

John 3:16

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[0 : 00] I love history.

It's one of the things I really love about Scotland. There's plenty of it. Some of you may be aware that Susanna and I had the chance to go down to Edinburgh earlier this week for the first time. And it did not disappoint. Not only did we go to the typical places where all the shopping is and see all the nice tweed and woolen products that were very well made and very lovely. But we saw, as you know, the castle and not the least St. Giles Cathedral where John Knox used to preach.

Now, that's part of your history. But as an American coming here, that's especially valuable to me because at this point all I've been able to do is read about that in history books.

[1 : 21] I haven't actually been able to go and see where it happened and visit the place where Scotland, as we know, was made.

And it was very interesting to go there and see the lovely artwork and the things that went into constructing that cathedral and to see that despite the fact that the kirkyard has long been paved over, they still have John Knox there under the pavement with a marker telling us in his memory that he once preached in this church.

And it was always a helpful reminder to go to places like that or to go to kirkyards and visit the long gone because I know that at some point in my life I will be in the same place they are and the only thing that anyone is going to know about me and remember about me is whatever is on that headstone.

What really matters is the impact that I have on you through the Word of God and you have on me through the Word of God or through prayer, spiritual impact.

That we stay loyal and dedicated to the truth. And that is the deposit that we have from men like John Knox and people of his day that have allowed us to stand and worship together here today and in the United States and in the world in general where the Protestant faith has moved on.

[3 : 25] As I was leaving Edinburgh on a train, I happened to notice on a boarded up section of a building that may have been being refurbished, it happened so quick I can't recall exactly, but I do think it was on a building and it had to spray paint, somebody had to spray paint it.

Opinion equals truth. What a marked difference from where our society has come to now.

And sometimes we need to sit back and realize or ask ourselves the question, how did we get here? Because I know that in the Western world, this is where we've all gone. And where I come from, it's exactly the same story.

These things are illustrated as a truth, I believe, that is axiomatic in the Gospel of John.

That darkness cannot perceive light and therefore claim and claims, yet doesn't really exist.

[4 : 35] A confusion between perception and reality. What we have is people trying to perceive the light from the darkness that is within them without the aid of the Holy Spirit and without the aid of the Scriptures.

And John has taught us that if we are to really know God, it has to be through Jesus Christ. And if we are to know Jesus Christ, it has to be through the testimony of apostles in the Scriptures through the work of the Holy Spirit who gave them these words from the Lord Jesus Himself. In recollection and remembrance of everything they witnessed while they were with Him in those days. And if my hope in knowing God's truth rests on my own ability to make sense of it, I'm doomed.

And it's not because I'm not an intelligent person. It's because that in the darkness of my own heart, I'm blinded to my own spiritual disability.

[5 : 56] And so here we find, as we peel back the layers of context and meaning, how can we be renewed in our affection for God's truth in the face of a world and culture that despises it? And here I give you the outline of this message.

Number one, awareness of God's love and judgment and affection for God's truth. Number one, awareness of God's love and judgment of the world.

God has done in Jesus Christ. The Apostle John offers the Spirit's insight into Jesus' mysterious teachings. Observe the first word in John 3.16.

Four. Go to the next slide if you would. The next, yeah, right there. Four. That red square. Believe it or not, this little word is especially important for how we should read this passage.

The Apostle uses the word for to explain Jesus' words to Nicodemus. Jesus had a conversation with Nicodemus explaining that you must be born again in order to see or enter the kingdom of God.

[7 : 15] Nicodemus asked him, well, how can someone enter the womb again? And how can these things be? And John is telling us, this is how these things be.

This is what's going on. He's giving understanding according to the Spirit. It's given to him after these things had happened. Remember that this gospel was written 90 A.D.

and this event would have happened somewhere around 30 A.D., 60 years apart. And the Tarnius here, Nicodemus, could not understand the concept of new birth.

But an uneducated disciple of Jesus, having understanding by the Spirit, is able to provide us with insight. And he relates to us the importance, and the abiding importance, of God's redemptive acts in Jesus.

