

Loving The Darkness

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Preacher: Treg Hallman

[0 : 00] Thank you, brother. This morning we continue in the book of John, chapter 3. And it's my privilege to read the passage this morning.

But before I read it, I just want to remind us that we're still in the section of John where Christ has received Nicodemus and they're in conversation.

And by the grace of Christ, he is sharing the truth with Nicodemus so that Nicodemus could come to see the only means of salvation.

And so it's beautifully articulated here in chapter 3, this message of being born again. And so this morning we will focus on verse 17 and following down through verse 21.

But for sake of context, I want to start reading in verse 14. And then we'll read down through verse 21. So if you would join me as I read, starting in verse 14, it says this, And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

[1 : 18] For God so loved the world that he gave his only 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 is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is a judgment. The light has come into the world, and people love 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. Let's pray briefly.

Fathers, we open your word this morning. I pray that you would open our eyes and our ears spiritually, that we might see the truth that is here in your word, and we might hear from you as you would help us to understand your word.

[2 : 33] Lord, I pray that you would move us on a heart level, that, Father, you would open our hearts to receive readily that which you share through your word this morning. I pray that you would bless this time as we open your word, and I pray it in your name.

Amen. So I've got five points I want you to see out of this passage this morning. I feel like Jonathan. I've got five points, and if you like taking notes, you might want to write down these five points.

Point number one is this. We see in verse 17, I want you to see the structure of the sentence, which there's a message in it that I want you to see.

So if I would abbreviate this sentence, it says this, God did not, but did. God did not, but did. And I'll fill in the blank here in a second, but I want to say this, is that when we see the negative coming before the positive, what it does is it emphasizes the positive.

It highlights the greatness of the positive. So if we fill in the blank here, the verse says this, God did not send his son Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but God did send his son Jesus into the world in order that the world might be saved.

[3 : 53] The first point is this, we see the purpose of God in verse 17, that the purpose of God is salvation.

And who is this salvation for? The verse reveals that this is a global salvation. This is not a salvation that is only for the Jewish nation.

You know, we've said it before in chapter 3, as we've preached week after week after week on chapter 3, we've said this, is that Nicodemus had a Jewish mindset.

Matter of fact, the text says this, he was a ruler of the Jews. It says in verse 1. And then in verse 10, it says, he was the teacher of Israel. So this Jewish man who was a teacher of Israel did not understand.

understand that the Old Testament prophesied about a coming Messiah, this king that would come through the lineage of David, of the line of David, and he would be a king, this great and mighty king, the greatest of all kings.

[5 : 00] But they thought that meant that he would be an earthly ruler. That he would be a great king of this great nation of Israel and all these other nations that had been a hindrance to Israel for all these years.

Even this Roman power that had their thumb on Israel, they thought that when the Messiah come, he would set up his throne.

And truly, that's what the Old Testament said. But it's speaking spiritually. It's not speaking physically. So Nicodemus misunderstood the Old Testament. This teacher of Israel misunderstood that this king was not going to have an earthly reign.

He was not going to destroy all these nations so that Israel as a nation, a physical nation, would be the greatest of all nations. That is not what was meant.

Nicodemus thought that there was only one nation that were children of God. Only one nation that was chosen of God. He saw himself as being a part of that nation, this Jewish nation.

[6 : 05] A nation that God first revealed himself to. And he thought because he was a Jew, he was saved. Because he was a Jew, he had eternal life. So when Christ graciously shares this with Nicodemus, we've got to understand that he would have been shocked.

He would have not understood up until that moment the breadth or the width or the greatness or the wideness of the salvation that God had intended.

And so we read it again. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world. What is he speaking of? He's speaking of the world that is the entity of earth, all the nations, the Gentiles.

So if we read that passage with the understanding of what Christ is saying to Nicodemus, he's saying, Nicodemus, Christ did not come to set up his throne that the Jewish nation would be the greatest of nations so that he could destroy all these other nations.

To judge them. And in essence, to condemn them. That is not why he came. That is not the purpose of the Messiah. Matter of fact, the purpose of the Messiah is totally different than what you're thinking, Nicodemus.

[7 : 27] It says, God did send his son in order that the nations might be saved through his son, Jesus Christ.

Isn't it beautiful? To see so clearly the picture, the purpose of God in sending his son. it's for the salvation that is widely offered to all.

