

John 3 v 16 to 36: God so loved the world...

For God so loved the world (John 3 v 16 to 21)

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (v 16). One could say there are ‘Seven Wonders’ of John 3 v 16:

- *For God* – the Almighty Authority
- *so loved the world* – the Mightiest Motive
- *that he gave his only Son* – the Greatest Gift
- *that whoever* – the Widest Welcome
- *believes in him* – the Easiest Escape
- *should not perish* – the Divine Deliverance
- *but have eternal life* – the Priceless Possession

‘If there is one sentence more than another which sums up the message of the Fourth Gospel, it is this. The love of God is limitless; it embraces all mankind. No sacrifice was too great to bring its unmeasured intensity home to men and women: the best that God had to give, he gave – his only Son, his well-beloved...’ (Bruce)

“Whoever does not believe is condemned already” (v 18) – John 3 v 16 is the most gracious, wonderful offer conceivable – eternal life for all who believe. Yet the offer has inherent consequences, for any who reject the offer, who refuse to believe. Their refusal makes their condemnation certain. But ‘what about those who never had the opportunity to believe because they never heard the good news of Jesus Christ?’ This is an important but separate question, addressed by Paul in Romans 1 and 2. Here, the focus is on those who deliberately reject the message, including those who heard and encountered Jesus in the first century.

“People loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” (v 19) – Jesus explains what keeps people from faith and salvation in him. It is because they are drawn to darkness, and love it more than the light. There is a critical moral dimension to unbelief that is often denied or ignored. Those who consciously reject Jesus often present themselves as heroic characters who bravely put away superstition and deal honestly with deep philosophical problems – however, it is more often the case that there is a moral compromise at the root of their rejection. Many opponents of Christianity have a vested interest in fighting against the truth of Jesus, because they love sin and do not want a God who will judge their sin.

“Everyone who does wicked things hates the light” (v 20) – some express their hatred of the truth by actively fighting against it, and others express their hatred by ignoring God’s truth – by saying to Jesus, ‘You are not worth my time.’ In contrast, “whoever does what is true comes to the light” (v 21).

Jesus and John the Baptist (John 3 v 22 to 36)

“After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing” (v 22) – John continues his account of the life of Jesus with the emphasis on what he did in Judea. The other Gospels focus on the work of Jesus in the Galilee region. Jesus, together with his disciples, did a work of baptizing, apparently similar to the work of John the Baptist. This was Jesus’ humble way of recognizing the goodness and importance of John the Baptist’s work.

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- How might one have expected John the Baptist to have replied to the statement of verse 26? Consider the quality of character brought out in his answer – how far do you share his attitude to Jesus?
- What is said about Jesus in verses 31 to 35 that set him apart from (and above) all others? What kinds of responses to Jesus do verses 33 to 36 describe? What are the consequences?

“A discussion arose between some of John’s disciples and a Jew over purification” (v 25) – we do not know the precise nature of this discussion. John’s baptism certainly had an element of personal purification, and perhaps some of the Jewish leaders objected to what he did or how he did it. ““He is baptizing, and all are going to him”” (v 26) – in that discussion John’s disciples learned that Jesus was baptizing, and drawing large crowds. But John would not allow envy or the fickle crowds make him forget his mission: to announce that the Messiah had come, and then step back and let the attention be focused upon Jesus.

““A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven”” (v 27) – John first answered his disciples that everything he had, including those who responded to his ministry, was a gift from God, and should therefore be received gratefully. ““I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him”” (v 28) – John then reminded his disciples that he knew who he was, and who Jesus was. He could thus keep his proper place: not too high (thinking he was the Christ), not too low (thinking he had no place in God’s plan).

““The friend of the bridegroom”” (v 29) – John explained that he was like the best man at a wedding; he was not the bridegroom. In Jewish wedding custom, the friend of the bridegroom arranged many of the wedding details and brought the bride to the groom, but he was never the focus of attention. ““Therefore this joy of mine is now complete”” – John wanted his followers to know that all these arrangements fulfilled his joy. One might say that John the Baptist lost his congregation to Jesus, and he was happy about it! ““He must increase, but I must decrease”” (v 30) – John understood he was to become less important, as Jesus would become more visible and known. This should be the motto of every Christian, especially leaders among God’s people. Jesus should become greater and more prominent, while the servant should become less important.

““He who comes from heaven is above all”” (v 31) – Jesus is not only different from everyone else: Jesus is greater than everyone else. ““No one receives his testimony”” (v 32) – John prophetically anticipated the rejection Jesus would endure during his ministry. He came from heaven, he bore witness to what he had seen and heard, but almost no one received his testimony, even though witnesses certified it as the truth of God.

““He whom God has sent utters the words of God”” (v 34) – Jesus is a uniquely reliable revelation, because he has the Holy Spirit “without measure”, in contrast to the Old Testament prophets.

““Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him”” (v 36) – John explained that because Jesus is the man from above, there is a heavy price to pay for rejecting him. If you reject the Son, then you receive God’s wrath. To reject the Son is to reject his gift – eternal life. ““The wrath of God remains on him”” – it remains in this world, because sin’s evil remains until its penalty has been paid. It remains into the next world, because those who reject Jesus cannot offer a perfect sacrifice acceptable to God. The wrath of God remains until the perfect payment Jesus made on the cross satisfies the debt of sin and guilt...

Looking back over John Chapter 3, we can say that it is a ‘must read’ chapter. There are four ‘musts’:

- *the Sinner’s must: “You must be born again” (John 3 v 7)*
- *the Saviour’s must: “So must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3 v 14)*
- *the Sovereign’s must: “He must increase” (John 3 v 30)*
- *the Servant’s must: “I must decrease” (John 3 v 30).*