

“WHAT IF JOHN 3:16 WERE NOT TRUE?”

JOHN 3:16

INTRODUCTION

I WAS AN AVID COMIC BOOK COLLECTOR WHEN I WAS A KID AND EVEN INTO MY ADULthood. I REALLY ENJOYED THE STORIES OF BATMAN AND MANY OF THE DC COMIC BOOK CHARACTERS. I ALSO ENJOYED READING AQUAMAN, GREEN ARROW, AND SHAZAM! I COLLECTED SUPERMAN FOR A WHILE DURING THE STORYLINE WHERE SUPERMAN IS KILLED BY A VILLIAN CALLED DOOMSDAY. AS I SAID I WAS MOSTLY A DC (WHICH STANDS FOR DETECTIVE COMICS) FAN. BUT I ALSO LIKED MANY OF THE MARVEL COMIC CHARACTERS ESPECIALLY SPIDERMAN AND DAREDEVIL. IT WAS MARVEL COMICS THAT CAME OUT WITH A SERIES IN 1977 THAT WAS TITLED “WHAT IF...”

THE “WHAT IF...” STORIES ALLOWED THE COMIC BOOK WRITERS TO EXPAND, ALTER AND FORMULATE OTHER POSSIBILITIES IN STORIES FOR THEIR CHARACTERS. IF ANYONE EVER WONDERED WHO WOULD WIN IN A BATTLE BETWEEN TWO SUPERHEROES, THIS SERIES HELPED ANSWER THAT QUESTION. THE FIRST ISSUE ASKED THE QUESTION “WHAT IF SPIDERMAN JOINED THE FANTASTIC FOUR?” OTHER INTERESTING TITLES INCLUDED:

“WHAT IF SPIDERMAN’S UNCLE BEN HAD LIVED?” WHICH DELVED INTO THE OTHER POSSIBILITY SINCE SPIDERMAN’S UNCLE BEN DIED IN THE VERY FIRST ISSUE OF SPIDERMAN.

THERE WAS ALSO “WHAT IF THE WORLD KNEW DAREDEVIL WAS BLIND?” AND WHAT IF CAPTAIN AMERICA BECAME PRESIDENT.”

THIS MORNING I WANT TO EXPLORE SOME WHAT IF POSSIBILITIES RELATING TO SCRIPTURE. MY HOPE IS THAT WE WILL SEE JUST HOW WIDE AND LONG AND HIGH AND DEEP GOD’S LOVE FOR US IS. JUST AS THE COMIC BOOK EXPLORED INTO THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS ITS READERS MIGHT HAVE ABOUT THEIR FAVORITE MARVEL COMIC BOOK HEROES, I WANT US TO EXPLORE SOME IDEAS RELATING TO THE MOST KNOWN VERSE IN THE BIBLE. TO DO THIS, I HAVE FOUR WHAT IF QUESTIONS I WANT US TO TAKE A LOOK AT AS WE PONDER THE ULTIMATE QUESTION: “WHAT IF JOHN 3:16 WERE NOT TRUE?”

BODY

NOW I UNDERSTAND THAT IT'S EASY AS CHURCH FOLKS TO THINK, "WHY WOULD WE WHO KNOW GOD'S WORD IS ABSOLUTE TRUTH EVEN WANT TO CONSIDER A QUESTION LIKE THAT?" BUT I THINK IT IS WORTH EXPLORING FOR TWO REASONS. I THINK IT IMPORTANT FOR EACH OF US TO PONDER WHAT OUR LIVES WOULD BE LIKE WITHOUT THE TRUTH OF THIS VERSE. I WANT US TO REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT PAUL SAYS IN **EPHESIANS 3:18 ABOUT GRAPSING HOW WIDE AND LONG AND HIGH AND DEEP THE LOVE OF CHRIST IS FOR US.** THE OTHER REASON, I WILL GIVE TOWARDS THE END OF MY MESSAGE. BUT I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT BEFORE WE DELVE INTO THE WHAT IF QUESTIONS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT OF THE VERSE AND ALSO THE IMPACT OF ITS UNIVERAL MESSAGE.

