

A Matter of Life or Death

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[0:00] Who's heard of the expression, it's a matter of life or death? Serious health issues can become a matter of life or death real quick.! Maybe you have someone you know, someone you love in the hospital, and you hear the word sepsis used.

Immediately, you're like, oh, this is going to be serious. This could be a matter of life or death. A natural disaster can become a matter of life or death, whether it's the forest fires out west or it's blizzards out east.

Let's pretend that you come across a horrific car crash. You're the first on the scene, and you look into one of the cars, and you know right away this is a matter of life or death. 911, send someone quickly.

We've got a matter of life or death on our hands. These are not trivial things. These are important things. But our culture has a way of making trivial things into a matter of life or death, and I'm guessing you all know what I'm talking about.

Because I've made trivial things a matter of life or death. I don't get the respect I think I'm owed. And what goes on in me, inside, one would think is a matter of life or death.

[1:16] Is it? Or your favorite athletic team goes to the championship game, and as you're watching, it seems as though this is a matter of life or death.

Is it? You have to declare bankruptcy. Is that a matter of life or death? You go through a divorce. Is that a matter of life or death? Do you know what else is a matter of life or death? What you believe about Jesus.

Whether you trust in Jesus or not is a matter of life or death. Hold on, you say. Maybe you're not a Christian in the room.

You're like, Jesus is a matter of life or death? I don't know what to think about Jesus, let alone trust in him, whatever that means. But Pastor Mike, are you actually saying that trusting in Jesus is on the same scale as pancreatic cancer?

[2:33] I know it sounds crazy, but I am. Because Jesus does. What you believe about Jesus is a matter of life or death.

So here's a question for you. If we can make trivial, unimportant things into matters of life or death, would not the opposite be also true?

That we can also trivialize the most important things. And Jesus is the most important thing.

A couple of weeks ago, we began looking at this nighttime conversation between Jesus and this religious leader named Nicodemus. And we're returning to that to finish off that conversation this morning.

But Jesus had thrown Nicodemus for a loop. He was saying things, you need to be born again. And Nicodemus was like, what? Lights were on, but nobody was home. Didn't get it.

[3:30] And so Jesus repeatedly sets the record straight for Nicodemus of what it means to be born again. What it means for the spirit to move and to give new life. And in that part of the conversation, Jesus in chapter 3, verses 14 and 15 of John, he says this.

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the son of man be lifted up. He's talking about himself. Jesus is clearly saying that what you believe about him, the son of man, is a matter of life or death.

Eternal life or eternal death. So what does it mean to believe in him so that you may have eternal life? That is why verses 16 through 21 are in your Bible.

It's Jesus himself explaining why believing in him results in eternal life. And so we're going to look at his explanation this morning.

And what we're going to see is that Jesus explains what it means to believe in him and have eternal life in two ways. He's first going to make the point that he is uniquely qualified to be trusted.

[4:50] And then secondly, he's going to say there are two polar opposite responses to him. So let me read for you now, John 3, 16 through 21.

You know the first verse. For God so loved the world. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, his one of a kind son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 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. Whoever believes in him, the son, whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he is not believed in the name of the only son, the one of a kind son of God.

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.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. 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.

[6:19] May God bless the reading of his word and hearing of his word. Now let's turn to point one. Jesus makes that he is uniquely qualified to be trusted. So this again is this part of his explanation that Jesus is giving of why, of how he is to be trusted and how that leads to eternal life.

And what's interesting is he starts with himself. He's essentially saying this is why you should trust me. What we see here is he says he's God's only son.

One of the many interesting things about Jesus is the way he talks about himself. And it's not unusual for Jesus to refer to himself in the third person.

He just did so in verse 14 and 15 where he talks about him being the son of man. And so here he's talking about himself in the third person again.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. I talk about myself in the third person it turns out. My daughter, Mary, loves matcha tea.

[7:29] She recently offered me some. I took a sip and almost threw up. And I said, Mike, no, like. Third person.

Third person. It gets something done. It's emphatic. And here Jesus is referring to himself in the third person. His only son.

God's only son. And he says this three times in 16, 17, and 18. God's only son, his son, the only son of God. And he is claiming to be God's son, which is essentially claiming to be God himself. And here's why that little only matters. He is one of a kind. Now, if you're a Christian brother in the room, you might be thinking something like this.

Wait, wait. Time out, Mike. I thought that the moment I believed in Jesus and became a Christian, that at that moment I was adopted by God the Father, and that I am an adopted son.

