

God Will Save All Believers January 1, 2006 John 3:16

This morning, as we start a new year, I want to talk about a lot of things from the Scriptures. I want to talk about the incarnation, the new birth, God's love, His purpose in sending Christ, the origin and nature of faith, and eternal life. And I'm going to talk about all of that by focusing on one verse.

If you were to ask every believer, young or old, mature or immature, to name one attribute of God, I'm willing to bet the top vote-getter would be that of love. God is certainly loving. God is love, according to 1 John 4:8. And if there's one verse that almost all believers, at least in America, could point to in order to show what God's love is like, it's John 3:16 - "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." John 3:16 is arguably the most famous verse in the Bible, but I dare say it may also be the verse that is most often misinterpreted and misrepresented by believers who are misinformed.

To understand John 3:16, or any verse of Scripture, you have to examine it's context. With that in mind, I want to start in verse one of John 3.

[Read John 3:1-21.](#)

In the chronology of the Gospels, the events of these verses come very early in the ministry of Jesus. After His baptism and subsequent testing in the wilderness, Jesus was invited to a wedding in the town of Cana, in Galilee. It was there that His first miracle is recorded, where the water was changed into wine. We find the account in chapter two, and in verse eleven John writes "This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."

Jesus was beginning to make a little bit of a name for Himself. Then, He visited Capernaum with His mother, brothers, and disciples for a few days. Then, it was onto Jerusalem for the first Passover during Jesus' 3½ year ministry, where we find Jesus making a scourge of cords and driving all of the moneychangers out of the temple. Surely this got the attention of the upper crust of Jerusalem. Even more so when Jesus said "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The temple was everything to the Jews, so any threat on the temple, which represented, in a sense, the existence of national Israel, was sure to get the attention of the establishment. Jesus, of course, was speaking of His own body, as John says in verse 21. Then, after that, in Jerusalem, He performed more signs and many believed in His name.

This is the setting for one of the most famous dialogues in the Bible. You had two main parties that controlled things in Israel - the Sadducees and the Pharisee. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, the minority party, a highly outwardly religious sort - all about outward conformity to the law. It seems he was a well-respected man. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council.

In John 3:2 we read about this Nicodemus approaching Jesus by night. Why at night? Probably because of pride. He didn't want others to know what he was doing. He didn't want to be ostracized by his peers. And since he was coming to ask questions of this Jesus character, he didn't want others to know that he didn't "know it all" as a teacher and ruler of the Jews. To admit he didn't know it all would have been embarrassing for a man of his position.

And it is vital to understanding what this passage says to remember that Nicodemus was thoroughly Jewish. He came to this meeting with a typical 1st century Pharisaical Jewish mindset. He was speaking for the Jews and their worldview.

The fact that Nicodemus was approaching Jesus at all lends credence to the fact that he personally knew Jesus was no kook. His first statement to Jesus even acknowledges that God is with Him: He gives Jesus a respectful greeting, "Rabbi," or teacher, "we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus' reputation had preceded Him.

But whatever question Nicodemus had coming next, he didn't get a chance to fire it off. Jesus answered Him, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." This is the beginning of a new year so we may as well talk about the new birth. The phrase "born again" gets tossed around by Christians and non-Christians alike, with few truly understanding what it means. However, in the literal translation of this verse it's better rendered "born from above," that supernatural act of one being quickened out of the state we read all men are born into in Ephesians, dead in our trespasses and sins. Being born from above makes us alive to the things of God.

And this whole idea was very Jewish. They were waiting for a millennial kingdom that would only be seen by those who are transferred out of the kingdom of darkness. This could only happen with a new, supernatural, spiritual birth. If Nicodemus understood Ezekiel he would have known that God was one day going to remove Israel's heart of stone and give them a new heart, a heart of flesh, and make them walk in His ways finally, and thus fulfill the blessings we read of in Deuteronomy 29.

And notice the order of what Jesus says in verse three. So many today who don't truly understand this doctrine of regeneration, or being born from above, get the order of verse three wrong. Jesus doesn't tell Nicodemus that he'll see the kingdom of God and be born again. He says that unless you have been born from above you cannot see the kingdom of God. Men must first be born from above and given spiritual life. Then they are able to see and believe.

