

Message #11

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John

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RESCUE FROM A DARK WORLD

JOHN 3:17-21

I.

Today is known in Christian circles as Sanctity of Life Sunday. It was 44 years ago tomorrow that the Supreme Court issued its famous Roe vs. Wade decision that declared state laws against abortion unconstitutional. I was in a constitutional law class in college at the time. So we studied the ruling in considerable detail. Hundreds of thousands of little lives have been snuffed out since that time. We Christians follow a God who is in the business of giving life. So we tend to have a problem with premature death.

The biggest news story in Nevada last year was the tragic killing of 58 innocent people on October 1 down on the Strip. It did not get nearly as much press, but a little over 7000 innocent lives were snuffed out in abortions last year in Nevada, most of them here in the southern part of the state.

The main provider of abortions in the US is Planned Parenthood. In 2017 they were responsible for 321,384 abortions, according to their own figures. They were funded, in part, through our tax dollars. Planned Parenthood likes to claim that they provide a variety of medical services for women. But their own report indicates, for example, that the number of visits for prenatal services have declined from a yearly total of 40,000 in 2009 to just under 8,000 last year--- that is across the entire nation. National Review Online argues that Planned Parenthood's annual report shows that the organization **"exists to provide abortions and not much else."**

As we have seen already, the Gospel of the Apostle John presents Jesus as the Son of God who came to give life. We left off last week at #3 v. 16 where the author declares, **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."** The context for these remarks was a conversation that Jesus was having with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a member of the Jewish high council called the Sanhedrin and a leading teacher of the Jews. Jesus was explaining that a spiritual rebirth is necessary for anyone to enter the kingdom of God. Nicodemus was steeped in the Jewish notion that all Jews went to heaven because they were Jews. Jesus was challenging that idea. In our passage today we have a further explanation from the Apostle John regarding the mission of Jesus Christ and the world's response to it.

II.

So in vv. 17 & 18 of John #3 we find that JESUS PROVIDES DELIVERANCE FROM JUDGMENT. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. JESUS PROVIDES DELIVERANCE FROM JUDGMENT.) In v. 17 we read, **"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."**

Jesus began His public ministry by performing the miracle of turning water into wine at a wedding feast. He followed that up by visiting Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. While he was there, he apparently performed a number of miracles, probably healing miracles. This got the attention of Nicodemus, who acknowledged that no one could do such things unless God was with him. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night with questions about His identity.

This led to Jesus' remarks and John's comments about Jesus. Last week, I pointed out that there is some uncertainty about who uttered the words of John 3:16. I argued that the past tense of the verb and the use of "only" point toward the conclusion that the Apostle John was making these additional comments about Jesus. Jesus never elsewhere refers to Himself as "the only Son of God," but the Apostle John uses this term three other times. That does not make the words of John any less authoritative.

Verse 17 repeats the claim of v. 16 that "the world" is the object of God's concern. This appears to be the world of people, which includes Gentiles as well as Jews. The notion that God could love Gentiles would have gone against the tradition of Nicodemus and most other Jews. But this love of God for other people was taught in the Old Testament.

Verse 18 describes the mission of Jesus to the world in a negative and a positive fashion. First, he says that it was not to "condemn" the world. The term for "condemn" is a Greek word that has a fairly broad range of meaning. Some of your translations may have "judge" instead of "condemn." By virtue of the contrast with "saving" in v. 17, I think that a good case can be made that the Apostle John was talking about the condemning sense of judging. The Greek word will appear a number of additional times in John's Gospel. We will have to determine its exact nuance by its use in the context.

The positive statement of purpose in v. 18 is that Jesus came that the world might be saved through Him. Strong Calvinists argue that "the world" must refer then only to the elect, to the ones that God has chosen. I would argue that Jesus came to provide a sufficient basis for salvation to all the world. In the end, it is only the elect who will be saved.

This is the first appearance of the verb "save" in John's Gospel. It has a fairly wide field of meaning, just like our English word "save" does. Sometimes it is used in the New Testament of a physical deliverance,

or a deliverance from a difficult situation. The context here suggests that a deliverance from condemnation is involved. So there is some kind of spiritual salvation that is suggested.

The beginning of the story of Jesus speaks of this salvation. The angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph and told him to take Mary as his wife (MATTHEW 1:21), adding, "**She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.**" Our passage suggests that this salvation from sins involves a deliverance from condemnation that is the result of our sins. This deliverance is bound up with Jesus.

Later in the ministry of Jesus, He will be quoted as saying (LUKE 19:10), according to Luke #19 v. 10, "**For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.**" This would seem to indicate some kind of spiritual lostness.

