

**John 3:14-22**  
**March 11, '18**

**“READ ON”**

**I’M SURE MANY OF YOU REMEMBER ROLLEN STEWART.  
YOU PROBABLY DON’T REMEMBER HIM BY THAT NAME,  
THOUGH.**

**ROLLEN STEWART WAS COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS  
“SUPERFAN.”**

**HE WAS THE GUY WITH THE BIG RAINBOW WIG WHO WAS SEEN  
AT VIRTUALLY EVERY MAJOR SPORTING & ENTERTAINMENT EVENT  
OF THE 1980’S.**

**ROLLEN CAME ON HARD TIMES – REALLY HARD TIMES – FROM  
WHICH HE NEVER RECOVERED.**

**MOST OF THOSE HARD TIMES WERE SELF-INFLICTED.**

**I HAD OCCASION TO MEET SUPERFAN.**

**IT WAS IN LONDON AT THE WEDDING OF PRINCE CHARLES &  
LADY DIANA.**

**EMMA SUE & I WERE THERE THAT DAY & I SPOTTED SUPERFAN  
& WALKED OVER TO TALK TO HIM.**

**I ASKED HIM HOW HE ALWAYS MANAGED TO BE SEEN ON  
TELEVISION.**

**HE SAID, “*FOLLOW ME – I JUST LOOK FOR THE CAMERAS.*”**

**SO I DID – AND MANAGED TO BE STANDING NEXT TO “SUPERFAN”  
BEHIND THE “TODAY” SHOW SET DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF  
BUCKINGHAM PALACE.**

**ASIDE FROM THAT RAINBOW WIG, THERE WAS SOMETHING  
ELSE DISTINCTIVE ABOUT ROLLEN STEWART.**

**HE WAS ALWAYS HOLDING A SIGN OR WEARING A T-SHIRT WITH “JOHN 3:16” EMBLAZONED ACROSS IT.**

**TODAY’S PASSAGE INCLUDES THAT VERSE – A VERSE THAT IS KNOWN TO EVERYONE, WHETHER THEY LEARNED IT IN CHURCH OR SIMPLY WATCHED A LOT OF SPORTING EVENTS WHERE SUPERFAN SHOWED UP.**

**IT’S A VERSE THAT MARTIN LUTHER CALLED “*THE GOSPEL IN A NUTSHELL.*”**

**ONE OF OUR ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES JUST COMPLETED A STUDY OF “*CHRISTIANITY & WORLD RELIGIONS.*”**

**AFTER LOOKING AT THE WORLD’S MAJOR RELIGIONS & MAKING A COMPARISON TO WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE, THE FINAL SESSION WAS DEVOTED TO CHRISTIANITY AS A WORLD RELIGION.**

**THE LEADER USED JUST ONE VERSE TO TALK ABOUT CHRISTIANITY – JOHN 3:16.**

**YOU NOT ONLY KNOW THE VERSE BUT YOU PROBABLY KNOW THE CONTEXT IN WHICH IT IS FOUND.**

**A HIGHLY-RESPECTED PHARISEE NAMED NICODEMUS COMES TO JESUS, “BY NIGHT” JOHN SAYS.**

**THERE IS, OF COURSE, THE DUAL MEANING OF “NIGHT” FOR JOHN.**

**NICODEMUS CAME TO HIM IN LITERAL DARKNESS TO AVOID BEING SEEN BY FELLOW JEWISH LEADERS.**

**AND HE ALSO CAME IN THE DARKNESS OF HIS SOUL.**

**HE CAME WITH QUESTIONS FOR JESUS.**

**HE CAME IN SEARCH OF SOMETHING MORE FOR HIS LIFE.**

**JESUS TELLS HIM ABOUT “*BEING BORN FROM ABOVE.*”**

**HE TELLS HIM THAT BELIEF IN HIM IS THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE.**

**AS JESUS FINISHES WHAT HE HAS TO SAY TO NICODEMUS, JOHN REFLECTS ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF JESUS' WORDS & HE BEGINS HIS REFLECTION WITH THIS VERSE --- THE MOST WELL-KNOWN VERSE IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE.**

**JOHN ARTHUR GOSSIP, IN HIS COMMENTARY ON JOHN, SAYS ABOUT THIS VERSE –**

***“IN THE WHOLE WORD OF GOD THERE MUST BE FEW IF ANY SCRIPTURES WHICH HAVE APPEALED SO IRRESISTIBLY TO SO MANY AS THIS VERSE.***

***DEEP CALLS TO DEEP IN IT; IN EVERY PHRASE, VISTAS THAT HAVE NO END AT ALL, BUT MELT INTO THE FAR REACHES OF ETERNITY, KEEP OPENING UP BEFORE ONE'S EYES & MIND.”***

