

God's Love Displayed

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[0 : 00] I want you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John. Gospel of John chapter 3. Pretty famous verse. I think most people probably could quote it if they wanted to.

But we're going to look at verses 16 through 20. So we take on just the idea of trying to understand a little bit about God's love and what that looks like for us.

John chapter 3, beginning of verse 16. Hear the word of the Lord. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not judged.

He who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light.

[1 : 07] For their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. Father, thank you for your word.

I pray that you would use it to break our hearts. I pray you would help break our pride and our arrogance. I pray that you would help break our self-reliance and that we would see your great love and why we are so blessed.

Help us to know you, to love you, and to follow you. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. So there's sort of a historical reference going on in this verse.

You have to understand that John 3.16 and following was written after Jesus had been born, lived, died, was buried, resurrected, ascended.

This is written after he's gone back to be with the Lord. And so as John writes this, he's writing it and he's looking at the swath of history because what he says is that God loves the world, so he gives his son.

[2 : 15] And so you have this historical reference that goes all the way back before creation when God loved the world enough to make the plan to give his son for the world.

But also, the world has got a problem. He loves this world, but we see that this world has a problem. And as he writes this, he gives us sort of that beginning point, that ending point.

And then in verses 18 through 20, he gives us sort of this, what the present reality is. And so I'm saying that because I'm going to preach this backwards just a little bit. What I'm going to do is I'm going to start in verses 18 through 20, and we're going to talk about the problem.

Because you see, we have this notion in our culture that says what you don't know won't hurt you. And in a lot of ways, there's some truth in that in certain things. But when it comes to eternal realities, if these things are true, then what you don't know will absolutely hurt you.

And so I don't want you to leave here not knowing the truth. I want you to know the truth. So we're going to start with verses 18 through 20, and just look at what I'm calling the wretchedness of sin.

[3 : 29] And we're going to just see how sin sort of begins its descent into darkness here. And it begins in verse 18. And I would say verse 18 tells us that sin is being condemned.

The verse again reads this way, he who believes in him is not judged. He who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Now, that's a little bit confusing because it's being translated from the Greek. And so let me give you the flow of this, okay? The flow of this passage is this. Whoever does not believe is condemned already.

Then there's this word because. And this is a specific Greek word that answers this question. How do you know?

So if we go back, we would say they're condemned already. How do you know? The answer is because he's not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

[4 : 35] What this means is this, is that a lack of belief in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation is proof that a person is already condemned.

Let me say that again. A lack of belief in Jesus Christ for salvation is proof that a person is already condemned. They are condemned already, so they do not believe, and their lack of belief demonstrates this condemnation.

And here's the point. The point is, is that every single one of us, at one time or another, has been in this very condition. We all, at one time, were either already condemned, but the Lord has saved us, or we still are already condemned.

This condemnation is the righteous judgment of God that calls us guilty and worthy of wrath. And the question is, are you one who is still condemned? Because you don't trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the first step. The second step comes in verse 19. And it's this idea that sin loves the darkness. Sin loves the darkness. Verse 19 again says, that this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil.

[5 : 53] This word judgment here, in verse 19, is the same word that's in verse 18, condemnation. Condemnation and judgment in the Bible are the same Greek root word. And so what he's saying here, is that there is this judgment, or there's this condemnation, and this is what the condemned people look like, is another way of thinking about this.

People who are condemned, they do not believe in Christ. This is what they look like, and they look like this. They love darkness. They love darkness. Now why do they love darkness?

Because their deeds are evil. Their deeds are evil. And again, let me just say, all of us at one time or another, were in this condition. We loved darkness rather than the light, because our deeds were evil.

Jesus is the light, and coming to him, is having our sins exposed. And this is why, this is why the world hates Jesus. Or they least want a Jesus that doesn't do this, because they don't want to feel condemned.

They don't want to feel judged. And why do they love the darkness? Because their deeds are evil. Now here's the thing. This word evil means everything that is opposed to God.

[7 : 08] Evil is not this idea of something that, for us, seems yucky or wicked. Something can be evil, and yet to us, seems perfectly fine.

And the reason for that is because evil is the idea of what is opposite of God. If you go to a restaurant, seeking to order something that tastes great, that's healthy and safe, and yet you're served something with poison, maggots, and trash, that would be evil, because that is the opposite of what you want.

Sin loves darkness, because it loves to be completely opposite of God. It hates to have itself exposed, so it loves to hide in the dark, because the darkness does not judge.