And we have the promise from John 6 that all who do receive this life do come to believe. Listen to what Jesus says:

- John 6:37 - "All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."
- John 6:44 - "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws Him, and I will raise Him up on the last day."

These verses are at the heart of the truth that salvation is the work of God, and not man. It is the Father doing the giving. All who are given to the Son by the Father will have eternal life. No one who is not given to the Son by the Father can come to the Son. Unless the Father acts, we don't see the Son. We don't gain spiritual life and belief in the Son on our own. It is the work of God. There is no way we can do it, and left to ourselves we would be hopeless. We will talk about this more in a few minutes.

Jesus' statement about being born from above and the kingdom catches Nicodemus off guard, so in verse four Nicodemus asks a logical question: "How can a man be born again (physically)?" And Jesus tells him that entrance into the kingdom requires a physical birth and a spiritual birth. You have to be born both of water and of the Spirit. Your mom and dad are responsible for giving your physical life, and God gives spiritual life by the Holy Spirit. By the way, you did nothing to make yourself alive physically. Through natural means your parents brought that about. You also do nothing to make yourself alive spiritually. Through supernatural means Almighty God brings that about.

This truth shouldn't have surprised Nicodemus. He was a teacher of the Law. He was familiar with Deuteronomy 30:1-6, Jeremiah 31, and Ezekiel 36. He probably knew them by heart. That's why Jesus told him in verse seven that all of this shouldn't amaze him. After all, he was a teacher of Israel.

Then, verse eight is a great statement by God about His own free will. Jesus tells Nicodemus that "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

We don't know whom God is making alive. The Spirit is blowing where, when, and how it wishes, according to the will of God. So don't ever say free will isn't taught in the Bible. God has ultimate free will!

Nicodemus, however, was still having trouble with this idea in verses nine and ten, so Jesus answers again in verses eleven through thirteen: "Truly, truly I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man."

Essentially Jesus is challenging Nicodemus to answer the primary question of the Gospels, the primary question from Jesus to all men really... "Who do you say that I am?" Nicodemus' lack of understanding had nothing to do with his intellect. As a member of the Sanhedrin and a respected teacher in Israel, Nicodemus was not stupid. His trouble understanding had everything to do with his lack of belief. And Jesus wasn't just talking about Nicodemus here.

It was Nicodemus who, back in verse two, said "we know that You have come from God." We, as in, the nation of Israel. And Jesus is speaking about Nicodemus and the nation in general. You, Israel, don't believe. That's why you don't understand when I talk about the kingdom to come, about how you have to be born from above to enter into it. Nicodemus was a learned man. He should've understood. If anyone was qualified to understand you would think it was a teacher of the Law. But he didn't understand, and the nation of Israel did not understand as a whole, because he, and they, did not believe. That is why he couldn't properly answer the question, "Who do you say that I am?" at that point.

All the more evidence this morning that you cannot think yourself into God's grace. You can't know yourself into God's grace. All of the head knowledge and all of the "good things" you do will not get you one inch closer to the kingdom. Being born from above, is by definition, something that happens to us as a result of the actions of God. From above, by His amazing grace.

In verse thirteen Jesus tells Nicodemus that "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man." Jesus was the only representative of humanity qualified to speak with authority like this regarding the kingdom. Why? Because He was the only One who was in heaven. He was the One who took on flesh, condescending to earth only after living side by side with God the Father from eternity past. He ascended and descended on His own accord, by His own power. He was the Son of Man, and your translation might add "who is in heaven." Some manuscripts add that. Others don't. I'm not sure if it's really there or not. I know the New American Standard omits it, while the American Standard Version that is sort of the grandparent of the NAS does include it. Consider the claim to deity, though, that Jesus is giving Nicodemus if it is there. He's the Son of Man, fulfilling perfect righteousness on the earth, but in His divine nature He still communes with the Father in heaven. In other words, He is God very God on earth.

But, as if all of that wasn't enough for Nicodemus, Jesus then unfolds something that happened in Israel's history to illustrate the point He's really trying to get across... His Gospel. Nicodemus might have been thinking about how sin needs to be punished. Jesus harkens back to the days when Israel was in the wilderness. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life." Jesus refers to the story we find in Numbers 21. The Lord had blessed Israel by delivering their enemies, the Canaanites, and their cities, into their hands. But it didn't take long for them to begin complaining about their wilderness journey, about food and water, and about the manna that God had provided for them.

