

## John 3:16-21

### II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (1:19-12:50)

#### D. Jesus and the Passover, Part One (2:13-25)

#### E. The First Discourse – The New Birth, Part One (3:1-15)

#### E. The First Discourse – The New Birth, Part Two (3:16-21)

We pick up today where we left off last week, with Jesus' conversation with the Pharisee, Nicodemus. Here, Jesus introduces the idea of being *born from above* (or *born again*). Having a right relationship with God has nothing to do with our physical birth (e.g., our parents, our genealogy, our ethnicity), but rather has everything to do with whether or not we've experienced a spiritual birth.

Jesus just finished comparing Himself to the account of the bronze serpent in the book of Numbers, saying in vv. 14-15:

*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*

From there, Jesus gives us one of the most well-known verses in the Word of God:

*For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.* (HCSB)

The word *for* gives us a direct connection to the previous statements. If we want to know why Jesus came, if we want to know the reason for the incarnation, here it is! The Father sent the Son to take on flesh and die on the cross for our sins as an expression of His love.<sup>1</sup> Because of His benevolent concern for His creation, because we were otherwise going to perish, the Father sent the Son. The Son is unique in who He is and what He can accomplish in removing the penalty of our sins. As a result, if someone *believes in Him*, they won't *perish but have everlasting life*.<sup>2</sup>

It's also worth noting again that Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Nicodemus would've taken great comfort in his ethnic heritage as a Jew. After all, it was to Abraham and his descendants that the promises were made. However, Jesus here is telling him that God had sent Him for *the world*! He's not just there for the Israelites!

We have that same word *for* beginning v. 17, as well. It turns out that the Father didn't send the Son to *condemn the world*; instead, He sent Him in order to deliver those in the world from their sins (cf. Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10). Sadly, many stop paying attention after v. 17, leading them to view God as one who is chiefly characterized by love, if not solely characterized by love. "The Father sent the Son

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<sup>1</sup>Surely you note that I switched to the Holman Christian Standard Bible for this verse, which properly translates the usual *so* as *in this way*. The Greek word *houtōs* very rarely means *so* as in *so much*, as we would think of it today. The vast majority of times, it is an adverb of manner (*in this way* or *thus*). Think of English usage in the early seventeenth century when the King James was translated; that's one of the ways *so* was used. Or, we could say, *so* was used *in that way*, or *so* was used *thusly*, or *so* was *so* used! Yet, because of how well-known the passage is, later translators didn't feel like they should mess with such an oft-memorized verse. This isn't uncommon!

<sup>2</sup>Many hang on that word *whoever* as if Jesus is teaching that anyone can believe. On the contrary, the sense is that anyone who does believe will have eternal life. He says nothing of our ability to believe here (in fact, He denies our ability to do so, and affirms God's gracious choice later on in the Gospel); rather, He is stating the prerequisite for *everlasting life*. Also, considering the previous passage, no one chooses to be physically born. Those circumstances are well outside our ability to decide or to will. I'd argue that being *born from above* is no different!

because He loves us!” And that’s quite true and cannot be denied. But it doesn’t follow that God will always deal with unbelievers in that way. We see this in v. 18.

*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.*

By believing in Jesus, as an outworking of God’s love and grace, we are not condemned! But, if someone doesn’t believe, they’re *condemned already*. Condemnation is our default (cf. Eph 2:3)! Jesus didn’t come to condemn, because we were already condemned. There’s no special decree needed there; it’s already ours. What we are in need of is a way out from under that condemnation! Not only that, but when Jesus returns, those who didn’t believe in Jesus will reap the results of their condemnation. Now is the time to be delivered from our sins; now is the time to believe. For when Jesus returns, it will be too late (cf. Rev 20:13-15).

Jesus goes on to explain more about what this *condemnation* looks like in v. 19. *The condemnation* is that the Son is here (cf. 1:4-9), and they *loved the darkness rather than light*. What a contrast between the love mentioned in v. 16. God loved us by sending His Son, and we in our natural state – in our flesh – love darkness over Jesus. They don’t want to come to the light, because it means their *deeds should be exposed* (v. 20). We don’t want to admit that what we’ve been doing is contrary to the holiness of God. But for those who were already looking to God, they were eager to *come to the light*, as they were quick to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

That might seem over-the-top. We might use that language for serial criminals, that they simply love committing acts of evil. Yet, we need to come to terms with the fact that the Word of God uses that language to describe all of us. And why shouldn’t it? Jesus (and John later in 1 John) speaks in these absolute terms because the standard for comparison is the absolute holiness and righteousness of God! There are no gradations of righteousness! We are either righteous as He is righteous, or we have fallen short! We need a righteousness outside of ourselves – and Jesus provides it! Will we look to Him as the Israelites looked to the bronze serpent?