

The Good News of Jesus: Salvation not Condemnation

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Date: 05 December 2021

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[0 : 00] And then turning to the New Testament, we'll look there at John chapter 3. John's gospel, you know, John has the seven miraculous signs.

He has the seven I am sayings. But John captures conversations that no other gospel writer captures. And one of these momentous conversations occurred at night and occurred between the religious man Nicodemus and Jesus.

And you'll notice if you read through John's gospel that we read of Nicodemus three times. It's, again, quite unique for a peripheral character that we see a character like Nicodemus more than once.

And we see the way in which God is at work. And maybe there's a point of connection here because you might be, it's night, you might be coming to find out a bit more about Jesus. You might be coming for any number of reasons.

Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night and he got more than he expected. And my prayer is that we all get more than we expect tonight. John chapter 3. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

[1 : 07] He came to Jesus at night and said, Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you were doing if God were not with him.

In reply, Jesus declared. Now actually what this says is Jesus answered him. And you'll notice in verse 2, there's no question.

Nicodemus isn't asking a question. But Jesus is answering the unasked question. And each one of us has unasked questions. Each one of us has questions that have no easy answer.

And Nicodemus, the religious man, is coming to the public figure Jesus at night. Not just to give him compliments, but because there's answers that he is looking for. Jesus answered, I tell you the truth.

No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. How can a man be born when he is old? Nicodemus asked. Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born.

[2 : 08] Jesus answered, I tell you the truth. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit.

You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound. But you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.

So it is with everyone born of the spirit. How can this be? Nicodemus asked. You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus, and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth.

We speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen. But still, you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe.

How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the son of man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the son of man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

[3 : 17] 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. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only son. This is the verdict. Light has come into the world. But men love 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 his deeds

will be exposed.

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

Amen. And may God add his own blessing to this reading of his word. We're not going to sing again a portion of the Psalms. We're going to sing from Psalm 48b, and we'll sing from the beginning down to verse 9.

[4 : 28] Let's stand together to sing these words to God's praise. Great is the Lord, his praise all else excels.

In our God's city, on his holy hill, Mount Zion is the joy of all the earth.

So high and fair like mountains of the north. Here is the city where the great King dwells.

God is the fortress of Jerusalem. When kings joined forces ready to advance, They looked and fled in terror and surprise, Gripped like a woman who in childbirth cries, Like ships destroyed by storm, you shattered them.

As we have heard, now have we have seen it so, Within the city of Almighty God, The city of the Lord, Which by his grace, He makes secure within your holy place, Your never-failing love, We seek to know.

[7 : 06] Many years ago, it was helpfully explained to me that there's a significant contrast between Christianity and all other world religions or world philosophies.

As a rule, most world religions suggest that the problems of life are primarily outside of ourselves, Whereas the solutions to life's problems are primarily within ourselves.

Look deeply, look deeply, dig deep, look into yourself and you will find the way, And you will come to know the truth, and then you can live the life.

However, Christianity is not one of those world religions. It's not one of those world philosophies, Because it has quite a different outlook. It says the problems are primarily in here.

And the solution lies outside of myself. So if I want to look for the way, I'm not going to find it by looking in. If I want to find the truth, I'm not going to dig deep into my own heart or strive in my own mind.

[8 : 26] And if I'm looking to live the life that I'm intended to live, I do not have the ingredients for such a life within me. I must look outside of myself.

And you see, that strand, that theme is seen throughout the whole of Scripture. That there is a profound problem that is within us. But that there is a solution that comes from outside of ourselves to us, in the person and in the work of Jesus Christ.

So whether we read from Isaiah 45, or John 3, or Romans 8, which we'll turn to in a moment, this strand brings together the old and the new, brings together the law and the prophets.

You see, we need help. We need guidance. We need wisdom. We need direction. But it must come from a different source.

We can't figure out our own problems. We can't even understand the problems, let alone devise a solution. But if you turn with me to Romans chapter 8, we have in that first verse, a summary statement that captures something profound.

