

In This Way He Loved Us
John 3:14-21
October 12th, 2025

1. A _____ of saving faith (3:14-15)

2. The _____ for God's saving act (3:16)

3. The _____ that hangs in the balance (3:17-21)

4. Applying the Word
 - a. For the non-Christian, _____ to Jesus and be _____ from condemnation.
 - b. For the Christian, you can _____ because you are not condemned.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on John 3:14-21

1. John 3:16 is probably the most well known verse in the Bible. If this were the only verse we had, what would we know about God and salvation?
2. Read Number 21:4-9. What were the people of Israel doing wrong? Why was the punishment so severe? Whose idea was it to make the bronze serpent and raise it? How does this provide a fitting metaphor for saving faith in Christ?
3. What does it mean for Jesus to be "lifted up"? See John 8:28; 12:32-33; and Isaiah 52:13-15.
4. Compare and contrast John 3:17-21 with 5:26-30 and 9:35-41. Why does John 3 say Jesus was not sent to judge but John 5 and 9 describe judgment? How are the terms being used differently? What do you notice about the context?
5. What is significant about the verb tenses for those judged or not judged in v. 18? Why is that important for the Christian to understand when they consider their present standing before the Lord?
6. What are some practical ways that people "love the darkness rather than the Light" and refuse to "come to the Light" in our culture today?
7. Why are the deeds of the one who "practices the truth" and "comes to the Light" in v. 21 described as "having been wrought in God"? If you have other translations of the Bible available, how do they word that last phrase? How does Phil. 2:12-13 describe a similar concept? How does this relate to the new birth described earlier in John 3 and in Ezekiel 36:26-27?

Note: Some questions partially adapted from *Knowing the Bible: John* by Crossway.

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Big idea: Our eternity hinges upon belief in the Son.

Intro –

Psalm 23 might be the most famous chapter in the Bible but John 3:16 is surely the most famous verse.

It is displayed on signs at sporting events.

Athletes have written it under their eyes or on their shoes.

Children memorize it as one of their first verses.

It captures the gospel in a clear, concise sentence of about 24 words in English.

It's the central hub of this section.

V. 16 starts with the word “for”, as vv. 14-15 are explained in v. 16

v. 17 starts with “for”, as it elaborates on the content of v. 16.

Because the Greek language didn't use quotes, there is some debate about where the words of Jesus to Nicodemus end and the words of John pick up.

Many commentators say the words of Jesus probably trail off in v 15 and John picks up in 16-21

John is the one who uses “only begotten” (1:14, 18) and Jesus does not normally refer to God with the precise phrase that is used after v. 15.

It isn't a critical distinction because all of scripture is the Word of God and so the “red letters” are no more authoritative or true than the black letters. And John is distilling and communicating accurately the teaching of Jesus, so whether he is here quoting Jesus or summarizing Jesus' own teaching is irrelevant.

1. A ***metaphor*** of saving faith (3:14-15)

- a. Jesus uses a teaching example from the OT that Nicodemus as a pharisee and the teacher of Israel would surely have known.
- b. It takes place in Number 21 as the people of Israel are wandering in the wilderness and begin to complain against God.
 - i. Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die? There is no food and water and we loathe this miserable food. (Sounds like teenagers – there's no food in this house and we don't like this food)
 - ii. The Lord sent “fiery serpents among the people” and they bit the people so many died.
 - iii. They repented and admitted their sin and asked for rescue from the snakes.
 - iv. **Numbers 21:8-9** Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." ⁹ And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.
- c. How is the Son of Man similar to the serpent lifted up in the wilderness? What are the parallels?
 - i. There was a problem (serpents biting the people, sin that requires judgment)
 - ii. God provided the solution (looking at a bronze serpent, looking to Jesus)

- iii. The solution required faith (how does looking at a bronze snake save me? How does believing in Jesus save me?)
 - iv. The bronze serpent and Jesus were both “lifted up”
 - v. It brings life (physical life, eternal life)
- d. What does it mean for him to be lifted up?
 - i. **John 12:32-33** "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." ³³ But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.
 - ii. Physically lifted on the cross – and exaltation
- e. Many will believe in Jesus when He is lifted up at the cross.
 - i. Nicodemus himself will show back up in John 19, helping with the burial of Jesus.
 - ii. DA Carson: Here then is the frankest answer to Nicodemus’ question: how can this happen? The kingdom of God is seen or entered, new birth is experienced, and eternal life begins, through the saving cross-work of Christ, received by faith.
- f. The new birth comes through the simple faith of looking to Jesus for forgiveness.
 - i. You might not feel like you have “enough faith.” You might still have questions and doubts. There might be things you don’t understand. But if you realize your problem and you understand the solution, you can look to Jesus in faith.
 - ii. You can imagine that there were some people who confidently turned their eyes to the bronze snake on the pole as soon as it was raised. But others were probably skeptical, doubting, wondering if God would really heal them the snake bite. But they looked, with their small, weak, faith. Which ones were healed? All of them.
 - iii. Kent Hughes: Do not look at your look. Look to Christ. If you have a repentant spirit and you realize that Jesus Christ bore your sins on the cross, then all you need to do is look and be saved!