And we'll see that a little later as we look at one of these other five points. But I want us to see, and I want to remind us, I want us to see that Nicodemus, as a Jew, would have known the Old Testament.

He would have recognized these references that Christ was sharing with him. And so even this reference, Nicodemus should recognize it in the Old Testament.

We've looked at it before, but I want to look at it again. It's in Isaiah 52 and 53. And I'm going to jump around a little bit because of sake of time just to hit a couple of highlights in Isaiah 52 and 53.

[8 : 31] But hear the word of God through the prophet Isaiah as he shares about his plan. Behold, my servant, Jesus, my servant, my son, my one and only son, that servant.

Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He will act in a sinless way. He will act in a perfect way. He shall be high and lifted up.

Yes, he'll be exalted in God's eyes. God will say, well done, my good and faithful son. But he will be exalted in another way.

He'll be exalted or placed on a cross for all to see. And he says, he was despised. That is, Jesus was despised and rejected by men. He wasn't rejected by the Father, was he?

He was applauded by the Father. Many times, audibly, God said in the audience of people, this is my son whom I am well pleased. Hear him. This son, Jesus, who never sinned, who lived a God-honoring life, who only did what the Father told him to do, who only said what the Father put in his mouth.

[9 : 41] This son, he was despised and rejected by men, even his own countrymen. Even the leaders of the Jewish nation rejected him and put him on a cross. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Surely he has borne our griefs. You know that this was written roughly 700 years before Christ came? God is telling us 700 years before that he was going to send his son and these things would be true.

Nicodemus, do you hear what the prophecies are talking about? He was smitten by God and afflicted. He was pierced. Obviously, we know that to mean on the cross.

He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Do you see the purpose of God in these verses in Isaiah? that God sent his son for those who would be saved.

That he would die for our iniquities. He would be crushed for us. With his wounds, we are healed. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[10 : 54] That is, those of us who trust in him as our Lord and Savior for salvation. Verse 10 says, Yet it was the will of God to crush him.

Isn't it amazing that God would send his son with the purpose of crushing his son? That Christ would have to take on our sin in order that we might know the forgiveness and the righteousness that God would offer us through him, his son.

He has put him to grief when his soul makes an offering for guilt. You know, the purpose of God is that he would send his son in order that his son would make an offering for us, his bride.

Isn't it beautiful to see the purpose of God in its own display here is that God sent his son in order that we might be saved. So it begs the question, why?

Why? Why would God send his one and only son to die and to suffer and be crushed? Why? It's because the condition of us, the condition of men.

[12 : 05] What is our condition? What state are we in? Well, Nicodemus thought that he was fine. Nicodemus came to him by night. He saw something different in the life of Christ.

He said, the things that you're doing, these miraculous things, they can't happen unless God's involved. Tell me what's going on here. something points to you being the instrument of God.

And what does he say to Nicodemus? Nicodemus, you think you're right with the Lord, but you're not. You think because you know the Old Testament text, you think because you're moral in the way you live, you think because you have been born into this nation, this Jewish nation, that your heritage is enough for you to be the child of God.

You think that you'll have eternal life because you're a part of this nation, but you don't understand that you have to be born again. You're in a condition that separates you from a holy God.

You're in a condition of sin. That's why I needed to send my son, Nicodemus. That's why Christ says, I am he. Do you believe?

[13 : 25] Nicodemus, let me show you by looking at multiple Old Testament texts that I am the Messiah, the one who speaks to you and he.

You need to be born again. Why? Because you're in a condition of sin. And we look at verse 19 and we see Christ talking about mankind here.

What does he say? It says, people love the darkness. You know that's true of all of us? That we love the darkness.

That is our natural bent. What is darkness? Darkness is everything that does not honor God. Everything that is in rebellion to God is in this category of darkness.

Notice, too, in verse 18. Whoever does not believe is condemned already. Do you know that we're in a state of condemnation? That our condition is this condition of condemnation.

[14 : 32] We are condemned. Why? Because of our sin. Isn't it interesting that as we read the book of John, that there was God sent someone before Christ.

God sent this forerunner. And what was the message of this forerunner, John the Baptist? What was his message? Repent! To this Jewish nation, he says, repent.

Repent of what, John? Of your sin. Do you not see your sin? Do you not recognize your separation from God? Just because you show up at the temple, just because you bow, just because you read, that doesn't mean that you're in right standing with God.