[8:30] You were. You are. Or maybe you're a sister in Christ, and you're like, time out. Wait, hold on. I thought the moment I believed in Jesus that I became a daughter of the Most High God.

You did. So why is Jesus saying he is God's only son? Aren't we all part of the same family? We are.

When you hear only, you need to hear one of a kind. If you flip back in your Bible to John chapter 1, I want to help you see it.

In John chapter 1, verses 1 through 18, John opens the gospel by talking about the Word. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. Verse 3, all things were made through him, the Word, and without him was not anything made that was made. Verse 14, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we've seen his glory.

[9:28] Glory is of the only Son, the one-of-a-kind Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. In verse 17, for the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. In other words, the

Word is Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God, verse 18, the only God, the one-of-a-kind God, who is at the Father's side. He has made him known. So here's what's going on. Here's what I want to help you see.

That Jesus, when he claims to be God's one-of-a-kind Son in chapter 3, it's being connected to what's been said about the Word in chapter 1.

So let me ask you, Christian, were you at the beginning? In the beginning, Genesis 1-1, were you there? You were not there.

I wasn't there, but the Word was there, who's also Jesus Christ, the Son. Were you in the beginning with God, distinct from God, but with God?

[10:26] No, no, none of us were in the beginning with God, distinct from, but no, no, no. Were you God? Are you God? No!

None of us are. Did you, were you the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the one-of-a-kind Son from the Father, full of steadfast love and faithfulness? Were you that? Are you that? No. Are you the one-of-a-kind God who's at the Father's side, who is making known visibly the invisible God?

No! So we're sons and daughters of God, but we're not the one-of-a-kind Son. And what makes him the one-of-a-kind Son is that he's totally God and totally man.

And it makes him uniquely qualified to get something done to rescue sinners from their sin. Now I just want to point something interesting out in this passage.

[11:40] In verses 16 through 18, Jesus speaks about himself in the third person as the Son, the only Son. But when you get to verses 19 through 21, he shifts his language from talking about to being the only Son to being the light.

This is the judgment. The light has come into the world. He's talking about himself. And people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light.

So I just want you to notice that Jesus shifts from talking about himself as the Son to talking about as the light and that he is the light that shines in the world.

And the world is equated with darkness and not a spiritual darkness. Darkness is a way of describing sin and death and light is a way of describing holiness and life.

And so what we see here is Jesus talking about that he is the light as a way of talking about that he is salvation. He is the one of a kind Son, Son of God, and he is the light of eternal life shining in the darkness of sinful humanity.

[12:58] He is the one of a kind Son. So he's making this argument. Why believe in the Son? Why believe in him? He's one of a kind. For what purpose did God send him then?

Did you notice in verse 16? I'm sure you did because this is the football field goal verse, right? John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that he gave.

And then in verse 17, for God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but sent him in order that the world might be saved through him.

So what we're reading here is that, is that God the Father gave his Son. He sent his Son. And he sent his Son for a purpose. Jesus is literally a God sent.

God the Father gave, sent God the Son for a purpose. And there's a clue to what that purpose is in verse 17.

[14:05] In order that. But in order that the world might be saved through him. Jesus was given by God, sent by God on a rescue mission.

He wasn't sent to condemn the world, but to save the world. To save, to rescue. Time out, you say. I didn't wake up this morning thinking that I was in danger.

I didn't drive to church this morning think I was needing rescue. I don't feel like I'm in danger right now, as a matter of fact. What exactly do I need to be saved from?

Well, you need to be rescued from something of your own doing. And it's something that you don't like to think about.

Those deep regrets that you have from your past of how you hurt people, how you deeply wounded people, how you injured, how you've done wrong and evil things.

[15:22] And if they were broadcast, you would be undone. You'd be devastated. You'd be embarrassed. You've said things and done things that are flat out wrong.

Do you know how I know? Because I've done them too. What you need to understand is that these wrongs that you've done are worse than you think they are.

Because those wrongs that you've done are not only injuring yourself and others, your wrongs are always wrongs against God.

And the Bible describes those wrongs that you commit against yourself and others and God. It describes it as committing sins. When you sin against another person, whether you lie or you steal or you commit adultery or you just flat out hate them, you are also sinning against God.

And God is not indifferent to that. Because God, as we heard from our communion meditation, is a God of justice, and that is good. What this means is that your wrongs that you've done, which you think that they weren't that bad, are worse than you think.

