

December 23, 2007

John 3:16 Part 2

Alright good morning. I'm so glad that your Christmas plans involved you being here to worship this morning. Grab your Bibles and let's continue to do that by continuing in our study of John 3:16. Look at that again with me today.

Last week we started our look at this incredible statement of Jesus and we saw the first two parts of the heart of our hope – of the gospel by which we are saved – we saw the reason there is a Christmas holiday to celebrate.

Jesus says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

First of all **our PROBLEM – that everyone is perishing apart from Jesus Christ. We will perish if we do not put our trust in Jesus.** And we understood that perishing is not simply dying or ceasing to be – it is being condemned by the wrath of God forever in the fiery torment of hell. That is the result of our sin. That is the reality of every human outside of Christ. That is the problem that mankind faces.

Then we saw **God's PLAN.** In John 3:16, Jesus tells us God's plan to fix our problem. **The plan is that God chooses to love us by sending His only begotten Son to die in our place.** We don't deserve it. We can't earn it. But God's plan is offered to us because it starts with God and God is a God of love.

Now this morning we see the third part of what Jesus tells us in John 3:16. And that is the link between God's plan and our problem. And the link between is our part. **Our PART.**

How God's plan solves the problem in my life is by my PARTICIPATION by faith. I must choose to BELIEVE in Jesus.

If we don't believe, we forfeit the love of God in His plan and we remain under the wrath of God. Remember from what we saw Jesus say last week in **John 3:36:**

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Believing is our link to the love of God. God's love as expressed in His plan is effective to save us from perishing, but God's love does not have that effect in those who do not believe. They will perish. Believing is how you become a "whoever" like we talked about last week. So what does that mean? What does it mean when Jesus says "whoever believes in Him shall not perish"?

The first thing we have to understand is that **believing is not a one-time decision. Believing is an ongoing CONDITION of the heart and mind.**

And we can see that right from the words of Jesus. In John 3:16 Jesus says "**whoever believes in Him**" – **not whoever believed in Him** – "**shall not perish...**" **That present tense in Greek is an ongoing, CONTINUAL action.**

I don't want to bury you in grammar and language points, but this is crucial. Look at **John 20:31** with me and I'll just use this to explain what Jesus is saying. John writes:

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

When he says that "these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ," that in Greek is the aorist tense – that's like our past tense – a one time event – something that happened

and had an ongoing effect – you have come to believe. But then he goes on and says “and that by believing you may have life in His name.” That “by believing” is Greek present tense that is that ongoing, continual reality. It would be “that by continuing to believe you will have life in His name.”

As John Piper explains, **believing is a vital link with the rescuing love of God ONLY when that believing is the ongoing condition of the heart.** Folks what we’re seeing here is that it is very dangerous and unwise to orient your Christianity on a past decision if you are wondering if you are a Christian. The issue isn’t did you ever have an experience where you believed in Jesus – but are you believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God? Is this the ongoing condition of your heart and mind?

Well how can you tell? What does that mean? **It means three things.**

First – it means agreeing with the OBJECTIVE truth about Christ.

Believing is not just an emotional thing or a subjective experience; it has specific truth content that is true whether or not you agree with it. See the reality of our day is that truth is relative. What’s true for me and my experience is great for me, but it may not be true for you and I can’t tell you that what is true for me is true for you. There are no universal absolutes. Christianity stands in absolute diametric opposition to that view. **Jesus Christ is who He says He is whether we BELIEVE Him or not.**

And genuine belief in Jesus AGREES with the objective truth about Jesus all through the Word of God. For example like we saw last week from John chapter 1, Jesus has always been, has always been God and the week before that how He was born of a virgin as God with us. But also includes his perfect life, his atoning death, and his victorious resurrection. Believing includes the objective truth about Jesus.

Secondly – it has to be more than that. If you’re believing is nothing more than an agreement in your head to the facts about Jesus, then your version of faith is no different than the demons James describes in **James 2:19** who believe and tremble. Knowing and agreeing with truth is necessary but it is not enough – it will not make you a Christian – it will not solve your problem. **Believing also means being SATISFIED with all the God is for you in Jesus.**

We’ve talked about before that for salvation to be real – the way that Jesus described it as he taught about it through parables, Jesus must be more than just your Savior and Lord – He must be your treasure. As Jesus said in **John 6:35**:

“Then Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

In other words, **belief means the needs of our heart – of our soul – of our lives are no longer insufficiently met by the stuff of this WORLD, instead they are satisfied through our relationship with CHRIST.** As Peter said in **2 Peter 1:3**,

“God’s divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

And finally, belief that connects our problem with the plan of God is a belief that results in obedience. **Believing affects HOW we live our lives.** It can’t do anything but affect our lives. We’ve talked about it so many times, what we really believe determines our behavior. So if our belief in Jesus is a saving belief, it will result in obedience. John wrote as much in **I Jn 2:3-6**:

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him:

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

That’s why it was so important for us to understand what Jesus was saying in the present tense when he says “whoever believes in Him.” It is not that at one point in the past you believed and acted

accordingly by walking an aisle or praying a prayer or even getting baptized. It is that from that moment on you have continued to believe and that belief shows up consistently in the actions of your life.