Do you not see your separation? Do you not see your sinfulness? Nicodemus. And I love the way that Jesus brought back Numbers 21 to the mind of Nicodemus.

He says, Nicodemus, we've all been bitten by the serpent and we're in trouble. We've all been bitten by the serpent. You know, it also takes us back to the garden, doesn't it?

[15 : 42] In a sense, we were bitten by the serpent. The serpent beguiled Eve. The serpent spoke a lie and Adam and Eve embraced the lie and they chose to rebel against God.

They chose to sin and as a result, they were forever out of the garden. They were kicked out, if you will, or forced to leave the presence of God because of their sinful state. Do you know that all men are born that way?

In this condition of sinfulness? You know, Paul used to think like Nicodemus? Do you remember the text in Philippians where Paul is sharing about the way he used to live?

He said, listen, I was a Jew, circumcised, in other words, I was of the right family, the right nation, circumcised the eighth day, I did it just right. I lived a God-honoring life, I was faithful as far as righteousness, I was leading the pack.

Matter of fact, I was so full of zeal that I was going from city to city to city to kill people or lock them up in prison that we're doing anything other than what is told us to do in the law, the Jewish law.

[16 : 53] And you know what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus? He had an encounter with Jesus. And you know what he realized? He realized, oh no, I'm in trouble. I thought that all of this was honoring to you, God.

He said, no, no, you're persecuting me. And so what did Paul say in Philippians? He said, everything that I used to think merited salvation, I recognize it now that it's all garbage.

It's all junk. It's all a lie. He said, it's worthy to be thrown on the garbage heap. Everything that I used to trust in for my salvation, every moral thing that I ever did, every attempt, my fleshly attempt to honor the law is garbage.

In light of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. Paul would say, I've come to see that not because I'm a Jew am I saved, not because I'm a Jew do I have eternal life, I only have eternal life because of what Jesus has done through the purpose of God on my behalf that he would die for me, that he would pay on the cross for my sins.

That is the provision of God and the condition of man. I want you to see what Paul says when he talks about the exclusivity of the Jewish people who thought that they were all in good standing with God.

[18 : 27] And he says this by way of argument to help the Jews understand. there's this tendency for Jews to think we're better than everybody else, we don't even marry with anybody else, we don't even spend time with anybody else, we don't want to talk to anybody else, we've got to keep ourselves clean by not associating with these other nations and people, etc.

And we see as the early church was growing there's this difficulty of accepting Gentiles, a difficulty of eating with them, difficulty of understanding that they're God's people too.

And Paul says it like this in Romans 3, he says, are Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we, that is Jews, have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.

As it is written, by the way, in Psalm 14 and Psalm 53, we see this, it's written, it says, none is righteous, he's speaking to the Jews as well as the Gentiles. none is righteous, not one, no one understands, no one seeks for God.

All have turned aside together, they have become worthless, that is without worth. No one does good, not even one.

[19 : 48] Paul, are you saying that the Jews are not a special class of people, that they don't have a special gift and blessing? blessing? In a sense, they were gifted the revelation of God showing himself to them, so in a sense, they have had a huge blessing given to them, and yet they didn't understand their sin.

They didn't understand how to be in this right relationship with God, though they had the law. So the second point, if you hadn't picked it up, is that men are in a condition of sin and without hope.

Except that God would provide salvation to those who are in a condition of sin, they would have no hope. You know that's you and me? Unless he provides salvation for you and me, those of us who are under sin, who are condemned, who are bitten by the serpent, who love darkness rather than light, we have no hope.

The third point is the provision, is Jesus. The provision of God we see in verse 17, for God did not send his son into the world to condemn, but he sent his son in order that we might be saved.

Let me just say this, the word of God declares we'll never be saved, we can't be saved apart from anything else except Jesus. There's no good deed you can do, there's no school you can go to and learn enough, there's no morality that you can achieve that's going to earn you salvation.

[21 : 31] Apart from the provision of God that is his one and only son, that is Jesus Christ our Lord, there is no salvation for anyone. I love how it talks about it in this passage.

it says that, and this is the judgment, that is, this is the evidence of this sinful life, this rebellion, this separation, is that the light has come and they love the darkness more than the light.

