

THIRD BIRD

John 3:16-What does it mean?

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Our peculiar Brother Bird
Had been napping by a tree stump
When some laurel bushes stirred.

And just then sly Willie Waver
Poked his head up looking pale:
"I was comin' out to tell ya,
Ernest Ladd's been put in jail.

"Farren Brimstone caught him talkin'
'Bout that endless torment stuff,
And he hauled 'im to the jailhouse,
For he said he'd *had enough!*

"Said he's gonna put an end to
All this nonsense that he's heard -
And he's gonna set a trap for
That peculiar Brother Bird."

Brother Bird then said to Willie,
"It's a most *peculiar* thing
That we're hounded for believing
In John three, and verse sixteen.

"You would think our error graver
Than the gravest heresy-
Yet we just believe John's gospel -
Verse sixteen of chapter three.

"In that sixteenth verse, third chapter
Of the gospel of Saint John,
Is the purest, plainest statement
Of the truth we stand upon.

"It's the 'gospel in a nutshell'
That we've known from early youth;
And in all the Holy Scriptures
It's the most familiar truth.

"God *so loved* the world, dear brother,
That He gave His only Son -
Gave His *only*, His *begotten*-
And He said, 'For God *so loved*...'

"That *believers* will not *perish*-
But have *everlasting life* -
That's the clear vocabulary
From the lips of Jesus Christ.

And the rest of all the Scriptures
Are throughout and in-between
Comprehensively coherent
With John three, and verse sixteen.

"*Will not perish*-oh, how lucid!
Will not perish-oh, how clear!
Everlasting life in contrast -
All we stand for is right here!

"Is it heresy, dear Willie
To believe John 3:16?
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?"

Then they heard some coonhounds barkin'
And they saw some lanterns bright -
Farren Brimstone with a posse
Silhouetted in the night.

And then Willie said, "Now, Brother,
I'm no the-o-lo-ge-un,
But I know enough to tell ya
I believe we better run!"

But by then they were surrounded,
And it was too late to flee;
Dr. Brimstone read the charges:
"Heresy, in first degree.

"And you have no rights - be silent!
Everything you've said before
Can and will be used against you,
And we have no need of more."

"What I've said conforms to Scripture,"
Brother Bird began to plead.
"It is WRITTEN, Dr. Brimstone -
And is there for all to READ!

"*Everlasting life* or *perish*
Surely say just what they mean
In that memory verse from childhood
In John three, and verse sixteen.

"Is it heresy, O Doctor
To believe John 3:16?
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?"

Then the doctor hollered, "Quiet!
You will have your day in court,
So don't waste your whistle whining
Till I've made a full report."

Then the doctor said to Willie,
"And I'm taking *you* in, too,
For cavorting with no-Hellers
Who've indoctrinated you."

"Doctri-whata...?" said poor Willie-
"I'm not *sure* what I stand for."
"Then you'll come," said Dr. Brimstone,
And we'll *help* you to get sure!"

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Brother Bird was thrown in jail;
Ernest Ladd and Willie Waver
Plopped beside him in the cell.

Brother Bird then spoke to Ernest,
"Bless your heart, O valiant youth,
You are persecuted, brother
For your faithfulness to truth.

"From a child you've known the Scripture,
One of which you are still fond -
Sixteenth verse of the third chapter
Of the gospel of Saint John.

"Must have heard it as an infant;
Must have learned it as a tot;
But to claim it now as doctrine
Gets you into water hot!

"Treat it as a gift-shop motto;
Twist and wrest its words so clear -
You'll have friends among the scholars,
And approval of each peer.

"Quote it in its simple beauty;
Preach it in its power plain;
Teach it true and unembellished
And you'll find but sure disdain.

"*God so loved*-O praise the Father!
That he gave-O praise the Son!
Inspired words-O praise the Spirit!
What a precious verse in John!

"See the text in brilliant context-
Nicodemus comes by night,
Learns the way to life eternal
From the words of Jesus Christ.

"*Whosoever* that *believeth*
Shall not perish - oh, now see -
Shall not PERISH - now the contrast -
But shall *live eternally*."

“*Everlasting life or perish,*
Endless life or life that ends;
Is it not so self-defining?
Is it not so clear, my friend?”

“But the doctor with his dogma
Says we speak a dang'rous lie;
He says *none* will really perish,
But that *all* will never die.

“Turns a word as clear as perish
Upside down and inside out;
Turns a verse as clear as this one
Into one of unclear doubt.

“Is it heresy, dear Ernest
To believe John 3:16?
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?”

Ernest Ladd then turned to Willie-
“What say you, or will you say?
I'll admit I didn't figure
I'd see *you* locked up this way.”

“Well, now, I don't know,” said Willie,
“I can't be sure, myself,
And some things are better, I'd say
To be left up on the shelf.

“*Maybe so*, is what I'm thinkin'-
Maybe not, is what I've thought;
Bur perhaps the *best* position
Is to keep from getting caught.”