Observe. Go to the next slide, guys. Okay. That's good. John relays God's past redemptive acts in Jesus and explains why they're still important to us.

[8 : 29] Observe. Here we find past tense words of action. The squares here. He's relating to us the past events in history according to the memory that he had.

A keen eye might notice that this passage offers an allusion to the provision of the ram on behalf of Isaac in Genesis 22. Let's briefly summarize Genesis 22, the problem and solution pattern.

The Lord tests Abraham with command to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. The implied question of this story, how will the Lord fulfill his promise to Abraham if Isaac dies?

But Isaac evaded, offered, or attempted to offer Isaac, or attempted to offer Isaac. Abraham evaded, attempted to offer Isaac. The Lord intervened and provided the ram.

The resolution is, we find that the Lord has guaranteed a prosperous future for Israel because Abraham, because Abraham did not withhold his only son.

[9 : 55] His actions were demonstrated by faith. Now, how does this compare with the passage in John? Next slide, guys. The Lord has guaranteed our eternal life as his people because he did not withhold his own son.

The Father takes on the role of Abraham and Jesus takes on the role of Isaac. And the idea that God loves the world is without a doubt something that was revealed to John because not many Jews at the time would have known this.

As a matter of fact, their concept of God would have been he loves the Jews only and might hate everyone else. He judges the nations.

He blesses Israel. So the very idea that God loves the world with all its different cultures and ethnicities was perhaps a new thought to them at the time.

But that here we find that God's love is not only for those naturally descending from Abraham, but for all those who believe.

[11 : 10] And he gives the promise of life to everyone who believes. So belief is the only appropriate response to God's love.

Observe the words as it says here, anyone who believes. the present tense words. Have eternal life. The one who believes is not condemned.

The one who does not believe. And then it says, is, are, anyone practicing evil does not come. the one who practices truth comes.

The emphasis here is that it is now a present offer. And in respect to what Christ has done in the past, that he is still offering us the time to believe and to reveal that love to us through the word of God and through the truth.

that despite the fact that we all have come under the sentence of judgment, that salvation remains available.

[12:21] Notice in John 3.16 it says, in the most common English translations, whoever believes. In the Greek, it may be translated literally, every believer.

Every believer. since the ultimate act of divine love remains in the historical past, one's present faith is still founded upon it.

And every believer in him is not condemned to the present time because he receives eternal life by faith. There is no formal job interview.

There is no resume cover letter, no calling up of references to get a feel for the applicant's character. God isn't looking for specially qualified individuals like scholars or engineers.

He only asks for faith. And I can imagine how such an interview would go, though, if it were to take place.

[13:29] Jesus, imagine this, Jesus in a very immaculate office sitting with someone across the desk, looking over a resume.

You are a disciple of Buddha. Why do you wish to become my disciple? Applicant, nervously rubbing his palms against the arms of the chair.

Buddha takes me from something and makes me nothing. But you, Lord, take me with nothing and yet give me everything. And Jesus in reply says, welcome to my Father's kingdom.

All that is mine is yours. Every believer has this promise. On the other hand, anyone not believing stands guilty because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And the judgment referenced in this passage refers to a declaration of guilt, a condemnation in view of a future and final destruction known elsewhere in Scripture as hell. But we have to ask ourselves, what does this faith look like?

[14:50] This faith looks like affection for God's truth. Let me read through verses 19 to 21 here real quick again. And this is the judgment that 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. Thus 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.

The basis of God's judgment is the affections of the human heart. Where are my affections? Look at the words.

The one who believes, the one who practices evil, the one who practices truth, these words indicate the basis of the judgment and the response to the ongoing testimony of the Son of Man who reveals a clear distinction between light and darkness.

He comes and he separates, if you will, the sheep from the goats. Our response is evidence of our faith.

[16:18] our daily response to the gospel reveals our heart for God. Faith will demonstrate itself in a love for the truth. D.A. Carson states, as the light of the world, Jesus is the revelation of God and the objectification of divine holiness and purity.

