

God's RX for Head and Heart
John 3:16
March 30, 2008 - Pastor Draeger 10AM

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus, Amen.

God's word for our consideration this morning is those very famous words called the Gospel in the Nutshell. That's how I learned it in Sunday School a couple of years ago -- a hundred of them maybe. How many of you learned it was the Gospel in the Nutshell? And then we learn not only it was the Gospel in a Nutshell, what was the next assignment we had? Memorize it - not only did you learn what it is but now you learn to memorize it. Some of us still have it memorized to this very day, probably a bunch of us even in King James' English.

We're going to be focusing on these 26 words for the next 6 weeks. As we think about these words in this text, I'm certain that for everyone of us we have all had hopes and dreams. Is that a fair statement? I would also suspect that some of those hopes and dreams have indeed come true. Fair statement? I would also imagine that there have been a few of the hopes and dreams that have not come true. Is that fair? Life always has its let downs, doesn't it? There will always be something in life that will be a speed bump, that will get in the way - people will disappoint us, circumstances will alter our plans. And for some of us that can be difficult because we have this condition called "control freak." We want to manage things and have things go our way. So when we have hopes and dreams, we plan that they're going to happen the way we script it - exactly the way we script it, or else.

I'd like to suggest to you that there is one place that we can look, there is one promise, one place of hope, one set of numbers upon which we can count and will never be let down. And they are what Max Lucado has called *The Numbers of Hope*. There they are - 3:16. You see those numbers in the back of an end zone many times on television. When the cameras zoom in on the end zone, you'll see a banner that says *John 3:16*. Well, Max Lucado, who has written numerous books, he has just tons of books out there in the marketplace. I think he writes something daily that can be published on the internet or in print. They all are pretty good things; they all bring some message of hope to us. They all focus upon Jesus and that is an excellent thing. The book is *3:16, The Numbers of Hope*, some of you may end up buying the book, wanting to read it. Others of you are going to participating in one of our small groups. Gary is leading one now over in the Conference Room at 8:30 based upon the book *3:16, The Numbers of Hope*. We're going to follow this as a sermon series for the next 5 weeks.

In this very special text, John 3:16, let's read it together: "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 is what Max Lucado calls a "26 word parade of hope." Count them in this translation, which is the INV translation, (New International Version), there are 26 words there. He calls this the 26 word parade of hope, beginning with God and ending with life. Isn't that a cool summary? Brief enough, he says, to write on a napkin, and clearly we've

already discovered brief enough for us to memorize in a moment. Yet this text, these words, the Gospel in a nutshell, are so strong that they have weathered 2000 years of storms and questions. These words, a great place for people who have absolutely no knowledge of what the Bible is about, to start. This is a great place for those of us who have lots of biblical knowledge to return, because they are 26 words of hope. And in the next 5 weeks we're going to tease these words out in greater detail. It is indeed the Gospel that you can just put in a nutshell - it's the Reader's Digest version of the Bible, if you will.

Many people read the Bible, and they see it as a book of rules - that if you do good, God will bless you. If you do good, you'll have eternal life. Love your neighbor as yourself. Golden rule, do unto others as you'd have them do unto you. They extrapolate lots of rules. Do you see any rules in John 3:16? What I see in it, simply put, *He loves, He gave, we believe, we live*. If you want to chunk it down into four brief statements; eight words, there it is - that's John 3:16. *God loves, God gave, we believe, we live* - eight words, do you think you could memorize that this week? And that is the outline of the next four weeks, and I'm going to summarize it in week five from now.

Or to put it just a little differently, these words are the gateway to the Bible. If you want to enter into the Bible, this is the gateway. Fargo, North Dakota, I discovered has a slogan. Their slogan is "Gateway to the west." Can you believe that? Fargo, North Dakota? Only someone born in North Dakota could believe that. Others believe there's another place that is gateway to the west -- it's called St. Louis. In fact, St. Louis so believes that they're the gateway to the west that they built an arch to demonstrate what a gateway they are to the west. You cross the Mississippi at St. Louis and you are now in the west. Well now, California couldn't be outdone and so we have a whole host of towns in California that consider themselves the gateway to the Sierras; and you could name a few of those: beautiful downtown Clovis - gateway to the Sierras. Arnold, Auburn and even Visalia, my former town, all claim to be gateway to the Sierras.

John 3:16 is without debate a *gateway* to the heart of God. If you want to see what's in the heart of God you read these words in John 3:16. And it starts out, "God so loved the world." And where does that love begin? That love began all the way back in eternity. It began with God's plan to create a vast universe and then on one tiny little spec of that universe, He would populate with two people to whom He would say, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." Then ultimately that little place called Planet Earth would be populated as it is today with nearly 7 billion people, all of whom are objects of His love. The reason God created us was He could shower His love on us. That's why there was an Adam and Eve, because God so loved. That's why there's a you and me, God so loved us that He would create us, and then He would do more than that - He would redeem us. God so loved the world and still does.

Many people expect an angry God, one who punishes. They have this idea that God is to be feared or appeased. And yet as we read John 3:16, it says God so loved the world; God so loved the world, the planet. There are good people on this planet and there are heart breakers on this planet, aren't there? There are hope snatchers on this planet and God

loves them all, even the good people. Would you consider yourself among the good people? It's okay to say "yes." Are you better than Saddam Hussein? You'd probably think so wouldn't you? Adolph Hitler? A mass murderer? So you probably think your better than some people at least. And yet, everyone of us, when we lay down at night, we know that we have not been the perfect people of God, don't we? In some way, whether in thought or word or in deed, we have done something that was offensive to God, or in some way we left out some things that as people of God we could have done and didn't, or should have done and didn't.

