

John 3:16

by Sir Knight John L. Rogitz

Is John 3:16 about God giving Jesus as a redemptive sacrifice, and if we believe that Jesus was the Son of God, we would be saved? In other words, is the verse primarily about the redemptive sacrifice? This certainly has been the way I have been in the habit of interpreting it.

Yet the verse does not start off by saying "God gave his only Son" and then say "because he loved the world," the natural order of thought you would expect if the sacrifice was the primary theme. The verse says that God loved the "world" instead of God loved "mankind," which is odd since it is mankind who presumably is benefited by the sacrifice. Most puzzling is the presumptive fact that if God wanted to save us, He could do so without a sacrifice.

Instead, the verse starts off "God so loved the world." Taken at face value as the first phrase of the verse, this states the primary theme, that God so loves the world. In this interpretation, the verse is not so much about the sacrifice as about God's intense love for His creation. The sacrifice from this perspective is intended as proof of the most profound sort imaginable of the principle theme. We know how much we love our own children and that God must love His Son far more. He is saying in effect, "I want you to know I love the world, and to prove it I am going to do something that is sure to be profound to you. It is so important to me that you believe this, that I love this world, that I will give you everlasting life. And you can show your belief through a surrogate belief, that Jesus is my Son, because if you believe that, it means you believe the rest - that I love the world."

This explains why the verse is written the way it is and resolves the puzzle of why an omnipotent God was required to sacrifice His Son to save us. He was not required. He did it to give power to the message.

Now here is the interesting part. Why is it so important to God that we know He loves the world? It's not like He needs our validation. It may be because knowing God loves the world is more transformative than anything else a man can know. That single thought makes for a calmer, more reasoned, and kinder person. With that thought in mind, one is less distressed, disturbed, and depressed, because after all, if God loves the world, how bad can it be really? If God so loves the world, things must never be as bad as they seem. One can see immediately that wrong and evil must diminish in proportion to how many people understand this simple truth. That is why it is so important for us to know, and it explains the profound proof of the sacrifice and its aftermath - the Resurrection.

It is the simplest and best enlightenment there is. John begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If the "word" embodied by Christ is "love," God's love for the world, this explains the start of the

Gospel and why it says that the true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. The light that enlightens every man is the knowledge that God so loves the world.

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