

January 19, 2020

Great Things in John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The scripture just cited is one of the most often quoted verses in the Bible. It has been variously described. For example, it has been called “the golden text of the Bible.” It has been described as “the gospel in a nutshell.” One writer, referring to this verse, said it “rises to the highest peaks in God’s mountain range of truth.” It has been called the “classic” passage in the Bible. It is one of the most (and possibly **the** most) memorized verses of the Bible. And, sad to say, it is often misapplied and perverted in such a way as to teach soul-damning error instead of soul-winning truth!

But our purpose in this article is not primarily that of noting how this verse is often misapplied to teach error. To the contrary, it is our aim to examine this scripture in such a manner as to set forth some of the great things that are mentioned in this verse. It is my belief that there is more than meets the eye — especially if it only receives a cursory reading. Hence, in the balance of this article we shall identify some of the:

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“For God” — The Greatest Force! Consider, please, the Person of God. He is Creator — *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”* (Gen. 1:1). He is *“the Father of spirits”* (Heb. 12:9). It is *“in Him”* that *“we live and move and have our being”* (Acts 17:28). He is *“from everlasting to everlasting”* (Ps. 90:2). His *“understanding is infinite”* (Ps. 147:5). He is omnipotent; in fact, He spoke the universe into existence! (Ps. 33:6,9; Heb. 11:3).

“So Loved” — The Greatest Emotion! As it relates to human beings, we often speak of one’s love of family (Eph. 5:25; Tit. 2:4), love for our neighbor (Matt. 22:39), and our love for God (Matt. 22:35-37). But this verse speaks of divine love, **God’s** love. *“Loved,”* as used in this verse, is translated from *agape*, the highest type of love. It is unconquerable good will. It prompts one to do what is in the best interest of another — whether he likes it or not. *“In respect of agapao as used of God, it expresses the deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential love in them towards the Giver, and a practical love toward those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others to seek the Giver”* (Vine, in **Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**).

“The World” — The Greatest Object! *“World”* is used in different ways in the Bible. It may refer to material things, as in Matt. 16:26, in which Jesus asked the question, *“what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and lose his own soul.”* *“World”* may also refer to the physical *“world”* in which we live, as in Rom. 1:20

wherein the apostle Paul referred to “*the creation of the world.*” In I John 3:17 “*world*” denotes the earth in contrast to heaven. And “*world*” also refers to the human race, or to mankind. Such is its usage in Matt. 5:14 wherein the Lord instructed His disciples to be “*the light of the world,*” the “*world*” of people who are able to see their “*good works*” and be moved to “*glorify*” our “*Father in heaven*” (v. 16). When Jesus said “*God so loved the world,*” He was referring to the “*world*” of people, a “*world*” in which every accountable person is guilty of sin (Rom. 3:23), and is therefore in desperate need of forgiveness. In view of the depravity which is so prevalent, one might wonder how God could even like the world, let alone how He could “*love*” the world! “*The world*” includes people of every race, nationality, and color; it includes those who are morally “*good,*” and those whose every thought is “*only evil continually*” (cf. Gen. 6:5). Augustine said “*God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love.*”

“That He Gave His Only Begotten Son” — the Greatest Gift! Love is measured by the sacrifices it makes in behalf of the object loved.! “*Only Begotten*” in this verse is from *monogenes*, and was used by John of Christ because “*he is of nature or essentially Son of God*” (Thayer). Jesus was deity and divinity incarnate in the flesh! In the beginning Jesus was “*with God*” (God the Father), and He “*was God*” (that is, of the same nature as the Father). He is “*the Word*” which “*became flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14). God the Father “*gave His Only Begotten Son,*” that is, He “*gave:*” Him up to die on that cruel cross! Please note Rom. 5:8: “*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!*” The apostle John worded it this way: “*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*” (I John 4:10)

“That Whosoever Believeth In Him” — the greatest offer! “*Whosoever*” is all inclusive. In the last “*invitation*” cited in the Bible, John said “*whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely*” (Rev. 22:17). In the first century, it included Jews who crucified Christ (Acts 2:36-38); it included Saul who persecuted Christians (I Tim. 1:15), and Cornelius a good moral man (Acts 10:1-6), Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-16), and immoral people like many of the Corinthians prior to their conversion (I Cor. 6:9-11). “*Believeth*” as used in this verse in the Greek is in the present tense; it denotes continuous action. Faith is essential to coming to God (Heb. 11:6). Those who have faith are given “*the right to become children of God*” (John 1:12). No one is saved by faith only (James 2:24-26). The faith which saves is an obedient faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Hence, Jesus said “*He who believes and is baptized shall be saved...*” (Mark 16:16).

“Should not Perish” — the Greatest Loss! “*Perish*” does not mean annihilation. “*Perish*” is translated from *apollumi*, which means “*to incur the loss of true or eternal life, to be delivered up to eternal misery*” (Thayer). It is not the loss of being; it is the loss of well-being. In the day of Judgment the unprepared will “*go away into everlasting punishment*” (Matt. 25:46). The Great Judge of the universe will tell them to “*Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and His angels*” (Matt. 25:41).

“But Have Everlasting Life” — the Greatest Gain! This is what the rich young ruler had in mind when he asked Jesus “*what good thing shall I do that I may have*

eternal life” (Matt. 19:16). Jesus is “*the bread of life*” (John 6:48); He is the “*Prince of life*” (Acts 3:15); He gave **His** life so that **we** can have eternal life (John 10:11)! On that last day, the righteous will enter into “*life eternal*” (Matt. 25:46). They will receive “*an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away reserved in heaven*” (I Peter 14). They will forever be in that celestial city where “*there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying,*” where they can forever drink the “*water of life,*” and eat of the “*tree of life*” (Rev. 21:4; 22:1-2).

Conclusion: In the preceding paragraphs we have noted some of the “great things in John 3:16.” In it we are made to reflect upon the exceeding greatness of God’s love for “*the world,*” His hatred for sin, His love for sinners, and the magnitude of the sacrifice made by both God and Christ for those lost in sin. In view of these facts, one wonders how anyone could look upon sin simply as a trivial matter, how one could be indifferent toward the gospel, or how a sensible person could ignore the gospel call. We should be deeply moved as we reflect upon the magnitude of God’s love for us, as we ponder the contrasting destinies awaiting the righteous versus the unrighteous, and made more determined than ever to obey and serve God in this life so that we can be with Him in the life to come.

*** —B. Witherington