[16:44] Because they've always been done against the living God, and they have eternal consequences. Maybe this is a surprise for you this morning.

Maybe there's something in your mind right now. I'm like, wait, time. Hold on a second, somebody. Look at your Bible. Look at verse 18. No.

17. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world. Why are you condemning me, Mike? Jesus wasn't sent to condemn the world, but to save the world.

Why don't you read your Bible? It reminds me of a story. Decades ago, my brother and I were driving our young families. This is decades ago, when I was a younger man, immature.

Decades ago, my brother and I were driving our families, our young families, in separate cars across northern Indiana on State Route 30. Anybody know it? And we were flying.

[17:50] I was in the lead car, my older brother Scott behind in his car, and we were setting a new land speed record. Brothers egg each other on.

At one point, I looked up in the rearview mirror, and lo and behold, an Indiana State trooper pulled up behind my brother's mother. Lights flashing, siren blaring, and my first thought was, stinks to be you, Scott.

I've been delivered. I look up again at my rearview mirror, and Scott is pulling his car over with the State trooper pulling over with him, and behind the State trooper was another State trooper.

Sirens going, lights flashing, and he pulled up behind me, and he pulled me over. You see, 10 miles earlier, we had been condemned already, and they had just been following us for 10 miles, waiting for the moment to pull us over.

Judgment caught up with me, and God's judgment for the wrongs you've done against him. You've already been clocked. And it's just a matter of time before it catches up.

[19:17] That's the danger you're in. It's not because Jesus, he didn't send Jesus not to condemn the world. The world was condemned already.

That's why he sent Jesus, in order to save the world. Because our sin provokes God's just wrath, and you will suffer for it if you have to pay that on your own.

God the Father sent God the Son in order to bear God's just wrath for your wrongs, in order to save you. That's why Jesus is a matter of life or death.

So let me ask this. What would motivate God to send Jesus? It's in one word. It's the word love.

For God so loved the world. This is God's extraordinary love, we delight in his justice, we are really grateful for his mercy, but his grace and his love, we celebrate.

[20:24] But let me just be clear, love doesn't mean some kind of emotional, feel-good thing right now. That's not the love of God. The love of God is a commitment. It's a resolve. It is a pursuit that none of us deserves.

And remember that this word world, for God so loved the world, don't think planet. The world is sinful humanity in organized rebellion against God.

Defined this way, you can start understanding why John uses darkness language to describe the world. It's humanity living in the darkness of a sinful rebellion, which then makes God's love for the world all the more extraordinary.

Let me tweak 3.16 a little bit to make the point. For God so loved his enemies that he gave his one-of-a-kind son.

For God so loved those who rejected him and ignored him and wronged him over and over and over again that he sent his one-of-a-kind son to die for them.

[21:41] For God so loved those who worshipped themselves, which is the high capital crime of pride. God so loved them that he gave his one and only son who humbled himself even to the point of death for them.

What is extraordinary is not how lovable you and I are, because we're not, but how loving God is. Extraordinary. In love, God sent Jesus to be lifted up on the cross and die in the place of those sinners.

Jesus suffered the full venting of God's wrath for all of our sin in six hours on one Friday afternoon. And being totally God and totally man, Jesus was uniquely qualified to be the savior of the world. Because he's totally God, he can satisfy God's wrath totally in six hours.

[22:50] And because he is totally man, he can represent us totally. He can sympathize with us in every way. What kind of love is this? That God incarnate would die for me and you rebels?

It's extraordinary. But let me just be clear. Jesus didn't die for us. Just to rescue us from God's wrath.

Jesus died in order to reconcile us to God. Not just to save us from God's wrath over our sin, but save us to God.

To experience a fullness of relationship which we were created for. God in his love paid the greatest price in order for you and me to experience a relationship, a life-giving relationship with him.

And do you know who gets all the glory for that? None of us. Not to us, O Lord. Not to us, but to your name give glory because of your steadfast love and faithfulness.

[23:59] This is a matter of life or death. And what Jesus is doing is making case that he alone is the sole object of our trust regarding this matter of life or death.

No one, nothing else can save you from your sins but him. He is uniquely qualified as being totally God and totally man, the one of a kind son to be the savior of the world, to be your savior.

So if Jesus truly is God in the flesh and he has made a way for you to be rescued from God's wrath and he's offering you rescue this morning, there are only two ways to respond to him according to Jesus.