2. The **motivation** for God’s saving act (3:16)

- a. God’s saving work is rooted in His love for us.
 - i. “So” can be an emphasis of intensity, like a child who says, “I love you sooo much.”
 - ii. “So” can also refer to the manner or demonstration of something.
 - 1. “For God loved the world in this way”
 - 2. Both are theologically accurate – God giving His own son for us was an intensity of love that we can’t wrap our minds around.
 - 3. But I think “In this way” makes the best sense of the passage and the context – Here’s how God loved the world, He gave. His love is demonstrated, acted upon.
 - 4. However, Milne is correct as he ties the two together: If the depth of love is measured by the value of its gift, then God’s love could not be greater, for his love-gift is his most precious possession—his only, eternally beloved Son. He could not love more.
- b. Who did God love? The world
 - i. Not merely the Jews who had been His chosen, special, unique people – but broadening out to the gentiles as well.

- ii. “The world” usually has a negative idea – we are told in 1 John 2 not to love the world or the things of the world. The world stands in opposition to God and stands under His wrath.
 - iii. Yet God so loved the world – surprising not because the world is so big but rather because it is so bad.
- c. Who did He give? His only-begotten Son
 - i. We encountered this phrase in the prologue in 1:14 and 18 and covered it there. This is God’s one-and-only, unique Son.
 - ii. The emphasis of this term is not on origin (He had no beginning) but on nature.
- d. The promise has a built in invitation – whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.
 - i. Perish is contrasted with eternal life as our only two options
 - ii. To perish is to come to ruin, to be lost but it is not to cease to exist, a view known as “annihilationism.”
 - iii. The word for perish can mean to cease to exist, but in Matthew 25:46 it contrasts “eternal punishment” with “eternal life,” both of which are eternal.
 - 1. **Matthew 25:46** "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
 - iv. And in Rev. 20:15, those whose names are not written in the book of life and thrown into the lake of fire, the same place that Satan was cast in v. 10 and is described this way:
 - 1. **Revelation 20:10** ...and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.
- e. I appreciate the way Kent Hughes laid this out:

God	The greatest Lover
so loved	The greatest degree
the world	The greatest company
that he gave	The greatest act
his only Son	The greatest gift
that whoever	The greatest opportunity
believes	The greatest simplicity
in him	The greatest attraction
should not perish	The greatest promise
but	The greatest difference
have	The greatest certainty
eternal life	The greatest possession

3. The **judgment** that hangs in the balance (3:17-21)

- a. Although many love and appreciate 3:16, few go on to read vv. 17-21.
- b. The positive – Jesus came to save not to condemn

- i. God sent His Son to save not to judge/condemn.
 - 1. The ESV rendering of “judge” as “condemn” throughout this is helpful because it has a negative idea.
 - 2. To condemn means “to judge a person to be guilty and liable to punishment” (Louw and Nida, Lexicon, 56.30).
- ii. His primary purpose in coming was to rescue – to give new life, new birth, eternal life – but for those that reject their rescue, their condemnation stands.
- iii. Jesus does have authority to judge, but He did not come for the primary purpose of judging but saving.
 - 1. **John 9:39** And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."
 - 2. **John 5:26-27** "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; ²⁷ and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man.
- iv. The one who believes in Him is not judged/condemned – present tense
 - 1. Not “will not be condemned” but already, right now is not condemned.
 - 2. Believer, take in all that this passage says about you now:
 - a. You are born again
 - b. You have eternal life
 - c. You are saved
 - d. You are not condemned
 - 3. These are not future promises for you but present possessions, present descriptions.
- c. The negative – the one who does not believe is condemned already
 - i. Notice that v. 18 says that for the one who does not respond to Jesus in belief, he “has been condemned already.”
 - 1. Maybe like arriving on the scene of an accident and the person is not breathing. You jump in and do CPR. There may be some fear that you would make things worse, but really the person is already in trouble. You pulled over to save them.
- d. Vv. 19 and 20 describe the heart condition of a negative response to Christ
 - i. They are under judgment because the Light came (Jesus) but they loved the darkness rather than the light.
 - ii. DA Carson – as with the arrogant critic who mocks a masterpiece, it is not the masterpiece that is condemned, but the critic.
 - iii. Not merely exposure but shame and conviction
 - iv. When someone rejects Christ or deconstructs after one-time affirming Christ, its legitimate to ask and incredibly important for their own honesty, to consider whether it is really because there is something they want to pursue that the Bible calls sin.
 - v. It may not be that. It could be an honest intellectual doubt. But passages like this tell us there may be more going on.

- e. V. 21 but the one believes in Jesus “comes to the Light.”
 - i. They are not worried about being “exposed” because there is no condemnation but forgiveness in Christ.
 - ii. But the passage goes onto say that this person comes to the light to show that “his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”
 - 1. “Accomplished by God” or “carried out in God” may be more helpful ways of wording it (CSB and ESV) but “wrought in God” has an epic feel to it.
 - 2. It’s not that one type of person has evil deeds and the other type of person has good deeds that they pat themselves on the back for. Rather, the one with good deeds know they have been “wrought in God” – they are a product of the new birth, new life, new heart that has been given to them.
 - 3. Milne - After ‘coming to the light’, believers live a new life expressing new moral power, but their ‘open secret’ is that the Light has now come and is the real, ‘plainly’ recognized source of this new life of ‘doing the truth’. Believers live, therefore, as they are saved, by grace alone.

4. Applying the Word

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- b. For the Christian, you can rest because you are not condemned.

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