

Life in His Name – Part 6
Saved Through Him – John 3:16-21
Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – March 12th, 2023

Intro:

- This morning we will continue to study this super significant passage of the conversation between Jesus and the highly educated and respected religious authority and teacher, Nicodemus. Again, we need to keep in mind as we read the reason why John wrote this Gospel, which he states for us in chapter twenty. Let's read this verse aloud together.

John 20:31 ESV

These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- Please go ahead and open up your Bibles to John chapter three, starting with verse sixteen. I am using John 3:16 as a “hinge” verse that unites the message from last week to this week. John 3:16 is the most recognized verse in all of the Bible, and it bears repeating and further examination. I have five things that I hope you will understand from our time in the word today. I hope that God will use a sentence or two or a concept or two to impact your thinking and build your faith. I am going to read the passage in its entirety, and then we will break it down into parts. If you have a Bible that prints the words of Christ in red, you will notice our entire passage is in red because these are words directly from the mouth of Jesus.

John 3:16-21 ESV

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

John 3:16a ESV

For God so loved the world . . .

The love of God

- God loved the world, not because the world is so loveable or because we loved Him first, but because this is who He is. God's love is amazing, not because the world is so big, but because the world is so bad. God's love is unselfish, costly, and praiseworthy. If you ever second guess if you are loved by God, look to the Son and remember the love of God for you. New birth into new life is possible because of the great, boundless love of God. The great love of God creates a great result in us.

John 3:16-17 ESV

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The uniqueness of Jesus

- There is no one like Jesus. He is the only one sent by the Father. He is the only one who was qualified by His sinless life to rescue and redeem humanity from the penalty of our sins.

2 Cor 5:21 ESV

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Gal 3:13-14 ESV

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

Isa 45:22 ESV

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

Acts 4:12 ESV

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

- No other person claiming sinless perfection did so by how they lived. Jesus could have condemned the world, but instead, He gave His life to redeem the world because of the great love of God. Jesus did not come to be the “great example” for us to follow. He came to save the world. Why did God send His Son into the world? So the world might be saved through Him.

John 3:18 ESV

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

- In this verse, we need to talk about two things—the meaning of believe and the state of humanity.

The meaning of believe

- We must believe in the name of the only Son of God for the forgiveness of our sins, to receive a new heart by His Spirit, and inherit eternal life. But what does “believe” mean? So many people say they believe in Jesus. What does that mean? There is a big difference between believing in someone versus believing things about someone. Let me give you an illustration of what I mean by this.

A high school basketball player, for example, who believes in his coach because that coach is a former NBA champion, will do whatever that coach says. He believes the coach is right. If the coach says to change his technique in his shooting motion, he will do it even if it feels awkward and initially causes him to shoot worse. If the coach says to run four miles a day or lift weights thirty minutes each day, he will do it even though it hurts. If the coach says to pass the ball more and shoot less for the sake of the team, he will accept that role.

Why? Because the athlete believes the coach knows what makes a winner better than he does. When you truly believe in a person in authority, you follow that person in complete obedience.

The athlete who does not truly believe in the coach will not fully follow. He may believe things about the coach—that he is a former NBA champion, that he is honest, that his name is Michael—but believing certain information about someone and believing in that person's authority are two different things.

Those who believe in Jesus not only believe the facts about his deity, atoning death, and resurrection, but they also believe in His right to direct their lives. True believers follow. (*Choice Contemporary Stories & Illustrations* by Craig Larson 1998, p. 22.)

- If you do not follow Christ, you do not believe in Christ. If you don't treasure Him as the most valuable thing you have, and if you don't treasure His word and follow with the obedience of faith, you don't believe in Jesus. Although you may know things about Him, as many do, this is not the same as belief in Him.
- Whoever believes in him experiences new birth (3:3, 5), has been forgiven of their sins (3:5), has been given a new heart (3:5), has eternal life (3:15, 16), is saved (3:17) and has an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (I Peter 3:4) among other things. The alternative to not believe in Christ is to perish (also 10:28), to lose one's life (12:25), and to be doomed to destruction (17:12). There is no third option. (Adapted from D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 1991, 206.) Also in this verse is the harsh reality of humanity.