Going back to **James chapter 2** he couldn't have made it much clearer. In verse **17** and in verse **26** he says "faith (or belief) by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

The third part of John 3:16 is our part in the process. And I really want us to understand the reality of what Jesus is saying. Mental assent. Habit. Past obedience. Religion. None of that connects us with God's plan of love. Belief that makes a difference – believe that solves the problem – believe that saves us from condemnation is belief that changes our lives every day. It is belief that makes us who we are. Not perfect in any one moment. But striving with all we are to be like the Jesus whose name we claim – whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

What we believe that is factually true, what we believe that transforms satisfaction and purpose in our lives, what we believe that changes how we live each day is that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, died in my place that I might have a relationship with God. And that's what communion is all about. So this morning as we come to the Lord's Table, it is based on a common belief in what is symbolized by these elements. That's God's plan was real. That Jesus – God's Son – came at Christmas in order to die because of our sins so that we could be saved from condemnation and instead live life in relationship with God. If that is the resounding truth of your heart today, then celebrate with us as take the Lord's Supper.

PRAYER – Observance of the Lord's Supper

As Jesus wrapped up the last supper, he gave hope to his confused and scared disciples when he said in Matthew 26:29 that he would not drink the fruit of the vine again until he drank it with them anew in the Kingdom of God.

Even then, Jesus was reminding them that there is more to life than what you see in front of you. How appropriate it is that on the Sunday before Christmas we focus on that eternal life. In John 10:10, Jesus said "I have come – and that's Christmas – that you may have life and have it abundantly." To have it in fullness and to have it forever. And that's the last part of John 3:16 this morning. **God's PROMISE.**

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. **God's promise is that in place of perishing, those who believe get ETERNAL LIFE.** Just real quickly I want us to look at what that means.

The basic, common understanding is that God is promising us a home in HEAVEN for eternity after we physically die on earth. And praise God that's true. Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 5:1:**

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."

But praise God that's not all it means. Abundant life is not just after death. **Believing means we have eternal life NOW, not just in the future. Every human being has eternal existence.**

Eternal LIFE begins at salvation. In **John 5:24** Jesus says,

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has – not will have, but has - eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

Jeremiah 29:11 God tells us about those plans he has for us in this life - "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Acts 17:26 God tells us that he sets the exact times for us and even where we will live.

Psalms 139 tells us that God knows us completely now – in fact it says that every single day ordained for me was written down and known by God before one of them came to be.

And those days – that life – Paul explained it best when he said in **Galatians 2:20**:
“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. – listen to this -
The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Believing is the link that unites us with the life of God in Christ now. If we have Christ, we have his life now and his life is eternal.

That eternal life is expressed in relationship with God. That’s the other element of eternal life I want you to realize. **Eternal life is a personal RELATIONSHIP with God the Father through God the Son.**

Jesus defines that for us in **John 17:3**

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

As John Piper explains, “eternal life is a conscious experience of knowing and relating to God.”

Folks that’s why we’re here. That’s why Fairway exists. That’s what the whole vision God has given us is all about. That we would NOW be moving deeper and deeper into that life in Christ one step at a time together. That we would be leading other people into it. That we would be living it ourselves. That our lives on earth day in and day out not just at Christmas but every day – would be the eternal life of Christ:

- Lives surrendered by faith to truth
- Lives changed by belief into obedience
- Lives linked by relationships into family
- Lives shared by service to our world

That’s the promise. That’s the goal. That’s eternal life. It starts now. It never ends. Death does not interrupt it. It simply moves it to an easier realm forever and forever.

Does that make you tremble? That so much is riding on your spiritual awakening in this life?

Eternity rides on our response – our belief. And you know why eternity exists? **Eternity exists because it will take that long for us to know the inexhaustible GLORIES of God.**

As Paul wrote in **Ephesians 3:18-19** that we:

“may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Now link that with the words of Jesus – “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but will have eternal life.”

Christmas begins because of God’s plan to solve our problem. And the Jesus of the manger – is the Jesus of the cross – is the Jesus of the empty tomb – is the Jesus on the throne – is the Jesus coming back to take those who believe home forever. Praise His Name. His love endures forever. Will you stand in celebration and worship Him today?

Pray