

judge and condemn us as our sins justly deserve. After all, God is a just and righteous judge.

Deuteronomy 32:4 NLT - 4 He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is!

If God is by nature just, then He cannot be unjust. Since we know the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23) and all have sinned (Rom 3:23) then our sins require death. But God is also by His nature love (1 John 4:8). How did God, in His mercy and wisdom, justly judge sin and yet express His love for us?

The amazing gift that God offers us is eternal life. Our physical body will pass away, but we will continue to have supernatural, divine life (Zoe) forever.

John 17:3 NLT - 3 And this is the way to have eternal life--to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.

Eternal life begins when we know Jesus as our savior. It will continue as we are in His presence for all eternity. Read Revelation 22 aloud to get a glimpse of the garden we will dwell in with God for eternity.

WRAP-UP

John 3:16 is at the heart of the Gospel. God loves you, and Jesus willingly took the punishment for your sin so that you wouldn't be condemned but that by believing in Him, you would have eternal life. Simple, profound, truth. The best gift you will ever receive.

MEMORY VERSE.

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.
- John 3:16 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN) Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life.

Challenge – Before you open your gifts this Christmas, pause to thank God for the greatest gift ever given, Jesus!

“For God so Loved...”

Advent-Love - #4

INTRODUCTION

What would you say is the most quoted verse in the Bible? Probably John 3:16. It is a verse seen and heard in so many places and by so many people that we have probably stopped listening to its message and pondering its truth. But right now, let's pause and look at it afresh. This verse is at the heart of John's Gospel, and it is the heart of God for all mankind. This verse defines what love is and so we need to set aside our boredom, cynicism, and presumption about John 3:16 and probe the depths of its meaning. Sandwiched between Jesus' encounter with the wealthy pharisee, Nicodemus, at night and the rejected and outcast Samaritan woman at noonday, Jesus declares that God's unfathomable love for all mankind was available because of the atoning sacrifice of God's beloved son.

Ice Breaker

Which of these do you feel best conveys love- acts of service, giving gifts, spending quality time, words of affirmation or physical closeness/touch?

Key Passage

John 3:16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. God So Loved the World

If we attempt to define love, we might equate it with warm feelings, or displays of affection. In our key verse we see that God's love was demonstrated by an excruciating self-sacrifice focused on the welfare of others. But why was this sacrifice required?

What does 2 Cor 5:19 tell us was accomplished in Christ's sacrifice on the cross? What was it that had separated us from God?

2 Corinthians 5:19 NLT - 19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.

God loved the world so much that He could not let us spend eternity separated from Him. This might make sense if those He was reconciling to Himself were good and loving people. But that is not the case. The world (*kosmos*) is a word that has various meanings. In this verse it refers to inhabitants of the earth or "the ungodly multitude; the whole mass of men alienated from God, and therefore hostile to the cause of Christ"¹

¹"G2889 - kosmos - Strong's Greek Lexicon (nlt)." Blue Letter Bible. Web. 16 Dec, 2022.

How do the verses below describe our condition when Christ was sent to rescue us?

Romans 5:8 NLT - 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

Romans 5:10 NLT - 10 For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.

Take a moment to reflect on the enormity of God's love and His broken heart as He sent His beloved son to die so that those who were hostile towards Him might live.

2. He Gave His Son so that We Might Believe

The whole Bible is an integrated story of God's love and plan for us. If we look back in Genesis, we see God's ultimate desire was to have fellowship with man. He placed us in a garden and walked with us there. But when Satan intervened and man rebelled against God, our path to return to fellowship in the garden had to go through the cross.

Genesis 3:15 NLT - 15 And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

Mankind had betrayed God and sinned. What was God's solution to the separation this had caused?

Genesis 3:15 was spoken by God to the serpent when God confronted Adam after he had sinned. It is a prophecy of the battle between Satan, and the offspring of the woman, and may be a reference to the Messiah's (Jesus) ultimate defeat of sin and death.

God had always known what was required to restore mankind.

John 1:12 NLT - 12 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 6:47 NLT - 47 "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life.

At the time Jesus spoke John 3:16 to Nicodemus, the Jews were awaiting their Messiah. But they were expecting him to be "their" Messiah, not the savior of the whole world. Jesus said that anyone, and everyone who believes in Him will be saved. In what ways might this make it harder for people to accept and in what ways would it make it easier to accept God's gift of salvation?

The path to salvation is incredibly simple but profoundly challenging. We must believe in Jesus. There is a difference between believing **that** Jesus is the Savior and believing **in** Jesus as my Savior. It is like the tightrope walker who asked the crowd, "Who believes I can push a man across this tightrope in a wheelbarrow?" Many said they believed that he could, but only his manager believed in him with enough faith to be carried across Niagara Falls. When we believe in Jesus, we accept His sacrifice as our atonement and believe we are changed into a new creation, born again into a new life in Christ. We place our eternal life totally in His hands.

3. Not Perish, but Have Eternal Life

God's offer of salvation comes in two parts. The first is what doesn't happen, and the second is what does happen.

John 3:17 NIV - 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

We won't perish (*apollymi*). What does this word mean? It means to utterly destroy. Verse 16 says we won't perish and verse 17 says Jesus wasn't sent to condemn the world. Of course, God has every right to