**IF THAT ISN'T DAUNTING ENOUGH, HE GOES ON TO SAY (AND THIS IS TERRIBLY FRIGHTENING TO THE PREACHER) – ANY ATTEMPTED COMMENTARY IS SUPREMELY AN AUDACITY AND AN IMPERTINENCE, TO BE ESSAYED AT ALL ONLY WITH REVERENCE AND HUMILITY.”**

**THAT IS A FRIGHTENING WARNING!**

**IT'S A WARNING THAT REMINDS ME OF A STORY ABOUT A MAN WHO BROKE INTO A WOMAN'S HOUSE ONE NIGHT TO ROB HER.**

**WHEN THE WOMAN SAW THE THIEF IN HER HOUSE SHE PICKED UP HER BIBLE AND SAID, “ACTS 2:38!”**

**WHEN SHE DID, THE ROBBER TOOK OFF RUNNING OUT OF THE HOUSE.**

**WHEN THE POLICE CAUGHT UP WITH HIM, THEY ASKED HIM WHY HE TOOK OFF RUNNING SO FAST.**

**THE THIEF SAID TO THE POLICE, “WELL YOU WOULD TOO, IF YOU HEARD A WOMAN TELL YOU THAT SHE HAD AN AXE AND TWO 38’S!”**

**MISGUIDED AS HE WAS, THE MAN WAS ACKNOWLEDGING THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD.**

**THERE IS PERHAPS NO VERSE MORE POWERFUL THAN THIS ONE. HERE IS THE CONSUMMATE PROCLAMATION OF GOD’S LOVE. IT’S PROBABLY ONE OF THE FIRST VERSES YOU LEARNED AS A CHILD.**

**IT’S ONE OF THE FIRST VERSES OUR CHILDREN LEARN IN THE BIBLE MEMORY CONTEST.**

**IT’S A VERSE THAT TELLS US – AS CLEARLY AS ANY VERSE IN THE BIBLE – ABOUT “THE LOVE OF GOD.”**

**WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG I REMEMBER HEARING ABOUT “THE LOVE OF GOD.”**

**I DIDN’T FIRST HEAR ABOUT IT IN THE WAY THAT I KNOW IT NOW, THOUGH.**

**I REMEMBER HOW I COULD TELL THE LEVELS OF MY FATHER’S DISPLEASURE WHEN I WAS SMALL.**

**WHEN HE WAS JUST A LITTLE BIT UPSET HE WOULD SAY, QUITE LOUDLY, “OH, FOR THE LOVE OF PETE!”**

**NOW, WE DIDN’T KNOW ANYONE NAMED PETE & I COULD NEVER UNDERSTAND WHO IT WAS MY DAD WAS TALKING ABOUT!**

**BUT WHEN HE WAS REALLY UPSET, IT WOULDN’T BE PETE HE’D REFER TO & HIS VOICE WOULDN’T JUST BE SLIGHTLY RAISED.**

**HE WOULD ANGRILY SHOUT, “OH, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD!”**

**UNFORTUNATELY, THAT MAY HAVE BEEN MY FIRST INTRODUCTION TO “THE LOVE OF GOD” AND I DIDN’T UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS MEANT BY IT.**

**IT WASN'T EVEN A COMPLETE SENTENCE.**

**IT WAS JUST THIS ANGRY EXPLOSION THAT WAS TOSSED OUT,  
NOT AIMED AT ANYONE IN PARTICULAR & WITH NO FURTHER  
COMMENT ABOUT ITS MEANING.**

**IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE.**

**IN THIS WONDERFUL VERSE IN JOHN, THE LOVE OF GOD *DOES*  
MAKE SENSE.**

**IT'S A LOVE THAT ISN'T CONFINED.**

**IT ISN'T CONFINED TO A PARTICULAR NATION AS THOSE OF THE  
OLD TESTAMENT HAD ALWAYS BELIEVED.**

**IT ISN'T CONFINED TO THE SO-CALLED "GOOD" PEOPLE – THOSE  
WHO SUBSCRIBE TO A PARTICULAR SET OF MORAL & ETHICAL  
STANDARDS.**

**IT ISN'T EVEN CONFINED TO ONLY THOSE WHO LOVE GOD.**

**IT'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD.**

**THE UNLOVABLE & THE UNLOVELY...**

**THE LONELY WHO HAVE NO ONE ELSE TO  
LOVE THEM...**

**THE PERSON WHO *LOVES* GOD & THE PERSON WHO *REJECTS*  
GOD.**

**ALL ARE INCLUDED IN THIS VAST, ALL- ENCOMPASSING LOVE.**

**1,600 YEARS AGO, AUGUSTINE SAID WHAT HAS BEEN SAID IN A  
THOUSAND DIFFERENT WAYS SINCE – "*GOD LOVES EACH ONE OF US AS  
IF THERE WAS ONLY ONE OF US TO LOVE.*"**

