

Darkness and Light

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[0 : 00] You may have noticed when it comes to religion in our world, there are pretty much just two types of people. There are the religious people, and there are the not religious people.

There are people who are interested in connecting with their Creator somehow, and there are people who couldn't care less. That's pretty much, if you had to boil it down, what our world consists of.

And you might be one or the other, but it doesn't really matter which one you are. I assume because you're at church, you probably fall more on the religious side. But, you know, I'm not going to assume that necessarily for everyone.

You never know. Maybe you were dragged here, kicking and screaming against your will, and you can't wait for it to be over. But it doesn't matter, because the Bible has something to say to you this morning, no matter which one of those you are.

And especially this part of John that we're looking at. It has something to say. It has a challenge for both the religious and the non-religious types of people in our world.

[1 : 04] So last week, if you were here, you would have seen that the Bible has a lot to say to the religious types of people, you know. Jesus has this conversation with Nicodemus, who's a very religious type of person.

He's kind of the most religious type of person you could get. And despite that, Jesus showed him that being religious doesn't actually impress God at all. This is a big shock for Nicodemus, and maybe a shock for you as well.

And his reason was because unless there's a change in our hearts, unless there's an internal change, which Jesus calls being born again, then religion and all the external trimmings don't mean a thing.

And it's a very important truth. Ever so important for people who are used to coming to church and being religious. It's important for us to hear. We need to get this truth that being religious doesn't impress God.

And that was last week. That was the passage we looked at. But this week, we go on to see this idea of being born again explain in more detail. And we discover something else. We discover why it's not just something for religious people to get.

[2 : 09] See, being born again is something that everybody needs, whether they know it or not. It's something that every person you meet needs.

Every person that you know. Everybody that you rub shoulders with in the coming week. Whoever they are, no matter whether they're interested in God or not. Whether they're religious or not. They need to know about being born again.

And there's at least two reasons in this passage why this is a truth that everyone in this world needs to know. So let's look at what they are.

Firstly, the first reason why everybody needs to know is because everyone is in trouble. Look at verse 18. Whoever believes in him, that's Jesus, is not condemned.

But watch this. Whoever does not believe stands condemned already. Now let's think about what that's saying for a minute. You see, when we read this passage, when we read through John 3, the second half of John 3, you know what?

[3 : 10] We tend to stop and focus on what? John 3, 16. The famous verse. Probably the most famous verse in the Bible. Because it's all about God's love for the world and how he sent his son so that we may not perish but have eternal life.

It's probably the first memory verse you would have learned at Sunday school. But what we need to do when we read John 3, 16, just like any other verse in the Bible, is look at the context and stop

and ask ourselves, well, why is it that we perish in the first place?

You know, this verse, John 3, 16, is all about the solution for the problem. But we won't really appreciate it unless we understand the problem. And the problem is that we perish. We die. Have you ever asked why that is? It seems a silly question. Of course we die. That's just part of life. Everybody dies. But why? Why do we die? You know, as opposed to what we think, death is not actually natural.

It's not just the circle of life. It's not meant to be. And anyone who has lost a loved one knows that. And many of you, I know, have lost loved ones to death.

[4 : 20] You know firsthand the destruction and tearing apart of relationship that death causes. You know that death is not meant to be because God created us to live, not to die.

And so why do we die? Well, the Bible says right here, verse 18, because we are condemned. We are condemned. Everyone is condemned by default.

Now, what does condemnation mean? Well, it comes from the word damnation, which is from Latin. It means to suffer loss. And so what that means is that we have already, by default, suffered loss. We have lost. We are losers as human beings. That's what the Bible tells us here. You and I are losers. Because we have lost life.

We have lost the right to live. That's why we die. Every single one of us has lost the right to live forever. From the moment we're born, all of us are under a death sentence.

[5 : 20] It's just a matter of time. We're on death row. We're dying from the moment we take our first breath. Because, verse 18 says, irrespective of whether we're religious or not, whether we care about God or not, we are condemned.

What you think about God doesn't change the fact that you are under a death sentence. But why are you under a death sentence? It seems a bit unfair, doesn't it, to say that people are born condemned.

