

John 3:16 - 4 impossible things in...

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[0:00] Now, this is the point at which you're going to need your Bible, and I want you to turn to John chapter 3. John chapter 3, we're going to look just at one verse in John chapter 3, and it's on page 1066, which is kind of pleasing.

Page 1066 in your church Bible. Now, Jeremiah, don't worry, my plan is not to detain us for very much longer, but I do want us just to have a look for a few moments at one very familiar verse in the Bible.

I think if you've been to church before, or maybe if you studied RE at school and you were made to do that like I was made to do that, you will know John chapter 3, verse 16.

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. In fact, it's so familiar, why don't we read it aloud together?

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.

[1:07] Now, I think that's probably got a claim to be the Bible's most famous verse. But I want to show you this morning four impossible things in John 3, 16.

Okay, four impossible things in John chapter 3, verse 16. And the first one is this, John chapter 3, verse 16, talks about loving the unlovely.

Loving the unlovely. To try and get this across, let me ask you some of the things that you love about Christmas. Anything that you love about Christmas. Oh my goodness.

The food, okay. People, look, put your hands up if you love the food at Christmas. There you go. UK, have you had bad experiences of the food at Christmas? Or are you just...

Okay, never mind. Anything else? What do you love about Christmas? Yes, I'm fine. Being with your family. That's great. According to the radio this morning, the average time for an argument as a family is 10.14 on Christmas morning.

[2:15] So if you've made it past that time already, you've done well. So time with family is a Christmas blessing, isn't it? Anything else? I want to suggest to you that we love lovely things.

So we love things like chocolate or family or good films or great music or Liverpool Football Club or something like that. We love the lovely things, don't we?

And what we don't love, we don't love unlovely things. So we don't love sprouts or cold rain blowing in our face.

We don't love delayed trains. You know, for us, love is a response to whether something is lovely. Yeah? We see something lovely and we love it.

We enjoy good food and we love eating it. We see our family and we love spending time with them. But John chapter 3 verse 16 says that's not how God works.

[3:15] Look down at the verse. For God so loved the world, he says. And the point is that in John's book, every time you encounter the word world, what you're encountering is, is not a beautiful place of mountains and wonderful scenery.

No, the world in John's gospel is the world in rebellion against God. The world is an unlovely place. Verse 19 tells you that the world loves darkness because it's a cover for its wickedness.

In John chapter 15, you'll find that the world hates Jesus and hates his disciples because the world is a dark and rebellious place. A place of wickedness where terrible things happen.

And we know that, don't we? Some of us have experienced some of those things, even this year.

And our verse starts with this impossible claim that God so loved the world.

It's not even that God kind of loved the world or God, you know, had some affection to the world.

No, it is he so loved the world. He loved the world to a high degree.

[4 : 24] God is a God of extreme love, even for the unlovely. Now, why do you think that might be the case? Why would God love something or someone that is unlovely?

You know, I think this sometimes happens to us, right? There might have been a time in your life, you might be able to remember it, where you looked at a sprout and you thought, that might be lovely. And then you thought, oh, that might be, I love that.

I love the idea of that. And then you bit into it and realize that it tasted like acid. And you're like, oh, that is not as lovely as I thought it was, right?

Maybe that's what God's like. Maybe he so loves the world because he kind of thinks that it might be lovely or it has the potential to be lovely, perhaps. But no, it's not that at all.

God knows, knows better than we do the darkness and the wickedness of the world. He knows that. God knows that. And yet he so loves the world.

[5 : 26] He so loves the world. Let me try and illustrate it. I need a volunteer. You can stay in your seat, but I need a volunteer.

And you need to be able to answer this question. It's very simple. What is your name? Okay? Does anyone want to put their hand up and help me?

I'm looking right at you. I'm not going to tell you your name because then I've answered the question for you. Are you going to help me out? No. Tex, are you going to help me out?

You help me out. Okay. So what I'm going to do, Tex, I'm going to ask you your name and you need to tell me your name. You can give me your full name if you like. And then I'm going to show you some pictures and I want you to tell me your name again.

Right? Does that make sense? Just to see whether anything that I show you changes these things about you. Right? Okay. So it's always going to be the same question.

[6 : 24] It's not, there's no tricks here. Okay? Because I was hoping it would be a child who'd do it. So you'll be okay. Okay. Can I ask you what your name is? Okay.

So that's more complicated than I thought. But I will call you Tex. Oh dear. Okay. So I'm going to show you a picture of something that's unlovely. Okay? Now, can I ask you the same question?

What's your name? Tex. Okay. That's interesting, isn't it? So even though you're looking at something unlovely, it doesn't change anything about your name. I'm going to show you the next picture. But I'm going to show you quickly because it is quite unlovely.

What's your name? What's your name? What's your name? Tex. See, his name is still there. Quick change of change. Okay. Here's something else unlovely.