And that's where I want to point you to now. The polar opposite responses. Jesus explains this in this passage. Imagine a topographical map of the United States.

Can you see that in your mind? Or maybe a globe where you can see on the western side of the United States just the rising of the Rocky Mountains and it is a mountain line that extends all the way up to the North American continent and all the way down to the South American continent.

[25:21] It's also called the Continental Divide. If precipitation falls on the eastern side of the Continental Divide, that water will flow either into the Hudson Bay, the Atlantic Ocean, or the Gulf of Mexico.

But if precipitation falls on the western side of the Continental Divide, it flows into the Pacific Ocean. The Continental Divide is a great watershed.

Rain can fall on top of the same mountain, but that water can end up thousands of miles apart in two different oceans.

Jesus Christ, God's one-of-a-kind Son, is the great continental divide of all humanity. How you respond to Him will determine where you spend eternity.

What you believe about Jesus is a matter of life and death, eternal life, eternal death, and Jesus Himself spells out two polar opposite responses to Him in this passage.

[26:34] And He uses different language for it. The first is believing or not believing in the Son. If you look at 3.18, whoever believes in Him, the Son, is not condemned.

But whoever does not believe is condemned already because he is not believed in the name of the only Son of God. Believing or not believing in Jesus are polar opposite responses to Jesus.

He's making Himself out to be the great continental divide of all humanity. And whether you believe Him or not will result in you being condemned or not condemned. And I've already shown you from 3.18 what it means to be condemned.

You're condemned already. If you flip your Bibles over to chapter 3, verse 36, this is just another way Jesus describes it. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. He's condemned already. That's what it means to be condemned, to be under God's just wrath.

[27:44] Whether you believe or not, there's a lot riding on it because Jesus is the sole object, the sole Savior, but there's some confusion on what it means to believe. There's confusion in the room of what biblical belief is and what biblical belief is not.

Hence, I brought out this chair. Can everybody see the chair? Let me ask you a question. Do you believe this chair can hold your weight?

Yeah, you do. You believe that. Are you exercising that belief right now? No, you're not.

You're trusting in your pew right now. You're not trusting in this chair right now, though you intellectually agree that this can hold your weight. When we talk about biblical belief, we're talking about active trust, not intellectual agreement.

Did you know that even the demons believe that Jesus is the one-of-a-kind Son of God? So here it is. This is not believing.

[28:58] If this chair is Jesus, this is not believing in Jesus. If you're sitting in the pew, you're not believing in the chair. It's only when you sit in the chair that you are trusting in the chair.

And what conversion is, it means you've got to get out of trusting in yourself. You've got to get up out of that chair, and you've got to go put all of your weight in the Jesus chair. Are you following me?

And if you think you believe in Jesus, but you haven't actually put all of your weight, your trust, for your present and future life to deliver you from the wrath to come, guess what?

You're not actually saved. You've deceived yourself. You just agree that Jesus is the Savior of the world, but you're not actually trusting in Him.

And so what that means is you remain condemned already. Whether you trust in Jesus or not, it's a matter of life or death. You've got to believe in the Son, not just agree.

[30:10] There's another contrast in verses 19 through 21. And it's not believing or not believing. It's where Jesus describes Himself as the light of the world, the light that has come into the world.

And what this contrast contributes is something a little bit more than believing or not believing in the Son. Because in this section, in verses 19 through 21, what Jesus actually shows us is why people don't trust in the Son.

Why people don't believe in the Son. Look at verses 19 through 20. 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.

Verse 20, for everyone who does wicked things hates the light. Hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works or her works should be exposed.

Do you know why people refuse to come to Jesus? Jesus gives the answer here. Because they love their sins more than they love the Savior.

[31:32] Savior. That's Jesus' answer. They don't want to have their sins exposed. They don't want to have to change their lives because they think that is going to be somehow lesser of a life when in fact Jesus offers abundant life.

They don't want to give up sinning. They don't want to be exposed. Here's what this means. If you're not a Christian in the room here's what this means.

In order for you to be rescued from God's very real wrath you must first take responsibility for the wrongs you've done against him.

You've got to own it. Coming to the light of Jesus requires humility. It requires honesty. It requires saying yes I am guilty.

I have sinned against you. When you come into the light of Jesus you get your sins exposed. You start to see your sin for what it is.

