

This week we will be continuing in the discourse of Jesus and Nicodemus from John chapter 3. Last week Matt took us through the first 15 verses of the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus and told us of what it means to be born again and have life in the name of Jesus. I want to call to mind verses 14 and 15 from last week. They read ¹⁴ **And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,** ¹⁵ **that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (Jn 3:14–15. ESV)**

As Matt mentioned last week, we must look to Jesus for life and rely on him alone for salvation. For if we do not set our gaze upon him, we are doomed to separation from God and subject to the wrath that is to come. He told us a beautiful story of what it means to believe and today we will continue in the journey of looking at what it means to believe that Jesus is the Christ, The Son of God.

John tells us in chapter 20 the reason he wrote this gospel and it is the theme of our study through the book as well.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (Jn 20:30–31 ESV)

As we walk through the text today, I want you to keep this verse in mind. John tells us that Life comes from believing and believing is the central message from our study today. I want to look at what belief really looks like in relationship with Jesus through the lens of John's Gospel. It is my prayer that through God's word today, we will know just a little better what it means to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and have life in his name.

If you have your Bible, you can turn to John 3:16, and we'll pick up there in a bit.

Upon hearing the reference to John 3:16, you are probably instantly transported to vacation bible school in your elementary years if you grew up around the church, or you may remember the first time the gospel of Jesus Christ was shared with you. Or, if you are new to church, this may be one of the first times you are hearing this reference.

Whatever your familiarity with the verse may be, statistically, this is the most popular verse in all of scripture. Christians have relied on this verse countless times throughout history to provide a full picture of the truth of the Gospel in one line of scripture. It does this and so much more, and I would like to dive deeply into verses 16-21 this morning so that we might mine just the surface for the gold contained within these verses.

John 3:16 and the surrounding verses lay out John's understanding of who Jesus is, what God has done through Jesus, and why He has done it.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 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.” (Jn 3:16–21 ESV)

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

What is John telling us here? Where does this love come from? Who is this love for?

The love John is speaking of here is not a love that we have gained or deserved by any merit of our own, but a love that God has had and been giving for eternity. A love so intense and complete that we can't comprehend just how deep it is.

*Bruce Milne - If the depth of love is measured by the value of its gift, then God's love could not be greater, for his love-gift is his most precious possession—his only, eternally beloved Son. **He could not love more.**¹*

This is the eternal love of the father for the son and we are invited to partake in this love through Jesus. God loves us with the same love that he has for his most precious Son! Let me say that again. God loves you with the same love that he loves Jesus.

We see confirmation of this in Jesus' High Priestly prayer as he is getting ready to head to the cross.

(John 17:20-23 ESV)

20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, **21** that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, **23** I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me **and loved them even as you loved me.** (John 17:20-23 ESV)

¹ Bruce Milne, [*The Message of John: Here Is Your King!*](#), ed. John Stott, Revised Edition., *The Bible Speaks Today* (London: IVP, 2020), 66.

Who is this love for?

The text gives us the answer. The world. The world is used in various ways throughout the gospel of John and in many instances it has multiple meanings in one use of the word. It could refer to the world in all its entirety, the fleshly worldly kingdom in rebellion against god, or those who do and will believe in Jesus to name a few. It could be every person in the world or a select group of people. We must be very careful in our reading here and take this verse in the context of the greater work of John's Gospel as a whole. Not simply this line alone.

D.A. Carson says- In John's vocabulary, world is primarily the moral order in willful and culpable rebellion against God²

And that is the way we are to interpret John's use of the word here.

God loves his creation but not all will turn to him. Jesus saves those who believe.

In light of that we could read this passage in the following manner.

For God so loved a world that was in complete willful rebellion against him. A world that looked to itself as its highest authority, a world that has no concern for the things of God or his ways, a world that would spit in his face, a world completely dead in their sin. That he sent the most important, precious, loved, beautiful, powerful, wise, mighty, honorable, glorious, and blessed possession he had that it might be saved.

This description of love is totally counter to anything we could conceive on our own and truly shows us the heart of God. *To quote Milne again - It is against the background of the wickedness of the world, even more than its vastness, that God's love shines out most gloriously.³*

² D. A. Carson, [*The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 17.

