

This Is How God Loved the World John 3:16-21

Intro

It is likely that you are aware of and familiar with the practice of individuals showing up at sporting events, concerts, so forth - people showing up and holding up signs that simply say John 3:16 but you may be unaware of how this phenomenon began.

The roots of this practice are found in the Jesus people revival of the 1960s and 1970s when converted hippies among others began holding up this kind of sign at various events as an evangelistic attempt to put John 3:16 in the thinking of the lost - the idea of course being that in reading John 3:16 one encounters what Martin Luther described as "the Bible in miniature."

And in all of this one man stood out. His name is Rollen Stewart aka "Rainbow Man" as he could be found regularly showing up wearing a rainbow afro wig and tie-dyed shirt, dancing wildly while holding up his John 3:16 sign. He began this practice after the Super Bowl in 1980

For the next decade, he traveled the globe to display his signs and banners. Among the events he attended: the Olympics, the world cup, NFL playoff games, the Indy 500, the masters, horse races and even the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana. He claimed that he drove 60,000 miles a year to attend sporting events. He figured out the prime positions for holding his signs by carrying a battery-operated television to games to help figure out where the cameras were pointed. (Monte Burke, *John 3:16: Where Is He Now?*)

Over time, some in the sports media began to loathe his antics and - conscious decisions were made to avoid giving him the attention that he obviously craved and over time things began to go south for Mr. Rollen Stewart. His life spiraled downward until he reached rock bottom in the 1990s and was arrested for holding a woman hostage and threatening the police among other things and is currently serving three life sentences in a California prison.

'His wig and tie-dyed shirt and jumping around seemed to be about getting attention for himself,' he says. "It was more ego-driven than an affirmation of religious invitation. (Quoting Joseph Price - Religious Professor)

Proving that even the most gracious invitation in all of scripture can be manipulated into a platform for one's own recognition.

Ubiquitous in sports - under the eyes - on the cleats - most recognized scripture in the west rivaled only by the consistently misapplied "Judge not lest ye be judged" (Matt. 7:1)

This morning our text contains this most recognizable verse - I'm aware of the temptation that over time one can grow overly-familiar with a verse like this and we may fail to appropriately

and reverently and joyfully wonder at the glory and grace contained in it - some present who may not be familiar at all

Let's consider again - without the rainbow afro and the-dyed shirt - placing this verse in context so that clearly see and receive the intended effect that God has for this verse - respond to this most gracious of invitations.

Two points

I. The love of God

II. Our response to his love

I. The Love of God

- A. Context we left the first half of chapter 3 last week having examined the conversation the Jesus had with a very religious jewfish leader - pharisee - Nicodemus - who learned from Jesus that all the religion in the world means nothing apart from the experience of the new birth - apart from the Holy Spirit himself, personally raising dead, sinful hearts to life in Christ - all who believe - put their faith in Christ and him crucified - we have eternal life - and Jesus described the foundation for all of this

[14] And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the son of man be lifted up, [15] that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

1. Lifted up in death on a cross

- B. Our text, we have more explanation of what Jesus means by this - note the connection between v. 15 and v. 16 - lifted up - for God so loved the world, that he gave his only son

1. In him being lifted up to die so that undeserving sinners like you and me could be rescued from death that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life - this is how God so loved the world
 - a) The love of God is not abstract concept - nebulous force - his only, beloved son willingly put on flesh and sacrificed himself in abject humility so that the unworthy and undeserving - those destined for destruction - can find the way out of death - all for loves sake he became poor

His love is not a vague, sentimental feeling, but a love that costs. God gave what was most dear to him. (Leon Morris)

- (1) He gave what was most dear - his own son - for those totally undeserving
2. No greater love! Consider the scope of what is described in saying he so loved the world
 - a) The world - the emphasis on the way he describes the world in chapter 1

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. (John 1:10)

3. The emphasis is on the whole world order full of sinners who are indifferent and often actively opposed to God and his Christ - understand it is to this world that he gave what was most dear to him - his only son

Illustration: Abraham and Isaac -

He said, "take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (Genesis 22:2)

God did not stay his hand with his one and only, beloved son - Jesus Christ laid himself upon the wood of the cross and willingly became the substitutionary sacrifice

- C. Rising from the dead in power - easter - he took one breath and put death to death and lives forevermore giving eternal life to all who believe in him

1. Even the vilest sinner can be washed and cleansed and given the gift of eternal life! It is a distinctively Christian idea that god's love is wide enough to embrace all people. His love is not confined to any national group or spiritual elite. It is a love that proceeds from the fact that he is love. It is his nature to love. He loves people because he is the kind of God he is. (Leon Morris)