God responded to their complaints by sending fiery serpents among the people. They would bite the people and many of them died. Some of the people, not all, but some, came to realize they had sinned. They cried out for help. God then told Moses to make a fiery serpent and set it on a standard. Then He said, "everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." Moses did just what God said, and the ones who believed God and looked upon the serpent, His means of temporal salvation at that point in time, were healed.

Of course, Jesus isn't making a temporal point, but an eternal one. Men and women have been bitten by sin and are condemned to eternal death because of it. The bronze serpent was a type, or picture, of the Christ Himself. The serpent was the tormentor of Israel, yet God had Moses make a serpent as a means of saving lives. In the same way, Christ became sin, bearing the full fury of the wrath of God for the sin of all who will ever believe. That's why He added that the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. Just as the Israelites were saved in the wilderness by looking upon God's given means of temporal salvation, so too are men and women today saved by looking upon God's only means of eternal salvation, Jesus Christ.

So that brings us to where we're going to camp out, verse sixteen. "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."

It's one of the most famous verses of the Bible, and with good reason. It's a great verse. Few verses capture the essence of the Gospel so clearly. Unfortunately, it's so often misunderstood, misinterpreted, misrepresented, and wrongly taught. This verse is used by many to teach a gospel that, when you get right down to it, proclaims that man somehow cooperates with God in the salvation experience. There are three assertions made about this verse that proponents of that view make...

1. God loves all men.
2. Christ died for all men.
3. Salvation depends upon the individual's free-will decision to trust in Christ.

I believe and intend to show that this text does not prove these three assertions. This morning I want to look at the biblical alternative, which I believe contradicts those three assertions. In looking at what the verse really says, we're going to see three things this morning...

1. God's motive - For God so loved the world
2. God's action - that He gave His only begotten Son
3. God's purpose - that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Notice that this verse is one complete sentence, a unified thought that is broken down into three sections. In our English translations there are two uses of the word "that," and they are translated from two different Greek terms, and they divide the verse nicely without taking away from the unified thought Jesus presented. The first "that" is the Greek word "haste", which you could also translate "therefore", or "for this reason." So you could just as well say "For God so loved the world, for this reason He gave His only begotten Son..." His love for the world was His motive for the action He did - giving His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die. The purpose for His action is

found after the second “that”, which is the Greek word “hina,” or “in order that.” He gave His only begotten Son in order that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

This verse is a complete sentence, a unified thought. The purpose of God’s love for the world was that believers should be saved by the death of Christ. John 3:16 is a beautiful passage which explains for us how God’s love benefits those who will believe. However, if you look at it, and think about it, the verse gives us no reason whatsoever to think that it provides any benefit for those who will not believe.

Mitch Cervinka did a great job exegeting this text, and he gives this illustration:

“There are two twin brothers, Tom and Joe. Tom trusted in Christ and was a faithful Christian, but Joe died a committed atheist. If we apply John 3:16 to Tom and Joe the way most people understand the word “world”, we could say...

“For God so loved Tom and Joe that He gave His only begotten Son so that Tom shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Now think about that again. Let me repeat it. It sounds crazy.

“For God so loved Tom and Joe that He gave His only begotten Son so that Tom shall not perish but have eternal life.”

What about Joe? How does God’s purpose to save Tom display any love for Joe? How is God’s love for Joe manifested in a purpose to save Tom alone? The passage makes no sense when we understand “world” to include those who will never believe – and an interpretation of Scripture that leads to nonsense is simply false.”

World can’t mean every single individual who ever lived. The use of the word “world” in John 3:16 cannot mean unbelievers, or else the verse just makes no sense. Let’s look at what it does mean, but let’s start with the beginning of the verse. God loved the world. Along with His own glory, it is the motive for all of great things He has done to secure salvation for His chosen. Let’s look at how the love of the Triune God manifests itself in salvation:

- Those God the Father loved He chose for salvation. In Ephesians 1:4-5, we read that “in love (the motive) He predestined us (the action) to adoption as sons...”
- Those the Father loved He gave Christ the Son to suffer and die as their propitiation. In Ephesians 5:25, we read that husbands are to love their wives, “just as Christ loved the church (the motive) and gave Himself up for her (the action)...”
- Those the Father loves He makes alive, quickens, regenerates (a.k.a. births from above) by the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 2:4-5, we read “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us (the motive), even where we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (the action) (by grace you have been saved)...”