But men loved darkness instead of the light. they prefer to live without such knowledge of God without such brilliant purity. End quote.

This is a judicial recognition of those who love the light. People who love the truth know that a holy God cannot bear false witness. And so you see, in our modern minds we tend to think of truth as something we know up here and we evaluate it based on evidence which may be true, but in the day that this was written their way of knowing truth was just a little bit different.

They knew something was true if it corresponded to what they knew of God, if it came from heaven, it was reliable and it was virtuous. They could see that it was something to be valued.

If it came from below, from the earth or from the world, it was suspect. That's why we see later in the gospel that people were on the fence about Jesus. They see him doing these miracles and these signs and they say, well he's doing these things that only God knows, we know that only God can do, but he's saying these crazy things and we think he's crazy, which in that time, being crazy or being demonic, would have been unclean and pure, not virtuous.

[17:57] But they could see that there was something unique about him because of the things he was doing that only God could do. my ability to discern between what is true and what is false is an indication of my spiritual condition.

I can't love the truth if I can't discern between light and darkness. I have to know the difference. Blaise Pascal once said, truth is so obscure in these times and falsehood so established that unless we love the truth we cannot know it.

And part of recognizing the light from the darkness is that we have to accept our darkness.

I have to accept my darkness in proportion to what is there in relation to my spirituality and my current level of spiritual growth.

Am I being appropriately self-critical? Now when I say this I don't mean being harsh on yourself and saying I'm a worm I'm worthless that's not what I'm talking about.

[19 : 13] I'm talking about appropriate self-critical examination. We're able to acknowledge the areas in our lives where we're not they have not maybe perhaps reached maturity.

And call it what it is. Don't try to hide. Don't try to shy around behind it. But just let it be what it is so that we can bring it into the Lord's presence and let him do his work.

Verse 20 for everyone who does wicked things and does not come to the light lest his work should be exposed. Observe that this is addressed to single individuals.

The original states in verse 18 the believer or the believing one the one who believes and in verse 20 all practicing evil all evil practicers you might say.

In verse 21 the one who practices truth these are personal and what's important about that is to realize that in the Old Testament era sometimes when we read the prophets in the Old Testament a lot of the judgments that were mentioned were always focused on the leaders of the nation or on the nation as a whole not really addressed to individuals but here we find that it's the one who believes the one who does not believe the one who practices wicked things the one who practices truth and we spoke earlier about the literal language of every believer and here we have a sense in which that's used where we have everyone is in the same boat we have we're all born into the basket of condemnation and wrath but in faith we're being transferred from that basket into the basket of eternal life and salvation and rescue and God's taking us from here and putting us here in new birth and as we grow in that salvation and understanding what that means and become lovers of truth ever increasingly every day we see that coming to the light means that

[21 : 41] I personally accept my darkness as the Lord works in me for believers this means not only coming to the light but walking in it what good will it do if I know God judges me personally according to my heart but I can't acknowledge the areas of my life still oriented to darkness God may have freed me from these things a new birth but there are still areas of my life that have not perhaps turned over and those areas I need to become aware of and let the Lord do his thing coming to the light refers to approaching the light so as to let the truth be known I've got a feeling that many of us don't come to worship or don't have a habit of regular prayer and reading of

God's word because we are afraid of what we're going to discover not about God but about ourselves sometimes it's hard to be confronted but it's in those times of God's tender love and mercy that we are most connected to him when we sense the most need and that's when he does his most powerful work in us when we avail ourselves to his mercy in such ways he is a loving father let's learn to let the word humble us before him we hear an awful lot about orientation and identity these days but we are all naturally oriented to darkness and affections outside of Christ I saw a comment on a Christian news post on Facebook with regard to studies showing that gender dysphoria as some call it as a sign of mental illness there was someone who commented on this that all as we would all believe in here all born sinners in need of

