

The Gospel According to 3:16
33 Biblical 3:16s
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“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” The famous, or infamous, John 3:16. You could say it is both the most famous verse in the Bible and the one that sums up the whole thing best. That’s why people put it on signs at sporting events and paint it on their eyelids. For some, that’s the message they want to get out there in the little time they have to tell the story. For some people that is both the beginning and the end of the story. It’s all they need or want to know, for themselves or for anyone else. The eternal salvation of their souls is the most important focus, and other more earthly concerns are secondary. Time is short, and the harvest is coming.

But others believe it’s just the beginning, that God's loving gift of Christ is the starting point on their inevitable journey through the ups and downs of this life, and of accompanying others who face the same ups and downs. They see God’s love as one that must be understood not only in the spiritual sense, but also in the bodily, earthly sense, that our real human needs during our time on this planet are just as important to God as our souls and spirits once we pass away from this earth.

And as you may have experienced, sometimes the holders of these two perspectives are at odds with one another. And that is unfortunate because it is

unwise to either limit the Bible to John 3:16, or minimize John 3:16's place in the Bible. Body and spirit are two sides of the same coin, are they not? Was Jesus merely a divine hologram or was he a real, flesh and blood human being? Was he merely a human being with pretensions of the divine but not really able to deliver on eternity, or was he the Son of God? Yes, our faith affirms that he was both fully human and fully divine, that he set foot, so to speak, in both earthly and heavenly realms, and that, I believe, is our best clue that God's gift of Jesus Christ is for every moment of our earthly lives, and every eon of eternity. And so, let me suggest that we take John 3:16 as the entry point to see God's work in history, and our response to Jesus Christ. And as we did on the Men's Retreat this weekend, let us do that through the remarkable collection of verses that bear the name 3:16, for they fill in the picture about our human condition and God's compassion. They flesh out what Christ was like and how he called us to be like him. They tell the story of God's concern for our bodies and our spirits. Listen to this divine story told through the 3:16s of the Bible (with a handful of connecting words thrown in):

Job 3:16

O why was I not buried like a stillborn child,
like an infant that never sees the light?

Genesis 3:16

For to the woman God said,
'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.'

Lamentations 3:16

He has made my teeth grind on gravel,
and made me cower in ashes;

Ecclesiastes 3:16

Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there,
and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well.

Isaiah 3:16

The Lord said:
Because the daughters of Zion are haughty
and walk with outstretched necks,
glancing wantonly with their eyes,
mincing along as they go,
tinkling with their feet;

Revelation 3:16

because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of
my mouth.

Habakkuk 3:16

I hear, and I tremble within;
my lips quiver at the sound.
Rottenness enters into my bones,
and my steps tremble beneath me.
I wait quietly for the day of calamity
to come upon the people who attack us.

Romans 3:16

Ruin and misery are in their paths,

James 3:16

For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and
wickedness of every kind.

2 Timothy 3:16

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for
correction, and for training in righteousness;

2 Peter 3:16

There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

2 Cor 3:16

but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

Exodus 3:16

[Remember that God said to Moses,] Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, “The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt;

Joshua 3:16

And [then] the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing towards the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over [the Jordan River] opposite Jericho.

Jeremiah 3:16

And [God said], when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the Lord, they shall no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the Lord.’ It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made.

Zephaniah 3:16

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.

Malachi 3:16

Then those who revered the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the Lord and thought on his name.

Luke 3:16

John answered all of them by saying, ‘I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John 3:16

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Matthew 3:16

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

Mark 3:16

So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); and all the rest.

Ezekiel 3:16

Now at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me:

1 Cor 3:16

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?

Galatians 3:16

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, ‘And to offsprings’, as of many; but it says, ‘And to your offspring’, that is, to one person, who is Christ.

Acts 3:16

And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

1 Timothy 3:16

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great:
He was revealed in flesh,
vindicated in spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among Gentiles,
believed in throughout the world,
taken up in glory.

1 John 3:16

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

Colossians 3:16

So let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Philippians 3:16

And let us hold fast to what we have attained.

1 Samuel 3:16

[As when] Eli called Samuel and said, ‘Samuel, my son,’ and he said, ‘Here I am,’

1 Peter 3:16

let us do so with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

Daniel 3:16

Remember how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defence to you in this matter.

Ephesians 3:16

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit,

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.

How consistent is the Bible? So consistent that even when you mix Old Testament and New Testament, BC and AD, human and divine voices, poetry and prose, you still get a story in only 33 out of order verses that not only makes sense, but is consistent with the more than 31,000 actual verses of the Bible. Of course, not every detail of the story is there, but all the big ticket items are: our fallen condition, God’s unhappiness with our sin, the threat of judgment, the offer of hope, and the deliverance from slavery; the life, death, resurrection, and ascension

of Jesus; ethics, spirituality, apologetics, faith, worship, vocation, prayer, healing. It's all there, and we neglect any part of it at our peril.

Let me suggest that in each of our lives, and in our common life together, we make sure we know the whole story, and that we live the full story. Yes, I'm the pastor, and yes, I have more formally studied the Bible than many of you, but I think it is not an unreasonable expectation that each of us should be able to do what I've done with these 33 verses. You might not put those verses in exactly the same order I did, but we each need to know the Good Book well enough from beginning to end that we can make sense of it, live out what it says in our own lives, and share it with others. It's the task of a lifetime, to understand and do all of that, but it's worth the effort. There is no substitute either for reading the Bible or for living out our faith, and may the blessings of these 33 verses inspire us to make that the work of our lifetimes, and all eternity. Amen.