[32:42] Evil and wicked works that are seen for what they are in God's sight. The very things that condemn you you get to see them. So in order

to become a Christian you don't ignore your sins.

You confess them. You repent of them. You turn from them because you realize this is the way of destruction. I don't want to perish under God's wrath.

I got to turn to Jesus and turn away from this stuff. So in order to become a Christian you don't ignore your sins.

You own them. being a sinner against God. That's why you need to be saved. What Jesus is saying here is that people refuse to come to the light because they love their sin more than the one who can save them from their sins.

And in verse 21 Jesus contrasts those who don't come to the light with those who do come to the light.

[33:57] Verse 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.

By implication if those who don't come to the light love darkness verse 19 and hate the light verse 20 then those who come to the light they've got to hate darkness they've got to hate the sin and they've got to love the light they've got to love Jesus they've got to see him for for the unique one of a kind son he is those who come to light love the savior more than their sins they see their need for rescue and are willing to say yes this is who I truly am save me did you notice that Jesus is emphasizing love hate language love the darkness hate the light do you know what that means conversion requires a heart change a new heart for someone to do what is true in pleasing in God's sight verse 21 that person has to have a new heart and God gives new hearts when sinners are born anew by the spirit they are born again this is what Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about moments ago they hate their sin and love the light and who they are living for becomes evidently clear that Jesus is the controlling center of their life so Jesus spells out these polar opposite responses to God's one of a kind son who is shining in the darkness and he spells them out by talking about!

the same responses in two different ways believing and not believing in the son as well as coming to the light being born of God or not coming to the light which is remaining dead in your sins and God's wrath remaining on you these are the polar opposite responses to Jesus and he makes himself into the great continental divide of all of humanity what side of him are you on Jesus explains what it means to believe in him so that you may have eternal life he alone is to be trusted as the savior of the world the one of a kind son and there are only two responses do you know what this passage is all about trusting in Jesus is a matter of life or death so trust in Jesus and live if you're a

Christian in the room here's what this means for you thank God for saving you don't forget what you've been forgiven from there's a little episode in Luke 7 where Jesus has been invited to a dinner party with Simon the Pharisee in a woman of the city which is a nice way of saying a prostitute comes in and she starts crying on his feet and cleaning his feet with her hair and then she breaks open this very expensive bottle of perfume and anoints him with that and there is Simon the Pharisee saying in his heart if he was a prophet he would know who this woman was and Jesus goes on to tell him a story and he sums it up this way this woman who's done all these things she's been forgiven much he's been forgiven much loves much but he who's forgiven little loves little and what you need to know is everybody in the room if you're a follower of

[38:22] Jesus you have been forgiven much and when you give thanks to Jesus it is good here's the second thing Christian you do tell others of what Jesus has done for you start easy start with your spouse but Mike my spouse is a Christian already so what tell them oh Jenny I am amazed that God would forgive me a sinner she'd be like amen you are a sinner saved by grace but don't stop with your spouse go on to your kids do your kids know how God saved you they might need a letter you might not explain it kind of in a G rating at first and then he moved to PG when they're a little older and then he moved into

R if you think you can when they're old enough oh but don't hold back tell them of what Jesus has done for you grandparents when Hudson my grandson is old enough I'm going to share with him what Jesus has done for his grandpa tell your grandkids and don't leave out what this same God is offering them in Jesus do you know why we tell other people about Jesus because Jesus is a matter of life or death let's pray together Lord Jesus thank you for willingly giving yourself as the

one of a kind son of

God for us sinners to make us God's sons and daughters God would you by your spirit not only deepen our gratitude for that but would you increase our boldness to tell other people about that amen I almost forgot I moved this around right before the sermon so I forgot to say this if you're a non-Christian if you're a non-Christian you've just been seeing Jesus as a chair that you could sit in Jesus is inviting you this morning he's inviting you this morning to trust in him alone to be saved to receive eternal life and

I'm guessing you're wondering what do I do you pray here's what you pray I'm going to read this and then I'm going to pray it and then you pray along with me you say Lord Jesus save me from the wrath my sins deserve and then you say thank you for dying in my place and giving me eternal life amen that's all you have to say so I'm going to pray that now and if you want to pray that you pray along and after I say amen I'm going to say one more thing to you Lord Jesus save me from the wrath my sins deserve thank you for dying in my place and giving me eternal life amen if you've prayed that prayer you need to tell me so would you find me after the service and let me know that today you've become a Christian God bless you amen