

## 25. The Gospel of John—3:17-21

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### *“You Must Be Born Again” Pt.4*

(4/1/18)

For the last few weeks we have been in John 3 and in particular the first 21 verses—which many have called one of the greatest sections in the Bible.

It’s great because in it Jesus corrects the record with regard the greatest misconception that ninety percent of the people on this planet are harboring under—that to get to heaven a person has to be ‘good’ (whatever that means) and do good—i.e. go to church, temple or synagogue and be in good standing when it comes to whatever ceremonies, rituals and rules their religion requires them to obey for them to enter into heaven.

The Lord Jesus shatters this notion by telling a very religious man named Nicodemus that his religious works will not (and cannot) get him into heaven—and then proceeds to tell him the only way he and everyone else in the world can enter into heaven.

I’ve divided the first 21 verses of John 3 this way—

#### **I. The Confused Seeker—v.1-12**

#### **II. The Condescending Savior—v.13-16**

#### **III. The Condemned Sinner—v.17-21**

Now, as we have pointed out numerous times, the first part of John 3 is built around two great ‘must’ statements given by Jesus.

These ‘must’ statements are found, first of all, in verse 7 where Jesus said—

**John 3:7 (NKJV)**

**<sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'** (the ‘must’ of the sinner)

I want you to notice how definitive the Lord was when He made this statement about what it takes to enter God’s Kingdom.

He didn’t leave any room for ambiguity—He was clear, definitive and unapologetic when He said that for a person to be saved they *must* be born again—which happens when they put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

But being born again wouldn’t have been possible if Jesus hadn’t died on the cross for our sins—hence the second ‘must’ statement which is found in v.14—

**John 3:14 (NKJV)**

**<sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up...** (the ‘must’ of the Savior)

And together they lead up to and climax in the single greatest *message* of love and hope ever given to mankind—

**John 3:16 (NKJV)**

**<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

Now, this morning we want to look at the third main point of our outline—

### III. The Condemned Sinner—v.17-21

One of the biggest misconceptions I run into when talking to people about going to heaven is that—not only do they believe that heaven is for good people—they also believe that they themselves are basically good and therefore God will accept them into heaven someday.

Now this concept coincides with what the Bible says in Proverbs 20:6 that most people proclaim their own goodness—or in other words, most people believe that they are basically good people and therefore heaven-bound.

The problem is that most people define goodness from *earth's* perspective—not from *heaven's* perspective.

Most people come to the conclusion that they are good people and therefore worthy of heaven by looking at others in society.

Of course, they can always find thieves, rapists, murderers and other assorted miscreants and malcontents to compare themselves to—which makes them look like Mother Teresa by comparison—shining examples of virtue and worthiness.

Jesus dealt with this issue as well and set the record straight in Matthew 19 when He talked with a man who wanted to know how he also could get to heaven. (John 3 and Matthew 19 are both critical passages on this subject)

Who was this man? Matthew tells us he was both young and wealthy.

Luke adds that he was also a 'ruler', in other words he was probably the leader of a synagogue—which was a very influential and honored position for a young man especially to hold.

So here we have a young, successful, prominent, man who was moral and religious—a man who told Jesus that he kept the commandments of God from the time he was a child.

If anyone was a candidate for heaven based on being a good person—this man was.

**Matthew 19:16-17 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" <sup>17</sup> **So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God..."**

Jesus was saying one of two things here—either He was saying:

1. *"Why are you calling Me good, there is no one good but God? So, don't call Me good I'm not God."*

Or He was saying:

2. *"Why are you calling Me good, there is no one good but God? Do you recognize that I am God?"*

If Jesus is only one of many religious teachers in history—then His words carry no more weight than the teachings of Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed or anyone else.

So many people want to acknowledge that Jesus was a good man, a moral man and a great teacher but stop short of believing that He is God.

Believing that Jesus is God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity is absolutely essential for salvation—

*"Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." (John 8:24)*

But getting back to Jesus' response to this 'good' man, notice what the Lord tells him—which is critical to our understanding of this topic of 'good' people going to heaven.

Jesus said to him that—*“no one is good but God.”*

Notice Jesus didn't say that no one is as good as God—He said no one is good but God.

You see the Bible defines goodness as 'moral perfection'—and only God is morally perfect.

Most people will say, *“I know I'm not perfect, but I think I'm good enough to get into heaven.”*

But God is telling us in His Word that if you're not *perfect* you're not good enough—and no human being is perfect—

**Romans 3:10, 12 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> As it is written: *“There is none righteous, no, not one... <sup>12</sup> ...There is none who does good, no, not one.”*

**Romans 3:23 (NKJV)**

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (sinless perfection)

**Romans 6:23 (NKJV)**

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin *is* death (eternal death—hell)...

Rabbi Harold Kushner's run-away bestselling book, *“When Bad Things Happen to Good People”* is built on a faulty premise—that there are good people in the world for bad things to happen to.

C.S. Lewis said, *“We're not just imperfect people who need growth—we're rebels who need to lay down our arms.”*

This world is not full of good people that God is treating badly—it's full of bad people that God is treating kindly.

As already mentioned, relative to other human beings, some people are obviously better behaved than others—but that doesn't make them 'good' (morally perfect) as Jesus was the only human being to be truly good—because He's truly God.

The Bible says that God originally made man good in the Garden of Eden—but when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—they fell.

And what they fell from was moral perfection and as such their fellowship with God was broken.  
(Comment)

And from that point until this very day—every person born into the world is born of Adam—a sinner that has been cursed and condemned by God to spend eternity in hell.

Most people comfort themselves with the knowledge that God is love, and surely a God of love won't send anyone to hell except the worst people in the world—ISIS and other terrorists, mass murderers etc.

