

WHOEVER BELIEVES IN JESUS HAS ETERNAL LIFE

John 3:16-36

Key Verse: 16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Last week, we heard Jesus’ teaching to Nicodemus, one of the top religious leaders of his nation. We learned the way to experience and one day enter the kingdom of God it is that we must be born again. When one is born again, the Holy Spirit changes our inner disposition so that we truly change. Many people try to accomplish this changed life by their own power, like trying to change the course of a boat set on autopilot by straining against the wheel. Every change feels unnatural and always the person wants to revert back to the direction their heart is set. But if by the Spirit one changes the autopilot, the boat naturally turns itself. Jesus tells us that such a change is possible only when we repent of our sins and look up by faith at Jesus on the cross (14-15). It’s all about Jesus, the whole Bible is all about Jesus—that is today’s message, I’m done.

Beginning in verse 16, John goes on to elaborate the meaning of Jesus being lifted up and the deep implications for our life. We want to think about 3 points: 1) Why God sent Jesus into the world, 2) Why people do not accept him, 3) Why Jesus must be everything. Our world is full of so much darkness and it may seem there are many solutions but the only answer for the world today is Jesus.

First, Jesus is God’s love for the world (16-18)

Let’s read verse 16 together. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This verse begins with the word “For” referring back to verses 14-15. Jesus said that for us to enter the kingdom of God, “the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” Verse 16 explains and expands the scope of those words. Why did God lift up Jesus? John explains, the motivation was love for the world. It wasn’t to fulfill prophecy or a grudging concession for sin, but love—and that makes all the difference. “God so loved” what? “the world” These words are unique to John’s gospel referring to all

people, especially the sinful Gentile world that did not know God and did not deserve to be saved.

But can holy God Almighty really love “the world,” full of sin, and full of people like Nicodemus who refuse to believe? Actually, through the Old Testament we can see that all of God’s history is a story of God’s enduring love. When God made Adam and Eve, he blessed them to rule over and subdue the earth (Gen 1:28) and he gave them every good thing they needed (29-31). But they believed Satan’s lie, “God doesn’t love you,” and sought to make themselves God (3:5-6), plunging all of Creation into sin. In his holy justice God should have destroyed the whole world, end of story. But “God so loved the world...” that he told them he was going to make a way for them to avoid his judgment. God then began to work throughout history to bring about the salvation of all people by raising the nation of Israel, to bless all people on earth. However, they rejected him to his face generation after generation and turned to any other god they could find. Yet, “God so loved the world...” that he would not abandon them. God demonstrated this through the prophet Hosea. “The Lord said to [Hosea], “Go, show your love to your wife again, **though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress**. Love her **as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods**” (Hos 3:1) In fact, after reading through the Old Testament we are blown away by God’s patient, enduring, long-suffering love.

Still we wonder, “How can God’s love endure so much? Surely God’s patience will reach its limit and he will give up on me!” The Bible says, “God IS love” (1 Jn 4:8). This “love” in Greek is “ἀγάπη” (agape). It is not a sappy emotional feeling or conditional human love. Agape is God’s universal, unconditional love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstance—it is God’s willful decision to love sinners regardless of what they do. “[Agape love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. [God’s] Love never fails” (1 Co 13:7-8; clarifications mine). We can rest in this love. No matter how far we’ve wandered from God he still loves us. One young man was very slippery and eventually was almost kicked out of our church because of his sins. But one shepherd reached out to him, making him her right hand in the campus work she was doing. Some wondered, “why is she reaching out to THAT guy?” But that’s the gospel: that God loves sinners, that he never gives up on them and his love never fails—yes, even THAT guy can be changed by God’s love. And God’s love transformed his life. He

can now confess “I am a shepherd for NEIU students.” There is no one who is beyond the love of God.

Still, yes we can believe God loves sinners, but we can't believe that he can love a sinner like me. One man tried to work hard for God, because he thought when he was good God loved him and when he failed God would surely condemn him for his sins. As a result he was very grumpy and full of condemnation and kind of scary. But he wanted to learn the grace of God and began a personal study of the book of Romans. There he found Romans 5:10, “For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” He realized that God loved him when he had done nothing. So, God would not suddenly become harsh and condemning now that he was God's child. He realized that God loved him one-sidedly not based on anything he had done and so nothing he could do could remove that love—and he was set free.

What's more, the expression of God's love should make us understand our great worth before God. Verse 16 can also be translated, “For God loved the world IN THIS WAY: He gave his one and only Son...” (CSB) How did God love the world? He gave his one and only Son. These words immediately remind us of Abraham, whom God tested saying, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love...and sacrifice him...” (Gen 22:2). His son was the most precious thing in all the world to him. When Abraham decided to obey God, he was saying that God was worth more to him than anything. And God said, “Abraham...Do not lay a hand on the boy...Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Instead, God provided the lamb for the sacrifice. And God HAS provided the Lamb. God gave his one and only son, the son whom he loved for the world. This elevates the world. The world is not this worthless object of God's wrath, but all people, no matter how they may look, are those whom God gave his one and only Son for.