And so, again, we just have this tendency to think to ourselves that something that's evil is going to be something that's like a maniacal, rogue Hitler that appears upon the scene and does worse than the original.

And we think to ourselves that for something to be evil, it has to go that far. And I'm saying to you, evil doesn't have to go that far away in being opposed to God to be evil.

[8 : 25] It can be right there next to him and still be evil. It's not how extreme it is that makes it evil.

It's the fact that it's opposite of God. I mean, think of it this way. He tells us, do not lie. Right?

Do not bear false witness, which means you're supposed to tell the truth. And when we lie, that is evil because it's opposite of God. And you might think to yourself, but it was just a little white lie.

I understand that it doesn't look bad, but it is still evil. He tells us, not to commit adultery, and Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that adultery happens when we look with lust upon someone. It happens in the mind. It happens in the heart. And when we look with lust upon someone else, that is something that is evil.

[9 : 27] It is opposite of God. He tells us to count it all joy when we encounter trials of various kinds. But when we as Christians decide to complain and cry about our sufferings, rather than rejoice, He tells us to pray without ceasing.

But when we make our decisions without prayer, He tells us to bear one another's burdens. But when we look past somebody's burdens because they're too messy for us, these things are evil. This is the wretchedness of sin. We love our deeds. We don't want it to be exposed. And this is why we're condemned. But it goes even further.

It says in verse 20 that sin is running from exposure. Verse 20 says, For everyone who does evil hates the light and doesn't come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

The flow again is that they love darkness. Why? Because their deeds are evil. How do you know? For those who do evil hate the light.

[10:38] Why? Because it exposes them. It puts them on display. It shows everyone what's going on. It makes them have this guilt and this condemnation feeling that they don't like.

We don't want to have this feeling of guilt. And I say to you that to try to run from that feeling of guilt is the wrong direction.

Instead, we need to see that we are guilty so that we can run for the solution to the problem. Living on the coast, we understood what it was for something to hate exposure.

On the coast, you have these massive water bug roaches. I swear to you, they like have their own zip code. They're so huge. And they come out at night.

And everybody's house has them. And when you flip on a light, they scatter. It's like if you've got a rock that's been sitting there on the side of the hill for decades and you lift it up and everything underneath it because of the light, it just runs scattering.

[11:44] This is who we are as sinners. We as human beings, we hate God. We hate to be exposed. We love our deeds. We want to do what we want to do. We want to be the boss of our own life.

And we hate to be exposed. And we hate the feeling of condemnation. This is the wretchedness of sin. The wretchedness of sin is being condemned already.

It's not believing in Jesus. It's our deeds are evil and we love it and we hate to be exposed. It reminds me of years ago when our son was two years old.

We lived up in the panhandle in Canadian, Texas. And we lived in the parsonage next to the church and we had this kind of a small backyard. But it had a place where dogs had been kept for a while before we had gotten there.

So all the grass was gone. It was just lots of dirt. And he figured out how to turn on the outdoor water. And he was gathering up water and he was pouring it there next to the house and he was making this huge mud puddle.

[12:48] We have pictures. We can prove it. You know, it was quite the sight because when we went out there, you know, he's still wearing a diaper, right? And so he's got mud in his nose. He's got mud in his eyes.

He's got mud in his ears. He's taken off his diaper so you know what I'm saying there. And I mean, like he is just enjoying himself. He's just playing. And the thing is is that he did not realize the danger he was in because it was winter and he was getting a little bit blue.

And he didn't want to be taken from that. He didn't want it to be taken away from him because he loved being dirty. because he loved being his own boss.

There's a wretchedness of sin and that if we don't if we don't take the time to talk about the problem that we have as humanity, all that Jesus did makes zero sense.

Most people would be happy to have a Jesus who didn't ask them to leave their mud puddles behind. But he does. He asks us to leave our mud puddles. He asks us to leave our sin. He asks us to walk away for being the boss of our own life.

[14:01] But most people would love to have a Jesus, a baby Jesus in the manger so they can put up lights and they can have gifts and everything else but they just don't want anything else to do with him. But that, beloved, is impossible.

Sin is wretched. And if you're a Christian today, you say you're a Christian, you say you've trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, you say that you know that when you die, you're going on to be with the Lord in heaven.

My question to you is do you remember your wretched state before you became a Christian? Do you remember your sin? Do you remember how much you loved your sin?

