

I. The Story of Jesus and Nicodemus

- A. John 3:16-21 . . . For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. [18] He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. [19] This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. [20] For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21] But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.
- B. Last Sunday, my primary goal was to remind you that there is a significant difference between making yourself and your longing to be loved your primary focus, and making God, the quality of His love, and giving that love to others your primary focus.
- C. Prayer

II. The story

- A. John 3:16 . . . For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
 - 1. These words from Jesus are His explanation of His previous words about having to be lifted up, that is, having to die on a cross so that whoever believes in Him for their present and eternal well-being, will in Him have eternal life.
 - 2. And though you already know the theology of John 3:16, I want us to look at several words in this verse for the sake of being reminded of the truth they convey.
 - 3. The first word I want to emphasize is GAVE: "God gave His only begotten Son."
 - a. The first truth that comes to mind when I think of God giving His only son, that is, His only natural born son because the rest of us are adopted, is that God gave according to the principle for giving He urges the rest of us to use when giving – and this principle is clearly stated in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Each one must

do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

- b. When I look at what God gave (His own natural born son), and at the attitude in which He gave it (not grudgingly or under compulsion – but cheerfully), I am motivated to make God the focus of the gift rather than me, and to make the quality of God’s love the quality of love I want to show to those around me.
 - c. We could stop here, but John has more to say about God’s giving, and as I point it out, I trust it will encourage you to keep God as your primary focus and the quality of His love the quality of love you are determined to show to those around you.
 - (1) God gives to all who receive Jesus, the right to become His children (John 1:12).
 - (2) As an equal member of the Trinity, Jesus gives the Spirit without measure (John 3:34).
 - (3) Jesus gives living water to all who ask for it, and this living water quenches our thirst forever (John 4:10,14).
 - (4) God gives us the true bread – a bread that comes only from heaven (John 6:32).
 - (5) Jesus gives eternal life to those sheep who listen to His voice and follow Him (John 10:27-28).
 - (6) Jesus gives the kind of peace that frees us from anxiety and fear (John 14:27).
 - (7) Jesus gives us God’s word – for He speaks what the Father wants Him to say (John 17:14).
 - (8) Jesus gives the same glory to us that God gave Him (that is, the divine presence within) so that we may be one with one another just as God and Jesus are one (John 17:22-23).
4. The second word I want to emphasize is PERISH: “whoever believes in [Jesus] shall not perish, but have eternal life.”
- a. Notice that Jesus contrasts perish with eternal life. To perish is to be destroyed. To have eternal life – as it is used here – is to live forever with God and all who belong to God.
 - b. In other words, even though we were created to live forever once we have been born into this world, Jesus speaks of living forever in hell as being destroyed, and living forever with God as having eternal life.
 - c. Jesus said something similar in Matthew 7:24-27, “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

[25] "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. [26] Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall (destruction)."

5. The third word I want to emphasize is really two words, ETERNAL LIFE: "they shall not perish, but have eternal life."
 - a. And what I want to remind you of is that eternal life, though a gracious, merciful, free gift to us, was not free for God. In fact, this gift cost God the life of His only natural born son.
 - (1) But there is more because God had to watch while His son was falsely accused and unjustly condemned to death by the very religious leaders who should have been protecting Jesus.
 - (2) And God had to watch while His son was taunted, ill-treated for the amusement of those mistreating Him, and tortured.
 - (3) And God had to watch while Jesus was nailed to a cross, and suffer a very cruel death on a cross.
 - b. My point here is simply this – what God has given so freely, He gave at a great cost to Himself. May we honor the cost of God's gift by treating Him with the love and respect He deserves, and by loving those around us with the love with which He loves us.
- B. John 3:17 . . . For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.
 1. Imagine having a neighbor who you have been close friends with for a number of years. Imagine that one day, this close friend beats your young children with a baseball bat, kills your spouse, and burns your house to the ground.
 - a. Now imagine, that before seeking justice, and at great cost to yourself, you make a way for your neighbor to be forgiven and set free from the just consequences of his evil behavior if he will repent and seek forgiveness.
 - b. And imagine that you did all this, not grudgingly or under compulsion – as if God or some other authority figure made you do this, but you did this freely and from a depth of love that defies human understanding in such a situation.
 - c. This is what God has done for us. Instead of sending His son into the world as His messenger of justice – to judge and condemn

sinners – He sent His son into the world as a messenger of salvation to make a way for us to be saved from the just consequences of our rebellion against God and sin against our neighbor.

- d. Paul affirms this when he says that, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).
- 2. Once again, imagine deserving the death penalty for the evil you have done, yet being offered this kind of grace, mercy, kindness, and love before ever having to stand before the just judge.
 - a. Then imagine accepting this offer of grace, mercy, kindness, and love, and as a result being freed from the just consequences of your evil behavior.
 - b. Now imagine that after accepting this offer of grace, your first response toward someone who is doing evil things, or toward someone who is failing to treat you the way you want to be treated, is to become offended and hurt, and in your hurt to become angry, and in your anger to become resentful, unkind, and unloving, and in choosing to be unloving you become silent and distant, or sarcastic and even abusive with your words.
 - c. And imagine that with an arrogant sense of moral superiority you feel fully justified in being resentful and unloving as you hand out the consequences – just or otherwise – for their behavior.
- 3. Now let us stop imagining and begin examining.
 - a. How many of us have gladly and gratefully accepted God’s grace and then made judgement and condemnation our first and foremost response to the sinners around us? I know I have!
 - b. And though it is probable we have all failed in this way in the past, let’s take this examination one step further. How many of us declare and sing the praises of God’s grace while continuing to make judgement and condemnation our first and foremost response when dealing with those who do not behave or treat us the way we believe they ought?
- 4. When we accept God’s grace yet continue being judgmental and condemning as our first and foremost response toward those who sin against us, we are committing an evil that is so offensive to God that it becomes a reason for Him to withhold forgiveness and mercy from us.
 - a. Jesus confirmed this when He said, “If you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

[15] But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:14-15).