**WHEN WE SHARE HOLY COMMUNION, YOU ALWAYS HEAR – IN  
THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION – THE WORDS OF JESUS – "*THIS IS MY  
BODY, BROKEN FOR YOU....THIS IS MY BLOOD SHED FOR YOU.*"**

**WHEN WE SHARE IT AT OUR 8:00 SERVICE BY INTINCTION, I LIKE TO PERSONALIZE IT – “*THE BODY OF CHRIST, BROKEN FOR YOU...BOB, JUNE, BILL, JANE.*”**

**AT THE 10:30 SERVICE, WE EAT THE BREAD INDIVIDUALLY, SIGNIFYING OUR UNIQUENESS & WE SHARE THE CUP TOGETHER, INDICATING OUR UNITY.**

**THE “YOU” IN EACH THOSE PHRASES – THE BODY BROKEN FOR YOU & THE BLOOD SHED FOR YOU IS BOTH SINGULAR & PLURAL.**

**CHRIST DIED FOR *YOU* & CHRIST DIED FOR *ALL*.**

**THERE IS SUCH BEAUTY & SIMPLICITY TO THIS BELOVED VERSE. WE SOMETIMES WANT TO MAKE THINGS MORE COMPLICATED THAN THEY ARE.**

**THERE’S NO NEED TO DO THAT HERE.**

**MAYBE THAT’S WHY THIS VERSE IS SO MEANINGFUL TO US.**

**IT’S STRAIGHTFORWARD.**

**IT’S ABOUT GOD’S LOVE AND IT’S ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE.**

**IT’S ABOUT BEING, AS JESUS SAYS TO NICODEMUS, “*BORN FROM ABOVE.*”**

**BUT WHAT DOES THAT REALLY MEAN?**

**WELL, IT DOESN’T MEAN TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF.**

**IT’S NOT LIKE GOING BACK ON A DIET FOR THE UMPEENTH TIME.**

**IT’S NOT ABOUT A SET OF NEW RESOLUTIONS.**

**IT’S NOT SAYING TO YOURSELF, “*WELL, I’VE GOT TO WORK ON MY MORALS.*”**

**JUST LOOK AT THE INDIVIDUAL JESUS IS ENCOUNTERING HERE.**

**YOU COULDN'T FIND ANYONE MORE "MORAL" THAN  
NICODEMUS!**

**IF ANYONE "DESERVED" ETERNAL LIFE, IT WOULD APPEAR  
THAT NICODEMUS HAD ALL THE RIGHT QUALIFICATIONS.**

**HE SEEMS WORTHY OF ETERNAL LIFE.**

**BUT THIS VERSE TELLS US THAT SALVATION ISN'T ABOUT  
HUMAN EFFORT OR MERIT.**

**NOR CAN POSITION SAVE YOU.**

**NICODEMUS HELD A DISTINGUISHED RELIGIOUS POSITION &  
THAT DIDN'T DO IT.**

**BEING A CHURCH MEMBER DOESN'T SAVE YOU.**

**BEING A GOOD PARENT DOESN'T SAVE YOU.**

**NO – ETERNAL LIFE ISN'T ABOUT POSITION.**

**NEITHER IS IT ABOUT POPULARITY OR PRESTIGE OR PEITY.**

**NICODEMUS EXCELLED IN ALL OF THESE & YET THAT'S NOT  
WHAT WOULD SAVE HIM.**

**BEING BORN FROM ABOVE ISN'T ABOUT HUMAN EFFORTS.**

**IT'S ABOUT THE POWERFUL LOVE OF GOD THAT TRANSFORMS  
US & IMPLANTS THE HOLY SPIRIT INTO OUR HEARTS & CHANGES US.**

**IT'S AS SIMPLE AS THAT!**

**THAT'S WHAT THIS VERSE IS ABOUT.**

**BUT FOR FAR TOO MANY, IT'S JUST *TOO* SIMPLE TO ACCEPT.**

**I READ A STORY ABOUT AN INSTANT CAKE MIX THAT WAS A BIG  
FLOP A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO.**

**THE INSTRUCTIONS SAID ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS ADD WATER  
& BAKE.**

**THE COMPANY COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY IT DIDN'T SELL –  
UNTIL THEIR RESEARCH DISCOVERED THAT THE PUBLIC FELT  
UNEASY ABOUT A CAKE MIX THAT REQUIRED ONLY WATER.**