And yet Mark tells us that when Jesus looked at this moral and sincere seeker—He loved him (Mark 10:21) and yet he still died and went to hell.

As we said last time, God's love can't save us—all it can do is provide a way by which we can be saved—

**John 3:16 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The N.T. tells us that it isn't by love that God saves us—it's by grace:

**Ephesians 2:8 (NKJV)**

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,

Now, when you understand all of this—you realize that Jesus didn't come to help good people be better (good enough to make it into heaven)—He came to save condemned sinners from hell.

This then naturally leads to verse 17—

**John 3:17 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Jesus at His first coming, didn't come to judge the world and send people to hell—He entered the world on a search and rescue mission to save condemned sinners—

**Luke 19:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

**John 12:47 (NKJV)**

<sup>47</sup> And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. [At His first coming]

Now understand—He will judge sinners and cast them into hell someday (Rev.20:11-15).

But right now, we are still in the day of grace where God is offering eternal life in heaven as a free gift to all who will believe in Jesus and receive Him as their Lord and Savior—

*"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name"* (John 1:12)

**John 3:17-18 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. <sup>18</sup> **He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

The people that I talk to about heaven, those who believe they're good enough to get there, often tell me—*“Well, when I die I'll stand before God and ‘present my case’, I'll tell Him all the good things I did over the course of my life—and I believe I'll be able to persuade Him not to condemn me to hell but to let me into heaven.”*

You see they think that when they die and stand before God that—that will be their *‘day in court’*.

Or in other words that this will be when their “trial” takes place, when their guilt or innocence as a person will be determined—a time when God will either pronounce them guilty and condemn them to hell or acquit them and let them into heaven.

What they don't realize, as Jesus stated it here in John 3:18—they're condemned already!

Their case has already been decided—God has already pronounced guilt upon the family of Adam (human race) in the Garden of Eden and sentenced all mankind to hell!

When unbelievers stand before Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment it won't be to determine their guilt or innocence—again, their case has already been decided, the verdict has already been rendered—guilty as charged!

At that judgment it will be the ‘sentencing phase’—or in other words, a time when the Lord determines their degree of punishment in hell. (Luke 12:47-48)

Pastor and evangelist Greg Laurie said this in a recent blog I read—

*“Conventional wisdom says that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. But here’s something that may surprise you. There are going to be some “good” people who will not make it to heaven, because no one is good enough to get there on their own. And there are some “bad” people who will be in heaven because they realized they were bad, and they called out to God for forgiveness. Heaven isn’t for good people; heaven is for forgiven people. You must say, “God I’m sorry for my sin,” and turn from it. Your life can be changed by Jesus Christ. He is alive. He is standing at the door of your life and knocking. And he is saying that if you will hear his voice and open the door, he will come in. No matter what you have done, don’t despair. God will forgive you of any sin you have committed – if you will ask him for his forgiveness.”*

**John 3:18 (NKJV)**

**<sup>18</sup> He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

Believing in His name is the same as believing in *Him*—

One pastor—

*“In the Bible, the name stands for the person. It involves more than merely accepting the facts about Jesus, it is believing to the point of commitment evidenced then through obedience.”*

**John 3:19 (NKJV)**

**<sup>19</sup> And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**

**“Light”** is often used in the Scriptures to represent—*spiritual truth, holiness, moral purity and obedience toward God.*

**“Darkness”** is often used in the Scriptures to represent—*spiritual error, evil, moral impurity and rebellion against God.*

However, even more to the point—the ultimate expression of God’s Light in this world is His Son, Jesus Christ—

**John 1:4-9 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. <sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. <sup>7</sup> This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. <sup>8</sup> He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. <sup>9</sup> That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

**John 8:12 (NKJV)**

<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

**John 3:19-20 (NKJV)**

<sup>19</sup> **And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**

One author had this to say—

*"Why will sinners not come into the 'light of life'? Because they love the darkness! They want to persist in their evil deeds, and this keeps them from coming to the light; for the closer the sinner gets to the light, the more his sins are exposed."*

Another said this—

*"Jesus was the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. He died for the sins of all the world. But do men love Him for this? No—they resent Him. They prefer their sins to having Jesus as Savior, and so they reject Him. Just as some creeping things scurry away from the light, so wicked men flee from the presence of Christ. Those who love sin hate the light, because the light exposes their sinfulness. When Jesus was here in the world, sinful men were made uncomfortable by His presence because He revealed their awful condition by His own holiness. The best way to reveal the crookedness of one stick is to place a straight stick beside it. Coming into the world as a Perfect Man, the Lord Jesus revealed the crookedness of all other men, by comparison."*

**John 3:21 (NKJV)**

<sup>21</sup> **But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."**

In other words, John is saying that when a person has Jesus (the Light of the world) living in their heart—they love the light (truth of God) and live the truth (obedience toward God) and come to the light (fellowship with the people of God—i.e. ‘church’)

The opposite is true of unbelievers—they don’t live according to God’s truth (Word), they don’t love coming to church and fellowshiping with Christians—in other words, they love darkness rather than God’s light because they want to live in the darkness of sin and rebellion—

**1 John 3:7-10 (NKJV)**

<sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. <sup>8</sup> He who [practices] sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning... <sup>9</sup> Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup> In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...

The title of this series is, “*You Must Be Born Again*” (to go to heaven).

Or in other words, heaven is an exclusive place—only children of God get to live there.

In these days of tolerance and inclusiveness—it’s important to know that God is very intolerant of sin and those who practice it—and will exclude them from heaven.

But anyone who will repent of their sins and receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord—they will be instantly forgiven and adopted into the family of God as a child of God.

Heaven *is* an exclusive place, only for children of God—that’s true.

But the good news is, that God is inviting everyone to come to Him and become a child of God by faith—and Jesus said, “...*the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.*” (John 6:37b)