- b. Paul said, "As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; [13] bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. [14] [And] beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (Colossians 3:12-14).
 - c. In other words, rather than pushing people away, we should work to build closeness. Rather than taking control and forcing others to do what we want, we should seek to be humble, gentle, and patient. And rather than being angry and resentful, we should be kind, loving, patient, and forgiving.
5. Does this mean we are not to correct or discipline or punish or seek justice? Of course not. But we are to do these things with an attitude and in a manner that honors God's show of mercy and grace and patience and kindness toward us.
- C. John 3:18 . . . He who believes in [Jesus] is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
- 1. There are four truths expressed here that I want us to consider.
 - a. First, because we have all sinned, we are all condemned sinners.
 - b. Second, condemned sinners who believe in Jesus will not face the Just Judge in relation to the penalty for sin.
 - c. Third, God is both savior and judge, and though every sinner stands condemned in His sight, and though His offer of salvation precedes His judgement, judgement is coming, and when it comes it will be final.
 - d. Fourth, though salvation is all God's doing, and though He saves us in spite of what we deserve, we are required to make a choice – the choice to repent and trust in Jesus for salvation from condemnation, or the choice to reject Jesus, continue in our sin, and remain under condemnation. Therefore, we have only ourselves to blame for the outcome of God's judgement.
 - 2. Now before moving on, let me summarize vs 18. The reality is, we all are condemned sinners – even though we will not face the eternal consequences of our condemnation until sometime in the future.

However, in spite of being condemned, all who believe on Jesus will escape the coming consequences of having been a sinner.

- D. John 3:19-21 . . . This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. We will look at this verse, phrase by phrase.
 - 1. This is the judgment – or in other words, this is the basis of the judgement that places all sinners under condemnation.
 - 2. that the Light has come into the world – that is, that Jesus Christ has come into the world, along with His teachings about the way of life and the way of death. In addition to this, Romans 1 reminds us that all of creation reveals the existence and nature of God, and that God has placed in every one of us an awareness of Him that is sufficient to move us to worship Him. Truly, the Light is here!
 - 3. and men loved the darkness rather than the Light – Why are we all sinners? Why do so many reject God, salvation through Jesus Christ, and the narrow path of godliness?
 - a. Because we love the darkness rather than the Light.
 - b. In other words, we love self-importance, self-rule, self-centeredness, the pleasures of sin, power over others, fame, the advantages of riches, and the easier, quicker ways of getting what we want the sin provides. We love darkness rather than Light.
 - 4. for their deeds were evil. – The point Jesus is making is that our love for the darkness is based on our nature or character. And the reason Jesus speaks of our deeds, when makes this point, is because our deeds reveal our nature or character.
 - a. In other words, evil deeds are a reflection of an evil nature or an evil character. In the same way, good deeds are a reflection of a righteous nature or character.
 - b. John states this same truth in 1 John 3:7-8, “Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous (in other words, his nature or character is righteous), just as [Jesus] (who by nature) is righteous; [8] the one who practices sin is of the devil (in other words, just as the devil’s nature is evil, so is the nature or character of the one who practices sin); for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God (who by nature is righteous) appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil (who by nature is evil).”
 - 5. The point here is that our deeds or behavior are a reflection of what we believe, which in turn is a refection of our nature or character.

Which means, those who are wise and wish to be spiritually mature, will carefully examine all their behaviors to see what each behavior says about their nature and what or in whom they believe.

- E. John 3:20-21 . . . For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21] But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.
 - 1. These two verses represent Jesus' final words to Nicodemus, and in these two verses Jesus states several truths we ought to consider.
 - 2. First, Jesus re-states the fact that our deeds or behavior are a reflection of our nature or character.
 - a. For example, if our nature is evil, we will do evil and we will hate the Light or truth of God about what and who we are to trust in and how we are to live.
 - b. On the other hand, if our nature is good, that is, if we have been born again, we will practice godliness and love the Light so as to grow and mature in godliness.
 - 3. Second, Jesus uses strong, uncompromising language when He says that those who do evil HATE the Light. And I am convinced that we can help ourselves grow in godliness if we will use strong, uncompromising language when admitting – to ourselves and to others – our sinful thoughts, attitudes, fears, desires, words, and deeds.
 - 4. Third, those who hide their evil deeds hide them because they do not want others to see their true nature or character. Those who openly do what is righteous and good, want others to see that who they are and what they do is because of God's work in and through them.

III. Conclusion

- A. For God so loved the world that He sent Jesus to make salvation available to any and every condemned sinners who will repent and trust in the redeeming work of Jesus. Therefore, all who repent and believe, though condemned already, will not be judged according to their condemnation.
- B. And why are we condemned already? Because our nature is evil – which is also why we hate the Light. And why do we practice sin? Because what we are inside drives what we do outside.
- C. Therefore, we not only need to be born again, we must be born again if we are to become new creatures with a new nature that loves God and God's ways of righteousness. And it is this born again life that Jesus Christ died and rose again to make available to us. May we who are born again live in a way that honors what He has done on our behalf.