

# The Gospel in One Verse

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[ 0 : 00 ] What a blessing, what a blessing. I went to Gardner-Webb.

I was a biblical studies major at Gardner-Webb. And we, right there on the North Carolina, South Carolina line, and on Wednesday nights, we'd ride out in the country to this big old church set out in the middle of nowhere.

And I think it was called Holly Springs Baptist Church, somewhere in northern South Carolina. And if she'd have sang that song at that church, some old boy would have got loose back there and went on a running fit.

Now, that freaks some of y'all out. But for some of us, Brian, you've been in those atmospheres, ain't you, brother? A little sawdust will tear you up, son. Good stuff. Thank you so much, Charlotte. If you have your Bibles, turn to John chapter 3. John chapter 3. In the 1870s, archaeologists uncovered in the sands of Egypt a giant red granite obelisk.

[ 1 : 05 ] They named it Cleopatra's Needle. And they gave it to England, which placed the 69-foot shaft on the banks of the Thames River in London.

They put a time vault in the base of that shaft. And they put coins in there. And they put clothes of that day in there. They put some newspapers in there.

And they put some photographs. They put some children's toys of that age as well. And then they formed a committee to pick the greatest verse in all the Bible and to put it in the vault.

They chose John 3.16 and they put it in the vault in all of the other, more than 200 known languages of that day.

Not only is John 3.16 the most popular verse of Scripture, but it may be the most impactful verse.

[ 2 : 09 ] Must be, actually. It's called the Mount Everest of Scripture. Martin Luther, the great 16th century reformer, called it the Bible in miniature. A.T. Robertson, the greatest Greek scholar possibly since the time of the Lord, called it the littlest gospel.

It's also been called the gospel in a nutshell. And today is March the 16th. If you abbreviate that, it's 3.16. It's a great day to celebrate the gospel verse, John 3.16.

As a matter of fact, today has been marked the international day of the gospel. And so I want us to do something today to celebrate John 3.16.

I want us to read it together. If you would stand together with me and let's read John 3.16. It says, You may be seated.

It's such a common verse that it's likely that we take it for granted. It sounds simple, but yet it's very profound. It is inexhaustible, quite honestly.

[ 3 : 24 ] Dwight L. Moody was a great preacher, a great evangelist that founded the Moody Bible Church in Chicago as well as the Moody Bible Institute and was preaching in the United Kingdom when a young man began to listen to him preach.

As Moody would travel, that fellow would travel with him in the UK and follow him to the next church and would listen to him again. And night after night, he listened to D.L. Moody preach.

He got to know the young man and the man said that he had a desire to preach in America. And Moody invited him and said, If you ever get there to America, let me know and I'll let you preach at Moody Church.

Well, his name was Henry Morehouse. And sure enough, Henry Morehouse had the opportunity to travel to America. And when he did, he contacted Moody. And Moody said, Well, great.

He said, I'm preaching Sunday morning and then I'm leaving and going out of town for a little while. And so you can preach on Sunday night for me when I leave. And that night, Morehouse preached.

[ 4 : 34 ] And when Moody returned, several days later, he found out that Morehouse not only preached that night, but he had preached several nights to a growing crowd every night.

He also found out that every night that Henry Morehouse preached, he preached on John 3.16 as his text. He preached different sermons, but he always preached on John 3.16.

As a matter of fact, Morehouse began preaching when he was 16 years old and he died at an early age at 33 years old. But for the 17 years that he preached, every sermon that he preached, he preached from John 3.16.

Different sermons, but every time the same text. My friend, it is inexhaustible. And I will not do it justice today, but I want to have some fun trying.

All I want to tell you is the same thing that this verse tells you. And that is, I want to tell you how to be saved. Now, I know that may sound overused to some, but I don't believe there's any need to fix something that isn't broke because Jesus still saves.

[ 5 : 55 ] And our verse today lies in the midst of an encounter that Jesus had with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Jesus said that when one is changed by Christ, it makes a world of difference.