[9 : 44] Therefore, Romans 8, 1, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

No condemnation. You see, sin, and by sin we mean doing those things you ought not to do. But I would suggest that sin, even more, is not doing the things that we ought to do.

So it's not just the unkind words. It's not just the thoughts or the actions. But think of all the generous words that you should speak. Think of all the kind deeds that you should do.

But you know what? We just don't have enough time. We just don't have the opportunity. And we just leave all those good things undone. Well, you bring those together, what we call the sins of commission, what you do, and the sins of omission, what you don't.

You bring them together. And there's a verdict that is passed against humanity. Against the rich and the poor. Against the wise and the foolish. Against the east and the west. The north and the south.

[10 : 49] There is a universal verdict. And that verdict is condemnation. Now the Apostle Paul begins at chapter 8 by saying, there's now no condemnation.

Well, something's happened. Because my heart condemns me. My mind condemns me. My life condemns me. If I am honest with myself, I am not the person I am meant to be.

I am not the person I was made to be. And I'm certainly not the person that will satisfy the righteous requirements of a righteous God. So I want to notice a few things tonight with you.

You see, we read from some monumental portions of God's word. Isaiah 45 is a chapter that's rich in a prediction of a worldwide gospel.

Where the whole world is told, look, look to me and be saved. All the ends of the earth. For I am God and there is none else. And then there's an image of every knee bowing, every tongue confessing, that somehow, some way, there will be a proclamation to the world and there will be a message of salvation that is made available not just to one nation, not just to one people, but to all nations and to all peoples.

[12:06] And then you have that evening encounter with Nicodemus. He comes to Jesus looking for answers. But the answers that he gets, he could never have predicted. You must be born again.

Something has gone wrong fundamentally and it must be transformed. But the transformation does not take place from us. The transformation takes place within us from God who now dwells in the hearts and lives of people.

And the message to Nicodemus, again, was presented very clearly. It's a message of salvation, not condemnation. So you see, if you come tonight and you're searching or seeking or curious and you wonder what God's desire is for this world and for its people, Jesus sums up that very simply with the word of salvation.

Jesus has not come to condemn, but he's come in order that the world might be saved. And the Apostle Paul here is drawing together in chapter 8 an argument, a profound argument to a clear conclusion.

He says, therefore. Now, I'm not sure if it's Martin Lloyd-Jones or John Stopp, but one of these great 20th century preachers said this. Whenever you see the word therefore, always ask, what is it there for?

[13:33] 4. Now, the Apostle Paul is a logical reasoning argument. You know, he's creating a logical, reasonable argument. Now, it's not surprising.

You might say, well, the beginning of chapter 8, he's obviously drawing together something from chapter 7. And you'd be right. Because Paul in chapter 7 is talking about a struggle. He says, you know what?

The things I want to do, I don't do those. The things that I don't want to do, those are the things I do. You know, what a wretched person I am. What a struggle. I find myself conflicted in my heart, conflicted in my mind, conflicted in my life.

Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. But you know, this chapter 8, I think is even bigger than a conclusion from chapter 7.

Because I think what Paul is doing here is he's drawing together his argument that he began in chapter 1. At the very beginning of the letter, he said in chapter 1, verse 16, I am not ashamed of the gospel.

[14:45] Now, this is quite remarkable because the Apostle Paul is speaking to a people in Rome, the very center of the empire. And this group is small. This group is weak.

This group is poor. This Christian community is not up to much. You see, it's fragile. It's fragmented. You just wonder, how is it possible that such a movement will ever have a second generation?

So on one level, there's much to be ashamed about. But Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

You see, the power in the ancient world resided in Rome, resided with the emperor, resided with the army. But Paul says, no, the real power of God resides in a message concerning his son. How remarkable that is, that the power of God is now found in a person called Jesus, and that power is demonstrated in the life and the death and the resurrection and now the proclamation of Jesus.

[15:56] I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. That's his proposition. He then goes on to demonstrate that all have sinned and fallen short, that there is a shared guilt and that there is a shared responsibility on our part.