God's grace there was a woman who replied someone I believe was probably living in sin well that may be true of you but I know it's not true of me I saw this it broke my heart because it's a fine example of how I think maybe we all approach ourselves sometimes well I'm not really that bad well perhaps that's not true perhaps it's true in general sense the Lord has done his work in us but we're not into comparisons the question is am I walking steadfastly in God's light and am I staying there am I allowing sin to come into my life where I'm not in quite good fellowship with God am I when I know that I'm not in step with the spirit am I going back and saying Lord I've sinned we have to stay up to date with the Lord and get close to him that way and avail ourselves of his great mercy and love my love for the light is renewed daily as

I learn to lay aside my pride that's hard that's the hardest thing about Christian life my love for the light is an attestation to God's work in me look at 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 do I know my role in the history of redemption I humbly receive all of God's grace observe in this passage that

God is the primary actor that anyone would love the light and come to it in faith would be a work accomplished

God loved God gave God sent the son judges and saves in the father's name we are passive we respond to God's activity the only active role I have in this is to believe and even this is in response to God's initiative otherwise I'm being judged I'm being saved and born again I'm the one as prone to avoid having my evil exposed by the light I am the one whose love for truth is evidence of God's work not my own let's recall Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus unless one is born again he is unable to see the kingdom of God birth is an entirely passive act for a child

[27 : 15] I know that two little girls of my own and I was there when they were born you know what I did while I was there I was just there I was amazed at what was happening because it was nature taking its course but it was amazing to behold the birth of children 1 Peter 1 3 describes it as an act that the father performs in being the one who brings forth children John's gospel would also take the same position in chapter 1 verse 13 that God's children are born by God's will in 1 Peter 1 3 it says according to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus

Christ from the dead I wonder if when Lazarus was raised from the dead was he able to hear Jesus while he was dead that he was able to hear and obey Jesus the call at all means that he was given life God was the one who worked to bring that about I once heard a church leader meeting with regard to a pulpit committee to find a new pastor prayed to God Lord we're a good church and we deserve to have a good pastor I remember leaving that meeting literally nauseated at the thought that anyone would go into God's presence and claim an entitlement at all this church was not one that I would say had a deep affection for God's word and in that distance they had from God and his word arrogance had crept in culturally our culture in the western world has seen the same thing happen on a grand scale we have become arrogant we don't need God we've got all these fancy gadgets all this money all this affluence all this military power and I think we all know from the testimony of scripture what is it if you gain the whole world and lose your soul I hope that none of us are listed among those in this room to have a deep affection for God and his word as I conclude and summarize the apostle John encourages us to be children of God who are aware of God's love and judgment and our affection for God's truth who also accept cleansing from our inward darkness through which God works within us through which God's work within us will be evident to his glory as God's children let's remember 1 John 1 5-10 we cannot have fellowship with God if we walk in darkness if there is anything blocking God's light out of my life I need to let that thing as it were come under God's judgment and let him deal with it so that it no longer disconnects me from our father if I do this and we allow the blood of Christ to cleanse us daily as we allow ourselves to become before the throne and be transformed we will remain sensitive to God's truth if I forget this darkness will no longer bother me and God will bring his fatherly discipline into my life it will be fatherly but it will be disciplined so that we can be saved and so we may persevere let's pray father lord we we love your word we we look to it for guidance for comfort but lord more importantly we look to you through the word and in your spirit who guides us and lord let it be that we remain close and sensitive to you we don't let arrogance creep in in very subtle ways that it does lord that we understand that we're not entitled to a thing everything we have is by your grace and by your mercy and lord everything we have is as your children the the the the immeasurable blessings that we can't even fathom what what waits for us in heaven as we the time comes we cross over and what is waiting for us when your son returns and establishes life here on a new earth a new heaven lord that that none of that is anything that we have earned but lord you have transformed us you have worked in our hearts through Jesus through the resurrection the spirit coming in to conform us to your son and that we would love you with all of our being that we would love our neighbors as ourselves although we thank you so much for these things and your continued guidance in Jesus name amen