into the world? (vv. 17-21)

APPLY IT

John 3 tells us that Nicodemus came to Jesus during the night and began speaking to Jesus. Instead of offering a greeting or even a question, he immediately started with a statement, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”²

Why would someone in the 1st century reading the words penned by John be so surprised that a man like Nicodemus would...

6. Come to meet with someone like Jesus?

7. Call Jesus Rabbi?

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In this third chapter, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that he needs to be born again, which he does not understand what the Master is teaching him, or he is just stubborn and unwilling to learn. Jesus goes on to explain that “...unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”³ The phrase born again has been redefined over the years to mean something other than its original meaning. John Piper explained in 2007, “...the term ‘born again’ refers to people who say things. They say, ‘I have a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. It’s important to me.’ They say, ‘I believe that I will go to heaven when I die. I have confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior.’⁴ John Calvin says, “Although there is nothing in the world deserving of God’s favour, He nevertheless shows He is favourable to the whole lost world when He calls all without exception to ... faith [in] Christ, which is indeed entry into life.”⁵

Being born again is a change of one’s heart, not on our own merits, but because of the call of God Himself. **Examine the following verses and explain why each of these verses helps us understand John 3:3 more clearly.**

8. Titus 3:5

9. 1 John 3:9

10. Romans 8:28

11. 1 Corinthians 1:23-24

³ ibid

⁴ Piper, J. (2007). You Must Be Born Again. Desiring God. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/you-must-be-born-again>.

⁵ John Calvin, The Gospel According to St John: 1–10, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker, Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 74.

Jesus refers to a story of when the people of Israel were sinning and going against God, and they turned to Moses, who turned to God to save the people from the killer snakes to parallel what the people needed to do with Him.

Read Numbers 21:4-9

12. Explain how these two passages parallel one another (See Numbers 21:8 and John 3:14-15).

All Words of Scripture are powerful and are God-breathed. However, there are few other verses in the entire 66 books located from Genesis to Revelation that contain the power words found in John 3:16. Below are four different versions (see footnotes), and the message is spoken very clearly in each one.

- “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”⁶
- “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.”⁷
- “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”⁸
- “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.”⁹

13. How has this specific Bible verse affected your life?

⁶ English Standard Version (ESV)

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⁷ New International Version (NIV)

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⁸ King James Version (KJV) Public Domain

⁹ New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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As people study John 3, they stop at the 16th verse because it serves as an excellent summary of the Gospel. However, John 3:17 shines a light on the fact that Jesus' purpose was not to come into this world for the Jews only. Nicodemus should have been reminded of Isaiah 49:6 when he heard these words by Jesus.

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”¹⁰

14. Why would someone like Nicodemus possibly feel threatened by verse 17 spoken by Jesus?

15. What does “...but whoever does not believe is condemned already”¹¹ mean?

In John 8, Jesus speaks to a group of Pharisees who want to kill a woman caught in the act of adultery. In response, after Jesus had told the one who had not sinned to cast the first stone, Jesus explains that He is the light, which is very similar to John 3:19-21. God says in Psalm 27:1 that He is the light. Earlier in John chapter 1, Jesus speaks of being the light (John 1:4-5). In contrast, Job 10:22, 1 Samuel 2:9, and Ephesians 5:8 talk about darkness.

16. Why does God contrast light and darkness so many times in scripture? Do you find that when it is dark that more evil seems to be lurking?

¹⁰ English Standard Version (ESV)

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¹¹ Ibid

This study was compiled and questions were written by Phil Chapman (Online Campus)—www.villagebible.church/smallgroup