The state of humanity

- If you ask Americans and various people around the world if they believe that people are basically "good," the majority would say that people are basically good. The Bible and Jesus do not affirm that thought. Paul, quoting the psalms, says, "there is not one righteous, not even one" (Rom 3:10) and "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Jesus said, "no one is good, except God alone" (Matt. 10:18), and here in this passage "**whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God**" (v18).
- Condemned... *condemned*... from the beginning. We recently saw a man condemned in that Murdaugh trial in Georgia. That's what condemned looks and sounds like. "Guilty!" And why do they remain condemned? For all the sins they've committed? Yes, but this especially, "They have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

- Jesus came into a world that was already condemned. It is not a neutral world where He would condemn some and save others. He came to save, not condemn. Jesus was on a mission from His Father to save the world. Personally trusting Jesus distinguishes those who are not condemned from those who are. We are condemned because we don't believe. Christians were not born Christians; they "were by nature objects of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). Despite this desperate status, they were made alive with Christ because of God's great love for them, this God "who is rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4-5). (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 1991, 206.)
- Jesus then goes on to give an illustration of this point.

John 3:19-21 ESV

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

The judgment of light

- So, the Judge enters the courtroom and says he's ready to render his verdict (v.19). If our original sin wasn't bad enough (and it was) now there is this additional charge. Even when the light of Christ came, He was ignored simply because people *love* darkness instead of light *because* their deeds are evil. That is, those sinful deeds give us a kind of light blindness, a soul-deep resistance to God's own light "for fear that their deeds will be exposed." People don't want their lives to be revealed—their deeds and motives and secrets. Verse twenty-one says that to come to Christ is to stop hiding our sinfulness, "so that it may be seen plainly that what we have done has been done *in the sight of God.*"
- People are judged by how they respond to the light. Jesus is the light that has come into the world, as John stated in the opening lines of his Gospel. People don't come to Jesus because they love the darkness. They love their sin more than they love Him. They don't want their evil actions to be exposed.
- We are like the man in the old story that tells of a desert nomad who awakened hungry in the middle of the night. He lit a candle and began eating dates from a bowl beside his bed. He took a bite from one end and saw a worm in it, so he threw it out of the tent. He bit into the second date, found another worm, and threw it away also. Reasoning that he wouldn't have any dates left to eat if he continued, he blew out the candle and quickly ate all the dates. (*Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* by Craig Larson, 1993, p. 59.) We are all like this in our sinful natures; we want to satisfy our "hunger" even though we know that what we are doing is bad for us.
- But those who do what is true come to the light, so it can be seen clearly that what they have done has been carried out in the name of God. "The one follows its course because its deeds are evil; the other follows its course not because its deeds are righteous, but because it longs to show that its deeds have been done through God" (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 1991, 208). Here is a really powerful verse that encapsulates this thought.

Phil 2:13 ESV

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

- Because we look to Christ to free us from our condemnation of our sins, He forgives us of our sins and then gives us a new heart that desires to do His will and gives us the power to do that work. It pleases God to do this for us and through us. This glorifies Him.
- John expands on this teaching of Jesus in his first letter to the church.

1 John 1:5-7 ESV

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

- God is light, He is perfect, and there is no darkness in Him at all. If we say we have a relationship with God but continue to walk in perpetual darkness, we are a liar because we don't practice the truth. And here is the beautiful and powerful thing about living your life in accordance with the teachings of Jesus: we have both fellowship (deep relationship) with others and with God because Jesus cleanses us from all sins. It takes humility and a love of truth to acknowledge our sin and walk truly and rightly with God and others.

Conclusion

- So we have walked through the treasures of this passage, and it should give us a lot to think about and also to respond to. You perhaps have gained an understanding of the difference between believing about someone versus believing in someone. Perhaps your understanding has grown in knowing the exact reason Jesus was sent into the world. Perhaps you have been helped knowing that God does truly love you because He sent His Son to you and for you. Perhaps you need to ask God for the help to give you both the desire and the power to follow after Him and do what is right.