

Avoiding Hell – Part 2

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John 3:19-21
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Hell is a real place. It is as real as the room you are in right now. It's a real place because Jesus said it is, and Jesus makes no mistakes. It's uncomfortable, yeah. Scary, absolutely. And do we spend much of our modern lives doing everything we can to avoid stuff that we don't like, that makes us uncomfortable, that we don't agree with? Yeah, we do that. We organize everything to make sure that I only hear the songs I want to hear. I only see the news I want to see. I don't see anything else and don't bother me there. I don't like it. Just give me what makes me comfortable and that I already agree with.

Sometimes we need to talk about uncomfortable things though. Just because something is uncomfortable or scary or we don't like it, or we don't agree with it doesn't mean it's not real. Some of the most real things out there are things that we don't like very much. I don't like or agree with murder, cheating, stealing, injustice, but all of that exists despite me not liking it or agreeing with it. And the same is true when it comes to hell.

Hell is a real place, it exists. It's the final destination for billions of eternal souls. And yet one author said, "We want a God without wrath to bring men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministry of a Christ who didn't need to die on a cross." That's what we want. But John chapter three has shown us that's not what exists. John three has been describing hell as perishing forever. Verse 16, "A place where people are constantly dying, but never die. A place where they are condemned." Luke 16 describes this place as a place of torment and anguish where there's no mercy, no comfort, and no hope of escape. Matthew 25 is described with the words, eternal fire and eternal punishment. That's the place where the cursed go after they stand before Jesus and guilty is pronounced over their lives. And that is their final destination, their sentence.

Think about it. A place of never-ending suffering, extreme torment forever and ever. Day and night, month to month, year to year, decade to decade, 10,000 decades to 10,000 decades, without any hope of relief. Every moment, worse than the last in pain and anguish and agony with your soul full of rage, as well as horrific despair and regret all mixed together without any hope that it'll ease up, without any hope of moving God to pity, without any hope of distracting yourself from your pain in misery, without any hope of help or change or improving your circumstances at all forever.

Hell is for devil and his angels, absolutely, but it's also for those who refuse to repent of their rebellion, who refuse to come to Christ and be rescued from hell. Our text today is about why people reject Christ and it's here in the Bible so that people will avoid hell. There's no part of me that takes pleasure in talking about hell, but I get a ton of pleasure talking about how you can avoid it and about how you can help others avoid it too. If we could all be more convinced of the reality of hell, that it's a real place, we would do anything to avoid it. And we would do anything to help those we love avoid it too. Starting in verse 16, this paragraph has been an explanation for what Jesus said to Nicodemus in verses 14 and 15, about why he was going to be lifted up on the cross to die.

The truth is that God looked out at a world in rebellion against him and being moved with compassion gave his only Son, Jesus punishing him for human sin. And he did that to rescue people from the condemnation, from perishing forever as a result of that rebellion. That rescue that salvation is for who verse 15, 16, and 18 say it's for those who trust in Jesus, who believe in him. They don't just know accurate biblical information about Jesus, they don't just accept the information is true. That's not what it means to believe, to believe in him is to trust in Jesus, to commit your life, to commit your life and your death to him.

It's not a one time did that now and I'm good to go kind of thing. That's what I thought it was growing up. I know some stuff about Jesus, I think most of it is true. I prayed a prayer, came to the front, talked to my camp counselor. Hey little Johnny, do you want to go to heaven or hell? I want to go to heaven. Well, that's good because we turned the thermostat up really high inside the service, so it felt like hell in there you don't want to go there, right? No, I want to go to heaven. Okay, pray this prayer. Now you're good to go.

Did that and moved on with my life, secure in my eternal fire insurance. That's not what it means to believe. To believe is a one-time turning to Jesus and turning away from rebelling. It's a one-time act of trust in Jesus to save you from the sins that you that you deserve, to save you from the rebellion to save you from the wrath that you deserve. That one-time decision then is moment by moment lived out for the rest of your life. That commitment remains just like getting married. It's a one-time act of turning from all other options and committing yourself to your one spouse. Then that commitment to be devoted to your spouse, to love her is then lived out daily, constantly in your life. So, God's compassionate love for rebels motivates this rescue from hell. He gave his very best, his only son to achieve this rescue.

Jesus is rejected, tortured, and murdered in order in order to accomplish this rescue, everything has been done. God did all that there was to do out of great love to rescue people so that they would avoid hell. So the question is, why do people still go there? Let's look at verse 19 and this is the judgment. The light has come into the world. We'll stop there. That word judgment shows us that the courtroom imagery from verse 17 still continues. In other words, God has a lawsuit against the world and it's not that they've rebelled against him. He moved in love towards the world because of their rebellion. No, the case that God has against the world is how people respond to his Son. The light has come into the world. That light is Jesus who brought salvation and truth with him. He enters the realm of rebellious humanity.