³ Bruce Milne, [*The Message of John: Here Is Your King!*](#), 66.

Is that not humbling? We were utterly destitute as a part of the world in rebellion and could not love God on our own. In 1 John 4:9-10 John again says **In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** (1 John 4:9-10 ESV)

The doctrine of salvation that is presented by John is wholly God-centered and points singularly to Jesus as the means for salvation and justification. It is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that we are saved not by works so that no man may boast. The glory is God's alone.

This is Ephesians 2. Paul is speaking to the church in Ephesus about the love of God for us.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:1–10. ESV)

God sent Jesus because he loves Him and He Loves us. The ultimate sacrifice of God, sending his son as a man in human flesh to live the perfect life and die the death we deserved to die on the cross and raising him to life because he was totally satisfied with Christs sacrifice and seating him at his right hand was so that we may behold the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ.

What does it mean to have life in His name? It means we believe this. And we behold this.

We were DEAD. We had no hope. We were buried under the sin of Adam and ourselves and there was absolutely nothing we could have done to seek, call after, look to, or reach for God.

But God, because of the GREAT love with which He loved us! gave us the gift of life and pulled us from the grave so that we can have life with him forever beholding his glory and praising father son and spirit for eternity.

There cannot be reconciliation without conflict and there cannot be redemption without a fall. The rest of this section of scripture goes on to show us the alternative to Living in this love and believing in Jesus.

Verse 17 - 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. ¹⁸ 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.

Again, we were dead, condemned under the weight of our sin to perish. God's purpose is not for us to perish, but that we would have life in His name. However, as we see in these verses, those that do not believe stand condemned already because of their unbelief. Jesus did not come to heap condemnation upon those already condemned. He came to save those the Father gave to him. The necessary consequence of his coming was condemnation being made apparent in the rejection of Jesus by those who do not believe, especially those who thought they were following God. Why would anyone reject Jesus? The rest of our text today sheds light on that.

Verse 19 - **And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹But 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.**"

We see here references back to the introduction to John. **⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (Jn 1:4–5 ESV).** The light of Jesus is not merely a light of salvation, but also a light of judgement for those that do not believe. Like a lighthouse beaming through a storm guiding a ship to safety we as believers look to Jesus as the light of hope and salvation. Our sins are laid bare in this light and we live out of grace and faith in Jesus knowing that that is no longer who we are and our sins have been forgiven.

However, those who do not believe see it as a search light seeking to expose their sin and they hate it and run for any crevice or crag to crawl into and hide from the exposing light of God's judgement. Verse 20 **²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.** We hide because we are afraid of our sins being

exposed. We say no i'm good without Jesus. I can handle my own I can take care of my own sins. But we know that is false and there is truly no answer for what we will do with our sins. When the rock is overturned, and it will be as none can escape death, those that do not believe are exposed before the light of Jesus and are found lacking and cannot stand.

Psalm 139 reads

Where shall I go from your Spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. (Ps 139:7–12 ESV.)

You cannot hide from the one that created you. He knows our every being. He is aware of it all. There is no point in hiding.

Knowing this, we seek him, we look to his light, for salvation is from Him alone and he is our only hope. The gift of salvation is open to the world - that believes in him.

You cannot have one without the other. In order to be saved to life we must be saved from death and that is the wrath of God and eternal separation from Him. Darkness is reigning in this present world but we have the guiding light of Jesus to lead us through. And when we follow his light we too become lights reflecting him and bringing his kingdom to bear here and now. He has given you eyes to see his light, seek him and show others too.

In light of all of this, what does it mean to Believe and by believing have life in his name?

It means we know we are sinners and we know the sacrifice God has made to make us right with him again. It means we see the immense love he has for us. It means we seek him with all our heart and all our lives and daily we confess our sins because we know he is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. It means we evaluate our priorities in life and ask ourselves am I bringing glory to God in my life? Am I witnessing to the immeasurable gift that I have been given? Am I loving others out of the love that God has for me. Am I following the light of Jesus?