Nicodemus would have immediately recognized the prophetic passage out of Isaiah. And that passage out of Isaiah chapter 9 says this, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Again, pointing toward Christ, this is the same passage that says, for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulders, his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And it says, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. What is that light? It's Jesus. That Jesus has come and they didn't even recognize him.

[22 : 53] Remember what John the Baptist says, there's one among you whom you don't even know whose latchet of his shoes I'm not worthy to even unloose. You come to me and ask me who I am.

I'm not the Messiah. I'm the voice of one crying in the wilderness. There he is. Trust him. There he is, the Messiah.

Do you see? That's the one that was foretold. Apart from him there is no salvation. Beautiful picture of this light.

You know that this is not new to our ears in the book of John. If we turn back to chapter 1, verse 3 and 4 said this, all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

in him was life. That is, in Christ was life. And the life was the light of men. There we go again. This theme that Christ is the light.

[23 : 53] What does the light do to darkness? It illuminates it. So physically speaking, a physical light is going to illuminate darkness. I've been in a cave before where there were no lights and you'd poke yourself in the eye and you'd never see your finger coming.

It was as dark as anything I've ever seen. One guy struck a match and it just went pew. The whole cave area was a light. Now it wasn't perfectly clear everywhere, but if you're looking that way it illuminated a lot of things.

The beautiful picture of the light that penetrates the physical darkness is only a pointer, is only a way of sharing a spiritual message.

And the spiritual message is the light that is Christ who is truth and is light has come into the world that were dark. They didn't understand. They didn't know the depth of what God was saying even through the scriptures.

Their mind was darkened. They were in a sense blind to the reality of their condition, blind to the reality of their sin, blind to the reality they needed Jesus. And when Jesus came, what did he do?

[25 : 02] He illuminated it. He showed us as he showed Nicodemus. Nicodemus, you need to be born again. This beautiful concept is highlighted in John 8.

If we peek forward a little bit and look at verse 12, it says this. Christ speaking, Jesus spoke to them saying, I am the light of the world. I am the light of the world.

Apart from the illumination that Christ gives, we will never see. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.

Whoever follows their own ways are walking in darkness, but whoever turns and follows Christ will not walk in darkness, because Christ illuminates what honors God.

Christ illuminates our sin. Christ says this, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. do you know that when we turn and follow Christ and we recognize him as the means of our salvation that we have light, he begins to show us.

[26 : 15] You know what it says in the word of God about the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit comes to indwell those who trust in him, and he leads us and guides us into all truth. He shows us what it looks like to honor God.

He shows us our sin, and he says, no, no, no, no, no, don't walk that way, walk this way, walk in a way that honors the Father. The fourth point is this.

I saw people start writing. That's really interesting. Jonathan, I've never done that before, but that's pretty cool. Everybody's pen went to their paper. The fourth point is this. I want you to see that three times in this passage, we see this invitation.

And you know, Christ gave, there's an invitation to Nicodemus that's inferred here, and I want us to see it.

But I also want us to see that invitation is for you and me. So if we were to look back in 14 and 15, it's the picture of that wilderness event where they rebelled against God, they rebelled against God's leadership, and God sent serpents to judge them, and they began, the serpents would bite them, and they began to die, and to die, and to die, and to die, and to die.

[27 : 37] Why? Because of their rebellion against God. Did they deserve to be judged? Yes, of course. But God provided a means that they might be saved, and Jonathan talked about that last week.

What a beautiful picture of looking on this provision of God in order to be saved. And we know that we need to look on the provision of God, that is Jesus Christ, in order that we might be saved.

But it says this, who can be saved? And whosoever believes, whoever believes, whosoever from any nation, whosoever believes. You know, we see it in verse 18 as well, and 16.

So in 16, for God so loved the world that he sent his only son, he loved him in that way that he would send his son to die, his provision. That whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

And we see it again in 18. Whoever believes in him is not condemned. So what is salvation? What is the means by which we would be saved?

[28 : 37] How is it that I can come to a place where I am saved? It's this, is it to believe on him? To believe that apart from him I have no hope?

To recognize my sin and my need of a savior, my need of forgiveness, my need of cleansing. whoever believes is not condemned.

Church, and those of y'all who might be visiting this morning, have you believed? Have you believed that Christ alone is our only hope?

Have you recognized, like he would say to Nicodemus, Nicodemus, do you see that you're actually sinful? Do you recognize that all these efforts that you've put into this religion don't merit anything?

