

Christmas 3:16
The Point of Christmas
John 3:16

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Introduction of Text: For these weeks leading to Christmas, I am preaching on one verse—John 3:16. Someone called it the “Mount Everest of the Scriptures.” I was struck recently with how this one verse communicates to us the message and hope of Christmas. You know the verse, but I pray that God will help us to see His truth in a powerful way. We have said that the premise of Christmas is identified in the first of the verse, “For God so loved the world.” We simply underscored the idea that Christmas begins with the amazing love of God for us and the whole world. He came out of His love. His amazing love prompted His coming. Last week, we talked about the gift that He gave. We said that He gave us Himself. Because He gave us Himself, He gave us His holiness. Because He gave us His Holiness, He gives us Heaven.

Today, we clarify that gift. Today, we will look at the phrase, “that whoever believes in Him.” This is a gift that is available to all, but it is certainly not automatic. We must believe. It is the point of Christmas.

As we have done each of the last two weeks, let’s read this verse together.

Text: ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

I have told this story often during the Christmas season, but it fits so well today, I tell it again. In December 1903, after many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their “flying machine” off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: “We have actually flown 120 feet—will be home for Christmas.” Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, “How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas.” He totally missed the big news—man had flown! He missed the point.

I want to talk to you today about the point of Christmas. We have said “For God so loved the world.” That’s big, big news, but it leads to a point. We have said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” That is big, big news, but it leads to something bigger.

The point of Christmas is in this phrase that comes next: “that whoever believes in Him.”

Now, you might think this is too simple of an approach to preaching this text, but quite literally, what I want to do today is just talk about the significance of each of those words.

The Recognition of “that”

He loved. He gave. If He did not love or did not come as the Son of God, there would be nothing to believe. So, there is a sequence. First, He loved. Because He loved, He came. Now, here is the next

part—He came so that we would believe. So, if we don't believe, His loving and His coming have no effect on us.

And so millions of people will celebrate Christmas, but actually, if they have not believed in Him for eternal life, there is no reason to celebrate.

The Elaboration of “Whoever”

The “whoever” of John 3:16 is actually the Greek word *pas* which means all. It is linked in the Greek text with what comes next, “the ones believing in Him” so that the literal translation would be “all the ones believing in Him.” What does “all” mean? “All” means “all.” That’s the beauty of this text. If you are one believing, you are “all.” So, we get the idea “whoever.” We get the idea “no matter who you are” and “no matter what you have done.”

The Whoever of the Whoever—Jews in Jesus’ day would have thought that Messiah was only for them. Jesus came announcing that His salvation was for all who would believe regardless of race or nationality.

The Whatever of the Whoever—No matter what you have done. Jesus told a great parable to emphasize this point. The parable of the Prodigal Son communicates with passion that no matter what you have done and no matter how far away from the father you have roamed, you can still come home.

The Whenever of the Whoever—Jesus also told a story, a parable, about the whenever of the whoever. That is, it is never too late to believe. In Matthew 20, we read about the Parable of the Vineyard workers. A vineyard owner went to hire daily workers. He hired some at 9, some at noon, some at 3, and some at 5. When the end of the day came, all got paid the same. “Deathbed converts and lifelong saints enter heaven by the same gate.” (Max Lucado, 3:16—*The Numbers of Hope*, 70.)

The Clarification of “Believes”

Now, we get to the central issue of this phrase. What does it mean to believe? There is a verse that we ought to examine right alongside John 3:16. The verse is James 2:19.

“You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe—and they shudder.” The context of this sentence is in a passage about the relationship between faith and works.

This belief is faith. It is the kind of faith that Jesus talked to Nicodemus about in the preceding verses. We often don't take advantage of seeing what the verses immediately prior to verse 16 say. These verses refer to an account in the Old Testament given in Numbers 21. The Israelites were grumbling about manna. “We detest this wretched food” is the actual quote. So, God sent snakes among the people. Many died. Now, they cry out to Moses to cry out to God. God told Moses to make a snake image and mount it on a pole. When anyone was bitten by a snake, they were to look at the pole and they recovered.

Why? It was God's way of saying, "You have no part in this, except to believe." In our salvation, we play no part. We can't be good enough, but we must believe. We must believe that His sacrifice brings us salvation.

The Decision to be "in Him"

The trust must be rooted "in Him." It is specific. Jesus is the way. He is not a way; He is the way. If you believe that He is just one way, you have not believed. You must believe He is the only way.

So What? We must believe. God gives the gift, but it is not ours until we receive.

Robert Albrecht taught me about receiving gifts many years ago. Robert is in heaven now, but I remember him well. Robert and I were having lunch. The ticket came. He said he was buying. I said I was buying. He said He was buying. I said I was buying. And, then He said "OK." Then, he said, "Now, let me teach you something. You are going to have to learn to receive. I was going to buy your lunch. I want to buy your lunch. I want to give you a gift—your lunch. But for it truly to be a gift, you have to receive it."

So, it is with God's gift. Many miss the gift because they are not willing to receive.