We don't do what we ought to do and we leave undone the things that we ought to do. So salvation is found in the gospel. So if that's his proposition and then he goes on to demonstrate the reality of the gospel and if you're wondering who is this gospel for, well, in chapter 1 he says, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

That's another way of meaning everyone. So ethically, your nationality, so whatever your nationality is, you're in one of those two categories. You either have a Jewish heritage or a Gentile heritage.

But if you're not sure that you're included, you can just flick a few pages to chapter 5 because Paul describes the kind of people that Jesus has come to help.

If you look at Romans 5 at verse 6, he says, you see at just the right time when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

[17:18] But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. There are three descriptors in this passage that sum up us, individually and collectively.

We're described here as the powerless, we're described here as the ungodly, and we're described here as sinners. That characterizes you and me.

It characterizes all of us in here. It characterizes all of them out there. We are not strong. We're weak. We are not godly. We are ungodly. And we are not sinless.

We are sinful. And this is exactly the class and category of people that the gospel is intended for. You see, Jesus did not come into this world to make good people better.

He came to find lost people. He came to give life to spiritually dead people. He came to give salvation to those whose category was otherwise only condemnation.

[18:20] So the Apostle Paul is drawing his conclusion to a clear end. There is therefore now no condemnation. But he's doing something as well.

The second point I'd like to identify is that Paul is drawing a critical contrast. Now I used to teach English. And one way of building vocabulary if you're learning English as a second language or if you're learning another language one way of building your vocabulary is learning opposites. You learn tall and you learn short. You learn thin. You learn fat. You learn old. You learn young. The Apostle Paul is showing us that there are two clear opposites here.

There's the word salvation condemnation and there's the word condemnation. And these two never meet. You are in one or the other. You are in the category of those who are saved or you are in the category of those who are condemned.

And you see John 3.16 that magnificent summary of the gospel for God so loved that he gave. He so loved this world that he gave his son. That whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

[19:32] And if you didn't get it in chapter 3.16 chapter 3.17 goes on to say 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.

So there you have the contrast. John is great at this because John tells us about light and darkness. He tells us about darkness which is ignorance. He tells us that darkness is evil and he tells us that darkness is confusion.

By contrast he says light is knowledge and light is goodness and light is clarity. And he draws this contrast in chapter 3 saying there's salvation and there's condemnation.

So the apostle Paul begins the letter to the Romans saying I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

And in chapter 8 verse 1 therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. If salvation is found in Jesus the one thing that the follower of Jesus will never experience is condemnation is judgment.

[20:44] And this is a present reality. It's not just a future event because in John 3.18 what do we read? Whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only son.

So this evening there are two categories of people here. It's not the rich and the poor it's not the educated and the illiterate it's not the wise and the foolish the young or the old but the categories that we have here in the Bible are this.

There are those who are saved and there are those who are condemned. Those who are saved are those who have come to know Jesus they've come to trust him. Those who are condemned are those who do not yet believe in the name of God's one and only son.

At the end of his first letter John puts it this way he who has the son has life. He who does not have the son of God does not have life. So this is a matter of life or death a matter of salvation or condemnation.

A significant character in the missionary movement in the 19th century was a man called A.B. Simpson he was an American guy he founded the Christian and Missionary Alliance it's not a large church in the west but if you go to south and central America the Christian and Missionary Alliance

