

John on Jesus - The Greatest Verse in the Bible

Sign Title: The Greatest Verse in the Bible

July 1, 2012

Good morning Faith family. I also want to say a special “Hello” to those connecting this morning through the Internet. It is great to have you studying the Word of God with us. We are studying our way through the Gospel of John and this morning are at the most famous verse of the book, a verse that is probably the most famous in the Bible --- John 3:16.

John 3:16 isn't just famous in the church, but it is making inroads into our culture. I found these example on Wikipedia. If you travel west, I encourage you to try In-n-Out Burger. It is a restaurant chain making a name for itself by paying employees significantly more than minimum wage. It also serves excellent food. The owners of this rapidly expanding burger franchise are Christians. To tell people the good news of Jesus they placed John 3:16 on the bottom of their drinking cups.



Another business using this verse is the clothing store Forever 21. The owners of the company are Christians. They printed John 3:16 on their bags. It is their way of getting the greatest verse in the Bible into the lives of the women who shop there.



Who can forget Tim Tebow, the man who puts John 3:16 on his eye paint? In the January 2012 playoff game against the Pittsburgh Steelers, Tim Tebow pulled off an upset. That game became known as the 316 game. Not only did Tim have this verse on his eye paint but he threw for 316 yards to win the game.



John 3:16 is considered to be the greatest verse in the Bible and the most well-known verse of the Bible. Most of you know it. Let's begin by saying it together from memory.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (ESV)

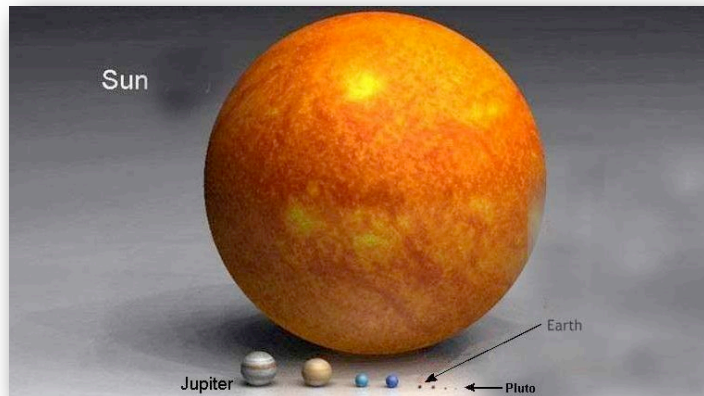
This morning we are simply breaking this verse down into four pieces to study it. My goal is not that you quote the greatest verse in the Bible but that you understand it so it becomes the greatest verse in your life.

God loves

For God so loved the world...

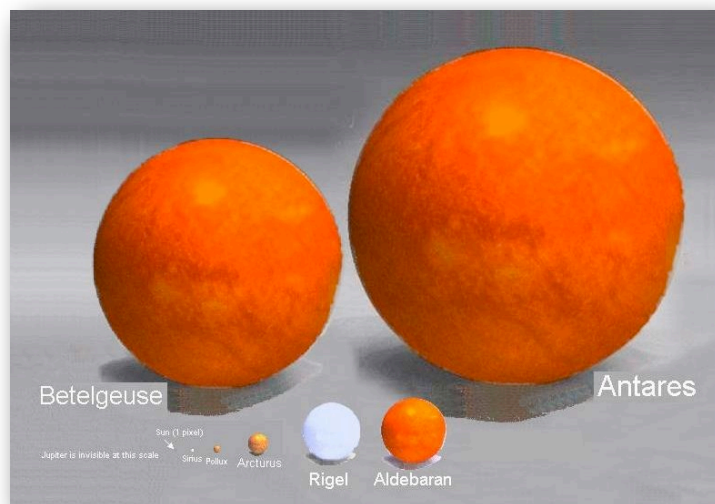
Who is God? God is the greatest being in the universe. He is the one who created and sustains everything. I could give you numbers to describe to you the size of the universe, but I don't think that would mean much. Looking at numbers is like looking at the size of our national debt. There is no way to feel a number unless you put it in perspective. Let's put the size of the universe God created in perspective.