Several years after Jesus had ascended into heaven, the Apostle Paul (1 TIMOTHY 2:3-4) would write in 1 Timothy #2 vv. 3-4, "**This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**" So this salvation that involves Jesus, and is initiated by God the Father, also involves a deliverance from falsehood and a connection with truth. Later in John's Gospel we will find that Jesus declares that He is the truth.

In the letter that Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, he indicates that the salvation that Jesus offers also involves a deliverance from the power of sin. In our passage in John the focus seems to be upon a deliverance from the ultimate consequences of sin, from a divine judgment. (PROJECTOR OFF)

When I was twelve years old, I went to a summer Bible camp. One evening the featured speaker asked a question that I did not recall ever hearing. He asked us young people who were gathered there, "Have you ever been saved?" I had not heard that terminology used before in my religious upbringing. Like Nicodemus, I had assumed that because of my family and religious connections that I was a Christian. I was part of the kingdom of God. But the speaker went on to explain that in order to go to heaven, we must personally invite Jesus into our lives. We have to recognize that we are sinners in need of a Savior. We have to recognize that Jesus is God and man. If we believe that and put our trust in Jesus, then we are truly Christians and have forgiveness of sins. It was at that camp and on that occasion that I truly became a Christian.

Back in v. 18 in our passage John writes, "**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.**" The natural question that we might have is: What is the exact nature of this condemnation?

A few years after John wrote this Gospel, he had a vision of the future that involved a revelation from Jesus. He wrote it down in the Book of Revelation. At one point he had a vision of the destination of the condemned, the spiritually lost. In #20 vv. 11-15 (PROJECTOR ON--- REVELATION 20:11) he wrote, **"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. (REVELATION 20:12) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. (REVELATION 20:13) And the sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. (REVELATION 20:14) Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (REVELATION 20:15) And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."** Such appears to be the nature of the ultimate condemnation that is faced by those who do not believe in Jesus.

Verse 18 in our passage specifically says that failure to believe in the name of the Son of God results in condemnation. John is not talking about a magical treatment of the name itself. References to name in ancient times referred to the character and reputation of the person behind a certain name.

Here it is the name of "the only Son of God." The term for only is *monogene* in Greek, which we looked at last week in our consideration of John 3:16. We saw from our look at the other usages of this word in the New Testament that the word has to mean "one of a kind" rather than "only begotten." For in Hebrews 11:17 Isaac is called the *monogene* son of Abraham. Abraham had another son, Ishmael. So Isaac was not the only begotten son of Abraham, but he was the special, unique son who would carry on the special promises given to his father.

From John's perspective, all of humanity can be divided into one of two camps--- those who believe in Jesus and those who do not. The Greek construction of "believe in him" in v. 18 is rare. It literally means "believe into." It implies a trust and not just a mental assent. Such is the nature of the required faith in Jesus. We are told in the New Testament book of James (2:19) that the demons have a belief in God, but it is not a trusting belief.

Those who fail to believe stand under the judgment of God. Their sentence has already been given. It just has not been fully carried out. This side of the grave the opportunity always remains to trust in this Jesus and escape this sentence of condemnation.

The only requirement to escape from this predicament is a trusting faith in Jesus. Down through history various attempts have been made, often by religious leaders, to add on to the requirements. The proposed requirements have included water baptism, various good works, membership in particular churches, maintenance of a certain level of behavior.

In the Middle Ages the Catholic Church, seemingly in an effort to assert additional control and authority, ruled in this way at the Council of Trent (PROJECTOR ON--- COUNCIL OF TRENT QUOTATION): **"If anyone says, that by Faith Alone the sinner is Justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification... let him be anathema."** (Canon 9, Council of Trent, 1545-1563)

Our text gives us the simple assurance that it is faith in Jesus that is sufficient to remove us from the danger of condemnation. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans #8 v.1 (ROMANS 8:1), **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** He appears to be describing the situation of every true believer in Jesus. We Christians do not ever need to worry about condemnation from God.

III.

Then in vv. 19-21 we find that THE WORLD POSES A DANGER THAT PEOPLE WILL CHOOSE TO STAY IN DARKNESS AND HATE THE LIGHT. (III. THE WORLD POSES A DANGER...) According to v. 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."**

"Judgment" is the noun form of the verb translated as "condemn" in vv. 17 & 18. What is described is not the final sentence of condemnation. Rather this is the process of how the judgment works. People choose darkness rather than light. They demonstrate that they are deserving of ultimate judgment.