That from the moment they're born, they're already under a death sentence before they have any say in the matter, before they could do anything. And lots of people say, well, that's a completely unfair doctrine to say that, that we're born sinners, that we're born condemned.

But let's get real for a minute. Every child ever born is born into circumstances that they have no control over. A child born in poverty in West Africa didn't choose to be born into that circumstance. They inherited that circumstance from their parents, who inherited it from their parents, etc. We all, whether we like it or not, inherited certain circumstances from our parents.

[6 : 27] Some people inherit good circumstances. I heard earlier this month, Prince William and Princess Kate, from England, by the way, if you don't know who I'm talking about, announced that they were expecting their third child.

They really are being productive, aren't they? Making new royals. Oh, and by the way, according to the papers, Princess Kate is apparently suffering from a pregnancy complication called Hyperemesis Gravidara.

Sounds serious. Sounds serious. But then I looked into it, and it's just a fancy word for bad morning sickness. But of course, a British royal doesn't get morning sickness. No, no, they get Hyperemesis Gravidara.

It's much more posh. But shame, I do feel for her, because I was born into the circumstance of being a male, and I will thankfully never suffer from that. Anyway, the point is, when that royal child is born earlier next year, it will inherit the circumstances of its parents and all the titles and privileges that go with it, even though it never had any say in the matter, because that is how life is. That's true of every single person. We are all born inheriting the circumstances of our parents, whether we like it or not, and that is true spiritually as much as it is physically.

[7 : 46] We inherit the spiritual circumstances of our parents as they inherited from their parents and them from their parents all the way back to our first parents, which we read about in Genesis. And the spiritual circumstance that we've all inherited is one of condemnation.

We are condemned already before we can do anything about it, and that is the fact of the matter. That is the fact of life, whether you think it's fair or not. And my job is not to defend its fairness. My job is to tell you the score. My job is to tell you how it is, what the Bible says is the fact of life. Not defend or debate the fairness of it.

You know, if a truck was bearing down on you, we were driving in a car, and a truck was coming head on to you in the wrong side of the road, in your lane, that's not the time to tell me and complain

how unfair it is that the truck is in the wrong side of the road.

No, no, that's the time to do something about it, whether or not you think it's fair. And the Bible is telling you and me that death and judgment are coming because all people are under condemnation from God, and that is a fact.

[8 : 53] And if you're still not convinced, then next in this passage, we're given some indisputable evidence for the fact that we're all under condemnation. How do we really know people are under condemnation?

Well, look at the next section of verse 18. Because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. That is proof. Not believing in Jesus is not what causes condemnation.

We're condemned already because we're sinners, because we've rebelled against the rule of God in our lives, and we've broken His laws, all of us. That's why we're under condemnation. Oh, by the way, I've often been asked, thinking about this, I've often been asked, What about the innocent tribesman on the remote island who's never heard of Jesus, never had a chance to respond to Him?

You don't mean to tell me that He'll be punished for that, do you? Well, no, He won't. He'll be punished for His sins against God. You see, the fact is that innocent tribesman is not innocent. There's no such thing as an innocent tribesman, because the Bible says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, which His conscience reminds Him of anyway, even without a Bible. He is already condemned. But it's those who do hear about Jesus and reject Him, that in doing that, don't begin to be condemned there, but they actually prove that they are already condemned.

[10 : 17] That's what this verse is saying. People's reaction to Jesus is proof of the circumstance that they're already in, which is condemnation under God.

Because of what the next few verses say. Have a look in your Bible from verse 19. So, this is an illustration of this principle. And it's a very important illustration.

This is the verdict, it says. Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

Of course, it's talking, as John reminded us earlier, as we sang in that song, Jesus is the light who's come into the world. But how do we know that people are under condemnation?

Well, in how they respond to that light. How they respond to Jesus. Like someone who wants to stay in the darkness responds to the light when it's come. And our natural inclination as sinners is to stay in the dark.

[11 : 18] In that way, actually, we're not unlike cockroaches. It's one of the small pleasures that a pastor gets to call his congregation a bunch of cockroaches.