Do you remember when Christ saved you? Because I think that we as Christians often forget where we came from so we have a tendency to view the world around us and the wretched sinners that

are around us through wrong kinds of glasses.

We look at things as the way they are going to be one day and think to ourselves what's wrong with all these people and I'm just telling you what's wrong with all of them is what was wrong with you before you came to Christ.

[15:13] We have to remember our own wretched state. We've got to remember where we came from. We've got to remember that back before we became a Christian, we didn't become a Christian because it was the culture we lived in.

It wasn't something like since everybody around me is of a political party, I'll just join that political party. No, we were dead in our sins and trespasses. We were spiritually dead like Lazarus in the tomb and Christ came to find us and raised us from the dead.

And that's why we follow Him. Christians, you need to remember where you came from. But if you're not a Christian today, you really do need the light of God's law to expose your sin.

And it's not because I enjoy doing that, it's because I think it's necessary for you to see why Jesus is so great. If you think about His law, you think about where He talks about lying and murder and adultery, you think about where He talks about stealing, and you ask yourself, have you ever broken these laws?

And the answer is yes, you have. Every single person on the planet has. And it puts us under the penalty of God's judgment.

[16:34] punishment. There's a penalty price to be paid for breaking that law. Even if you had only broken one law your entire life, you would still be under that penalty payment for breaking that law because it's not about the law itself, but the law giver.

He is infinite in worth, and breaking one of His laws puts us worthy of infinite punishment because it's against an infinitely worthy God.

And the question is, what are you going to do to have that penalty paid for? You see, this is a legal transaction. And God, in His great love, sent His Son, who died upon the cross, to pay the penalty for our sin.

And that brings us to the second part of this, the glorious love of God, where we get to John 3.16, that God so loved the world. And it's interesting to me that He expresses, first thing I would say, is that He expresses His love in a world of sinners.

He's decided before time, eternity, to love the world and to send His Son, but He expresses it, He demonstrates it, in a world full of sinners. And I always find it fascinating how many people love to quote verse 17, that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world.

[17:56] Well, why is that? Because it was condemned already. It was already full of sinners. It was already full of wretchedness.

And He came into that place. He came into a world like that. He came into a world condemned already to a world of idolaters, to a world of evil people who hate the light, to a world of people who love themselves more than anything else.

It was in the middle of that sinful, imperfect, condemned world that God's love was manifested in the giving of His best gift, His Son. And He gave His Son to us.

He gave His Son to us. And this gift is the most beautiful gift we could have ever been given.

The Father gave His Son. Now think about for just a second who this Son is. The Son is the only begotten Son. That's what the New American Standard reads. The only begotten Son.

[19:05] He's the only begotten from the Father. So there's a relationship here between the Father and the Son that's being hinted at. It's a relationship of begetting.

And the term begetting means for one comes from another of the same kind. It is that the Son is the Son eternally and the Father is the Father eternally.

and they are so because the Father eternally begets the Son. The Father begets the Son. It is His gift of His own character.

It's the gift of His own nature. It's the gift of His own power. It's the gift of His own Son that He gives. And it is His only Son. There is none like Him.

I know that there is so popular out there these days for people to talk about, well, you know, Jesus is just like one of many kind of Savior figures and stuff. And there was this movie years ago called Zeitgeist that put all this stuff out there based upon a book from the 1800s.

[20:04] And it is just such a sham. It's so ridiculous how much people try to downplay the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son. There is none like Him.

Mithras. Mithras was born from a rock. He's not, he's not virgin born. You understand what I'm saying? There's no one like Jesus Christ.

There is no other God. There is no other deity. There is no other religion in the world. There are only two options in this world. Following after Jesus Christ or rejecting Him.

There is nothing else. He's given us this most beautiful gift of the only begotten Son.

His Son. The only Son. So why is this a beautiful gift? We could talk about it this way. We could say that this gift is beautiful because of the impact it makes on our lives.

[21 : 07] And that's true. If you trust in Jesus, you're no longer headed to hell. You're no longer under condemnation but instead you are now one of His children. You're safe for all eternity.

And as His child He works in you to perfect you until the day of Christ Jesus. When you're saved you're just covered with His righteousness. You're not made righteous. And the rest of your life He works to change you.

And we could talk about that but I think there's more to this. we could also say that this is a beautiful gift because in the giving of His Son to the world the Son died and His death saved us from our sin and it started setting the world aright.

Right? Last week we talked about how this world is cursed. It's why there's tornadoes. It's why animals attack. It's why there's all kinds of diseases. It's because this world is a cursed world. And part of what He's doing in His death upon the cross and His saving of His people is setting right everything.