Earlier the Apostle John described Jesus as "the light." He specifically mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. He came out of the darkness, but He was attracted to the light, to Jesus. At this point in John's Gospel, it is unclear what Nicodemus will decide about Jesus. We will find out later what happens.

Why do people choose darkness? John says that they are caught up with evil. They like their habits and addictions. They don't want to change. Inez Brown Burns had several abortions performed for her by a California doctor early in the 1920s. She started working for him and learned how to do abortions. They were illegal in California as in other states, but practitioners were rarely arrested. She saw how much money could be made by doing abortions. So she struck out on her own and established a thriving business based in San Francisco. She had to pay off police and judges. Eventually she was charged with income tax evasion. But as a result of her overseeing an estimated 150,000 abortions, Inez Brown Burns became one of the wealthiest women in California history. Why change when she was enjoying the best that life had to offer, or perhaps the best that death had to offer?

Aldous Huxley (ALDOUS HUXLEY) was a famous British writer and philosopher of the last century. He was known for his defense of atheism. But in one of his books, he was honest about his reason for rejection of Christianity. He wrote, **"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had not; and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning for this world is not concerned exclusively with the problem of pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to... For myself ... the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political."** (*Ends and Means*, pp. 270, 273) Too many people love the darkness because their deeds are evil. (PROJECTOR OFF)

This is why we often see the reaction that we do to Jesus in John's Gospel. Already we have seen that Jesus kicked the money changers and animal sellers out of the temple. They were occupying the part of the temple reserved for Gentiles who came to worship the true God. The priests were taking a financial cut from the profits of these businessmen. For some reason, they took a quick disliking to Jesus. It is largely religious people in John's Gospel who reject Jesus because of their own forms of darkness and evil deeds.

John continues in v.20, **"For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed."** Light uncovers darkness. It exposes things and shows the way they really are. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, the worst time of day for crime is 10 PM. It is after dark. Darkness covers things up. Light uncovers them.

John claims that Jesus is the embodiment of light. He reveals truth. He uncovers sin. He cleans out the temple and shows the corruption of the business run by the priests.

On the final judgment day He will expose the deeds of the evil. (ROMANS 2:16) Paul references that day when he speaks of the **"...day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."**

Awareness of this day, and awareness of this God who exposes evil and reveals truth, can be a good thing. It was a factor in the conversion of St. Augustine. (PROJECTOR OFF) In his Confessions he writes, **"You took me from behind my own back where I put myself all the time that I preferred not to see myself. And you set me there before my face that I might see how vile I was. I saw myself and was horrified."**

Then in v. 21 John writes, **"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."** So there is an alternative. Doing what is true and right requires coming to the light, which is embodied in Jesus. Nicodemus is coming to the light. He is

not completely there yet. His faith is in the process of being developed. We will see how he does later in John's Gospel.

John is fond of absolute contrasts. People either believe in Jesus or they don't. They are either in the light or the dark. The reality is that all people are sinners. But the ones in whom God is at work are like Nicodemus. They are coming to the light.

The world around us poses a danger. People like the darkness. They are naturally caught up in deeds of evil. Unless God works in them and they move toward the light, they will be inclined to oppose the light. They will be inclined to reject Jesus and His values and standards.

We see this principle at work in the abortion issue. The evil of killing babies is covered up. It is covered up with claims about women's rights. As with the priests in the temple, there is a corruption involving the making of money. An undercover operation in 2015 revealed that there is a selling of baby parts connected with this business.

As God's people, we Christians are responsible to shine the light. Ultimately that means promoting Jesus and His values. It means promoting life. Gianna Jessen was a victim of evil and darkness. But she came to the light and is involved in promoting Jesus. We will let her tell her own story.

GIANNA JESSEN VIDEO (See YouTube- Gianna Jessen abortion survivor in Australia) [9+ minute video of message from gal who survived a saline abortion in LA and promotes Jesus in the face of this silent holocaust.]

Verses 17-18 in our passage assure us that Jesus provides deliverance from judgment. The statistics would suggest that in a group this size there are those who have fathered children who have been aborted and women who have aborted their babies. The assurance of the passage before us is that Jesus provides forgiveness that comes simply through faith in Jesus.

Verses 19-21 in our passage remind us that the world poses a danger that people will choose to stay in darkness and hate the light. We do well to not be counted among these people. At the same time, we are called to be lights in this world of darkness. For some that calling may involve, as it does with Gianna Jessen, a determination to promote life in a world that promotes death. For others of us it will mean shining our light in other ways. As we do so, we should expect that we will encounter opposition. **"For everyone who does wicked things hates the light..."** May we be people who overcome that opposition and let our lights shine.