Paul recognized it. He said all that stuff is garbage. You know what tends to happen for you and I? Is that we tend to lean on something else besides Jesus.

[29 : 40] We tend to think because our goodness, because of our attendance, because of our family, because of whatever, that that is enough. That God would not dare not let us in.

Look how good we are. Look at all these things we've done. You know that Nicodemus couldn't have done a single thing that would have earned him salvation and neither can we. Apart from looking on the provision of God, apart from looking at the Messiah elevated on a cross and recognizing that that sacrifice God accepted as a substitute for our sin, as payment for our sin, our condition of sinfulness was paid for.

That is what it isolated and separated us from a holy God. But God sent his provision in order that we might be saved if we would only do what? Whoever believes.

Have we believed? You know the invitation is for everyone worldwide? Whoever believes, whatever nationality, whatever background, whatever level of sin, whatever things you've done in your life, if you will look on the Messiah, though you've been bitten and you will believe on him and you will cast yourself into his hands for his mercy, we will be saved.

The invitation is for all of us. And if there's someone here who right now in your heart you're saying, you know, I truly never have actually stepped toward God.

[31 : 17] I've never truly entrusted myself to him. I've never truly understood that it's Jesus and Jesus alone. You know the invitation is for you this morning? God will forgive you on the basis of the sacrifice of his son, Jesus Christ.

His death, his perfect life, his death, the burial, and the evidence of God's acceptance by his resurrection and ascension. That God would forgive you.

He would take the righteousness of Christ. This is a beautiful picture that Jonathan reminded us of last week in Corinthians. that he would take our sins and he would put our sins on the back of Christ.

And Christ would carry them to the cross for us. Our sins on Christ. And in exchange he would give us his righteousness. So when God looks at those who trust in him, who trust in the son, you know what he sees?

He sees the pure and spotless blood of the lamb covering us. Cleansing us. You know there's no other way to be cleansed except through the powerful blood of Christ.

[32 : 28] The invitation is here and the fifth point is the response. What will your response be? When you hear this truth, how do you respond? You know I think many of us have already understood this.

Many of us have already asked God to forgive us and asked God to accept us as his son and daughter. Ask God to be our Lord.

We've changed. We've begun to serve him. Not perfectly, but our heart is there. Our heart desires to honor God and desires to seek God, desires to serve God. What will your response be?

How about Nicodemus? We had talked about this once before. Do we see any evidence in the life of Nicodemus after this encounter with Christ that he's a changed man? You know the text says this.

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.

[33 : 29] You know what? We see something carried out in the life of Nicodemus. His works. This display laid in the Gospels.

You know the Gospels didn't have to tell us this. It didn't have to tell us that Nicodemus went with Joseph of Arimathea to anoint the body of Christ. His work, his willingness to step outside of the will of the Sanhedrin and to go and anoint the body of Christ is evidence, at least I believe, that he was changed.

That we begin to see works that were different than before. That there's this changed life. You know that when we turn to God, God does something special to us. He gives us a new heart.

Ezekiel says this, And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put into you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart that desires me.

Let's pray. Father, I thank you that you would open our eyes to see our sin and our condition.

[34 : 39] That apart from the provision of your Son to fulfill your plan that is the salvation of many, that we would have no hope. God, thank you that you've opened many of our eyes and I hope all of our eyes.

God, we've come to see that we're separated from you because of our rebellion, because living for our own ways and not living for you.

Father, you're holy in every way and it's right that we would serve you and that we would bow our knee to you and we would honor you with our whole life, that we would present our bodies and our life as a living sacrifice to you, which is right and proper, considering that, Father, you've given us a gift that's so great that we can't even understand.

Not only do you accept us as your child, but you provide for us glory. That we will be able to spend eternity with you. We will be able to have perfect fellowship with you.

Father, our salvation is just the beginning of this amazing depth of relationship with you that you've simply gifted to us, those of us who will bow our knee, those of us who will recognize our need, those of us who will cry out to you.

[35 : 54] And Father, I ask, even this morning, if there's somebody here that is not yours, that has not bowed their knee, that has not accepted you as Lord and Savior, that has not called out to you, Father, move in their heart this morning to give them a desire to call out to you.

And I know who you are, God, that you're a God of grace and you always respond to those who lift their hands up to you and say, help me. So God, do what you will. We praise you in Christ's name.

Amen.