JOHN 3:16

THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THIS VERSE IS THE MOST FAMILIAR VERSE IN THE BIBLE. IT'S A FAVORITE VERSE OF MANY. IT'S ONE OF THE FIRST VERSES TOUGHT TO OUR CHILDREN. IT HAS BEEN CALLED "THE WHOLE GOSPEL IN A NUTSHELL."

OF THE WHOLE BIBLE, THIS ONE VERSE HAS BEEN SEEN MORE FREQUENTLY THAN ANY OTHER OUT IN THE WORLD. ONE RESTAURANT CHAIN INCLUDES IT ON THE BOTTOM OF THEIR CUPS. YOU CAN FIND IT ON T-SHIRTS AND POSTERS. IT USED TO BE SEEN AT FOOTBALL GAMES IN THE STANDS BEHIND THE GOAL POSTS. ONE CHRISTIAN SONGWRITER, STEVE TAYLOR, EVEN WROTE A TRIBUTE SONG TO THE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN RISKING HYPOTHERMIA GOING TO FOOTBALL GAMES IN THE COLD WINTERY WEATHER RAISING THE JOHN 3:16 BANNER. THE WORDS INCLUDE "HE AIN'T GONNA CHANGE THE WORLD, BUT HE KNOWS WHO CAN."

IN THE SCRIPTURES, JOHN 3:16 IS PART OF A DISCOURSE BETWEEN JESUS AND A GOOD AND RELIGIOUS LEADER BY THE NAME OF NICODEMUS.

NICODEMUS ACKNOWLEDGES THAT JESUS CAME FROM GOD AND JESUS TELLS HIM "UNLESS A MAN IS BORN AGAIN, HE WILL NOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD." NICODEMUS HAS DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING WHAT JESUS MEANS BY THIS STATEMENT, SO JESUS RESPONDS BY QUESTIONING HOW A PERSON CAN UNDERSTAND HEAVENLY THINGS WHEN THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND EARTHLY THINGS. AND THEN SPEAKING OF HIMSELF, JESUS SAYS IN JOHN 14-15 "**THAT JUST AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SNAKE IN THE DESERT, SO THE SON OF MAN**

MUST BE LIFTED UP, THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM MAY HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.”

THAT’S WHAT PRECEDES THIS AMAZING VERSE. LET’S READ IT AGAIN:

JOHN 3:16 AND 17

THESE VERSES SPEAK TO US ABOUT TRUE SALVATION. BUT WHAT IF JOHN 3:16 WASN’T TRUE? LET’S EXPLORE THIS QUESTION BY BREAKING DOWN THIS VERSE INTO FOUR OTHER WHAT IF QUESTIONS”

QUESTION #1 “WHAT IF GOD HAD NOT LOVED THE WORLD?”

1 JOHN 4:16 SAYS, “**GOD IS LOVE.**” BUT WHAT IF GOD DID NOT LOVE THE WORLD?

I THINK THE FIRST THING THAT WE AS CHRISTIANS WOULD UNDERSTAND IS THAT WITHOUT GOD’S LOVE THERE WOULD BE NO HOPE AT ALL. THERE WOULD BE NOTHING TO LIVE FOR AND NO PURPOSE FOR EXISTING. MANY OF THE THOUGHTS EXPRESSED IN ECCLESIASTES WOULD BE TRUE. EVERYTHING IN THIS LIFE WOULD BE MEANINGLESS. THE WORDS OF SOLOMON REGARDING THE USELESSNESS OF THIS LIFE WOULD BE, IF YOU’LL PARDON THE EXPRESSION, “GOSPEL TRUTH.” IT REALLY WOULDN’T MATTER HOW WE LIVED OUR LIVES. “**A MAN CAN DO NOTHING BETTER THAN TO EAT AND DRINK AND FIND SATISFACTION IN HIS WORK.**” (ECCLESIASTES 2:24)

EVERY DEATH WOULD BE THE END OF PERSONAL HOPE AND ASPIRATIONS AND EVERY GRAVE WOULD BE A PLACE OF DESPAIR. WE WOULD TRULY LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE PRAYERS ARE USELESS CRIES TO THE SKIES IF GOD DID NOT LOVE THE WORLD.