And even though he's not physically here now the truth in the salvation is still here. So today the door to salvation that he flung open with his death and resurrection, that door is still open. The truth that he taught, that he passed on to his followers, that that when people believe in him, they get through the door. That truth is still being proclaimed to this day. So before we move on from that, let's soak in that truth for a minute. The only Son of God, the light of the world, Jesus came into the world at war with him and he didn't come here to make war. He didn't come here to fight at all. He came to rescue, he came to save. And with that being the case, you should point **#1) *Be humbled that God planned your rescue. Be humbled that God planned your rescue.*** So you were once part of the world, the world at war with God, the world that resists God and wants nothing to do with Jesus. That was once you and me at one time you and me, we didn't understand, we didn't seek after God. We wanted to get away from God. We didn't want anything to do with him. We turned away from him. We didn't do what was right, we weren't trying to please him at all. We lived for self and loved self and lived to get attention for ourselves. We used our mouths to hurt people. We made decisions that hurt people.

We were slaves to various desires, making us disobedient and uncaring about our disobedience. We didn't care that we disobeyed God it didn't matter, it was fun, it was great. Didn't care what it did to others didn't care what it meant to God, that didn't matter at all. And yet in the midst of that, the God of the universe, the only God that there is the God of the Bible, he is a Savior and yes, there's a cosmic plan to rescue rebels that started with God, that's what we've been seeing in John three, where there's a personal plan to rescue you. In the words of Titus 3:4, "He had compassion on you in your sin against him." When you had no hope of rescuing yourself because of your sin. 2000 years ago, he sent his only Son, 30 years later, he gave his only. Son up to die as a sacrifice for human sin on the cross. He planned all of that 3:16. But about 2000 years later, those historical events, the death and resurrection of Jesus, all of that light came to you personally. Maybe it was through a friend, a spouse, or a parent, it was a sermon that you were in person for or online or on a tape somehow. I don't know but you know, however it happened, it happened exactly as God planned that it would.

That light that came into the world and stayed 2000 years ago. It stayed here so that truth about Jesus and salvation that he gives could eventually, after those 2000 years come to you so you would believe, and you would be saved. That God saves sinners at all is incredible, that he takes this planned salvation, this salvation that that began in eternity passed and took it from his throne in heaven and applied it to you, a speck on this massive planet and this massive universe that he would take that and give it to you personally is so incredibly humbling.

It's humbling like when you get a gift from someone and as soon as you open it you know this person really planned this gift out well. This wasn't an afterthought, this wasn't 8:00 PM on Christmas Eve. They really thought about you and what would be the very best gift for you. And they didn't just think about that and get something that wasn't it. They thought about that and they nailed it. They got the exact right perfect gift. Have you ever gotten a gift like that? I I have and it's the kind of gift, it's the kind of care, the kind of thought and planning that when you open it, yes. There's excitement. But right before that excitement, it's humbling. It's *wow* and it's not a wow of like, wow, that's so cool. It's it's a *wow* that drops your chin and goes, *wow*, you did that, you got that, you gave me that!

It's the kind of gift that brings a tear to your eyes. That kind of love is humbling and it's that kind of gift that is the gift of salvation that we've been seeing in John three. So, as you think about all that went into the plan, not just to save sinners in general, but to save you specifically, does it still humble you? Does it still amaze you? Does it still fill you with gratitude? Does it overwhelm you at times? Especially when you finally embrace the idea that you don't deserve it and you could never in a million years earn it, that he saved you, that it wasn't you and God working together to save you, but that he saved you, that you were lost and he found you that you were in danger and he rescued you. When it finally goes from something that you grew up hearing, to I can't believe that I got to grow up hearing about Jesus from from the time I was a baby.

That amazement, that wonder, that kindness, that God would allow you to hear this truth and respond. When it finally goes from information that you you know in your head to a commitment of your life. When you finally get it. Isn't the feeling, isn't the response one of just overwhelming humility. That this holy, perfect, sin hating God would design and accomplish a specific plan to save a sin lover like you from the eternal punishment you deserve for all of your sins against him. That in order to save you, yes, it took the death of his precious Son but that somehow in his wonderful plan for the world, that that message found its way to your heart, and you believed.

That is deeply humbling. And when you think about it, there's really nothing left to say in response to that than than kind of lip quivering thank you.

Well, that's not the response coming from people who are going to hell. Verse 19, this is the judgment, the light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil. And this is the judgment that phrase refers to the case that's being made against people who reject Jesus. What follows in verses 19 and 20 is the evidence. This is the condemnation. This is what they are filling up the cup of God's wrath with. So instead of coming to the light, instead of loving the light, instead of believing in Jesus, who's the light to the world. Notice, instead of all that people loved the darkness. Jesus, coming into this rebellious world, reveals what people really love and live for.