No, I'm joking. But think about it. I mean, the illustration stands, doesn't it? Have you ever noticed how cockroaches react when you turn the lights on? Eh? You know, they're quite happy lurking around in the darkness.

But the moment you turn the light on, they scurry away and find the darkest little recess they can to get away from the light. Well, you know what? The Bible says we are like that. The Bible says we are like cockroaches.

When the Son of God arrives in this darkness on earth, and when we look and compare ourselves to Him, and we evaluate ourselves in light of the truth He brings us, and see how sinful we really are.

When we see how our motives and thoughts and words are far more evil than we tend to think. When we look at Jesus, you know what we do? We want to get away from Him. We don't want to hear it.

[12 : 20] Because that means we have to change. Because it challenges our lives. And we don't want to hear it. So people don't want to hear about Jesus because hearing about Jesus shows them themselves.

We'd rather stay in the dark, wouldn't we? We'd rather cover up our sins. We'd rather come to church and smile and pretend like we're good people and be upstanding members of the community.

As long as we don't want to hear about our sin. As long as we don't have to hear about condemnation. As long as we can pretend like our sins aren't there. Then we're fine.

And that is actually why people ignore Jesus. Even people who come to church ignore Jesus. They can ignore Jesus. You can sing songs. You can hear.

You can be affirmed what a decent person you are because you got up early on Sunday morning. But you can ignore Jesus. You can hear a preacher preach about what he says. You can ignore him because you can go away and not do what he says.

[13:17] And according to Jesus, the real reason people ignore him is not because they're not interested in him or they think what he says is not relevant. But it's because they want to stay in darkness.

Verse 20. They will not come into the life for fear that their deeds will be exposed. That's why your friend doesn't want to hear about Jesus, by the way.

Because when she hears the truth about Jesus, she'll need to hear the truth about herself as well. And that's one thing she doesn't want to do. You know, all those people you thought aren't interested, you thought you couldn't break through because they just have no interest in religion. It's not that. It's because they're dead scared of hearing about Jesus. They don't want to hear it. For fear that their deeds will be exposed. And she might not even know that's the reason.

You know, people often have a resistance to Jesus without knowing why. Have you seen that in our culture? In our world? There's a reason that Jesus' name is used as a swear word and not other religious figures.

[14:18] Have you noticed that? I mean, you don't hear someone in traffic shouting, Mohammed, man! Or what do you think you're doing? Dalai Lama! You know, you don't hear that.

You only hear Jesus Christ. Why do people who have no interest in religion still make a point of dragging the name of Jesus through the dirt? I'll tell you why.

It's because they're threatened by Him. Because He is the light who's come to expose their darkness. But that's not how everyone reacts.

Look at verse 21. It goes on to say, Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, So that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done through God.

Through God. That's a better translation, by the way, than the modern NIV, if you had that, Which says, Being done in the sight of God. But, more accurately, the original talks about being done in God, being done through God.

[15:14] And what it means is that those who are willing to admit the truth about themselves, Those who are willing to take on the light of Jesus, And admit what they truly are, deep down inside, Difficult as that is, When they do that, even they can't take any credit for the good that they do, Because the good that they have done is done through God.

There is nothing valuable in and of themselves. And that is the testimony of all true Christians. That's why they came to Jesus. Not because they were good enough to be Christians, But because they were bad enough to be Christians.

Have you come to that point of realizing you are bad enough to be a Christian? Have you come to that point of realizing you are bad enough to come to Jesus? Because you know, it's only when you realize how truly condemned and bad and wicked you are, That you will come to Jesus for salvation.

But you see, the point is, no matter how a person responds, In this passage, No matter how a person responds to Jesus, Positive or negative, It will prove that they are, by default, under condemnation.

Either they will ignore Him, proving that they want to carry on living with their sin, Or they will submit to Him, proving that they realize they need forgiveness for their sins, But either way, they show themselves to be sinners and under condemnation, Because that is what we all are, and we need to face that fact.

[16:35] But that's not all. Because secondly, Jesus is relevant to all people, Not only because everyone is in trouble, But because everyone has a way out of trouble. Everyone has a way out.

And this is the good news. But I've spent so much time on the bad news, So that you understand why the good news is good. You see, once we understand the problem, That we are all under condemnation, It then gives new significance to John 3.16, doesn't it?