In our immediate solar system, the Earth is the third largest planet around the sun. When you compare it, we are not big. The diameter of the sun is 109 times larger than the Earth. Sun spots, those are solar flare-ups on the sun, are bigger than our planet. Those are big balls of fire!¹



Incidentally, our sun is not that big. It is just a medium-sized star. Astronomers estimate there are 100 thousand million stars in the Milky Way alone. Outside of that there are millions upon millions of other galaxies.

In the universe, our sun is a small sun. There are others stars like Betelgeuse and Antares which are much larger. Antares burns 10,000 times brighter than our sun and its diameter is 1,400 wider than

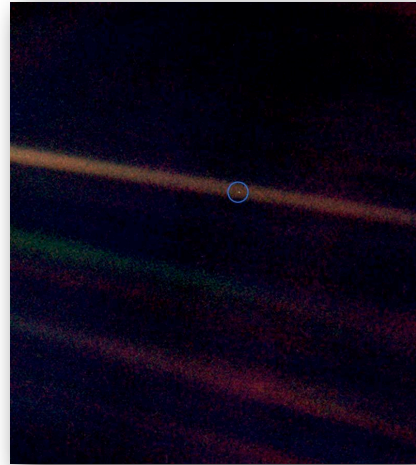


our sun, which makes the Earth look like an incredibly small part of the universe.²

¹ <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Did-You-Know-How-Insignificant-the-Earth-Really-Is-in-the-Universe-59306.shtml>

² <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Did-You-Know-How-Insignificant-the-Earth-Really-Is-in-the-Universe-59306.shtml>

Another way to look at this is a photograph transmitted to Earth from the Voyager 1. The spacecraft was 4 billion miles from Earth when this picture was taken. The entire Earth is nothing more than a beam of sunlight.³ The universe is big, and we are very small.



These are parts of what scientists call the visible universe. The invisible universe, that we can't see, is much bigger.

God is the one who created all of this. I want you to humble your mind. When we think of the complexity and size of the universe and we see the size of the Earth in it, we are humbled.

When looking at Earth, instead of studying outerspace, we can study inner-space and be just as fascinated. Look at the variety of life on our planet. Look at the elephants, the whales and sea creatures, both great and small. Look at the seemingly infinite variety of life on the planet. Look at the complexity of cells, DNA, atoms, particles, protons, neutrons and quarks. Everyone must come away with these conclusions. God is huge. God is powerful. God is amazingly complex. We are not even close to understanding him.

If you really want to blow your mind, remember that according to the opening of the book of Hebrews and the Gospel of John, it was God the Father's will to create the universe but Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, carried it out. The same Jesus who walked the Earth and hung on a cross made the entire

³ <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Did-You-Know-How-Insignificant-the-Earth-Really-Is-in-the-Universe-59306.shtml>

seen and unseen universe. Jesus is amazing! Look what the Bible says about creation.

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. Romans 1:20 (ESV)

The Bible says there is no such thing as an atheist, maybe an agnostic, but not an atheist. An atheist says there is no evidence for God. An agnostic says, “There is evidence for God but I don’t know who he is.” According to the Bible, true atheists don’t exist. The universe *screams* of God’s power and divine nature. God is powerful. God is complex. God is beyond our understanding. God is also incredibly intelligent.

Have you seen the advertisements for Blendtec blenders? [You can look these up on YouTube.](#) The company sells industrial-strength blenders. In its advertisements, actors take household items and put it in the blender to reduce them to powder. [One of my favorites is when they blend a new iPhone.](#) They

reduce it to carbon. It comes out as a fine black dust. In that carbon dust, you have all the components of an iPhone. What are the chances of putting that powder in a box,



shaking it and opening it to find the new iPhone 5? You tell me, “That will never happen!” You are right!