So we too fall into that category of hope disappointers, heart breakers, because our sin breaks the heart of this great God and disappoints Him enormously just as Adam and Eve in the garden. And yet, what did God do with Adam and Eve in the garden? The very first thing that He says is to offer them the 1st oracle in Genesis 3:14 & 15. What did He say to the serpent? The seed of the woman; which woman? The one who had taken the fruit from the tree and handed it to her husband. This sin-stained, broken woman, who now deserved to be eternally separated from God, God says, "I'm going to use this woman to be the seed bearer." I have to look at that and say that's the love of God, that's the grace of God for sin stained people. He didn't just point His finger at her and zap her off the planet, but He pointed His finger at her and said I'm going to use you. And from your seed will come the head crusher, who'll crush your head Satan; you will be destroyed. And, of course, we know when that came true, it was Easter Sunday. Jesus rose as the head crusher and defeated Satan and sin and death. You see, when God wanted to show His love for us He gave; He gave the world His only Begotten Son. He didn't give edicts and rules and declarations; He gave His Son. He gave not abstract ideas, but He gave flesh wrapped divinity.

In the previous service, I asked Brad Kinstler, CEO of See's Candy, "Do you sell divinity?" He said absolutely, and I asked what do you wrap the divinity in? He gave the only answer a See's Candy guy could give -- he wraps it in chocolate. So he sells chocolate covered divinity. When God wanted to wrap divinity, He didn't wrap it in chocolate. He wrapped it in flesh and blood in a baby in a manger. In One who would stretch His arms out on a cross to redeem us -- that's how He would wrap divinity. He wrapped Himself, if you will, in flesh and blood because He loved and still loves the humanity He created.

Scripture equates Jesus with God, so God gave Himself at Christmas and God gave Himself on a cross on Good Friday. And God raised up flesh and wrapped divinity on Easter morning, and He still gives of Himself. Now He wraps Himself in the waters of baptism as He did last Sunday with three little people when He gave them His Holy Spirit, divinity if you will, wrapped in water and word. And He's going to give you divinity this morning. He's going to give you His own Son wrapped in bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus, for the forgiveness of your sins - wrapped divinity, if you will, how sweet it is to receive that grace, that forgiveness, *that* way. Because who of us in this room doesn't need that grace so that whoever believes in Him, whoever believes in Him? Here's our response, *we believe. Whoever*, who's in whoever? Everyone. Who's in everyone? You and me. So, for each of us in this room we could say, I am in everyone.

So it's not just a generic "whoever" but it is *I* - I am among those for whom He gave His Son wrapped in flesh and blood. So it is *I* who believe (as part of the everyone), *I* shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Jesus has put a huge "do not enter sign" at the gateway to hell. Not St. Louis, not Fargo, not the Sierras, but He's put a huge "do not enter sign" at the gateway to hell. And Jesus has said only over My dead body can people enter this place. And His choice is that none would. For God says He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The gates of heaven are securely opened to all who believe -- that's you, that's me.

Bible translators in the New Hebrides Islands struggle to find the appropriate verb to translate the word in this text, *believe*. It was a huge problem as they were trying to translate this word, which is essential to the Gospel of John for it appears more than 100 times in the Gospel of John. They're going to translate this word into something that would make sense in that culture when they had no word for believe. The Bible translator named John Peyton struggled until accidentally he saw something that was a solution. The solution came to him while he was hunting with the tribesmen. Two men bagged a large deer and put it on a pole and they carried this large deer up a steep mountain to Peyton's place. When they reached the veranda, both these men dropped the large deer on the porch, and they plopped in the two chair that was sitting there. And as they did, the native explained in the language of his own people, 'my, it is good to stretch yourself out and rest.' At that moment John Peyton took a pencil and paper and wrote down those words, 'my, it is good to stretch yourself out here and wrest,' and he said that he now had the word now for believe. And so his translation of John 3:16 went like this - For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whoever stretched himself out on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. And isn't that exactly what Jesus did? He stretched Himself out and then His first words to His disciples in the room where they gathered, is as we heard in today's Gospel, "Peace be with you." And He showed them His hands and His side.

I'd like to suggest to you people the prescription for head and heart today are these words, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever stretches him or herself out on Him, should not perish but have everlasting life." That's what Martin Luther did - when the great reformer was dying he suffered of severe headaches. He was bedfast and pain struck. When offered medication to relieve the pain he declined and he said, "My prescription for head and heart is that God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

And people I'd like to suggest to you today, the best prescription for your life, for head and heart, for your thoughts and your emotions, and ultimately even your behaviors - the best prescription for your head and heart are these words - *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish by have everlasting life.* Or to put it differently, *God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever stretches himself or herself out on Him, should not perish but have everlasting life.*

This week people and for the next five, I want to encourage you with the numbers of hope: John 3:16. Stretch out and rest. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, the unimaginable peace of God that passes all understanding, and was obtained for you by the death of His Son, keep and guard your hearts and minds. That's His prescription for rest now and forever. Amen.