For God so loved the world. What, this world? Us? Those who are under condemnation? Those who are wicked sinners? Yes. He loved that world, That He gave His one and only Son, That whoever believes in Him, Shall not perish, But have eternal life.

And so we've learned already, That we're all born into a circumstance, A state of condemnation, But that's not all. We are also, All born into a state, Of being loved by God.

Because God loves to an extent, Everything that He's made. Now this is not talking about, The special covenant love, That God has for His chosen people.

[17 : 46] That is different. This is a broader desire, That God has for the well-being of His creation, And everything in His creation, Including you and me. Psalm 145 teaches this.

It says, The Lord is gracious, And compassionate, Slow to anger, And rich in love. The Lord is good to all. He has compassion, On all that He has made.

You see, It's for that reason, That He sends rain, And sunshine, On even the wicked. It's for that reason, That He keeps the earth, In orbit around the sun. It's for that reason, That He maintains the seasons, And provides air to breathe, And provides food from the ground.

Because He loves His world. Even though we fail to love Him. That is the love of God. And this is mind-boggling, If you think about it, That God decided to love you, Before you could ever love Him. In fact, When you were His enemy, Under His condemnation, He still chose to love you. That's why, by the way, He's delaying, As much as possible, The final day of judgment, When all will suffer, Their condemnation, Will stand before, The judge, He's delaying that, As long as possible.

[19 : 04] Why? Because He loves this world, And He loves the people in it, And He wants to give them a chance, He wants to give them a way out. Now, if we didn't understand, That we were under condemnation, Then John 3.16, About God's love for the world, Would be nothing special.

It would be, You know, La-di-da, Same old, Same old, Yes, God loves us, Of course He loves us, That's His job, isn't it? That's what people assume. People assume, That God is kind of this, Fuzzy grandpa in the sky, Whose job is just to love everyone.

But it's not. You see, The fact that we are sinners, Under God's condemnation, Means that God's job is to judge us, God's job is to punish us, Which is the right thing to do, Which is what universal justice demands, Which is what God's justice demands, The fact that He still loves us, Is absolutely amazing.

He didn't have to. And that's why, A person can only understand, God's love properly, If they understand, The depth of their own sin, First. Sometimes people complain, That we talk too much, About sin and judgment, And condemnation.

Not, We don't talk enough, About the love of God, Apparently. But don't you see? Don't you see? Unless you understand, The depth of your own sin, Unless you understand, The eminence of your condemnation, You will never fully understand, How amazing and unexpected, The love of God really is.

[20 : 31] That's why we talk about sin. It is so amazing, That He demonstrated it, In this way, By giving His son, To a world who, He knew would hate him, And kill him, And yet through that death, Jesus achieved, The very purpose, For which He came, Which was to take, Your condemnation, To take the condemnation, Of all who believe, So that we can have, Eternal life, That we never deserved, And it's only when, We realize, That we never deserved, What God gives us, That we truly, Can sing, What we sang, Amazing love, Oh what sacrifice, And it's only when, We truly understand, The depth of our sin, That we can sing that, With passion, With heart, And I don't think, Lots of people do, I mean I was there, Earlier when you sang that, You know what I heard?

Amazing love, I want sacrifice, Seriously, It saddened me, And I hope, I hope that if nothing else, This sermon, Has helped you to see, That that love really is amazing, It's not something we can ignore, It's not something that we can just, Take for granted, It's not something we can just assume, We have no rights to it, We never did, It is amazing, Because of the death of our sin, Because of what Jesus did, For you, And me, And not only did Jesus, Do that for you, He is the only person, Who could do that for you, He is the one and only son, More literally, The one of a kind son, That's what it means, He is uniquely qualified, To take your condemnation, For you, Uniquely, No one else can, And that is why, You need to come to him, No matter who you are, This morning, No matter if you're religious or not, No matter if you're interested in this or not, No matter if you want to be here or not,

You need to come to Jesus, And that's what, John the Baptist realized, In the next story we read, Which is not randomly here, It's here for a reason, See what was happening, In the passage that Penny read for us, More and more people were following Jesus, Which meant that few were following John, Who had this flourishing ministry, And John's disciples started to get a little concerned, About this competition, So they told John, They complained to John, You know what he

said?