church is a large denomination and he summed up the gospel in this way he said the gospel tells rebellious men that God is reconciled that justice is satisfied that sin has been atoned for that the judgment of the guilty may be revoked the condemnation of the sinner cancelled the curse of the law blotted out the gates of hell closed the portals of heaven opened wide the power of sin subdued the guilty conscience healed the broken heart comforted and the sorrow and misery of the fall undone that's what we mean by the gospel that's what we mean by the message of Jesus so Paul says no condemnation but you might say but why does he need to emphasize that why does he need to stress that because I would suggest that there are voices that speak of condemnation you see the Christian has three graces we're told that our lives should be characterized by three things by faith by hope and by love but the Bible also tells us that we have three enemies the Bible tells us that we have the world and the flesh and the devil and each of these enemies has the capacity to condemn to accuse and to make us think that we are not saved but rather lost so the world the world that lives without Jesus the world that is going in a different direction the world that prioritizes different things we can be condemned by the world we can be condemned by ourselves by our conscience by our mind by our heart and we can be condemned by the devil the evil one [23 : 57] I was reading Pilgrim's Progress and there was a remarkable scene in Pilgrim's Progress Apollyon the character that represents the devil and Christian you know the follower of Jesus they meet and Apollyon begins by condemning or accusing Christian and he says you have failed your prince many times how have I failed my prince and then Apollyon goes on to list all of the mistakes that Christian made and you know we could list all the mistakes that we made and there are many and what I love is Christian responds to Apollyon and says all that you have said is true and much more but my prince is a forgiving prince you see when the evil one accuses you respond by saying your accusation is insufficient I am much worse than you say I've done far worse than you accuse me of and that's exactly why I'm a Christian

I'm not a Christian because I'm strong I'm a Christian because I'm powerless I'm not a Christian because I'm godly I'm a Christian because I'm ungodly I'm not a Christian because I'm sinless I'm a Christian because I'm a sinner the terms and conditions of Romans 5 are a great response to the world the flesh and the devil we are not good people made better we are ungodly powerless sinners saved and set free transformed by the grace of God so we have a conclusion to Paul's argument we also have a contrast a contrast between salvation and condemnation they are completely opposite so if I am not ashamed of the gospel because of the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes for the everyone who believes one thing that is never possible is that you or I would ever be condemned but I want to my final point is this is that this whole verse indeed this whole gospel hinges on a crucial connection this small word in for those who are in Christ Jesus you see it's not what you know now what you know is important there's a certain knowledge that's needed it's not what you know but it's who you know we've heard that haven't you that you know if you know somebody with power or with authority somebody that can make things happen well you see when we are believers in Jesus Christ we are now united to him we know him he knows us but even more than that we are united to him he is within us we are within him story was told in London in the end of the 19th century a regular visitor to the United Kingdom also to Edinburgh was D.L. Moody D.L. Moody was a physically large man he was from Massachusetts and he commenced a worldwide evangelism campaign he was educated in the fourth grade he was not well educated his pronunciation was unique and yet he felt called by God to bring the gospel to the world by the end of the 20th century 19th century he didn't succeed but he did succeed in preaching to 100 million people in person that's not not bad for someone with a 10 year old education but the scene was told in London a young boy made his journey across London to hear Moody preach he was poor he wasn't particularly well dressed he wasn't particularly clean and he came to the hall where Moody was preaching and the usher asked what are you doing here I've come to hear Mr. Moody preach not looking like that you don't and he was told to go away just then as the boy was sitting on the curb crying a carriage pulls up a large man steps out and says young man what's the problem I've come to hear Mr. Moody preach but they won't let me in he said put your hand in mine and let's see if I can help you something strange happened because the door that was shut a moment ago was now open the same ushers that had said go away now welcomed the large man and the small guest now of course the large man was Moody himself but you see so it doesn't matter what you know but it matters who you know closed doors become open when we know Jesus Christ the doors that were otherwise shut have now opened to us when we come to

know Jesus Christ all the benefits and all the blessings that belong to all the people of God come to us

Sinclair Ferguson who's a 21st century Bible teacher put it this way he said remember these three words he said remember that there are benefits for being a Christian remember that these benefits belong to all of us we are beneficiaries but he said never lose sight of the benefactor you see it's quite easy to focus on forgiveness you might focus on grace you might focus on justification or sanctification or regeneration all these big theological words and these are so important but what Ferguson is saying is always focus on the one through whom all of these benefits flow to all of these beneficiaries never lose sight of Jesus because it's our connection with Jesus that brings all of these benefits all of these blessings long time ago in Oxford John Owen was preaching and he said this he said that our union with

