

For This: He Came to Be the Way **John 3:14-21**

Introduction

In the late 1800s the region of South Wales on the eastern edge of England was hit with a major snowstorm during which a young mother woman attempted to cross the hills of that region on foot to get to the home of her brother. She unfortunately never made it.

Her brother knew she was coming, so as soon as it was possible, a rescue team was dispatched to look for her. When they found her body, they were puzzled that this woman would dare to weather that snowstorm like that without her winter coat. What could she have possibly been thinking?

Once they lifted her body, they quickly understood what she had been thinking, for there underneath her body they found her warm winter coat wrapped snugly around her infant son ... a son who was alive and well and warm! This mother's name was Elizabeth George. You would have no reason to know anything about her, unless you knew the life story of that son, David.

David Lloyd George would grow up to become the Prime Minister of Great Britain. He served during World War I, and is regarded as one of the greatest statesman Britain has ever known. He lived because his mother gave her life for him. You might say, she saved him by dying for him.

Our Lenten journey with Jesus brings us today to one of the most famous and loved verses in the Bible. Almost everyone knows a piece of it. If you grew up in the church, it was probably the first verse you ever memorized. I invite you to read it with me again:

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

This verse has often been called the "Gospel in a Nutshell," for every truth that you need to know about God and His plan for the salvation of the world is wrapped up neatly in that one single verse. The gospel in a nutshell teaches us that ...

God created us to be with Him.
Our sins separated us from God.
Sins cannot be removed by good deeds.
Price of sin was paid by Jesus.
Everyone who believes in Him has eternal life.
Life with Jesus starts right here, right now.

As you know our Lenten theme this year is "For This." Our truth for today is this:

Jesus came to **BE** the way.

In weeks past, He came to **SHOW** the way. He came to **MODEL** the way. He came to **CLEAR** the way. And today we say: He came to **BE** the way.

Motivated by His great love for the people He had created God took the initiative and sent Jesus to be the way so that people of all generations, and nationalities and genders could once again be restored to right relationship with Him.

Don't miss this point! It is a point that goes contrary to a worldview that portrays ...

- God as a grumpy old man seeking violent revenge on anyone who doesn't toe the line.

This verse tells you that God:

- **So loved the world ...** Is motivated by His love for you
- **He sent His Son to die ...** Has initiated a means by which you can experience
- **So you could live forever ...** eternal life.

Another famous verse in the book of Romans describes this activity of God as a gift:

... the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23b)

You saw that in the epistle reading for today as well, didn't you?

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God... (Ephesians 2:8)

One of my standard ice-breaker conversation starters is: "What's the best Christmas gift you have ever received?" There are many, of course, but I will always remember the Christmas my brother and I got matching 10-speed bicycles. We rode those things all over Grant County IN! Every other childhood Christmas gift paled in comparison to that gift.

But hear this GOOD NEWS! The gift of eternal life offered by the loving grace of God is even better than brand new Huffy 10 speed bike!

To receive it requires only that I "believe." Webster's dictionary defines "believe" like this:

be-lieve: *verb.* to accept (something) as true.

Believing is a choice I make to accept something as being true. I may have seeds of uncertainty, but I have decided that I will accept it despite those uncertainties, and I will live my life with as though I am 100% convinced.

What does that mean in practical terms? What do I need to believe? Three things:

#1: THAT GOD LOVES ME

For God so loved the world ... (John 3:16)

Believing the good news of John 3:16 means that you believe God loves you, that when you read or hear the words "God so loved the world" you understand that He sees you individually in that "world" and pours out His love for you.

It was not easy for a Jew in Jesus' day to believe that. Jews, like many people today, looked at God as ...

- The One who imposed His laws on them and punished them if they broke them.
- A judge sitting at the bench ready to impose harsh penalties on them.
- Someone who demanded costly sacrifices.

They didn't doubt that God existed. They just doubted that He could possibly love them. This despite the fact that the Old Testament Scriptures are filled with reminders of His love for them ... in verses like this:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love ... (Jeremiah 31:3)

A man and his wife visited an orphanage where they hoped to adopt a child. In an interview with the boy they wanted, they told him in glowing terms about the many things they could give him – good food, good toys, and nice clothing.

To their amazement, the little fellow said, "If you have nothing to offer except a good home, clothes, toys, and the other things that most kids have - why - I would just as well stay here.

"What on earth could you want besides those things?" the woman asked?

"I just want someone to love me," replied the little boy.

Hear the gospel again:

For God so loved the world ... (John 3:16)

The second thing you need to believe, that is, to accept as true is:

#2: THAT JESUS DIED FOR ME

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son... (John 3:16)

The last words of a dying person are normally never forgotten. A person's closing comments often reveal their pain and agony. Some enter eternity without saying anything, while others utter sentiments that disclose their values, priorities, and innermost thoughts.

For example...

- Right before P.T. Barnum died, he asked, "How were the receipts today at Madison Square Garden?"

- Joan Crawford was filled with anger when her maid began to pray out loud and said, "Don't you dare ask God to help me!"
- Louis Mayer, the film producer, gave his philosophy of life (and death) when he said, "Nothing matters."

But the great English preacher, Charles Spurgeon, said as his last words, "Jesus died for me."

What a wonderful assurance to know that my sins – every last one of them – has been forgiven because of the death of Jesus on the cross. Without being egotistical at all, every one of us can say "Easter is all about me." Because my sins are forgiven.

The Bible clearly teaches us:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and **WILL** forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

One of the old hymns I used to sing as a boy joyfully proclaims:

My sins are blotted out, I know!
They are buried in the bottom of the deepest sea:
My sins are blotted out, I know!

Hear the gospel again:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son... (John 3:16)

Which brings us to the third thing you need to believe, to accept as true...

#3: THAT I WILL LIVE FOREVER WITH HIM

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

Next time you're in an airport notice the difference between passengers who have confirmed tickets and those on standby. Those who have confirmed tickets are relaxed. They are confident and expectant. Those on standby hang around the ticket counter. They pace and smoke, pace and smoke, pace and smoke...all because of the uncertainty they are experiencing.

God offers us freedom from the burden of uncertainty, so we can know for sure where we stand with God. The one who believes in Him can be confident that heaven awaits and that eternal life begins right now.

APPLICATION

Jesus came to BE the way. Sent by a loving Father to a world that was dying in its sins, Jesus died on the cross so that those sins could be forgiven. And more importantly, His death opened up the doors of heaven so that all who would believe the truth of the gospel could spend eternity in heaven.

God did the hard part. What could be harder than sending your son to die for people who had consistently rebelled against you? But He did it anyway.

And He asks only that we believe.

Let's pray ... Amen.