This is a fight. Yeah? What's your name? Tex. Why? It doesn't matter what I, it doesn't seem to matter what I show him. His name is always Tex.

[7 : 27] Why is his name always Tex? But okay. You're learning a very deep and important theological truth this morning. You don't realize it. But Tex is his name because his name belongs to him outside of what he is looking at.

Yeah? Now, bring that back into John chapter 316. Why does God so love the world? Because love is who God is outside of anything else.

God is and has been loving from eternity past. So God so loves the world because God is love. It's his name.

It's who he is. And so the unloveliness of the world cannot jeopardize the love of God because love is who he is. So God so loves the world with an impossible love, a love for the unlovely.

I wonder whether perhaps one or two of us this morning need reminding of this. Do you know that God loves you not because you're sorted and nice and together? God loves you because he loves you because he is loved.

[8 : 34] Not because you've got a perfect family or a brilliant job or a bank full of money or because you've never done anything wrong. No, God loves you not because you deserve it, but because of who he is and who he has always been.

That's impossible thing number one. God loves the unlovely. Impossible thing number two, and I've made up a word for this. God is giving the ungivable. Giving the ungivable. Now, you know that Christmas can be an expensive thing, right?

Because you end up having to give presents perhaps and you've asked your family members and you ask them what you wanted and then you've tried to pull the money together. But I want to suggest to you that sometimes giving is not...

The cost of giving is not so much just the money, the financial cost. It's what it costs you, right? It's what it takes out of you to give it. I'm going to use this as an example and Vanessa will hopefully forgive me.

But once, years and years ago, when we were first married, Vanessa spent most of the year making like a quilt for her mum and dad. And this is like a project that had lasted all year. You know, we'd collected together little bits of material and Vanessa had really carefully stitched them together and like sort of poured her heart and soul into making this quilt for her mum and dad.

[9 : 51] And then, you know, on the day before Christmas, she's kind of like trying to finish it off so that it's ready. And when she handed it over and they opened it, Vanessa started to cry.

Not just because the emotion of everything that had gone into... I mean, I didn't cry, but I could have done. Because there was a lot of me in there as well, just in terms of the backup role, right?

So there's a lot of things have gone into that and then giving it away and passing it on to somebody else. And there are just certain things, aren't there, that we shouldn't give away, right?

There are certain things because they would cost us so much, we don't actually give them. We don't want to give them. And here in John 3.16, God doesn't just give something really expensive. He gives something that really you shouldn't give. It should be ungiveable. You shouldn't be able to give it away because of the sheer cost to God of giving it.

[10 : 49] So look in the verse. For God so loved the world that he gave... What did he give? His one and only Son. His one and only Son.

Now, if you know this verse, which you probably do, it seems unremarkable to you. But just stare hard at it for a moment and have a think with me about what's being said. You understand, don't you, that you're being told that God, the eternal creator of everything, is a trinity.

So we've met God the Spirit earlier in chapter 3, and we can look at that later. But you find out now that God is both his Father and Son, as well as Spirit.

God is eternally existing in three persons. And in Christmas, the eternal and only Son is given at incomprehensible cost.

For God so loved the world, he gave his one and only Son. Amazingly, what you find out as you read on in John's book is that the giving of the ungivable is not just as God the Son clothes himself in human flesh and is born in a manger as a baby, but even more so as that Son gives his life on the cross to die for our sin.

[12 : 09] An absolutely unthinkable cost. God is giving up what is most costly for those who are least worthy. Do you see that? Put them together.

The impossible love for the unlovely with the giving of the ungivable. And here you've got a God who is giving something he should never give to people who don't deserve it, like you and me. Okay, the third impossibility is fixing the unfixable. Fixing the unfixable. 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.

It's right there, isn't it, at the end of the verse, that the Son is given so that we should not perish, but have eternal life. You know, don't you, that the unfixable thing in life is death.

We know that, don't we, especially today as we miss loved ones. But death is not just unfixable because it's like a really difficult problem, okay? Death is not just unfixable because it's like a Rubik's cube, which is really difficult to solve, or a maths problem that's really complicated, so you're not going to be able to do it.

[13 : 18] No, rather perishing, symbolized in physical death, but even more in spiritual death, the exclusion from God's presence. That death is unfixable, unsolvable, because it's exactly what we deserve.

It's justice. Judgment for rebelling against God and living for ourselves is death. Death, spiritual death and physical death.

Think about it like this. Put your hand up if coming up in 2025 you have exams at school. I know some of you have got exams at school coming up. Yeah, you see, there's a few here.

I want you to imagine for a moment that you sit your geography exam. We all know that geography is the most valuable subject at school, right? Isn't that right? I don't know where Liz has disappeared with the grandkids, but Liz and I agree on that, right?

So you're sitting your geography exam, and you know that you don't get a single question right, okay? You didn't get a single question right.

[14 : 21] Everything was wrong. And then you get your mark back. What mark are you expecting if you get every single question wrong in your geography exam? What are you expecting to get?