It's as if you are starting over, being born spiritually all over again. I remember when I was a small child, I remember hearing President Jimmy Carter say that he was born again.

And I remember, even though I was a child at the time, remember the media giving him a hard time about that, what it meant to be a born again Christian. Well, I got news for you. Jimmy Carter didn't come up with that.

Jesus came up with that. And when he told Nicodemus that he must be born again, old Nick, as I love to call him, didn't understand, even though he was a religious leader, schooled in what we now know as the Old Testament.

And so Nicodemus asked him, how then can I be born again? And the response of Christ gives us a great glimpse at the power and the hope of the gospel message, the good news of Christ.

[ 7 : 05 ] Notice what he says in John 3, beginning in verse 13. He said, No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

It's been said a lot of different ways, but I want you to see this morning three steps to being saved. The first step is this, to look, to look.

In describing how a person can be saved, Jesus referred to Moses and the serpent in the wilderness. And that account is found in Numbers chapter 21.

[ 8 : 18 ] Numbers 21 says this, beginning in verse 4. For Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way.

And the people spoke against God and against Moses. Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there's no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.

Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, we have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you.

Pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten when he sees it shall live.

So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. It's amazing sometimes what we have to endure to turn our eyes back to the Lord.

[ 9 : 35 ] These were a complaining, impatient people. Surely not Baptist. And they were upset with their circumstances, and it just made it worse.

The more they moaned about it, the worse it got. That is usually what happens, quite honestly. The more negative you are about something, the more you whine and complain, the worse things will get.

I heard Lou Holtz say one time, don't complain about your problems. 90% of people really don't care, and 10% are glad it's happening to you. So listen, you got to keep it all in perspective.

A harsh word, but it may be reality. Complaining does not help. And when those complained, the Lord sent serpents that had a fiery bite to them.

Now when it says fiery there, one, it means it hurt. The second means it was venomous. And that woke up folks that were hurting, and they said, Moses, you need to call on the Lord.

[ 10 : 33 ] And Moses called on the Lord. I hope you know that there would have been a lot less loss here if they had turned to the Lord when times got tough. Instead of turning to each other and complaining and growing impatient.

Because in reality, it's not what happens in life. It's what happens to what happens in life. How do you respond in life?

They got to the point in their lives when they turned to God and followed his instruction. And his instruction was to look to the snake and find relief.

And they did. Now you may not seem comfortable about that. Why in the world would there be a bronze snake for comfort? Well, I'll tell you why. Because God gets on our level.

He speaks to where we are. And these people had been plagued by a tendency to look at graven images. Idols that they looked to for strength and comfort and hope.

[ 11 : 43 ] And so God gave them an icon and he instructed them to look at it. And when they looked at it, they found healing. Get this now. Not because of the snake.

They didn't get their healing because of the snake. Their healing came in obediently following what the Lord told them to do.

And just as that serpent was lifted up, so Christ has been lifted up on the cross. And when we look to the cross, we'll find our strength.

When we put our faith in the God that hung on the cross for our sin, but first, we have to look. First, we have to acknowledge it.

We have to see the need. We don't need to look inside of ourselves for answers. We need to look to Christ for answers. That's where the answers are.

[ 12 : 43 ] But it's not just enough to look. For the second means, the second way to come to salvation is to believe. To believe.

For after acknowledging our need for help, we must look to God and believe that what he did changes everything. The key to John 3.16 is the love of God.

He willingly sent his son to die in our place because of our sin so that we could have eternal life.

What kind of love is it that sends his sinless son to the cross to die in our place?

All of us, ugly sinners before God, quite honestly. Without the forgiveness of God, we'd have no hope. So how is it that he sends his son? What kind of love is that?

It's a matchless love. I guess my two favorite songs that's ever been written is It Is Well With My Soul and The Love of God.

[ 13 : 42 ] And the lyrics of The Love of God say this, Could we with ink the ocean fill and with the skies our parchment made were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade?