So, why did God give his one and only son? Verse 16b says, “...that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” God created humanity to live eternally with him in paradise but warned them if you disobey me, “you will surely die” (Gen 2:16). When humanity sinned we were separated from the eternal life of God and we died. As a result, from God's perspective, all people are dead men walking, destined to perish and go to the same punishment as the devil

and his angels in the fiery lake of burning sulfur, where the worm that eats them does not die and the fire never goes out (Mk 9:48).

Some people imagine that a loving God cannot send people to hell. But what would be the loving thing to do if your children rebelled and took over your house, killed your spouse and threw you out into the street saying never return? Let them live their life, until others died and the whole neighborhood became hell? Someone like Hitler, who killed 11million people, should he just be forgiven of his crimes and not brought to justice? Well, of course, he should go to hell. What about a father who commits adultery and has a child out of wedlock? In today's society it seems pretty commonplace maybe that can pass. What about if the child was born to his cousin and that father then beat the child growing up out of spite? What if he beat him so much, so often that he turned the child into a monster who killed 11 million people? That's the story of Alois Hitler the father of Adolf Hitler.¹ There isn't innocent sin and serious sin, there is just sin. Sin always gives birth to sin, and leads to escalating evil, our sin destroys God's world.

When we consider honestly the rebellion of man against God and the level of evil we have done and the degree to which we have corrupted God's good world, the question is not, "why doesn't God give us more chances to be saved," but rather, "why does he give us even one?"² The answer is, God in his great love does not want anyone to perish but all to come to repentance (2 Pe 3:9). If we repent of our sins, and look up at Jesus, we WILL be saved. And not only saved but restored the free gift of eternal life. Eternal life ("zoe" in Greek) is not living after death (even those in hell will live forever) but is a crossing over from a dead life to true life, abundant life, life to the full which we experience now in the body and beyond our wildest imagination when we go to be with the Lord (Rev 22:17).

Then given the extent of God's love and promises to the world, we must consider: what is God's mission in the lost world? Verse 17 says, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to SAVE the world through him." Jesus does not need to condemn the world because as verse 18 says, the world stands condemned already. What the world needs then, is to be saved from this horrible fate. Jesus' coming into the world is a rescue mission. Are we part of his

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/aug/04/research.secondworldwar> & <https://allthatsinteresting.com/alois-hitler>

² RC Sproul, *John* (2009: Reformation Trust Publishing) 45

rescue mission? Jesus had harsh words for Bible experts of his time, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them” (Lk 11:46). When you see other sinners, sinners just like yourself, do you want to condemn them? Or do you say, “They need Jesus!”? God says, “WHOEVER believes will not be condemned.” Good people, bad people, gay, straight, murderers, immoral, idolaters, outspoken atheists, whoever would repent and leave their sins, renounce their false gods, and look up to Jesus for salvation, will be saved and will not be condemned. Thank you Jesus!

Second, Don't hide from Jesus' love (18-22)

The gospel is such amazingly good news for all people! So, we must ask the question: how could anyone not accept it? Let's read verses 19-21. “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.” People may come up with many logical arguments and doubts and complaints about why they can't accept Jesus, but the verdict is that the root cause is sin. This is not only true for unbelievers but it is true for Christians who choose to live in sin. 1 John 1:5-6 say, “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.” Whoever loves sinning is living in darkness. Jesus said clearly that no one can serve two masters. Those who love their sin, from God's perspective, hate Jesus because they hate the way of repentance and the new way of life he offers (Mt 6:24; Ja 4:4).

If those in the light live by the truth, then those in darkness live by the lie. Satan uses 2 lies to keep people in bondage in the darkness. First, is the love of darkness. He lies, that if we come into the light, we will lose our fun and have no “life.” For example, have you ever gotten tricked into watching YouTube for hours? Why do you stop watching? You're bored. Yet the next day again you watch, thinking “this time it's going to satisfy me.” The same is true of playing video games, or partying. When I was in college, many of my friends worked hard, looking forward to partying all weekend. But they were like dead men walking on

Monday and said, “never again.” Yet, somehow by Friday they believed that “this time it will be alright and I’ll be satisfied.” It’s a lie, sin will never satisfy, it only offers death not life. The second lie Satan uses to keep us in darkness, is fear of being exposed. He lies, that if we expose our sin the shame and fallout will be too great and it is safer to hide in the dark. This weapon of Satan, is especially powerful against Christians and keeps many in bondage. When people indulge in one sin and do not confess or expose it, it becomes stronger and stronger until it becomes a fortress, and a stronghold of Satan in their heart. Darkness is the place of hiding and if there is ANYTHING that we are hiding in our life, we are in darkness. To illustrate this I asked some CBF kids to take some video in their homes and at the Bible houses of people on the computer and phone, I’ll show you some of the juicy parts on the next slide. Just kidding, but how many of you jumped a little when the slide switched? That’s darkness. And the longer we hide something, the stronger it gets, and the more subtly it will make us hate the gospel.