In looking at these verses, it’s clear that if God loved all men without exception, then He would have predestined all men unto adoption as sons, and would have made them all alive with Christ. To assert otherwise is to disconnect the Scriptures and to reassemble them the way you want them to sound. But John 3:16 is a unified statement, one complete sentence, so it makes sense that His motive, action, and purpose would be connected with regards to whom the verse applies. God performs these actions for each and every person He loves. Therefore, anyone who is not chosen by God, or who is never made alive by His Spirit, was never savingly loved by Him. This is not an unfair thing for anyone, which I’ll elaborate on as we continue. It is a glorious truth about the actions of a gracious God for those whom He has called.

Back to the verse, the emphasis of this opening clause, “God so loved the world”, is actually not on the word “loved”. It’s not on the word “so” either. The verse doesn’t say “God SOOOO loved the world.” That word “so” is better translated “Thusly”, or “In this way.” It’s better read “In this way God loved the world.” Jesus was saying, “Hey Nicodemus, this is how God loved the world”.

That means that we now have to explain what “world” means when the Scripture says “God so loved the world.” I’ve told you what I believe it doesn’t mean. But what does it mean? And it’s here that it’s crucial to remember the context of what was going on. Remember the situation. Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, a teacher and ruler of the Jews, in the center of Jewish universe, Jerusalem. Nicodemus, realizing that this Man had God on His side, came to Jesus by night, firmly entrenched in the Jewish idea that salvation was only for those in the nation (the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). To Nicodemus the pig-eating Gentiles were dogs, the scum of the earth, and the idea that God would save any of them was repulsive to the Jewish mind.

But that's exactly what Jesus was saying: I contend that the context demands the beginning of the verse sound something like this: "In this way, Nicodemus, God set His love upon the world (not only the world of the Jews, but also the world of the Gentiles)...".

(pause)

Now, before you go and allege that I'm reading into the text to assert my own beliefs on this verse, let's look at how the word "world" is used in a variety of ways in the New Testament.

- In John 12:19, it says "So the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are not doing any good; look, that world has gone after Him.'" The Pharisees didn't mean every single individual who ever lived. They meant the large crowd that was following Jesus.
- In John 7:4 it refers to the general public. The verse says "for no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If you do these things, show Yourself to the world."
- In Romans 1:8, Paul writes, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world." Paul didn't mean every single person. He meant all who had heard of the faith of the Roman church.
- In John 12:25, Jesus said, "He who loves His life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal." Definitely not a reference to every single individual, but a reference to our present existence.
- In Mark 8:36 it refers to the riches and pleasures of life. "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world (definitely not every single individual), and forfeit his soul?"

I could go on. In John 7:7, 17:6, 17:9, 17:16, and 1 John 2:15, just references by the apostle John in his writings, "world" refers to the evil world system that surrounds us. James 3:6 refers to the world of iniquity. Matthew 4:8-9 refer to the "world" as the people living on earth at a particular time.

So you can see by all of these examples, and the context we've looked at, that you just can't insist that it has to mean every single individual who ever lived. If anyone is trying to fit a word to prove their theological preference, it is the one who insists that John 3:16 proves God loved every single individual who has ever, and will ever, live. In fact, it's debatable as to whether or not there is any New Testament usage of the word "world" that means every single individual who has ever lived.

The word is often used in the Scriptures to define a general group of people, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, or an ethnic group. And there's no reason in this passage to suppose that it is intended to identify the specific humans whom God loved. The remainder of the sentence does that, by teaching that God's great love purposed that only those who believe in Christ should be saved.

(pause)

Belief. Where does it come from? From where does faith originate? The claim that salvation depends upon the individual's free-will decision to trust Christ is simply not taught in the passage. John 3:16 says that "whoever believes in Him" will be saved, but it doesn't say where that faith comes from. One of the primary misconceptions about this verse is that the word "whoever", or "whosoever", depending on your translation, somehow lends support to the idea that it's up to everyone's free will. But that is a classic example of eisegesis (reading something into the text that simply isn't there).