To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry, nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

Oh, love of God, how rich and pure, how measureless and strong, it shall forevermore endure the saints and angels song.

Friend, it is a love worth believing. And that belief is a committing belief. It is an all-in kind of belief.

It is an action statement of not just understanding something, but acting on that, believing it enough to act on it. Romans 10, 9 says, If we confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[ 14 : 48 ] It's having a confident trust in the Lord. It's having a firm, life-changing conviction in Christ. It is enough to surrender our lives.

It's enough to surrender our plans. It's enough to surrender our ambitions, to give him over control of our life. And when we do that, we do that with everything that we are.

We are saved for all of eternity. More Oklahoma may be the deadliest place on the planet, at least for tornadoes.

In 1999, an EF-5, very rare to have an EF-5, but an EF-5 tornado with top speeds of 301 mile per hour, the highest wind speeds ever measured on Earth, came right through the center of Moore, Oklahoma.

It stayed on the ground for 85 minutes. It went for 38 miles. It killed 36 people. And it was the first tornado to ever cause over a billion dollars worth of damage.

[16:00] In 2013, practically the same path was taken by another EF-5 with 210 mile per hour speeds that killed 24 people and injured 377.

It wiped Moore, Oklahoma off the map twice. It got hit again in 2015 by an EF-2. And I guess they just thought it was a strong breeze compared to what they had faced before.

But in 1999, it was devastating. And the storm went right by First Baptist Moore, Oklahoma. That is a beautiful facility with instead of a steeple, they have a large cross projecting where the steeple normally would be.

That facility was practically left untouched. And its central location caused it to become a relief and a care center. And in an effort to get the word out, people got in the back of trucks with bullhorns and rode through Moore, Oklahoma, saying, whatever you need, go to the cross.

However you're hurting, go to the cross. Whatever you need help with, go to the cross.

[17:24] If you need any supplies, you go to the cross. If you need anybody to take care of you, you go to the cross. Whatever you need, Moore, Oklahoma, go to the cross.

Go to the cross. Go to the cross. Help is waiting for you. My friend, help is waiting for you.

Go to the cross. God will save you if you only believe. Look to the Lord. Believe.

And lastly, be saved. There's a choice to make. God initiates within us a desire to come to him and we respond to that.

He gives us the ability to believe and we just have to give up and we just have to give in. And that's not offered to just some.

[18:30] It's offered to all. Romans 10, 13 says, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. It is a promise that is as real and lasting as the shed blood of Christ on Calvary for your sins.

God knows us like no one else does. God loves us like no one else has. And God wants to save us like nothing else you will ever experience.

Years ago, there was another school tragedy. This one was in Florida. And my oldest daughter, Abby, was in a government class in high school and they were talking about guns and they were talking about prevention and they were talking about school policies and they were discussing what was happening with this tragedy.

And she had seen an interview in that class with a father of a child that had been killed. And he had talked about how things could be done differently if people would work together.

And I agree with a lot of what he said. But part of what he said was haunting to me. He said this, I didn't think it was going to happen to me.

[19:52] I knew that if I knew that, I would have been at school every day if I'd have known how dangerous it was. Work with the president.

Work to fix schools. That's it. No other discussion. No more discussions. I will never see my kid again.

Never ever will I see my kid. I want you to let that sink in. Eternity.

My daughter. I'll never see her again. And it's simple. We can fix it. That man had a lot of good points.

But what kept ringing in my head was something different. And before the preacher daddy in me could say it to my daughter, Abby looked at me and said, Daddy, he's lost.

[21:03] He's lost. Now either his daughter never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ or either she did and he don't know it or either he didn't understand it or either he was just lost without Christ but he said there was no hope of an eternal reunion.

No hope of eternity. I can't imagine what that man was going through. I can't think about it. It has to be the most horrid thing that anybody could ever go through in this life.

