

John 3:16

John 3:16

Slide 1

Have you ever noticed a John 3:16 sign at a sporting event or concert. In case you are wondering, that all started in 1980.

A guy by the name of Rollen Stewart had been making a name for himself by appearing at major sporting events wearing a rainbow-colored wig and dancing wildly for the cameras. He was known as the "Rainbow Man."

In 1980 following the Super Bowl, while Stewart was sitting in his hotel room watching a televangelist by the name of Charles Taylor, he committed his life to Christ. Shortly after that he decided to add the John 3:16 sign to his "Thing."

He travelled over 100,000 miles a year to various sporting events, including the Indianapolis 500, the Olympics, and the Super Bowl.

He even showed up at Prince Charles and Lady Diana's wedding, but it wasn't just Rollen and his sign.

Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow wore John 3:16 printed on his eye black while playing College Football.

When his team won the 2009 Bowl game, John 3:16 was the most googled term on the internet the next day.

Shortly after that the rules were changed, forbidding college football players from having words written in the eye black. This is sometimes called the "Tebow Rule."

And on January 8, 2012, exactly three years to the day from that College win, Tebow played his first NFL playoff game and led the Denver Broncos to victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Tebow threw for 316 yards. He averaged the highest single-game post-season completion average in NFL history; 31.6 yards per completion, and the second-quarter interception, the Bronco's took the lead on the third-and-16.

But it's not just football, pro-wrestler Steve Austin was known to wear a 3:16 shirt, and some Christian Businesses try to include it.

Christian owned "In and Out" Burgers use to place it on some of their cups, and it shows up on road signs every once in a while.

John 3:16 is probably the most memorized verse in the Bible. It's been called "The Gospel in a Nutshell."

Now understand, there's nothing magical about the numbers 3:16. Every Chapter 3, verse 16 in the Bible doesn't have something profound for us.

The system we have of Chapters and verses in the bible has only been around for the past 600 years or so and they're pretty arbitrary.

So, our first message comes from John 3:16. But like most verses in the bible, John 3:16 doesn't stand by itself, it's a part of a bigger story.

Prior to this, we see Jesus baptized by John; we watched as Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, and how He cleared the temple courts for the first time.

John 2 ends with these verses, *“Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.”*

Then Chapter 3 begins with these words, *“Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.”*

The next 21 verses chronicle the discussion that ensued between Jesus and Nicodemus. It's in this discussion that we read the words of John 3:16.

So, today we want to look at this verse and see what it's really about.

Slide 2

First, John 3:16 is about love.

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.”* What we first discover in this verse is the Person of this love.

How often do we hear about the wrath and anger of the Old Testament God and the love and grace of Jesus in the New Testament?

Somehow, we get the picture of a gentle, graceful Jesus rescuing us just in the nick of time from this grumpy Old Testament deity.

When we're challenged about events from the Old Testament that we can't explain or that embarrasses us, we blame that vengeful, jealous Old Testament God.

But seriously, is that a reality? Listen, there is no Old Testament God and New Testament God, there is only God.

Or perhaps we see God the Father and God the Son sitting around the heavenly strategy table and the Son saying, *“Well Dad, we tried it your way and it didn’t work, so let’s try it my way.”*

It’s almost like Jesus argued and finally persuaded the Father to try something different instead of being so judgmental and angry with the world. But that wasn’t it. Listen to how this verse begins, *“For God.”*

This was God’s idea, this was God’s love that’s spoken of in John 3:16, *“For God.”* We diminish the character and the love of God when we put Him in an Old Testament box or a New Testament Box.

Throughout the Old Testament we read about the unfailing love of God, the love that God has for His people and God’s everlasting love. The Person of this love is God.

Slide 3

The next thing we need to understand is the breadth of this love. God didn’t just love part of the world, He didn’t just love the loveable, He didn’t just love the obedient.

John 3:16 says, *“For God so loved the world.”* That’s not just a part of the world that’s all the world. It was for the world, not for a single nation or a single people group.

It wasn’t just for good people, and it wasn’t just for people who loved God. It was the whole world that God loved. The lovable and the unlovable, the lonely and the lost.

It was those who accepted the love of God and those who’ve rejected the love of God. Now this may be a little difficult to understand.

We’re sure that God loves us and our family, and the nice old lady next door who bakes us cookies and smiles at our kids.