Then the three discussed the subject,
Without yielding to a yawn,
Until Willie started nodding
At the waking of the dawn.

That same morning at the courthouse
Flocks of folks from hill and dale -
Curious and conscientious -
Came to fan the fires of hell.

Came to watch Doc Farren Brimstone,
Came to hear and to be heard,
Came to ponder on the puzzle
Of peculiar Brother Bird.

Brother Bird could see the jury
Had been chosen carefully -
Twelve convinced of endless torment,
Just as firm as they could be.

Larry Barry, Big “B” Baptist;
“Brother Bob” of Gospel Bright;
Benton Cherry, of the Presbies,
And Professor Malways Wright.

Clayton Buckett, Bird's first pastor;
Early Young, who baptized him;
Noah Guard, ordaining elder -
Brother Bird knew all of them.

Dr. Ray of Bible College,
And Evangelist O'Wowell;
Dandy Redwords, hotshot preacher,
All prepared to face him now.

Missionary Marty Martin;
Sister Mary (Quite) Contraire;
These the twelve who formed the jury-
Sure to be most just and fair.

Brother Bird knew most were good men,
But a few were rude and trite;
And he knew this subject often
Kindled much more heat than light.

In the room a crowd of people -
Sister Smoke sat near the aisle;
Bishops, elders, priests, and deacons -
All were eager for the trial.

Dr. Brimstone asked for silence -
“We are here today to quell
Any teaching that would threaten
To put out the fires of hell.

“This man Bird has spread the error
That our creeds are but a lie -
That there is no endless torment,
And the soul of man can die.

“He contends that God so holy
Would not torture anyone,
But that wicked men will perish
In the fire of wrath to come.

“He denies the cardinal doctrine
Of the faith we love so well,
That the whole point of atonement
Was to rescue us from hell.

“And he's pushed this point, my brothers,
And what makes this oh, so bad,
Is that he has de-ceived others
Like this poor young Ernest Ladd.

“And now Ernest Ladd's a zealot,
And it's growing here and there,
And if we don't stop it promptly
It will spread to who knows where!”

Then the courtroom shook with grumbling,
And the jury looked perturbed,
And all eyes and ears were waiting
For a word from Brother Bird.

Brother Bird stood front and center,
And he beckoned with his hand,
“Men and brethren, and dear sisters,
I would have you understand

“That I love the Holy Scriptures,
And believe them every whit,
And concerning hell and judgment
I accept just what is writ.

“You would think our error graver
Than the gravest heresy -
Yet we just believe John's gospel -
Verse sixteen of chapter three.

“In that sixteenth verse, third chapter
Of the gospel of Saint John,
Is the purest, plainest statement
Of the truth we stand upon.

“Is it heresy, my brethren
To believe John 3:16?
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?”

Then the room began to rumble
With the mumblings of the crowd -
All were musing on the reference,
Or were quoting it aloud.

Dr. Brimstone cried, “Objection!
What an effort to be slick,
And avoid your actual meaning
By a childish little trick!”

“For the verse you've called in question -
Yes, John three, and verse sixteen -
Cannot mean what *you* are meaning,
That is, what you *really* mean.”

“It is childish, yes, O Doctor,
For we learned it as a child -
And I only seek to show you
That my view is not so wild.

And my meaning *is* of meaning -
Of just what plain words do mean,
And I think they're crystal clear, Sir,
In John three, and verse sixteen!

"I uphold the Bible's teaching
Of a dreadful end called Hell,
But the texts we use to prove it
Do not endless torment spell.

"I affirm the resurrection
And the judgment of the dead,
And maintain what I've been teaching
From the *words* that I have read.

"Words like *perish* and *destruction*,
And *devour* and *consume*;
Words like *death* and *end* and *burn up*,
That describe the sinner's doom.

"And I've emphasized the *perish* -
Yes, sir, PERISH I have *read*,
So I've said it is just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

"And God says the wicked PERISH,
So I've said, "They surely do,
And God means it as He's meant it
As He's used it through and through.

"Would we charge the Scripture's Author
With such clumsiness of words?
The Creator of all language
With incompetence? Absurd!"

And then Malways Wright, Professor,
After proffring his own view,
Said, "Expound John 3:16, and
Search the context through and through."

Sister Smoke could tell that Malways
Thought himself to be so smart,
But she knew he had it coming,
When our Brother made his start:

"I believe it as I read it,
And no other sense I seek,
For its words are self-defining
In the English and the Greek.

"*Shall not* PERISH is in contrast
To eternal, endless LIFE.
And consistent with the context
Are these words of Jesus Christ.

"For Christ tells us just like Moses
(Numbers, chapter twenty-one);
Lifted up the brazen serpent
Even so must be the Son.

"And the serpent is a type of
Sin and death, and death by sin,
And Christ said to Nicodemus
That he must be born again.