Let’s take another example. Let’s put in the Blendtec blender a steak. Let’s reduce the steak to a protein puree. What are the chances of that protein

puree becoming the cow the steak came from? Not high. There is a better chance of getting your new iPhone 5 from its carbon dust than getting self-replicating DNA from the steak protein. It takes extreme intelligence to create self-replicating DNA. Who made it? God. [If you want to learn more about this, check out the Scientific Reasons to Believe Your Bible Message on the Christ 2R Culture website.](#)

Now I want to show you something even more amazing. This same God, who made everything, loves you. The same God who made the world is passionately in love with you more than anyone on earth could be. That is amazing!

Before we get too carried away, we should see what kind of love this is. Love is a slippery word. This morning I told Cindy I loved her, but I also told her I love exercising in the gym. There is a difference between the love I have for my wife and the love I have for exercise. One is much harder to love! In the Greek, there are six different words used to describe the different kinds of love we have for things. The word used here is the word agape. It is what we call “love of choice.” It means there is nothing about us that made us deserve God’s love. God simply chose to love us, and we don’t deserve it. It is not the kind of love that junior high students have where they are infatuated with one another for a week and bored the next. This kind of love has nothing to do with what God gets from us in return. God loves us, not because he has to and not because he needs something from us in return. The God who created this universe has just chosen to love us because he wants to. He is passionate about it. We need to

realize the creator of the universe is acting in unceasingly selfless action toward us right now.

For some of you, the concept of God passionately loving you and never leaving you in spite of your failures is hard to comprehend. Some of you grew up in a home where your parents who loved you hurt you. Some of you had a spouse marry you then leave you, and the whole matrix you have for understanding what love looks like is bent. Your picture of God's love is skewed by broken examples of earthly love.

If there is one thing I want you to go home with today, it is this: God loves you. In this world, people will fail you. Even those closest to you will fail you and hurt you miserably. God's love for you will never fail you! Right now, God's affections for you are stronger than the love anyone else on this planet could possibly possess toward you. Do you really believe that? That is the good news of John 3:16!

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38–39 (ESV)

I know many of you have heard this before. Don't let your familiarity with hearing about God's love for you dull your senses about it. In Islam, there are 99 different names for God; not one of them is love. The idea that the God who created the universe knows everything there is to know about us and yet still loves us is simply earth shattering.

Application: I want you say it with me. "God loves me."

God gave

He gave his only son.

Why did God give?

God gave because he loves us and we are sick. Recently, my friend was diagnosed with a heart problem. Putting the words heart and problem together in the same sentence is enough to strike fear into anyone. He feels like a walking time bomb. Having a sick heart leaves you living in fear.

Unfortunately, I have to tell you, it isn't just a select few who have a heart problem; all of us have a deadly one.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

The problem with our heart is sin in our lives. Today, we don't talk about sin. We talk about poor choices or lapses in judgment. That is not what the Bible calls it. The Bible says each one of us is desperately sick with sin. Sin already killed us spiritually. It will kill us physically, and it is the reason that, apart from Christ, we will be condemned eternally.

Look what the Bible says about the source of our problems. They all come from a sick heart.

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. Mark 7:21–22 (ESV)

How much did God give?

If we are desperately sick, and God really loves us, wouldn't you think his love would compel him to do something about our situation? That is exactly what happened. God gave what was closest to his heart, to save our sin-sick hearts.

God took his only son, and God gave him for us. God the Son humbled himself and poured himself fully into a human body out of love for us. In love, he was nailed to a tree. God hung and died in love for us. In those moments on the cross, God the Father took all of his just wrath against our sins and he poured it out fully upon his most precious possession, his own son, instead of us. This way the justice is served for our sins, and God's unfathomable love for us is displayed.

