

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

The Greatest Gift

John 3:16

Intro: Jesus has been having a conversation with Nicodemus concerning the new birth. This probably wasn't the topic that Nicodemus intended to discuss when he met with Jesus on that warm Judean evening but this is where the conversation quickly turned. Nicodemus may well have believed he had everything he needed in life but Jesus here assures him that he did not. He was, in fact, missing out on the one thing that he needed most – the new birth. Without this, without being born again, it would be impossible for Nicodemus to enter or even see the kingdom of God. This was the greatest desire and expectation of every Jew but especially for those of the ultra-religious Pharisee.

Throughout their conversation, Jesus' teaching has been focused on a personal level. While our study has made a broad application of the truths of the new birth so far; Jesus has merely addressed the specific need of Nicodemus. Until now! As we move into the remainder of this passage, we begin to see the personal lesson Nicodemus received set forth in terms of universal applicability: that the new birth is not just necessary or available to Nicodemus, the religious Jew or the Israelite nation; but that the new birth (salvation) is both necessary and available to all mankind!

There are many passages in the Bible that have been chosen by various believers as their favorite text. It may be a verse that has spoken to them in their own particular situation or has instructed, guided or comforted them in some way. But the text we come to now is everyone's text. There's hardly a place in the world where the gospel of Jesus Christ has gone that this verse has not become almost instantly known. It's the first verse translators put into another language. Millions have committed it to memory. It's inscribed on books and chiseled onto buildings. It is **John 3:16**.

If there's one sentence above all others that sums up the message of John's Gospel, or the entire Bible for that matter, it's this one. If there is one verse that has been expounded upon more than all others, it would have to be this one as well. It can seem like a daunting task to bring a fresh, new message on a passage that has been taught so many times but that's the beauty of

God's Word, no matter how many times you go to the well, it never disappoints!

Some would argue that this is the greatest verse in the Bible (it'd be difficult to find one greater), but not because of how it was written but because of what it declares. Someone has stated it this way: "**For God** (the **greatest** Lover) **so loved** (the **greatest** degree) **the world** (the **greatest** company), **that He gave** (the **greatest** act) **His only begotten Son** (the **greatest** gift), **that whosoever** (the **greatest** opportunity) **believeth** (the **greatest** simplicity) **in Him** (the **greatest** attraction) **should not perish** (the **greatest** promise), **but** (the **greatest** difference) **have** (the **greatest** certainty) **everlasting life** (the **greatest** possession)." Clearly, we won't be able to address each of these but we'll look at a few.

1) **God so loved** – This is the driving force of our passage but what does the Bible tell us about God's love?

Eph 2:4-5 – God's love is great. Now, if you have been paying attention as we've studied through the Bible, it will not surprise you to learn the God is the master of the understatement. God created the universe in 6 days and at the end of each day, what did God say? It was good. Man makes a product and advertises it as: fantastic, all new, can't live without it (when in fact, you actually can). God creates the universe as we know it and it was good! Now, transfer the breadth of that understatement to the greatness of God's love! Suffice it to say, when God tells us that His love is great, He's telling us that it is so great that it goes beyond our own ideas of greatness or our own understanding.

Eph 3: 17-19 – God's love is infinite. Paul prayed that the Ephesians might be able to comprehend the love of God. How can finite man ever hope to comprehend the infinite love of God? We can certainly know it by exposure and experience, but only in part. Believers have been touched by His love and bathed in at least a portion of it. Still, the *fullness* of God's love lies forever beyond our understanding just as the vastness of the universe lies beyond the finite, probing eye of man. God's love is boundless and unfathomable – it knows no limits!

Heb 13:8 – God's love is unchangeable. This truth is evident throughout the OT. Israel rebelled against Jehovah, their covenant God, time and time

again. Tho God allowed them to suffer the dire consequences of their rebellious sin, He never stopped loving them. He always came to their rescue whenever they turned to Him in repentance. This may be the most wonderful aspect of God's love. God loves in such a way that nothing you or I have ever done or ever will do can change it.

2) *the world* – The reality of God's love would not have been a big news flash to Nicodemus but the stated object of God's love would have floored him! The Jew of that day was ready enough to think of God as loving Israel, but nowhere was the idea espoused that God loved the world. It is distinctively a Christian idea that God's love is wide enough to embrace all people. His love is not confined to any nation, race or group of religious elites. That is the earthly concept of love – we'll love that which benefits us. But divine love is not so self-focused. It originates from the fact that ***God is love*** (I John 4:8, 16). It is His nature to love. He loves mankind, not because mankind benefits Him but because that's the kind of God He is – a God that loves without condition, without preference, without limitation!

God is love. You won't find very many people today who will argue that point. But, what many of these same people fail to recognize is that we only know God is love because of Jesus Christ! How do we *know* that God loves us? Certainly not thru creation! Sure, there are beautiful vistas and glorious sunsets but there are also volcanoes, tidal waves and hurricanes. Do we know God loves us because mankind values love? No, because not all do.