To answer the question about the origin of faith, you have to turn to other verses in Scripture, and there are plenty that give us the answer...

- Philippians 1:29 says "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake... to believe in Him..."
- Ephesians 2:8 says "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."
- Hebrews 12:2 calls Jesus "the author (or originator) and perfecter (or finisher) of faith".

The Scriptures also teach that in order for a person to receive God's Word, God must open their heart...

- Acts 16:14 says of Lydia that "the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."
- Going back to John 6, in verse 64 Jesus says, "there are some of you who do not believe... For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

In that John 6 "bread of life" discourse we read how many of Jesus' disciples stopped following Him after He said those things. Why? Because God had not granted those that stopped grace to believe. Therefore, they had no interest in coming to Christ.

That goes to show you how great the grace of God is for those who DO believe. Romans 9 teaches that God endures vessels of wrath prepared for destruction with great patience in order to make the riches of His glory known upon the vessels of mercy (the believing ones), which He prepared beforehand for glory. What a glorious thing for believers to rest in as we begin a new year. If you are a believing one He has shown you mercy, in order to glorify Himself.

So when we come to the question: "What is the origin of faith?" Scripture repeatedly answers the question. God grants faith to those He has made alive, so that they can come to Jesus, so that He can keep them and raise them up on the last day. John 3:16 doesn't answer the question, as some try to make it, but there is the biblical answer.

So why the misrepresentation of the verse? Why the confusion over the word "whoever"? Think about it. We're fallen, and by and large, fallen man has a problem with a God who treats some differently than others -- especially today, in modern America, in a society defined by political correctness, where we celebrate the "freedom of choice" for everyone. Those who talk about free will with regards to salvation forget about the state of unregenerate man, though. According to Scripture, man is dead in his trespasses and sins. The natural mind cannot understand the things of God according to 1 Corinthians 2. Fallen man is stubborn, with an insatiable desire to please himself. Fallen man wants nothing to do with a holy, sovereign God. So if God left every fallen person to his or her own decision whether to believe in Christ, 100 percent of the time fallen man would freely choose to remain in a state of rebellion, sin, and unbelief. One hundred percent of the time.

We've heard the verses. Psalm 53 says that "God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there is anyone who understands, Who seeks after God. Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one." Again from John 6, "No one can come to Me (Jesus) unless the Father who sent Me draws him."

Those who have been made alive, God has chosen these out of the rebellious lot to be saved in spite of their rebellion. Ephesians 2:4-5 says "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). There we see the motive (his love), the action (making us alive), and the purpose (so that those alive are saved).

So I've told you what the word "whoever" does not mean. What does it mean?

The Greek word is "pas," which can be rendered "all", "every", or "all manner of". We could just as properly translate the passage "that everyone who believes in Him might not perish". The word "whoever" or "whosoever" has somehow generated uncertainty, but when you go to the text it just doesn't have that uncertainty. There is nothing uncertain about the fact that all who believe will not perish.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 backs this truth up: "God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth." A great verse that demonstrates God's role in giving us our faith and sanctifying us.

John 1:12-13 says "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." We're not saved based on our background, a truth Nicodemus didn't quite yet get. We're not saved by our desire to be born from born from above. And we can't save anyone else. Salvation, all of it, is entirely by the will and action of God. "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

Denial of these truths amounts to a denial of the sovereignty of God. And you cannot diminish the sovereignty of God. God can't be 99% sovereign. He's either sovereign or He's not. He's either in control or He isn't.

Denial of these truths also amounts to a denial of His omniscience. God knows all. He has declared the end from the beginning. If He doesn't know everything He's relegated as one of those powerless pagan deities we read about in the Old Testament. But that's not our God. Our God is the Creator and Lord of all. "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13)

What does "whoever believes" mean? It means that God saves all believers, from every tribe, tongue, and nation. God saves them all in Christ. Jew or Greek, strong or weak, mighty or meek. God saves all believers in Christ.

