

## **John 3:16 – 15<sup>th</sup> May 22 – Sermon Notes**

### **Introduction**

I want you to picture a beautiful sunny day, blue skies, sunglasses out, sun cream on, it's actually hot. Then you hear music from an ice cream van. What a joyous moment! Children immediately jump up and start screaming "Mum, Dad, can we get ice cream?!" There's this joyful belief at the greatest possibility imaginable, ice cream and it's not even dinner.

At least you would have that joyful reaction if you weren't my wife and her siblings when they were younger. Her parents were very crafty and told their dear children that the ice cream van's jingle meant that they had run out of ice cream! And their four little children believed them. I asked Tori when she worked out the truth and she didn't know.

What we believe is important. It shapes our lives. What you believe about ice cream vans could mean the difference between joy and disappointment. But that's a small belief with a relatively insignificant effect. This morning I want to talk about a big belief that won't just shape your life on earth, but your eternal life. I'm talking of course about believing in God.

At the core of believing in God, is what we call the gospel. If you haven't heard that word before, the word gospel means good news. So, when a Christian talks about the gospel, they're talking about the good news that though we are separated from God because of our sin, we are loved by God, and out of his love, we are saved by God through the death of Jesus on the cross.

That's why we're looking at John 3:16 this morning. This verse is often referred to as the gospel in a nutshell and it does highlight those three gospel truths which we're going to explore this morning: we are separated from God, we are loved by God, and we are saved by God.

Whether it's the first time you've heard the gospel or the 300<sup>th</sup> time, I hope you will encounter God in a new way this morning.

### **We are separated from God**

So first, we are separated from God. Look at that last section of v16: 'whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'

God doesn't want us to be separated from him, he wants us to be together. He wants us to believe in him, he wants us to be together in this life on earth and forever in eternal life, in heaven, a place of endless joy and companionship with God.

Did you know God wants to be in a relationship with you? Even if you knew that already, really think about that for a second. The God who created the universe, the God of all goodness wants to be in a relationship with you.

It's clear in this verse that He wants us to join him in eternal life, but it's also clear that there is something separating us from him. But what is it? Why can't we have eternal life without believing? And why will we perish if we don't? What have we done to deserve that?

Well, we don't have to go very far to find out the answer. V19 really helps us understand and picture our separation from God. 'This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were **evil**.'

You may be thinking "I'm not evil, I'm not perfect, but I'm not evil." I agree, by human standards you probably aren't evil. But we're talking about a relationship with God here. The standards are completely different.

There is a word that literally means failure to achieve God's standards and that word is sin. Evil is often used as a synonym for sin. I read a great quote describing sin recently that I think clarifies our separation from God. 'Sin is directly opposite to all that is good in the character of God'. 'Sin is directly opposite to all that is good in the character of God.'

Exodus 34:6-7 highlights this saying, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.'

How many of us can say we always act in this way? We may not be evil by human standards, especially when we look around at all the evil in the world at the moment, but we all sin, we all get things wrong, and if we're honest, we do do evil things every so often. When we compare our imperfection to the standard of God's goodness, we definitely come off looking a little evil. Can we say we are slow to anger and abounding in love? Not to thousands of people.

John provides a great illustration of our separation: light and dark. Light and darkness do not mix. When you shine a torch at a shadow, it disappears or moves to a place where there is no light. In the same way, the goodness of God and our sinfulness cannot mix. When God shines the torch of his goodness on us, we run and hide because none of us are that good.

But there's more to it than "God is good, and we aren't." I know there are lots of superhero fans among us. We love to watch superhero films or shows where the hero defeats the villain and sends them to jail to get justice for what they've done. Well, like them our sin deserves justice. God can't accept us into a relationship with him unless the price of sin is paid.

This is where that scary word appears again. What is the price to be paid? 'Whoever believes in him shall not perish.' Romans 6:23 puts it simply 'For the wages of sin is death.' John purposely compares perishing to eternal life because the definition of perishing is the opposite of eternal life. Our sin separates us from God now and forever.

## We are loved by God

But there is good news! This is where the good news comes in! We are loved by God. 'For God so loved the world.'

God loves you. And God's love is not some wishy-washy, rom-com, chocolates, and flowers kind of love. God loves you despite all your sin, despite all you've ever done wrong in your life and all you ever will do. God's love is active, it is sacrificial, and it is unconditional.

Ultimately, God shows his love for us by giving up his son. I'm going to jump back to Romans 6:23 because I didn't finish that verse. '23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.' 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.'

John 3:16 is often misunderstood to mean God loved the world so much, but the word 'so' actually means 'in this way.' God loved the world in this way. In what way? That he gave his one and only son.

But let's consider that for a minute.

God is giving us an immense gift in his son. God loves his son. At Jesus' baptism we read this from Matthew 3:17, 'And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him, I am well pleased."' Yet God was willing to give him up. Bear in mind that God has watched the people he loves commit an entire history's worth of sin and evil. How many of us could say we would be willing to sacrifice the life of a family member to save someone who had wronged us?