AND THINK OF THIS, WITHOUT GOD’S LOVE, WE OURSELVES WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND TRUE LOVE. IN A WORLD THAT ALREADY STRUGGLES WITH WHAT TRUE LOVE MEANS AND IS, HOW MUCH MORE DIFFICULT WOULD IT BE IF GOD DIDN’T DEMONSTRATE TRUE LOVE?

BUT, THE GOOD NEWS IS, GOD DOES LOVE THE WORLD. EVERYTHING SPEAKS OF GOD’S LOVE. EVERY SUNRISE, EVERY BLADE OF GRASS, EVERY FOUNTAIN OF WATER, EVERY BIRTH, THE FACE OF EVERY CHILD SPEAKS OF GOD’S LOVE. BUT THE GREATEST DEMONSTRATION OF HIS LOVE FOR THE WORLD IS THE CROSS.

JOHN 15:13 “GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS, THAT HE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.” THIS WAS GOD’S GREATEST EVIDENCE OF HIS LOVE.

BUT THIS LEADS INTO OUR SECOND QUESTION:

#2 “WHAT IF GOD HAD NOT GIVEN HIS SON?”

WHAT IF GOD DID LOVE US BUT WAS NOT WILLING TO GIVE HIS SON? WHAT IF THERE WAS NO CROSS-, BECAUSE GOD WOULD NOT ALLOW JESUS TO DIE? CAN YOU IMAGINE THE FRUSTRATION OF GOD’S LOVE WITHOUT THE CROSS-? SINCE GOD COMMANDED ATONEMENT FOR SIN, WITHOUT JESUS, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND MANKIND COULD NEVER BE SALVAGED. THERE WAS AND NEVER COULD BE ANOTHER PERFECT SACRIFICE. MANKIND WOULD NOT BE REDEEMED WITHOUT GOD’S SON.

REAL LOVE ALWAYS DEMANDS THE GIVING OF ONE’S SELF. THINK OF THE MANY WAYS A HUSBAND AND A WIFE SHOW AND EXPRESS LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER. THE HUSBAND SHOWS THIS LOVE BY GIVING OF HIMSELF THROUGH HIS WORKING, PROVIDING AND CARING FOR HIS FAMILY. THE WIFE LIKEWISE, GIVES OF HERSELF TO SHOW HOW MUCH SHE LOVES HER FAMILY. TRUE LOVE IS SHOWN BY HOW MUCH ONE GIVES OF THEMSELVES.

JOHN 10:17 “THE REASON MY FATHER LOVES ME IS THAT I LAY DOWN MY LIFE-ONLY TO TAKE IT UP AGAIN. NO ONE TAKES IT FROM ME, BUT I LAY IT DOWN ON MY OWN ACCORD. “

GOD WAS WILLING TO GIVE ALL THAT HE HAD FOR US. GOD GAVE UP HIS SON, AND APART FROM THIS THERE WOULD BE NO SALVATION.

“GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER...”

QUESTION #3 “WHAT IF GOD’S OFFER OF SALVATION WERE NOT FOR THE WHOSOEVERS?”

THE WORD “WHOSOEVER” IS A GENERAL WORD ENCOMPASSING EVERYONE AND ALL. THE WORD TOUCHES EVERY PERSON REGARDLESS OF STATUS, AGE, SEX OR ANY OTHER CATEGORY.

BUT WHAT IF IT DIDN'T? SUPPOSE GOD ONLY OFFERED SALVATION TO THE RICH, OR ONLY TO THE HEALTHY, OR ONLY TO THE EDUCATED? THINK OF HOW MANY PEOPLE WOULD LOSE OUT ON SALVATION IF IT WERE BASED ON SOME SORT OF MATERIAL CRITERIA. THIS IS AN INTERESTING QUESTION, BECAUSE OTHER RELIGIONS BASE SALVATION ON THIS VERY THING.

SCIENTOLOGY BASES THEIR WHOLE THEOLOGY ON THIS VERY THING, AS DO OTHER RELIGIONS. SALVATION, IT'S SUGGESTED IS ONLY OBTAINED BY REACHING SOME, MOSTLY, OUT OF REACH SPIRITUAL PLANE. IF THIS WERE HOW GOD DETERMINED SALVATION, MANY OF US SITTING HERE THIS MORNING, INCLUDING MYSELF, PROBABLY WOULD MISS OUT.