He said, Let them go, Let them go, The whole point I've come is, So that people will realize who Jesus is, And go to him, You see, John knew that Jesus is the light, And not John, John knew that no matter how well he preached, Or how many followers he got, He is not able to give them life, He is not able to solve their problem, Of being under the condemnation of God, Only Jesus is able to do that, And so John was more than happy, For people to leave his ministry, And go to Jesus, Sure, He wouldn't have sold many books, On church growth strategy, That's for sure, But still, He stands as an example, To all of us, Who are involved in ministry, In some way or another, In that, If we're not directing people away from ourselves, Towards Jesus, As the only way to life, Then we have failed, If we're relying on our programs, And our teaching, And our, You know, Social media campaigns, And our building,

And our music, To change people's lives, We have failed, And if you're not, In a church, That directs you away from itself, Towards Jesus, Then change churches, Because, The church can't save you, The preacher can't save you, Religion can't save you, And the wisdom of men can't save you, Programs and courses and books can't save you, Only Jesus can save you from condemnation, He alone is the light, And so are you ready to, Step into that light, Difficult as it might be, Are you ready to admit that you're a sinner, And that you need Jesus, Are you ready to admit that you are a loser, Without Jesus, That you are a loser, That you have lost, Already, The right to life, Because you're under condemnation, But Jesus has come to take that condemnation for you, And then are you willing to obey that life, Without compromise, Just as much as you'd obey the word of a rescuer, Come to take you out of a burning building,

[25 : 01] You wouldn't sit, And go to the rescuer, Well thank you for that advice, I'll take it into consideration, I'll maybe try to put it into practice, In this coming week, No, When the rescuer comes, And the building is falling apart around you, You listen to what the rescuer says, You do not hesitate, Jesus has come to take you out of something, Much worse than a burning building, He's come to rescue you, From eternal condemnation, So it is even more important, To obey everything he says, Without hesitation, Will you do that?

Will you open the Bible? Will you gather with other Christians? So that we can together, Learn and encourage each other, To obey Jesus, And to live in the light, Of his truth, Because, Whoever believes in the Son, Verse 36, Has eternal life, But whoever rejects the Son, Will not see life, For God's wrath, Remains on them, That's how this passage ends, And it's no mistake, That the passage that begins, With describing God's love, For the world, Ends with reminding us, Of God's wrath, For those who reject, His Son, Because at the end of the day, There are only two types of people, In this world, But it's not so much, The religious and the unreligious, The two types of people, In this world, Which everyone falls into, One of these categories, Is, Those who believe in the Son, And those who reject the Son, Those who are in the light, And those who are in the darkness, Make sure you know, Which one you are, And if you are in the light, By God's grace, Ask yourself, What are you doing for those, You know, Who are still in darkness, What are you doing for those, That you will see, This week, And know that they are still in darkness, Because they need to hear about Jesus, Far more, Than they know, Are you going to tell them, Are you going to invite them, To church, To a church that, Directs them to Jesus, Which I hope we do, Let's pray, For God's help, To do that, Yes Lord God, We thank you for displaying, Your undeserved, Unexpected love, For sinners like us, By sending Jesus to die, Sending your, One and only, Beloved Son,

To die for us, Who didn't deserve it, Lord help us to realize, How amazing your love truly is, Help us to obey Jesus, As we live in the light, And Lord give us, Compassion for those, Who are still under condemnation, Who are still in the darkness, Help us not to be quiet, Because there is a way out, But they need to hear that way out, Help us to tell them, Lord remind us, That we might be the only people, In their lives, Who know the way out, That Jesus has come to give us, Help us also to be bold, Not just to talk about, The love of God, But to talk about, The wrath of God, Help us Lord, To tell people about, The realities of sin, And condemnation, So that, They will take the way out, That Jesus offers, And we pray, As we go into this next week, That your power, Your presence, Would be with us, Guide us, In how we live, And guide us in the words we say, In Jesus name, Amen. Amen.