Most of us are comfortable in our lives. I know I was. Content to know that I was saved, I had prayed a prayer and I was trying to live a good life, but with no real relationship to the Father. Not seeking his kingdom daily. Not bringing his truths to bear on every part of my life. Some of you may know our story, but after Chelsea and I came to college we began a long season of spiritual dryness and separation from the church. A few years into college we were married and a few years after graduation Jasper was born. Up to this point we had been carrying on with life with no real concern for the kingdom of God. Soon, We realized we were struggling. Our family was a few hours away and we had no real community in Auburn. The Lord in his kindness began to draw us back. We both felt the conviction and knew we needed Christian community. We finally gathered the courage through the Lords help and made it to the back row of a small church plant meeting in a lutheran church building on Sunday evenings. Through the love shown to us from God's people we were drawn into community and back into church. We began serving, we slowly moved out of the back and into the midst of the church. The Lord had opened our eyes to life in the local church. Looking back now I can see how he was preparing us and leading us every step of the way to the point that I am standing in front of you now telling this story. When we surrender to God, he uses us for bigger things than we can ever know. While we aren't all called to pastoral ministry, we are all called to walk in the good works he has prepared beforehand.

Chelsea and I were longing for the light of Jesus but hiding from shame and fear. Oh they don't want us there since we've been out of church for so long. What kind of Christians are we? How can we show our faces in church again?

There is no fear in love. Truly understanding the love God has for us means stepping out in faith and saying here I am with all my scars and defects and I take you at your word and BELIEVE that I am a new creation and I will walk in the Good works you have prepared for me because You know the plans you have for me and you will see me through. Beloved we are not alone. We are quick to fall into the American way of pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps and making our own way, but that is not the way of the kingdom of God. We need HIM. He is our refuge and strength, a helper who can always be found in times of trouble. We are not alone. You are not alone. His light is there upon the hill guiding you through this life.

His church is there to lift you up and carry you into the good works he has prepared beforehand. You just have to come in and sit down on the back row and trust God.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

My question today is do you believe?

What does that belief look like?

Do you believe that God did what he has said he's done and everything that comes with that?

Do you believe that he has prepared the good works for you to walk in?

Do you believe that the love he has for you is the same love he has for Jesus?

Do you believe that he is worth it?

So what does it mean to have life in His name?

It means we Believe these things and live out of them. We are spurred on to love radically and seek Jesus every day. He is not far and his spirit is within us. Everything we do, every step we take he is with us and we are too quick to forget that and the enemy uses every means to distract us.

I question myself and my worthiness. Who am I to proclaim the word of God. Who am I to try to love people like Jesus loves. How can I in my brokenness bring the Kingdom of God to bear on this earth now? What if I mess up?

But I must remind myself Jeff He has called you, he has loved you, he has equipped you and he forgives you. He has prepared the good works beforehand. We only have to walk in them and he is there holding our hand guiding us as we go.

What lies do you hear whispered in your ear? What falsehoods do you battle with that keep you from living like you believe? When you hear those whispers remember

1 Peter 5:7 He is our loving father who cares for us. We cast our anxieties, fears, and doubts upon him.

I encourage you to seek his presence daily. Converse with him, cry out to him, rejoice with him, mourn with him. Jesus listens and hears better than anyone else can. We must live life out of that relationship. Don't stop at simply admiring the great love he has for us, but seek a deeper relationship with him in light of that love.

God is accessible to us through Jesus and he is not far off. He is as real and as near as the person sitting right next to you if not more.

To quote Dallas Willard, “Now, when you pray, Jesus will walk right up to you and he will listen to you.”

Jesus is not just some historical figure he is living and seated at the right hand of the father. He has defeated sin and death is no more for those in Jesus.

But... Most of us pray and live like he is just part of history. Do you realize that we believe that a dead man was raised to life. Why is it so hard for us to believe that he is near? When we pray we must believe that he is there listening. I am beginning to learn what it is like to take him at his word and trust him with every area of my life. I pray you will too. That you will cast your burdens upon him and know that he cares for you. That's what it means to believe and in believing have life in the name of Jesus. It means we recognize that he is here. That he does care for us and that he guides us every step of the way through life in the light he gives. We must take hold of his promises and live in them, looking to him, depending on him, and seeking him in every area of your life.