

John 3:16: - Not a universal offer of salvation

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 11 February 2015 11:51

Possibly, this is one of the most well-known texts of scripture, even in the eyes of the unsaved. It is preached on so often, it has almost become a 'household word'. Yet, in spite of this fame, most preachers get it wrong. The result is, almost everyone believes the text teaches something it definitely does not: an universal offer of salvation and an universal opportunity to be saved by one's choice of the Saviour.

But, this is a fallacy. The text actually teaches the *exact opposite*: salvation limited to those who are chosen by God. Because this is so important, let us briefly examine this text and see what it says:

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

If we were to put this into ordinary modern-day English, it could read: "For God so loved His own that He gave us His only Son, that those He called and who believed should be saved." Of course, Arminians and those seduced by their message will say this is just my opinion. My response is that if that is all I base my conclusions on, then I have no business preaching God's word or being a pastor. My reason for concluding the above is because scripture says so, not because I think it should read that way! Now, let me prove my case...

The word for 'world' is kosmos it can certainly mean just that – the whole world (people). But, it is in the interest of Arminians to maintain this to be the only meaning available. In truth, kosmos can have one of a number of meanings, all found in the Greek of the New Testament. Apart from 'whole world', it can also mean harmony and order in government, things, etc., ornament or decoration (e.g. the stars in the heavens); the universe; the earth itself. It can also refer to those who are ungodly or unsaved, world affairs and riches, etc., any collection of things; Gentiles... and, wait for it... believers only.

It could be said that even if this is so, why pick out this meaning – surely we can also pick out 'whole world' as a meaning? No, we cannot. Why Not? Because the context does not sustain such a meaning, but, rather, sustains the meaning of 'believers only'.

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'Whosoever' can mean 'which', or 'who', 'the things', 'the son', 'these', 'that', 'this', and so on, so even this word can be variously interpreted. However, to be consistent, the word must be interpreted according to the context.

Thus, 'whosoever' can easily fit the translation of, for example, 'saints', which literally means 'holy things'. In which case, we can choose the meaning of 'the things', or simply 'who'. So, who 'believeth' or trusts in God (another way of talking about salvation) 'should not perish but have everlasting life'. It is that simple. But, I know that this will not suffice for Arminians, so let us put the verse back in to its own context...

Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, who, we read, amazed Jesus by his ignorance of holy matters. Jesus was re-teaching this priest in the 'process' of salvation. In verse 15 we are told very clearly that only those who believe in Him would be saved. The same word for the believers is used – 'whosoever'. John goes on to say, in the next verse, that those who believe will not perish.

The same 'world' (whosoever = the saved) would be saved (verse 17), or would not perish. He who believes is not condemned (verse 18) but he who is an unbeliever is condemned already. Thus, verse 3:16 has nothing at all to do with unbelievers, but only with the saved. It is a text meant for the encouragement of the saved, not for the evangelisation of unbelievers.

In verse 19 the meaning of 'world' is different, for it refers to the unsaved masses. This is also clear, and it shows us how careful we ought to be when providing meanings for Biblical texts: the same word can mean different things even in the same context.

Really, this is very simple. It is men who have made the matter difficult. Some accuse that in going back to the Greek text we are somehow barring folk who cannot use it from understanding. This is not true. We only do this when those who are preaching badly or wrongly persuade men to believe a lie!

We know this from many texts throughout scripture, both old and new testaments. All of scripture declares the Almightyness of God. It speaks of God as the Potter, a description given by God Himself, which tells us plainly that He can choose and cast away whoever He wishes! God does not hate and love as we do. His hatred and love are both of purity and holiness and

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cannot ever be wrong. This same God, Who is Creator, chooses those who will be saved (predestination) and who will not be saved. So, John 3:16 cannot ever be used to maintain the position of universal salvation – or even universal preaching.

It is true that all men called to preach must preach the message universally, but this fact is not found in John 3:16. And even if it were, it would not mean men had an equal opportunity to be saved. This is because 'equal opportunity to be saved' would automatically mean that the truth of predestination and election would be null and void. As this cannot be possible, for all of scripture is equally valid and God-breathed, the notion of universal salvation, or the possibility of it, must be discarded as unscriptural.

We must preach universally (unless stopped from doing so by the Spirit) whilst knowing that only those predestinated will be saved. It is not our role to preach only to the elect. We must preach to all, partly as a call in this world to those who will be saved in their lifetime, but also as a witness to God's Almighty power before the whole world, and as a sign of His wrath against the wicked.

John 3:16, when viewed in its proper context, is all about God's encouragement to His chosen few, the saved, just as the other famed text, showing Jesus knocking at the door (found in the painting by Holman Hunt) refers only to Believers and not to the unsaved! Yet, that text is also used by Arminians, who thereby blasphemously suggest that Jesus waits like a lackey until the unsaved man decides to 'accept' him!

Let us examine and use Biblical text as it is written, and not as we prefer! We have no right or warrant from God to interpret texts as we wish. We must always apply meanings that are sustainable only by the text itself.

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