Zero. Zero. On your GCSEs, is it possible to get zero? Or do you always get one? Even if you get... Okay, maybe you should experiment, Anderson. Go into an exam, get every question wrong and see whether you get just a one.

You might get a one. Okay, so you would expect, wouldn't you, to fail your exam if you didn't get a single question right. But imagine then you opened your results on results day, and you opened it, and geography is the one you really want to know.

And you got a nine. You got a nine. I mean, I didn't get a single answer to any of those questions right. You know, I got them all wrong, and yet still I got a nine. Well, what would you think then?

This is a grave injustice. I've got a nine, and I got everything wrong. That's... There's something wrong. There's an injustice going on. And that's the sense in John 3.16.

[15 : 22] When John says, or Jesus says, we're not actually quite sure whether it's Jesus specifically being quoted by John or whether John is paraphrasing here. But when it's said that because God so loved the world, he gave his son that we should not perish.

It's like people opening their exam results and getting nines when really they should have got ones. Because it's not simply that we've done everything morally wrong that we could have done.

I'm sure that's not the case, and I'm sure you've done many good things. The problem actually is much worse than that. It's that we do good things, good and bad things. We do them for our own glory and not for God and his glory.

And because God's law is love God with all of our soul, our mind and strength, when we don't do that, because of that, we deserve death. In the exam of life, we have got the questions wrong because we've lived for our glory and not for God's glory.

And so we deserve death. And so to not perish but receive eternal life, well, it's a massive injustice. How can God do that and still be a God of justice, righteousness, holiness?

[16 : 31] But God says here that because he gave his only son in his love for the unlovely, his giving of the ungiveable, he can fix the unfixable. How so?

Well, because God the son in human flesh is going to die in our place, receiving the punishment of perishing in our place. So that we might receive eternal life.

It's utterly remarkable. God fixes the unfixable. Now, there's one more impossibility in John 3, 16. And for this, you need your thinking cap.

So have a look down at the verse and I'll show it to you. Let me read to you the verse 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.

Notice just with me that to benefit from God's loving of the unlovely, to benefit from his giving the ungiveable and fixing the unfixable, that there's a clause in there that means that we need to do something, don't we?

[17 : 36] We have to, what? Believe in him. Notice that? Now, that sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Okay, if all I have to do is to believe in God, if all I have to do is acknowledge his existence, well then, that's perfectly possible for me, isn't it?

It's not an impossibility. But actually, that's not what believing in him means in John's gospel.

Perhaps you know that John chapter 3, if you just turn over the page to 1065 and look at the heading, you'll know it's a conversation between Jesus and a guy called Nicodemus.

Nicodemus is a Pharisee, right? He's like the religious dude. Everybody respects Nicodemus. He does everything right, as far as anyone can tell. And he comes to Jesus in the night to ask him some questions.

And Jesus speaks to him and says to him in John chapter 3, verse 3, Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they're born again.

Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, the religious guy, listen, believing in me, receiving the kingdom, receiving this gift of the fixing of the unfixable, that requires being born again.

[18 : 45] Being born again. John chapter 3, being born again and believing are the same thing. So if you go back to John chapter 3, verse 16, you can read the verse like this. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever is born again shall not perish but have eternal life.

And you know this thing, don't you, about being born? Yeah? You're not in control of it. None of us decided to be born, did we? And actually it is outside of our control to be born again.

Instead, we need God to do that for us too. And so the final impossible thing in John chapter 3 is the giving of new spiritual life. God is able to give you and me new spiritual life.

God is able to make you and me into believers. People who love him and trust him and want to live their lives for him so they can benefit from God's love of the unlovely, his giving of the ungiveable, and his fixing of the unfixable, because we've received new life from him.

And really that's why Christmas is such good news, isn't it? It's not just that God is offering the gift of his son. He's offering you the gift of faith in his son.

[20 : 14] And that is incredibly precious. And I want to ask you this morning, if you're a visitor or you're a guest and you have never received that, why not ask the Lord, please, I want to be born again, that I might receive your love of the unlovely, your giving of the ungiveable, and your fixing of the unfixable.

Please do that for me. And many of us in this room have received that a long time ago. And my prayer for us is that today we get to remember and rejoice in all that Christ has done for us.

As unlovely as we are, as in trouble as we were, God has done everything that needed to be done so that we might receive eternal life and not perish.

Let me pray as I close. Gracious God, thank you so much that you love unlovely things like this world in rebellion against you.

Thank you that you love me, that you love us. Thank you that you are willing to give what is ungiveable, the person of the son in human flesh to die on a cross for us.

[21 : 39] Thank you that you are able to fix what is unfixable, that we might not perish but have eternal life, through the forgiveness of our sins in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

And thank you that you are able to offer people like us new life, faith in you, belief in you, that we might receive these extraordinary benefits of the Lord Jesus Christ, dying in our place, facing our punishment that we might receive his life.

How we thank and praise you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.