No, what our text declares is that we only know that God loves us because He has given His one and only Son, His well-beloved, to be crucified for us and by this, bring us back into fellowship with Himself. Thus, if the love of God is one of God's greatest attributes, then the gift of Christ is most certainly His *greatest gift*. It's only thru the incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we come to know God's love and come to love God in return (I ***John 4:19***). God's love is a giving love. Since God's love is the greatest love, it can only be satisfied to give the greatest gift.

2) *Son*– Why is Jesus Christ the greatest of God's gifts? **A) Jesus is the best God had to give**. God loved the world so much, He gave the very best. Jesus is the ***only begotten Son***. The primary meaning of that term is *unique*; Jesus is the *unique* Son of God; there's no other like Him, no one His equal. Thus, *because* Jesus Christ is the very image of God and

because there is no one like Him, when God gave Jesus, He gave the best gift in the universe. In fact, Jesus is not just God's gift, He is *the* gift. There are no other Divine gifts available to man apart from or outside of Jesus Christ. **James 1:17** "**Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of Lights**" and they all originate and find their ultimate conclusion in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is also God's greatest gift in another sense. Jesus wasn't just another created being – He was God incarnate. So, when God gave Jesus, He gave Himself! To give oneself is the greatest gift anyone can give. When we look at Jesus, who is God incarnate, we must recognize that God gave the very best—He gave Himself—for us.

B) Jesus was a gift planned from before the foundation of the world. God had always intended to give Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. We must not entertain the idea that Adam & Eve's fall into sin caught God by surprise or that it threw the Trinity into a panic as to how best to deal with it. Not at all! God knew all from the beginning. Before He set the universe in motion, before He created us, He determined to send Jesus to die for the sins of the human race.

C) Jesus is perfectly suited to meet the needs of sinful man. What does sinful man need? *Knowledge of God* – Jesus reveals that. If you want to know what God is like; look to Jesus. *A Savior* – Jesus became that. Fallen man needs more than knowledge, he needs salvation. Jesus provides that and He's the only one qualified to purchase it.

Deliverance from sin – we all want to live but we all die, it's part of being human but it's a direct consequence of sin. Jesus can deliver us from that fate. Jesus is the answer to all of sinful man's problems. He has the power and the right to make us everything that God created us to be in the first place.

3) *whoever believes*— Herein lies the great conundrum of this verse: as great and infinite as God's love is to man; as perfectly suitable as the gift of Jesus Christ is to sinful man – the only ones who benefit from these great blessings are *those who believe* in Jesus Christ! This verse literally screams out the fact of God's amazing grace but the only way fallen, sinful man can access it is by faith. Faith is the indispensable channel of God's grace. But what is faith?

Heb 11:1 – This is **not** blind hope. The word *substance* does *not* mean substitute, as if faith were a substitute for evidence. It means title deed to a property. That's faith! God says that although none of us have entered fully into the inheritance that's ours through faith; faith *is* our title to it. Faith is itself the evidence of things not yet fully seen.

This is no human title deed. This deed comes from the infallible God Himself. The all-powerful God stands behind it. When God calls on men and women to believe what He tells them, He calls on them to do the most sensible thing they'll ever do in their lives: believe in the only Being in the universe who is entirely reliable.

But, what is it exactly, that God wants us to believe? **1st**) He wants us to believe that we are less perfect than He is.

As such, we deserve to be separated from His presence forever. We are sinners – God must punish sin. That's precisely why we need a Savior. That's why our text mentions **perishing**. What is it? The exact opposite of eternal life! Whatever benefits are enjoyed in eternal life is not only lost in perishing but an equal and opposite degree of suffering must also be endured. You can't have a heaven without a hell. We are sinful. God is perfect. Since God cannot tolerate sin, we must admit that we deserve to be separated from Him.

2nd) God wants you to believe that He loves you in spite of your sin and that He has acted thru Jesus to remove that sin and to begin to make you perfect again by conforming you into Christ's image. Yes, we are sinners. Yes, we deserve to perish. In fact, we're already under God's condemnation (**17**). But it is equally true that God loves you and Christ died for you. There may be a lot about this that you don't understand right now. Welcome to the club. But God *wants* you to believe that He did this *in order* that you might not perish but enter into His eternal life instead.

Do you believe these things? Do you believe you're a sinner? Do you believe God when He says that you deserve to perish for your sins? More importantly, do you believe that God sent Jesus to die for you and to bring you salvation by His death? If you do, then God also calls on you to *do* something. He wants you to move your faith out from the area of intellectual acknowledgment and into the realm of action. God wants you to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and commit your life to Him. Eternal life has nothing to do with what church you go to, what ceremonies you participate

in or what denomination you hanker to. Eternal life is the greatest possession of only those who have finally recognized their need for a Savior and have obeyed God by accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior.

If Jesus Christ is your Savior, then you have been touched by God's love. If so, is God's love now your pattern? Is your love for God and others "great" or do you merely love what benefits you? Is your love limitless, unchangeable?

Do you have a giving love? Are you willing to give yourself for the cause of Christ and the advancement of God's kingdom? In short, Do you love like Jesus? We're all called to show that kind of love by which the world will be drawn to Him. 😊