

## The Cross of Jesus – Come to the Cross

### John 3:16-21

John 3:16. It is perhaps one of the most popular, most loved and most memorized verses in the Bible. This verse has so much popularity you may have seen it on t-shirts. I have even seen it on signs at sports stadiums. Some of you may remember the man wearing the big rainbow colored afro style wig that showed up at sporting events around the country holding a sign that said John 3:16. In the mid-1980's he spent all of his time traveling to sports events around the country, lived in his car, and subsisted on donations and his personal savings. Sadly, that man – Rollen Stewart – is now in prison serving three consecutive life sentences for kidnapping. His sign by itself didn't seem to help him a whole lot!

He is in prison but the infatuation with John 3:16 continues. Many have referred to this twenty-six word verse as “the Bible in a nutshell”. “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.” That is it. This is the undying, untiring timeless message of God for our world today and for every generation. Max Lucado, who was called “America's Pastor” by Christianity Today magazine in 2004, says that 3:16 are “the numbers of hope”.

Why does this verse have such great popularity and appeal? It is a verse that begins with God and ends with life. It is a verse that urges us to choose Jesus and in so doing to choose life.

As powerful as the message of this verse is all by itself, let's look at it in the context of the verses that follow it. In Vs 17 Jesus is unpacking the great value of this verse and its message. Jesus said that God didn't send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Jesus. Many of you have already heard me say this before, but let me take a moment again. If Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world, then neither should the church take it upon herself to condemn the world. No, the heart of the Deer Flat family is to be like Jesus. We will preach and teach and live that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. We will not condone sin and we will not compromise the truth. But, it will never be our purpose to condemn people for their sin or their lifestyle. The heart of the Deer Flat family is to be like Jesus and help others be like Jesus. We will love our neighbor like Jesus. And as we learn to love like

Jesus, we will trust the Spirit of God to speak into the hearts of those that most need His words of hope.

Let's go back to the words of Jesus. In Vs 18 Jesus says that "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son". This is the Easter message ... "Whoever believes in Jesus is not condemned!". Whoever – this really means whoever! It doesn't matter how bad your life has been. It doesn't matter how unfair life has been to you. It doesn't matter how cruelly life has victimized you. It doesn't matter how many unspeakable sins you may have committed. Whoever means whoever! And whoever means you and me. Whoever means anyone in this room this morning. Whoever means anyone we know. Whoever means anyone who ever lived, anyone alive today, and anyone who will ever live between now and when Jesus returns. Are you catching the theme here? Whoever believes in Jesus ... is ... not ... condemned! Wow!

But we have to look at the rest of Vs 18: "...but whoever does not believe stands condemned already ...". Why? Why are we condemned if we do not believe in Jesus? Let's keep reading ... "because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." That is it? That is all I have to do? Simply believe in Jesus?

My friends, this is the Easter message. Yes, all you and I have to do to be saved and to be a part of this incredible adventure that leads to God and heaven is simply believe in Jesus. Tell me why? Someone please tell me why anyone would hesitate to accept such a gracious invitation. No matter how great and many my sins, I can stand before God when I die with no fear and no condemnation simply by believing in the name of Jesus. No matter how great and many my sins, I can live life in this world free from the power and the guilt of sin simply by believing in the name of Jesus. Please, somebody tell me why churches this Easter morning aren't full with those who believe in the name of Jesus. Please, somebody tell me why our Treasure Valley isn't full of transformed hearts and homes with people lovingly and joyously simply seeking to be like Jesus.

Maybe we can find an answer to this if we keep reading. Let's look at Vs 19. "This is the verdict ...". A verdict? Why did Jesus use this word? What does He mean by this? Jesus chose a legal word as if He was a Judge sitting in His court room and pronouncing the sentence to the guilty party. We need to remember what the Bible says about Jesus one day being our Judge. In Acts 17:31 it says God has set a day when Jesus will judge the world. It is like there is an alarm clock in heaven set to go off when it is time for Jesus to return as our Judge. In Acts 2:16 the Bible says that there will be a day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus. In 2 Timothy it says that Jesus is the righteous Judge who will judge the living and the dead.