BUT GOD'S LOVE REACHES OUT TO ALL PEOPLE. IT ISN'T SUBJECT TO ONE'S STATUS. GOD'S OFFER OF SALVATION EXTENDS TO ANYBODY AND EVERYBODY WHO WANTS TO BE SAVED.

PAUL TELLS US IN **GALATIANS 3:26-28**

“YOU ARE ALL SONS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS, FOR ALL OF YOU WHO WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE CLOTHED YOURSELVES WITH CHRIST. THERE IS NEITHER JEW NOR GREEK, SLAVE NOR FREE, MALE NOR FEMALE, FOR YOU ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS.”

GOD CALLS ALL PEOPLE AND OFFERS SALVATION TO ALL PEOPLE. THAT LEADS US TO OUR FOURTH AND LAST WHAT IF QUESTION:

“GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVES...”

QUESTION #4 “WHAT IF GOD’S OFFER OF SALVATION WERE NOT BASED ON FAITH ALONE?”

THIS IS AN INTERESTING QUESTION. IT'S OFTEN THE ONE THAT TRIPS UP A LOT OF PEOPLE. THAT'S BECAUSE MOST PEOPLE HAVE THEIR OWN THOUGHTS ON HOW A PERSON IS SAVED, BOTH BIBLICALLY AND NON-BIBLICALLY.

SUPPOSE GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION WAS BASED ON WORKS. CAN YOU PICTURE WHAT THAT WOULD BE LIKE? CAN YOU IMAGINE THE DISAPPOINTMENT IN PEOPLE WHO TRIED WITH EVERY OUNCE OF THEIR OWN ABILITY TO GAIN SALVATION, ONLY TO FIND OUT IT WASN'T ENOUGH? AND WHEN OTHERS SEE THE EFFORTS OF THOSE WHO

FAILED, IMAGINE HOW MANY PEOPLE WOULD GIVE UP TRYING. THERE WOULD BE THOSE WHO WOULD FIND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO EVER REACH THE STATUS QUO, WHATEVER THAT WOULD BE.

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, I PLAYED A LOT OF SOCCER. I BEGAN PLAYING AT THE AGE OF FIVE AND CONTINUED PLAYING THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL. I WASN'T AN OVERLY SKILLED PLAYER, BUT I WAS PRETTY GOOD ON DEFENSE. DURING MY SENIOR YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL, I TRIED OUT FOR THE TEAM LOOKING FORWARD TO MY FIRST YEAR OF PLAYING VARSITY SOCCER. BEFORE OUR FIRST GAME AT THE END OF ONE OF OUR PRACTICES, MY COACH CALLED ME OVER AND INFORMED ME THAT I WOULD BE CUT FROM THE TEAM. I WASN'T TOLD WHY, BUT I CAN STILL REMEMBER THE PAIN AND DEVASTATION I FELT THAT DAY. I EVEN HAD A NUMBER OF MY TEAMMATES WHO IN CONSOLING ME WITH KIND WORDS EXPRESSED SURPRISED THAT I DIDN'T MAKE THE TEAM. I WAS CRUSHED.

MANY OF YOU PROBABLY HAVE HAD SIMILAR EXPERIENCES. MAYBE IT WAS LOSING A JOB. IMAGINE IF OUR SALVATION WAS BASED ON SOMETHING OTHER THAN FAITH, ONLY TO BE TOLD YOU WEREN'T GOOD ENOUGH. THE PAIN I FELT NOT MAKING THE SOCCER TEAM WOULD SURELY BE MINOR IN COMPARISON TO MY ETERNAL DESTINY.

BUT FAITH AND GOD'S GRACE DO DETERMINE OUR SALVATION. **EPHESIANS 2:8-9 SAYS, "FOR IT IS BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED, THROUGH FAITH-AND THIS NOT FROM YOURSELVES, IT IS A GIFT OF GOD-NOT BY WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE CAN BOAST."**

GOD MADE SALVATION AS BASIC AND SIMPLE AS HE COULD. KNOWING THAT WE COULD NEVER ATTAIN SALVATION ON OUR OWN, HE EXTENDED GRACE THROUGH FAITH AS A GIFT.