Let's also consider the quality of the gift. This isn't just anybody's son. This is the son of God, Jesus Christ, God himself in human form. Jesus lived a human life unlike any other. He committed no sin; he was perfect in every way. He was completely innocent, undeserving of the price that had to be paid. God gave His best to us, his beloved to us, and his most pure and most unique gift to us.

There's another subtle way God shows his love for us in this verse. '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.' God's love is for everyone, an indeterminable number of people because that number continues to grow as the world's population grows.

God loves the entire world. God does not show favouritism. God's love is not restricted by race or nationality or wealth or gender or eye colour or hair colour. You don't have to be six feet tall to be in a relationship with God, thank goodness.

But God doesn't just show love in an overarching global way, he loves every individual. 'Whoever.' That could be you. Maybe that is already you. God loves you, individually you, despite all your sin, and enough to send his son to die for you. He loves every single one of us and he loves us all equally as much.

God's love is limitlessly wide and limitlessly deep. There is no one out of reach of God's love, and there is no depth God won't go to love us, which is proven in giving up his son for us.

### **We are saved by God**

Finally, out of God's immense love for us, we are saved by God.

Though we are separated from God, he does not abandon us. God could leave us to face to penalty we deserve for our sin he doesn't. He loves us and so God makes a way to save us from the price that has to be paid.

V16 and 17 '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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.'

How does God save us? By giving up his one and only son, to die on the cross, to pay the price for our sin.

The price of death had to be paid, and none of us can pay it if we want to live, and we can't pay for our neighbour's sins when we have our own to pay for. But Jesus was able to accomplish all of this.

First, the son of God came to earth to be born as a human baby, fully man and fully God. He then lived a perfect life, committing no sin, completely undeserving of punishment, completely undeserving of death.

He was put on a cross for a crime he didn't commit, but there he took on the sin of the whole world, of all people ever. As 2 Cor 5:21 says, 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.'

On the cross, he died, sacrificing himself to pay the price of the world's sin. Dying for me, paying for my sin, and dying for you, paying for your sin.

That's why we take communion together. It's a symbol to remember Christ's death and what he died for.

As John writes in his letter 1 John (2:1-1), '2 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.'

But the story doesn't stop there. God brought him back to life. Jesus defeated death. Jesus paid and overcame the price of sin, giving us a certain hope of eternal life beyond death. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice as 2 Tim 1:10 says, 'Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel'

## Conclusion

John 3:16 shows us that we are separated from God, but we are loved by God, so we are saved by God.

But what do we do with this information? John says, and I would agree, we should believe.

We all know what it means to believe in something, but I want to give you a couple of pictures to illustrate it.

Remember the ice cream van? We've all seen the instinctual reaction of children when we hear that music. Believing is a bit like that. It's about more than just accepting something as fact with our minds, it's about believing with our hearts which creates that life change, that emotional response. It's no longer just fact, it is life.

There's also an outward component to believing. It doesn't just affect our lives and emotions, but our speech and our actions. It's a bit like following a bad sports team. I'm a big Jacksonville Jaguars fan. For those who don't know American football, we have won 4 of a possible 33 games over the last two years. Those are the sorts of statistics you don't shout about, but I'm a big fan, and I'm happy to show my support because I believe in them. In a similar way, believing in God leads us to believe outwardly, to be able to say aloud "I believe in God" and act according to his word.

And it says in Romans 10:9 'If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

I'm going to close with a word to those here this morning who do believe and to those who don't.

To the believers, you may have sat through this morning thinking I know all of this already. Why isn't Roy up here talking about Abraham?

One of the blessings I have received from preparing this sermon is a reminder of how important it is to remind ourselves of the gospel. The gospel is the reason we do anything. Everything we believe, everything we do and say flows out of God sending Jesus to die for us and save us. That's how we're able to live the new lives we're living. So, let's not bat the gospel aside.

Let's take a moment and really reflect on an aspect of the gospel. That could be how much God loves you, that could be how limitless God's love is, that could be how much sin we commit that God has forgiven through the death of Jesus, or that could be that God wants to be in a relationship with us even though we are separated from him.

For those here who don't believe in the death of Jesus, may I encourage you to think about believing?

God sent his Son to die for you, to save you, to give you eternal life. This isn't an ice cream truck or a bad sports team, this is the greatest and most important thing you could believe. I can personally say, and I'm sure others in the room would agree that it is the best decision you can make.

But it isn't always an easy decision to make. Roy is currently going through a series about Abraham called the journey of faith. Abraham is this great Bible hero, but he made mistakes and he needed help believing in God. Maybe you can't say for certain that you believe in God, but you know you want to and would like some help. Wherever you are on that journey, we would love to help you. You can talk to me about it at coffee afterwards or with our Pastor Roy, or Mike who's been leading the service to name a few.