[29 : 54] Jesus those who are in Christ Jesus is the cause of all the other graces that we are made partakers of they are all communicated unto us by virtue of our union with Christ hence is our adoption our justification our sanctification our fruitfulness our perseverance our resurrection our glory when we are united to Jesus everything that belongs to him flows to us everything that he earns we receive every benefit every merit that he achieves that he is worthy of flows to everyone who is connected to him no other world religion no other world philosophy presents the message in this way there's no solution within the only solution that we have to life's problems comes in a person Jesus his life his death his resurrection and when we come to know him everything that he deserves is ours by gift he we are united to him so there's this crucial connection that we now have with

Jesus so we have Paul drawing his argument to a conclusion we have him drawing this very sharp contrast between salvation and condemnation if you are saved one thing that is never going to happen is that you will be lost remember the language of John 10 I give them eternal life said Jesus and no one can snatch them out of my hand he is placing his reputation on his ability to hold on to his people sometimes we as Christians we look at our lives we look at our faith we look at our commitment to God and it seems very inconsistent it seems very weak it seems very fragile it seems very sometimes it's here today sometimes it appears to be gone tomorrow primarily the Bible does not define our relationship with God based on the strength of our commitment to him that's important we believe we trust we rely upon him that's important but primarily the foundation of our

Christian life is based on his commitment to us his promise his perseverance his victory his success so what do we do with this what does a life look like if this is true for you and if you're trusting in Jesus it is true for you how should this find expression I'm going to suggest three things I'm going to suggest first of all safety you and I are safe in the hands of Jesus we are safe in him there is no more secure place than to be in Christ Jesus because he will keep us he will hold us he will protect us second word I want to say is confidence we have confidence to commend this Jesus to others we know what he has done we know who he has done this for so we have every confidence to share this message with others and we have every confidence to speak and every confidence to serve and third and finally is this if there is such a thing as an optimist and I'm not talking about temperament

I'm not talking about the glass half empty person or the glass half full person but if there's ever such a thing as an optimist surely the Christian should be an optimist you see we are filled with hope not to spare our lives are filled now with joy with peace with comfort with meaning with purpose we are safe we are secure we are confident in him so we above all people should look upon this world should look upon this city should look upon this nation with great optimism to see what God can do to see what God has done and to see what God is able to do in this day and in this age you see he's not the God of the past only he's the God of the past the present and the future Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever so as you read the pages of scripture you see what God has done but when you see what God has done that should give you great hope for what God is able to do today what he's able to do in your family what he's able to do in your community what he's able to do in this city what he's able to do in the country of

Scotland and to the ends of the earth you might not believe it but the 21st century is going to be the greatest century of church growth ever more people are coming to know Jesus in this century than they have in any other century the expansion of the Christian church throughout the world is remarkable we don't see it here to the same extent but you go to Africa you go to Asia you go to

South men and women coming to faith so let's be let's recognize that we are safe let us be confident in the gospel and let us be optimist to see what God is doing what God has done and what God is able to do in us what God is able to do through us because there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus let's pray Father we thank you for your word we thank you for its truth for its power we thank you that the gospel indeed is good news the gospel is the good news of salvation that is found in

[35 : 38] Jesus and for those of us whose faith is in him all of his benefits and blessings belong to all of his people help us Lord to recognize that in him we are safe that we are secure help us to realize confidently serve him that we can make him known through word and through deed and help us Lord to look upon this world with optimism help us not to see a day of small things but help us to see a harvest field that is ripe and let us pray to you oh God the Lord of the harvest to send forth many more workers into this harvest field so that more churches could into the world into those places where they don't know anything about Jesus Lord we come to you you are the Lord of the harvest help us to see things as you see them and help us to pray as you command us to do and all these things we pray in that precious name of

Jesus through whom every blessing and benefit flows to every one of his people we pray in his name amen we're now going to conclude by singing the Lord is my salvation let's stand together to sing and then we can remain standing for the benediction