However, if you don't believe in the Lord and if you don't surrender your life to him and you don't get saved, you'll go through the most horrid thing that anyone could ever go through for all of eternity. You'll die without Christ when in reality he died for one reason so that you don't have to die without him.

Billy Sunday was a great preacher. He's a character. He's a baseball player that turned preacher. Man, he's a character. He was like a Billy Graham of the day.

[ 22 : 35 ] Billy Graham made such a difference in the second half of the 20th century and Billy Sunday made such a difference in the first half of the 20th century.

But there was a difference in the way they presented themselves. Billy Sunday was a wild man in the pulpit. He was a fire-breathing preacher. He preached hard messages on sin.

And one time after a sermon somebody said to Billy Sunday, he said, Billy, you better tone it down a little bit. And Billy said, why? And he said, well, Billy, you're rubbing the fur on the cat the wrong way.

And Billy Sunday said, that old cat is headed to hell. And if that cat will turn around, I'll rub her the right way and she can go to heaven.

And my friend, I want you to understand something this morning. I don't talk about the reality of hell with glee.

[ 23 : 42 ] I don't celebrate the fact that the majority of the people in the world in which we live will probably die and go to hell without Christ. I don't relish in that.

I don't celebrate that. I try my best to get the warning out that anybody and everybody that I come in contact with at all possible can know you don't have to let your sin separate you from Christ.

He died in your place to change your life. And all you must do is give him everything you've got. Just all of you.

Look to Jesus. Believe in your heart that he'll forgive you of your sins and he'll come into your life and he'll save you.

And as you begin to feel him draw you to himself respond and get saved and let him change your life.

[ 24 : 51 ] You'll never be the same. the Holy Spirit of God will empower you to rise above those circumstances that may hold you back from making a decision for the Lord now.

Don't let anything hold you back. You just trust Christ. He'll make all the difference in the world.

There's a lot of people in here today and you know that and you've accepted the Lord Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior and you're secure in that.

Maybe you've never acknowledged that publicly in the way that Jesus commissioned us to do it and even did it by example through baptism. And if you've done that privately but you've never acknowledged that publicly I encourage you to come.

I'd love to guide you in that. Maybe God's guiding you to First Baptist Church and you feel like the Lord's leading you to do this and your next commitment of obedience to follow Christ is to join the church and be a part of that.

I'd love to guide you through that as well. But the reality is if you're here this morning and you know the Lord Jesus and you're an open confessing Christian I want you to know that God has planted people all around you that desperately need the Lord Jesus.

[ 26 : 04 ] And when you leave here today don't feel like because I got my salvation everything's done. No it ain't. God's put many people around you every day in the different walks of life that we live in the different places that we go in the different conversations that we have.

People who desperately desperately need the Lord Jesus. And the way it works is as God lays those people upon your heart God works in their lives as well.

There's a divine appointment that takes place that we can't even see even half of it taking place.

But God allows us to be used to see people's lives changed.

But if we're not sensitive to that if we're not open to that we'll miss that opportunity. So I ask you today Christian before you leave here will you say dear God will you put somebody in my path this week for me to share the gospel with.

For me to just ask have you ever given your life to Christ? And if you have I'd love to hear your story. Listen if there's a Christian that gets offended by that they're not a real Christian.

[ 27 : 14 ] If you can ask somebody have you ever given your heart and life to Christ? I mean you can tell them look I mean it seems like you have but will you tell me about that experience and let them share their testimony with you and then share your testimony with them?

They may not have a testimony and by you sharing yours you can make a difference in their life.

God's just using you. You're not doing the salvation. You know what you're doing? You're just scattering seed.

You're not responsible for whether it takes root. You're not responsible whether it's fruitful. You're responsible for scattering the seed. You don't have to be eloquent about it. You're just a beggar

telling another beggar how to find bread.

My friend I encourage you if you've got salvation in the Lord Jesus give it away. Give it away. It'll just be better in your life.

Heavenly Father I love you.