**APPARENTLY, PEOPLE THOUGHT IT WAS TOO EASY!**

**SO THE COMPANY ALTERED THE FORMULA & CHANGED THE  
DIRECTIONS TO ADD AN EGG IN ADDITION TO THE WATER.**

**THE IDEA WORKED & SALES INCREASED DRAMATICALLY!**

**IS THAT THE WAY YOU RESPOND TO A VERSE  
SUCH AS THIS?**

**IT'S TOO EASY?**

**UNLIKE THE CAKE MIX MANUFACTURER, GOD HASN'T CHANGED  
HIS "FORMULA" TO MAKE SALVATION MORE MARKETABLE.**

**IT'S STILL THE SAME.**

***"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD..."***

**HAVING SAID ALL THAT, I THINK WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL  
WITH THIS VERSE.**

**WHAT I'M ABOUT TO SAY MAY SEEM TO COMPLETELY  
CONTRADICT EVERYTHING I'VE JUST SAID.**

**THERE IS A CONTEXT HERE THAT GOES BEYOND JUST THE  
ENCOUNTER WITH NICODEMUS.**

**THERE'S THAT SEEMINGLY STRANGE VERSE THAT BEGAN THIS  
PASSAGE – A VERSE ABOUT MOSES & SNAKES & A POLE IN THE  
WILDERNESS.**

**THAT'S FOR ANOTHER TIME & ANOTHER SERMON, BUT THERE'S  
ALSO THE VERSE WHICH FOLLOWS THE ONE WE KNOW SO WELL.**

**I'M AFRAID THAT SOME PEOPLE HAVE A TENDENCY TO TAKE  
THAT BELOVED & FAMILIAR VERSE – JOHN 3:16 – AND TURN IT INTO  
*BAD NEWS* RATHER THAN *GOOD NEWS*.**



**I'M AFRAID – IF TRUTH BE TOLD – THERE ARE THOSE WHO WOULD CALL THIS THEIR FAVORITE VERSE BECAUSE IT REMINDS THEM THAT *THEY'RE* “SAVED” BUT OTHERS AREN'T.**

**RATHER THAN BEING SEEN AS THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE, IT'S USED AS A CALL OF JUDGMENT.**

**INSTEAD OF IT BEING A STATEMENT OF GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD, IT'S USED AS A THREAT TO THOSE UNWILLING TO ACCEPT THAT LOVE.**

**IT'S NOT OFFERED AS AN INVITATION TO HELP *SPREAD* GOD'S LOVE, BUT RATHER A SUMMONS TO EXCLUDE THOSE WE THINK AREN'T *DESERVING* OF THAT LOVE.**

**HERE, AGAIN, IS WHERE CONTEXT MATTERS.**

**TO ME, YOU CAN'T TRULY UNDERSTAND THE BREADTH & THE BEAUTY OF JOHN 3:16 WITHOUT INCLUDING THE VERSE WHICH IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWS.**

**YOU HAVE TO READ ON IN THE PASSAGE TO SEE THE MAGNIFICENT EXPANSE OF GOD'S GRACIOUS LOVE FOR ALL HUMANITY.**

***“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.”***

**READ ON:**

***“INDEED, GOD DID NOT SEND THE SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT IN ORDER THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM.”***

**YOU KNOW, AT SOME TIME - I DON'T KNOW WHEN - I COMPLETED THAT SENTENCE THAT I OFTEN HEARD SHOUTED BY MY FATHER.**

**I COMPLETED IT WITH THE WORDS “HAS SAVED ME” AND I CHANGED THE TONE OF VOICE IN WHICH IT WAS SAID.**

**IT WENT FROM “OH, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD...!” TO “OH, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD...HAS SAVED ME!”**

**IT'S NOT JUST JOHN 3:16 THAT TELLS ME OF THAT LOVE.**

**WHEN I READ ON – WHEN I INCLUDE VERSE 17 – I KNOW THAT JESUS DIDN'T COME INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT THAT THE WORLD – THE WORLD & EVERYONE IN IT – MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM.**

**PERHAPS IT'S VERSE 17 OF JOHN'S THIRD CHAPTER THAT WE SHOULD ALL MEMORIZE.**

**PERHAPS IT'S THAT VERSE THAT SHOULD BE FOUND ON PLAQUES & BUMPER STICKERS.**

**PERHAPS IF SUPERFAN ROLLEN STEWART HAD BEEN ABLE TO “READ ON” IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, THOSE HARD TIMES HE BROUGHT UPON HIMSELF MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT.**

**“INDEED, GOD DID NOT SEND THE SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT IN ORDER THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM.” AMEN.**

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