- D. Application

1. Wonder - love is magnified by how his love is poured out on the unlovely - he the offended party has made provision for guilty sinners like you and me to be liberated from death and judgment and transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved son

If the depth of love is measured by the value of the 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. 'The true looking of faith is placing Christ before one's eyes and beholding in him the heart of god poured out in love.' (Bruce Milne)

2. Believe - born again - new birth into eternal life - all who believe though deserving of death and judgment are not condemned but rather receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life

II. Our response to his love

- A. V. 17 God did not send his beloved son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him - and yet clearly present in this text is condemnation for those who do not believe

1. Perishing - death - fearful and final judgment

The son of man came into an already lost and condemned world. He did not come into a neutral world in order save some and condemn others; he came into a lost world in order to save some. (D.A. Carson)

- B. What differentiates? Whoever believes in the name of the son of God = all that he is = not condemned / whoever does not believe is already condemned because of their sin - belief and failure to believe - no middle ground - two kinds of people in the world
- C. V. 19 A judgement or verdict is declared over these two categories - believe and unbeliever
 - 1. Reiterating Ch. 1 light of the world who came to his own but they did not receive him - here's why - people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil - v. 20 those who do wicked things hate and avoid the light because they don't want their wickedness to be exposed

Illustration: cockroach necklace

God grants repentance— that is, he awakens the life that sees the ugliness and danger of sin and the beauty and worth of Christ. That truth sets the prisoner free. It's what happens when a person in the dark fondles an ebony brooch hanging around his neck, and then the lights go on and he sees it's not a brooch but a cockroach, and flings it away. (John Piper)

Illustration: Sméagol's obsession with the one ring of power - object of great evil - cherished - retreating into the dark away from the nasty sun

One day it was very hot, and as he was bending over a pool, **he felt a burning on the back of his head) and a dazzling light from the water pained his wet eyes.** He wondered at it, for he had almost forgotten about the sun. Then for the last time he looked up and shook his fist at her. 'but as he lowered his eyes, he saw far above the tops of the misty mountains, out of which the stream came. And he thought suddenly: **"it would be cool and shady under those mountains. The sun could not watch me there. (Tolkien)**

Residing in the dark he became twisted and warped by what he thought was precious

- 2. Willful rejection - love darkness - perish in the end

- D. But whoever does what is true comes to the light - these are those men and women who are willing to bring their sin and darkness into the light - to experience the conviction and sorrow for their sins and turn from that sin to the love of God in Christ and his liberating life-given light - experiencing the grace of Christ in receiving new, eternal life that begins in part the moment they believe those willing to declare with the Psalmist

[23] Search me, o God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! [24] and see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139:23-24)

- 1. The works don't make them right or earn them anything - new life - new birth - new affections - new passion to serve and please God
- 2. Their true and good works have been carried out in God - no credit - expression of new birth and the gift of the Holy Spirit

- a) Two kinds of people those who love darkness and resist the light of Christ and will perish - those who are willing to open their lives before his glorious and life-giving grace

E. Application

[5] For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus 'sake. [6] For God, who said, "let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:3-6)

1. If you have a glimpse of Christ this morning - if you are aware of your sin in light of his holiness - opportunity to turn from sin and darkness - oh my friend, do not turn away

[11] take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. [12] for it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. [13] but when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, [14] for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, "awake, o sleeper, and arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." (Ephesians 5:11-14)

2. Get woke! Even this morning sleepers waking up - the dead rising from spiritual graves - awake, awake, arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you
3. As we celebrate this easter morning let us ensure that we are those who make it our aim to not only rejoice in the light but also walk in the light

[5] This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. [6] If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. [7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin. [8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:5-9)

4. Imperfect but sincere - covered by the cleaning, atoning sacrifice - walking into eternity only by the grace of God - because of the great, redeeming love of God

Close

It is true that we are sinners; —but Christ suffered for us. It is true that we deserve death; —but Christ has died for us. It is true that we are guilty debtors; —but Christ has paid our debts with his own blood. This is the real gospel! This is the good news! On this let us lean while we live. To this let us cling when we die. (J.C. Ryle)

Raise that John 3:16 sign as a banner over your life in your home, in your neighborhood, even to the nations

Let us lean while we live - let us cling when we die - remembering that his resurrection from the dead is the surety of the promise that we have eternal life as we believe in him - trust in him.
What a happy day!

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