Let's go back to John 3:19. Jesus is speaking with all authority as He gives the verdict. This is the sentence that Jesus will pronounce on those who do not believe in His name. "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." Incredible ... Light – Jesus – has come into the world. But something crazy happened. Mankind loved darkness over the light! Why, why would anyone love darkness over light? Jesus answers this in His verdict: "...because their deeds were evil".

Have you ever gone into your garage at night and turned on the light as you entered? Have you ever seen the black insects scurry across the floor looking for cover? They run from light and race back into the places of darkness. Wow – that is what Jesus says that mankind does. When some see Jesus coming and feel the Light of his presence they want to race back into the places of darkness. And why do we do that? Because we know that there are behaviors and attitudes in our lives that are evil. I didn't say it. Jesus said it. You see it is a matter of the heart. Please look with me at Vs 20-21: "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

If we lowered the light so that this whole room was sitting in the shadows, and if you knew that if you came into the light here at the front everyone in the room would be able to see the secrets sins of your life ... would you come forward? Or would you stay right where you are in the shadows so that no one could know the secrets of your life? That is exactly what Jesus is saying. Mankind has always preferred darkness over light, because of the secret sins and the evil in our lives.

But life in the darkness always, always, always leaves us empty. Sooner or later we begin to wonder what it would be like to get back in the sunshine once again. We have a drama prepared that I invite you to watch now.

## DRAMA

Friends, I have an invitation for you this morning that comes from the heart of Jesus – our Risen Lord. Jesus died on the Cross. Jesus died for your sins and mine. The Bible says that while we were still sinners Jesus died for us. Jesus knows we are hiding in the darkness. Jesus knows why we are hiding in the darkness. Jesus knows what we are hiding in the darkness.

I have words of hope for all of us this morning. Darkness has never been more powerful than light. Darkness can never push out the Light. But friends, I want you to know that the Light can always push out the darkness. Jesus is the Light. And Jesus is always calling into the darkness, inviting us to come to Him. And no matter how hard it feels for us when we try to fight our way out of the darkness, Jesus will be there for us. Jesus will fight for you against the forces of darkness. Jesus will fight for you against the addictions and habits that drag us down and hold us back. Jesus will fight for us releasing us from the anger and the shame of our past.

If you are tired of the darkness ... if you long for the Light ... I have good news. All you have to do is believe in the name of Jesus. And by the way, if you ever wanted to come forward in this room to spend a few moments in prayer and talk to Jesus you don't have to fear. We can't see into your heart. Only Jesus can. And as you come to Jesus He will wash your heart clean. Jesus will look at you just as if you had never sinned. And so will we.

I am going to offer a prayer and if there is anyone here this morning that is tired of the darkness and longs to be in the light again, I invite you to silently repeat this prayer with me. *“Jesus, thank you for loving me. I am tired of the darkness. I can't make it out on my own. Jesus, I want to believe in Your name. Thank you for fighting for me and helping me come back to You. Amen.”*

If you offered this prayer with me this morning, I personally invite you to write me a note on the communication card in your worship folder and tell me that you did. Simply write “I prayed”. I

want to get you some information about Next Steps that can help you on your new journey to be like Jesus.

Isn't this incredible! All we have to do is believe in the name of Jesus! We are going to close our service this morning by celebrating with those who believe in the name of Jesus and are about to be baptized.

In our tradition baptism does not make you a member of this church and it does not guarantee your salvation. Baptism symbolizes new life in Jesus. Baptism is our way of giving witness to the world that we choose Jesus. And this morning we will have one infant who will also be baptized. His baptism will also simply symbolize that his parents are choosing a way of life that will help lead this child to Jesus.

Prayer.