And one day there will be a new heaven and a new earth. And that's a great reason for this to be a beautiful gift. But I want to suggest to you one more thing as to why I think this is a beautiful gift.

[22 : 23] And I sort of see it in the idea that it says these words that He gave His Son. It's His Son. Over the last few weeks I've tried to explain a concept and I've been hitting at it again and again and again.

Some of you haven't been here so I'm going to catch you up to speed just a little bit about this concept. It's a beautiful truth if you can get it. It's this idea that God does all things for His own glory. It's that God is uppermost in His own thoughts. That God does all that He does for His own glory. He loves Himself more than anything and anyone else. I'm trying to say it in such stark ways that just make you uncomfortable.

We can see it played out in the Trinity because the Father is fully pleased with the Son and the Son is fully delighted and the Father and the Spirit is fully glorifying the Son and the Father. God created for His own glory.

God saved Israel from Egypt for His own glory. God saves us for His own glory. God is supremely happy and joyful because He is supremely glorious.

[23 : 33] If He loves Himself and He's supremely glorious then when He loves Himself He's supremely happy because He's supremely glorious. If that doesn't hurt your head yet just hang on.

There's not a single being there's not a single entity or single thought or single idea that is more glory filled more praise inducing more joy producing than God Himself.

Let me say it this way. The Father is supremely pleased and delighted and enthralled with His Son because His Son is supremely enthralling eternally glorious infinitely delightful.

Nothing makes God happier than His own essence. He can delight in His Son. And this is why this gift is so beautiful.

So it's Christmas. It's Christmas and let's talk about giving some gifts for a second. Maybe this will help us. Let's just say that I give all of you a gift and I started to wrap up a package and have it so I could have an object lesson but there's my gift.

[24 : 45] You can see it, right? There it is. I brought you a gift. Let's just say that the gift that I'm going to give you is a gift that is guaranteed to bring you absolute joy.

Like, just for a second, like go through and think about all the difficult things that you have been through over the last year. Pile them all up 15 minutes before you walk into this service.

And the emotions and the weight and the dread and the terribleness of all of these things from this last year piled up 15 minutes right before the service started and then I gave you this gift and I'm telling you it's guaranteed to bring you eternal joy.

I mean, that'd be pretty great just in and of itself to open such a gift and there'd be joy in the face of such darkness that we've had. And then let's just say that not only would this gift bring you such delight but it would do something to you.

It would like change you. It would like take you and make you someone completely different so that you were no longer thinking of things in the same way but you are now a completely radically different person.

[26 : 11] and then let's say that this gift cost me everything.

I spared no expense in putting this gift together. This gift that to me brings eternal joy that is the delight of my eyes and it cost me everything.

If I give such a gift to you if you were to give such a gift to me I would understand something of the nature of your love.

God has given us his son the son in whom is all of his delight and the reason that this is such a beautiful gift is because there is no other gift that delights God as much.

There is no other gift that thrills God as much. There is no other gift that satisfies God as much.

There is no other gift that cost God as much as giving the gift of his own son.

[27 : 33] And he gave the gift of his son to a world of wretched sinners. How deep the father's love for us.

How vast beyond all measure. That he would give his only son to make a wretch his treasure.

You see when we trust in Jesus for salvation we're covered in the cloak of his righteousness. We've become united with Jesus by his righteousness covering us.

So when the father looks at us he treasures us because he treasures his son. He has given to us the best gift in his son.

The incarnation yes is about Jesus knowing what it's like to be us. Taking on flesh so he can identify with us.

[28 : 49] The incarnation yes is about fulfilling prophecy of old and proving that God is faithful to his promises. The incarnation is about God delighting in God at great cost to himself letting that splash over and overflow to us as he gives us the gift of his love.

We don't deserve it. We're unfaithful. We're broken. We're weak. We're unstable. We're tired of trying.

We're fearful. Yet he's given to us this gift.

God is not good. And you know, no one can come to the hill of the Lord. The scriptures teach us in Psalm 24 who can come to the hill of the Lord.

Only those with clean hands. Charles Spurgeon said this. He said, we can never come to God.

None of us. We're not righteous.

[30 : 06] We're not holy. We're not good. But every single one of us can come to Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ can take us to the Father.

And so we need to come to Christ today. And I just want to share with you this song that I think just sums up what it is that this is all saying.

And I pray that the Lord would use it for you.