"For our first birth is in Adam,
And brings death, an end of life;
But a new birth of the spirit
Gives us endless life in Christ!

"Christ was lifted up at Calvary,
And He died the sinner's death;
He who knew no sin was made sin,
That is what the Scriptures saith.

"Therefore like the brazen serpent,
Christ, who died and rose again,
Has been lifted up to look to,
And give life to dying men.

"So by faith we look to Jesus -
'Look and *live*, O sinner, *live*!' -
And our risen Lord and Saviour
Has eternal life to give.

"Is this not a clear expounding
Of just what these words must mean?
Endless torment's but confounding
To John three, and verse sixteen.

"For all those with but a first birth
Have not everlasting life,
And they shall most surely PERISH
Who do not believe in Christ.

"*Perish* is the word in focus
In John three, and verse sixteen;
Apollumi in the Greek text,
And we know just what it means.

"God has used this word so often
In His Holy Book divine,
That its meaning is quite easy
By its usage to define.

"It means *perish* in the English,
And the Greek original,
It means *perish* in the context,
Both in part and in the whole!

"Ask your children, yes, your children,
'What does *perish* mean to you?'
And if left to answer simply
They will give its meaning true.

"Ask your pastor the same question,
And he'll tell you that you need
A good lexicon to help you
Line up *perish* with the creed.

"He'll deny consistent usage
As defining of the word,
And then cite presumed exceptions
As the meaning most preferred.

"Is it heresy, Professor
To believe John 3:16?
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?"

Then the doctor interrupted,
For he saw that some were stirred,
And he feared the less committed
Might be swayed by what they heard.

"That's enough!" he stomped and sputtered,
"We have heard his heresy -
His own tongue has tried and found him
Just as guilty as can be!"

And the jury in agreement,
Said a long and loud "Amen!"
Larry Barry yelled, "This jailbird
Must not ever chirp again!"

"This will doom our foreign missions,
And no one will even go;
And why even be a Christian
If there be no endless woe?"

Then a mob in senseless frenzy
Rushed the threesome up a knoll,
And though Sister Smoke implored them,
It was out of her control.

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge,
How that knoll began to quake -
Brother Bird and Ernest Ladd were
To be burned there on a stake.

For they did not flinch or falter,
And they would not budge or bend,
And they did not whiffle-waffle
To avoid a dreadful end.

Willie Waver said, however,
Right before he up and ran,
“I have always, and will ever
Be an endless torment man!”

Ernest Ladd did testify to
Everyone who stood nearby;
“Life in Christ, and death in Adam
Is the truth for which we die.

“And we love our precious Saviour,
Our dear Lord who gave us life -
And we long to share the gospel
Of eternal life in Christ.

“Read your Bibles! Search the Scriptures!
And you'll find our 'heresy'
Is but only the clear wording
God has used consistently.”

“Malachi and John the Baptist,
Jude and Peter and the law;
Psalms and Proverbs and the Prophets,
Jesus Christ and Brother Paul;

“These have spoken by the Spirit;
These have told us everyone,
That the unbelieving *perish*
In the fire of wrath to come.”

Benton Cherry then beseeched him,
“Dear young brother, please desist;
Your immortal soul's endangered
If in error you persist.”

“Is it error, Elder Cherry
To believe John 3:16?
Or a danger to be certain
That it says just what it means?”

Then the doctor struck a match on
A big rock he leaned upon;
Then the two began repeating
That dear precious verse in John.

“God so loved the world,” they quoted,
Then some folks began to cry,
“Oh, we dare not really burn them,
And we cannot watch them die.”

But it was too late for pity,
For the Doctor lit the pyre,
And the flames crept ever upward,
And the smoke began to spire.

Brother Bird was bravely quoting,
When a voice did interrupt-
Was the voice of Willie Waver:
“Brother Bird, Wake up! Wake up!”

Then the flames were disappearing,
As his head began to rise,
And the smoke was quickly clearing
When he opened up his eyes.

And he stared for just a moment
At the tree stump at his side,
And he looked at Willie Waver,
With his eyes now open wide.

“I've been *dreaming? Only dreaming?*
Oh, dear Willie, what a dream!
It was really such a nightmare,
And how real it all did seem.

“You would not believe it, Willie -
Off to jail, and then to trial,
And the jury - what an outfit! -
Brother Bird began to smile.

Then they heard some coonhounds barking,
And they saw some lanterns bright -
Just some locals on a coonhunt,
And no cause for any fright.

Brother Bird enjoys his freedom
To discuss God's Word on hell,
And he's thankful he can do so
And not have to go to jail.

Yet he knows that many brethren
Are not free to search it out -
By their creed and in their circle,
They are not allowed to doubt.

For they fear their peer group's censor,
Or the label of a “cult,”
And a feeble acquiescence
Is the pitiful result.

Is it heresy, dear reader
To believe John 3:16,
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Someone's sure it cannot be,
But perhaps he's only dreaming
To be hoping you'll agree.