Then, what can we do? Come into the light! The light is the place where everything is exposed. Without the repentance of sin there is no way that we can come to Jesus and live in him. There have been two great battles against sin in my life: one was video games and the other was pornography. At first battling these things was epic, like trying to move a mountain. It’s because in the darkness, at my core I loved my sin and was constantly afraid of being exposed, and so it had GREAT power over me. Yet, when I confessed my sins again and again before God and others and brought them into the light, amazingly it became very easy to overcome. In the end in each case, I made one clear decision and never turned back. Sometimes when I was down, they tried to entice me again, but in the light I could see very clearly how silly and disgusting they were and it seemed ridiculous to go backwards. There is no better feeling than being able to stand before God and man and say, “I’ve got nothing to hide.”

Those who live by the truth, happily come into the light without regret and without fear. It is because they understand the deep truth of the gospel, that if they confess they WILL be forgiven. 1 John 1:7&9 say, “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, purifies us from all sin...If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” It’s always possible that we may be judged by people, but those who live by the truth don’t

fear people, they fear God. They come into the light with all their flaws and their dirt and their wounds fully exposed without shame and without fear, humbly repenting and confessing and God purifies them from all unrighteousness.

The great strength of our ministry has always been repentance: every morning through daily bread, every week through testimony writing, every day as we raise disciples, every minute as we grow in godly house churches. This is such a blessed life! Repentance releases the Spirit's power into our life. Every great revival that has ever happened, beginning from Pentecost till the present day, has been marked by a time of deep repentance that released the Spirit's power in ways that changed whole nations. If we want to experience the great love, salvation and light that Jesus promises and see the incredible work of the Spirit in our lives, our families and our ministry we must love the light, expose all our sin and love to repent deeply every day. May God help us to live fully in the light as those who live by the truth. Amen.

Third, Jesus must become greater, I must become less (22-36)

After this, Jesus spent time with his disciples in the Judean countryside where he continued John's baptism ministry (22). However, John was also still baptizing (23). It seemed the stage was set for conflict between competing ministries. Sure enough an argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew. It seems, given the context, to be, "Why is John still baptizing? Everyone is going to Jesus, his baptism is better!" So, they came to John and exclaimed, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about" (that he is the Lamb of God, that he has surpassed you, that he takes away the sin of the world!, that the Holy Spirit remains on him, that he baptizes with the Holy Spirit, that he is God's chosen one—you know that guy!)—"look he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him" (26). "Can you believe it?!" These men had such a fierce human loyalty to John that they refused to get involved with what God was doing—it's a great danger in ministry. John's reply may have been very surprising to them.

In recent years, even recent weeks, we have seen so many tragic church scandals have come to light. It seems to be a really appropriate time to think about how to keep ministry centered on Jesus. Firstly, and most importantly, we must accept that the people we shepherd and who come into our church are never ours, they

belong to Jesus. John testified plainly, a person can only receive what God gives them, I'm not the Messiah, so the bride doesn't belong to me but to the groom (27-29). In this metaphor, Jesus is the groom and the bride is the church. John never had any illusions that the ministry was his, everything he prepared was only ever for Jesus.

Secondly, we should be full of joy when God gets the win, not coveting his glory for ourselves. Verses 29-30 say, "The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less." The role of the friend of the bridegroom was a tremendous honor given to the very best friend of the groom and there was no guest happier at the wedding celebration than him. This is how John saw himself. The friend of the bridegroom joyfully makes the preparations for the groom, he doesn't marry the bride! When we know what our mission is, then we look for the way to get the win for God, even if it means we need to step aside to help a sheep or our ministry. It doesn't need to be about us, but how God can get the win even through others.

It's all about Jesus not us. We try our best, but we're not from heaven (31-32). We must help people to come to Jesus. Jesus is above all, Jesus speaks the words of God, Jesus has been entrusted with all things (33-35). "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them" (36). The world is condemned because of God's wrath against sin, that is the verdict. But God so loved the world, that whoever believes in the Son will not perish but have eternal life. Jesus is not one among many ways, but he is the only way. He is more than what we deserve. Today let's trust in God's love and come into the light, confess our sins and repent believing in God's great love expressed through Jesus. Let's receive the free gift of eternal life and live a life that is all about Jesus. Amen.