(Pull up person from audience). This is _____. I want to tell you about him. He is a sinner. He was born a sinner. Every day he confirms it again and again by his behavior. He lusts in his heart. He has watched and thought about some of the most disgusting stuff over the years. He deceives people with his words every day. He is prideful. He is arrogant. Many times he only thinks about himself. In short, he is no different from the rest of us. Let me tell you what he deserves. He deserves to have justice served upon him. What is just for his sins against the God who created the universe? According to the Bible, since he rebelled against the ultimate being, he deserves the ultimate punishment. He deserves eternal-conscious, never-ending punishment. What he should receive is horrifying, but if we could see the details of it, we wouldn't think it unfair. God is completely just.

(Bring David or Daniel on stage.) This is my son. He is my pride and joy. I am so proud of my son. He is my future. He is my hope. I would do anything for him because I love him with a love that is beyond any other love I have. If he was sick, no expense would be too great. If he was in trouble, no obstacle would

be too great to keep me from getting to him. (If David, use next illustration.)

Some of you know that when David arrived in Mongolia, the team mistakenly left him in the center of the city. He was lost for five hours. David told me he was thankful they didn't call me to tell me what happened because he knows I would have chartered a plane to fly to the other side of the world to look for him myself. That is the kind of love of a father has for his son.

What if God, wishing to show the depth of his love to us, decided to take all of the wrath we deserved and instead of pouring it out on us, he poured it out on his most precious possession, his only son. That is love! Friends, don't ever believe that nobody loves you. You can't be more loved than you are by God right now!

God wasn't content to simply pour out the wrath we deserved upon his son instead of us, he took the righteousness of his son and he gave it to us! All of the purity and favor of the son is given to us by God. God's love keeps getting better!

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

This is called the great exchange. Christ took our punishment and, in exchange, we received all his righteousness. Through faith in Christ, we became children of God. We can't be any more loved than this.

Application: Say this with me. "God loves me so much, he gave his most precious possession, his son, to save me."

We believe

Whoever believes in him...

This is really important. If you have drifted, tune back in. A response to what God has done for us is required. Next week, we will look at Rob Bell's book called "Love Wins." He is a universalist that believes everybody goes to heaven in the end. That is what we want to believe but the Bible is emphatic that universalism is a lie from the pit of hell. A conscious response is required. Next week we will look at Rob Bell's book in greater depth. For now, understand we must respond to God's love.

Let me explain how we respond. This is important because many people get this wrong. There are two kinds of belief. There is mental belief, and there is actual belief. Only one will land you in heaven; the other is a non-working substitute. Mental belief is knowing something is true in your head but not applying it to your life. Actual belief is taking what you know and living by it.

Let me give you an example. Stand up if you believe it is important to eat right and exercise. Stay standing if you exercised at least three days last week for more than 30 minutes and avoided all fast food restaurants.

That is the difference between mental belief and actual belief when it comes to health and fitness. Listen to me! If that is the way you are about the Gospel, you have no reason to be confident that you are born again. Check yourself, because I meet many people who believe Christ died for their sins mentally but don't actually believe it when it comes to behavior. They don't have a changed life. If God really loves you, the Bible is the greatest love letter we

could ever read. If you don't read your Bible, you only mentally believe God's love, you don't actually believe it. When it comes to obeying Christ, only those who actually believe God loves them will obey. Those who just mentally believe will not sacrifice to obey because they don't believe that what God says is out of love. Those who just mentally believe don't actually believe.

Do we lapse into times of not applying what we know to our lives? Of course. When that happens, in actual belief, we repent and cast ourselves upon the cross. We repent again and again going back to what we know is true. God loves us.

Another way to think about the difference between mental belief and actual belief is rappelling.

Rappelling is tying a rope into a harness around your waist and walking backwards over a cliff. Nothing keeps you from falling hundreds of feet to the rocks below, other than the rope. If the rope



gave out, your head would explode like a cantaloupe when you hit bottom.