But what about the terrorist or the jerk who cut us off in traffic or the old guy who yells at our kids for cutting through his yard, or the person with more than 10 items in the express line.

John 3:16 doesn't tell us that God loved nice people or lovable people, it says He loved all people.

That's everyone, regardless of their sexual preference, their race, their color, their religion, their personality, or even their political party.

Which is why we're told in Romans 5:8, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

When? While we were still sinners. That's the reality; God loved the world, this broken unregenerate world.

He loves it the way that parents love their rebellious child. It's a love of broken-hearted grief, but it's love.

Slide 4

Then we discover the depth of this love. John 3:16 doesn't just say, *"For God loved the world that He gave."* No, it says *"For God so loved the world."*

How much did God love the world? He loved the world so much, that He gave His one and only Son. Think about that. For whom would you willingly sacrifice one of your children?

There are many here that I would sacrifice myself for, but there isn't one of you for whom I would sacrifice one of my children.

But God loved the world so much, that He willingly gave up what meant more than His very existence.

Paul tells us in Romans 8:31-32, *“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”*

Slide 5

Which leads us to the next point in John 3:16, the acceptance of this love. This is where universalism breaks down.

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.”*

If the verse simply said *“everyone shall not perish but have eternal life,”* then it wouldn’t matter what you did, or how you behaved or what you believed.

But it doesn’t say “Everybody,” it says *“whoever believes in him.”* Believes in who? Believes in the Son.

John 3:18-20, *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.”*

That isn’t just an isolated statement. Salvation is offered to everybody, and salvation is like the sun, it provides light for everyone, but you have to open your eyes if you want to benefit from that light.

It’s not enough for the belief to be here in the head and not here in the heart. You can’t just say you believe if that belief hasn’t actually had an impact on your life.

Charles Blondin, better known as the Great Blondin, was a tightrope walker. He was the first person to walk across Niagara Falls on a tightrope.

He did it on June 30th, 1859, and after he got across he asked the crowd, *“Who believes I can walk back across with a man on my back?”*

Everybody cheered, and then he asked, *“Who wants to be that man?”* Nobody said anything. They believed here, but not here.

Then one man stepped out of the crowd and said, *“I’ll be that man.”* The rest said they believed, but Harry Colcord really believed.

God extends the invitation of His love to us, but it’s up to us to accept the invitation.

Slide 6

So what happens when you believe; what are the results of this love? John 3:16b, *“whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Did you catch that? It’s a twofold result. The first result is that the person who believes won’t perish. You’ll not be separated from God for the remainder of eternity. That means you won’t go to hell.

But it doesn’t just end there. You see, more than simply being a fire escape from hell, the person who believes is promised eternal life, not just living forever but living forever in the presence of the God.

Which is why I find it so hard to understand why there are those who call themselves followers of Christ and children of God who don’t spend any time with God.

J. Oswald Sanders wrote, *“It’s impossible for a believer, no matter what his experience, to keep right with God if he’ll not take the trouble to spend time with God. Spend plenty of time with Him; let other things go, but don’t neglect Him.”*

Slide 7

Conclusion

So, to sum it up, Nicodemus comes to Jesus and Jesus tells him in John 3:3, that he must be born again.

They get into a discussion about what that means and Jesus eventually tells him how much God loves him, and Nicodemus’ response?

We don’t know. We have no clue how the conversation ended.

In John Chapter 4, we read the story of the Samaritan woman at the well and how she embraces the claims of Christ and goes back to her village to tell everyone she knows about Him.

In Mark chapter 10, we read about the rich young ruler who came to Christ and left rejecting Christ’s claim on his life.

But there’s nothing to indicate that Nicodemus either accepted or rejected the claim of Christ on his life. Now we do hear from Nicodemus again before the story ends.

When the religious leaders begin to plot against Jesus we read in John 7:50-51, *“Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, “Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?”*

And then after Jesus has been crucified and Joseph of Arimathea asked permission to take down Jesus’ body he’s mentioned again.

John 19:39-40, *“He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.”*

In both the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Church, Nicodemus is revered as a saint.

We see Nicodemus at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and again at the end of the story, but we don’t know if he actually embraced the grace that Jesus offers each one of us.

So, the question isn’t how did Nicodemus’ story end, the important question is *“How will your story end?”* Only you will be able to answer that.

“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.”