And who or what do we trust for our salvation? Wherein lies your confidence that you will escape the wrath of God? If it's not Christ and Christ alone, you fall into a group you don't want to be a part of. That group of those who haven't been made alive, who are called helpless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies of God.

Saving faith looks to Christ. Saving faith cries out to God for mercy. There are many who call God vengeful and mean because He's going to punish many with eternal damnation. They forget that eternal damnation is exactly what we all deserve. It is a merciful God, and not our own free will or wonderful faith, that makes the difference between our being lost and being saved. Our free will choice is not the deciding factor in our salvation. God is not obligated to show mercy. It is His prerogative. He will show mercy to whom He will show mercy, and He will show compassion to whom He will show compassion.

The common interpretation, or misinterpretation rather, of John 3:16 changes the meaning of the text. If we assert that God loved every single person of every age SOOOO much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for them, so that as a result, anyone can receive eternal life simply by making their own free-will decision to trust in Jesus Christ – if we allege that we've changed the purpose for the incarnation. Christ no longer came to save sinners. He came to make salvation available to sinners, if only they'll receive Him. The control no longer rests with God, but with each individual instead.

That's a big difference, bigger than we realize most of the time. That's a different Gospel, and we know what the apostle Paul says about different gospels in Galatians 1. "If anyone preaches a different gospel, let them be anathema!" That gospel preaches a different God – a weaker God. Frustrated, having done all He can, and now insecure, waiting for His creation to determine whether or not they'll accept Him. I hope you see just how important understanding verses such as John 3:16 properly are.

But we're not done yet. We have to finish the purpose. God's motive was His love. His action was giving His only begotten Son (unique Son is a better, more literal translation). His purpose is that those who believe in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

If you find yourself believing, you will not perish. You will not get what you deserve. God is holy, and He will punish all sin. Our church has been going through the book of Romans for quite some time now. Back in Romans 2 we saw that all who perfectly continue in obedience will inherit eternal life. But in Romans 3 it became clear that no one meets the standard of perfect righteousness. Romans 5 shows us that we can be as good as we can, but we've still inherited a sin nature from Adam. Left to ourselves there's no hope. But apart from works, the righteousness of God stands revealed in Jesus Christ. He took on flesh, came to earth, met the perfection requirement, then went to the cross. God punished Jesus, Him who knew no sin. Jesus bore the wrath of God for all the sins of all who will ever believe. God made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Thus, God sees those who believe as perfectly righteous, and we inherit eternal life. We will inherit all things as we've seen in Romans 8. And it's all by the grace of God. It's a new year, but it's the same Gospel. Dwell on that in 2006.

Here's John 3:16-17, the Matt Privett translation...

God manifested His love for humanity (both Jews and Gentiles) in this way. He gave His only unique Son to die, in order to secure and guarantee the eternal salvation of those people who possess genuine faith in His Son. God did not send His Son to the Jews and Gentiles to condemn the Jews and Gentiles (they were already condemned by their sin), but that the believing ones, through Him, would be saved.

And quickly, to finish out the section we read at the beginning: [Read John 3:18-21](#).

All mankind is divided into two classes: believers and those who do not believe. Our eternal destiny hinges on our answer to the question Jesus posed throughout the New Testament: "Who do you say that I am?" The Light has come into the world, but the world has rejected the Light, preferring the rebellious darkness. Verse twenty refers to those who do not believe with very strong words – "everyone who does evil hates the Light." They're God-haters.

But those who believe, those who hold to the truth and place their faith in Christ alone, they come to Christ, the Light, because the Father has drawn them, so that their salvation may be manifested... and pay attention to the last clause of verse 21... as having been wrought in God.

Salvation is by God, through God, for God (ultimately for His glory). This morning, this year, if you are a believing one, thank God for your salvation. If you are not a believing one, I pray first and foremost that God's will be done, and by way of supplication I pray that He would open your eyes to see, your ears to hear, and your heart to understand, as the Scriptures seem to teach eventually happened to Nicodemus. And by way of application today, by the mercies of God, let's present our bodies as living and holy sacrifices, acceptable to God. It is our spiritual service of worship, the only reasonable thing to do. Jesus came that believing ones might have life more abundantly, right now and forever. Let's live that life. Let's pray. **Pray.**