If you rappelled, you know how freaky it is when you first lean backward over the cliff. When you first lean over the edge, the rope doesn't have any tension. You feel like you are falling to your death. That is the moment you

discover whether you have mental belief in the rope or actual belief in the rope. Mental belief is the guy who won't lean over the cliff and entrust his life to the rope. Actual belief is the guy who is willing to trust the rope with his life.

That is what it means to believe in Jesus. It means betting your life that Jesus' death for your sins is enough. When you stand before God, you will not be judged for your sins but welcomed home as a child of God because of your faith in God's love for you and how it was displayed through Jesus. It is believing that Christ is the only good thing you have, not Christ and your help at the local food pantry, not Christ and your financial gifts to the new stadium. It is Christ and Christ alone that pays for sin and gives you righteousness to stand before God. This is hard because believing all we need is faith in Christ is like going over the cliff with just our faith and not seeing a rope!

Placing all of our trust in Christ is not just something for the day we die, it is something we need every day. Earlier we learned that we have hearts sick with sin. Evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, envy and pride all come from sin in our hearts.

While I am not playing down the role of the physical sciences, when we struggle with sin issues, most of us think we need a pill or a shrink to solve our problems. The heart of our problem is the problem of the human heart. It is sin. The only way to break free from our sinfulness is Jesus! It is placing all of our weight on him every day. When we struggle with lust and when we struggle with pride or envy, what we need is to meditate on Jesus. We need to read the Bible

and let God use his word to bring healing to our souls. The solution to the problem of sin in our hearts is not a pill or shrink, it is Jesus!

We live

...should not perish but have eternal life.

We will talk more about this next week, but the consequences of rejecting or believing Jesus are real and eternal.

What does it mean to perish? Perish means to suffer eternally in the Lake of Fire. That is the final fate of everyone who either rejects Jesus or those who die apart from Jesus.

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:15 (ESV)

How do I get my name in the book of life? I get my name in it by believing in Jesus. I place all my eggs in the Jesus basket and really believe that God loves me so much that Jesus took care of my sin problem eternally and he is the answer to releasing me from the sinful cravings of my heart today.

What is eternal life? Eternal life is found in Revelation 21. It is the new heaven and the new earth where we live in real physical incorruptible resurrection bodies on a new heaven and earth that is combined together with Jesus as the king of it all. We will look more at eternal life next week, but for now, understand that eternal life is the incredible love of God blooming like a flower. We have it in Christ, but until Christ finally and fully defeats Satan, sin and death, we will not see every good thing God has for us.

What is your greatest possession? For some of you, it is a house or a car. All that we possess pales in comparison to having eternal life. God's love for us

through Jesus is the greatest thing anyone can have. It is given to us through Jesus, the greatest act of love every done. A hundred years from now it is the only possession that will matter.

I want to ask you to put your focus on this message. Are you saved? Can you look to a time when you repented of your sins and leaned all of your weight into the rope of Jesus as the only way to be forgiven of your sins? God's wrath is real. Sin is the heart disease that is killing us. The greatest act of love in the universe is to be fully forgiven of your sins and to get all of Christ's righteousness which is offered to us today. The only way to receive it is to believe. It is to lean back into the rope of Jesus and trust him as the only one who can save your life.

If the desire of your heart is to be born again and place all your hope in Jesus, pray with me as we close.

Prayer

Father, I know I am a sinner. I deserve your judgment. I believe you placed the judgment due me upon your most precious possession, your son. Thank you for loving me more than I can imagine. Today, I leave behind my plans to save myself. I leave behind my identity being found in what I do and what I have. I leave behind everything I have trusted in. I lean back fully into the rope of Jesus. I completely trust Jesus as the only one who can forgive my sins. I completely trust Jesus as the only one who can change the desires of my heart and heal the wounds in my life. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer as the desire of your heart. I would like to welcome you as a Christian.



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