DO WE BEGIN TO SEE HOW FUTILE LIFE AND EXISTENCE WOULD REALLY BE IF GOD DID NOT LOVE THE WORLD, IF GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON, IF GOD'S OFFER OF SALVATION WASN'T FOR THE WHOSOEVERS, AND IF GOD'S OFFER OF SALVATION WASN'T BASED ON FAITH ALONE?

I STARTED THIS MORNING WITH TWO REASON WHY I FELT IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE EXPLORE THE QUESTION OF "WHAT IF JOHN 3:16 WERE NOT TRUE?"

I MENTIONED THE FIRST REASON WAS FOR US TO PONDER WHAT OUR LIVES WOULD BE LIKE WITHOUT THE TRUTH OF THIS VERSE. I WANTED US TO REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT PAUL SAYS IN **EPHESIANS 3:18 ABOUT GRAPSING HOW WIDE AND LONG AND HIGH AND DEEP THE LOVE OF CHRIST IS FOR US.** AND I THINK BY LOOKING AT THE OTHER ALTERNATIVE HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND PAUL'S STATEMENT EVEN BETTER.

I DIDN'T MENTION THE OTHER REASON BUT I THINK IT'S JUST AS RELEVANT. YOU SEE, WHILE MOST OF THIS MORNING DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM UNDERSTANDING THE TRUTH OF JOHN 3:16, WE BELIEVERS NEED TO BE REMINDED THAT THERE ARE MANY WHO DON'T UNDERSTAND IT.

WE DO LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THAT GOD LOVES THEM. MANY LIVE THEIR LIVES IN A STATE OF HOPELESSNESS. THERE ARE MANY WHO FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT GOD WOULD OR COULD EVER LOVE THEM. CONSIDERING HOW MUCH THE SCRIPTURES TELL US OF GOD'S LOVE, IT'S AN AMAZING FACT THAT EVEN PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH FEEL THIS WAY. THERE ARE MANY WHO THINK THEIR LIVES ARE WITHOUT PURPOSE OR MEANING OR THAT THEY ARE JUST A PART OF A MISTAKE.

THERE ARE ALSO PEOPLE THAT DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND THAT GOD GAVE HIS SON FOR THEM. THERE ARE SOME WHO THINK THAT ALL RELIGIOUS PATHS EVENTUALLY MEET IN THE SAME ETERNAL DESTINATION, SO IT DOESN'T MATTER WHICH RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION YOU ARE APART OF. THIS INCLUDES MANY WHO DON'T RECOGNIZE JESUS AS THE ONLY MEANS OF SALVATION.

WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION IS FOR THE WHOEVERS AND THAT THIS GIFT IS AVAILABLE TO ALL PEOPLES. SO MANY SPEND THEIR LIVES TRYING TO REACH SOME SPIRITUAL PLANE THAT THEIR RELIGIOUS LEADERS TELL THEM THEY MUST REACH IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THEIR SALVATION.

FURTHERMORE, MANY BASE SALVATION ON THEIR OWN BELIEFS. MANY THINK THAT AS LONG AS THEY LIVE "GOOD LIVES" THEY WILL INHERIT HEAVEN. THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE THAT THINK HEAVEN IS AVAILABLE TO THEM, EVEN WITHOUT JESUS.

AND WE, THE BELIEVING CHURCH, NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND THIS. WHAT IF JOHN 3:16 WERE NOT TRUE? THERE ARE MANY WHO DON'T KNOW THIS. THERE ARE MANY WHO LIVE THEIR LIVES AS THOUGH IT WERE NOT TRUE.

BUT THIS IS WHAT I KNOW TO BE TRUE:

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

THESE WORDS ARE TRUE. OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST SPOKE THESE WORDS. AND THESE WORDS ARE ETERNAL. WHAT A MESSAGE THIS IS. WHAT A MESSAGE WE HAVE TO TAKE TO A WORLD THAT DOESN'T KNOW IT.

INVITATION