Darkness, that word is everything opposed to Christ. So, if Jesus reveals truth and salvation, the darkness is lies, sin, and rebellion that leads people to spiritual death and notice the text, people love it. The darkness is what they value, hostility, disdain towards Christ or disdain towards God's word and God's ways, they admire people who live like that. It may not look like it on the outside, but that's what they truly are on the inside. It may not be obvious now, but the day they stand before Christ, it'll be obvious. There is something they're holding onto, something they don't want to give up. That word loved by the way in verse 19, same exact word is 3:16, God so loved the world. In other words, sin is what people choose with eyes wide open, sin is what they think is best for them.

This is what drives them. Not love for Christ like the Christian, but love for the darkness. If the light is reality, then the darkness is an illusion. If light is goodness, darkness is evil. And in fact, why do people love the darkness? What does verse 19 say? They love the darkness because their works are evil. They prove their love for the darkness by the lives they live. In other words, how they live and how they treat people, how they how they are when no one's watching, how they are when the people who know them best are watching, that reveals their heart. Their heart of disgust towards God and his truth. It's not their lips, it's their lives that prove it. And then they act out this love for the darkness is seen in verse 20. Everyone who does wicked things hates the light, does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

Why do they sin and do wicked things? The text says why because they hate the light. And because they hate the light, they refuse to come to the light and they refuse to come to the light, the text says why, because they fear being exposed. The hidden things, the unrecognized things will all come out and they know this. So the last thing they want is to be known, that's why Jesus makes them uncomfortable. They feel safe in the darkness. All that is though is a feeling they're not actually safe. They're actually doomed by the darkness that they love so much. And yet they suicidally grip and cherish the darkness. The very thing that condemns them to hell, they're holding onto for dear life. That's why the word wicked there means activity that is worthless. It's good for nothing, it actually destroys them.

But the darkness is an illusion. They believe with all their heart that this is what's best for them because they believe the lie. All of this is true of Nicodemus and the Jewish leaders of his day. That's we're going to see throughout the book of John, but all of this is true of every human being in our day apart from those who believe in Christ, they refuse to come to him to be rescued. They refuse to be saved because they love their sin. They love the rebellion, they love the pleasure of sin, they love the illusion of independence. All of which is pride. They love the admiration, the

self-righteousness the selfishness, they applaud, the rush that sin gives. Some will try to put a show of religion on, but their heart isn't in it.

They're like an actor. They're playing the part of a Christian And they know deep down they're not really Christians. Love for their sin is why people hate the light and don't come to the light to be saved. God loves rebels. He's willing and able to save them. Thank you, I'll keep my sin instead. So, if God plans the rescue of rebels, if he gave his precious only Son up to death to rescue rebels, if he brings people into the environment where they can hear about his love for rebels and be saved, then point #2) ***own it that what you need rescue from is you. Own it, embrace it, believe it. What you need rescue from is you.*** What people need to be rescued from is themselves, they are the problem or more specifically their love for the darkness, their hatred for the truth, their refusal to come to Jesus and be saved from eternal punishment for their sins. That's the problem. It's them, their love for being their own god, their love for rebellion, their love for defiance, the rush it gives, the pleasure it gives, all of it is evil. It insulates people from their own rescue. Colossians 1:21, people's minds are described as "Hostile to God." So the way they think and feel, the way they make decisions is tainted with conflict tainted with with I'm pushing against God. I don't want his stuff in my life. As a result, they do evil things that defy him. Ephesians 4:18 describes their heart as hard, boulder, stonewalls, the light of truth shines into their life and there's simply no effect, it just bounces right off. Instead of melting their hearts, the truth makes their hearts harder against Jesus.

When you were a kid... You probably don't do it much anymore but when you're a kid and you went out to the yard and you saw that big rock and you lift it up because you wanted to do something with it. And what was underneath? Bugs, right? So you lift it up and what do all the bugs do? They scurry away. They retreat back into the darkness. That's a picture of people who refuse to believe, who refuse to give their lives to Jesus. They hear the truth, they feel the weight of the truth. They're struck with how this truth would change their lives and how this truth exposes their lives. But like beetles, they run under the rock. They flee from the light.

Like Adam and Eve fled from God's presence after they sinned, so rebels against God, see the light and try to run and hide back in the darkness. That picture, bugs fleeing into the into the darkness after you lift the rock, could that be you? When you hear about your sin and your need for a savior, does it make you mad? Does it make you uncomfortable? Do you sit there and think I can't wait until he says let's pray because that means it's almost over? You want to run out of here? You want to turn off the live stream because your sin, what you love, you you being the king or queen of your own life, that's being challenged by God's truth and you're... I just adjust don't want that. I don't want to hear that, I'm out. I've seen it almost every week in this series about how to go to heaven when you die. The truth about Jesus, the light shines, and people scurry.

They fidget in their seats. They ignore me on their phones. They talk to their neighbor. They stare at me in rage, or they get up and walk out. They don't want to give up their sin. They don't want to be exposed for who they really are before God. In fact, they love their sin so much that like a man who falls off a ship in the middle of the ocean with a huge belt of gold tied around his waist, you'd rather die than take the belt off. They'd rather go to hell than let go of their sin. Or in this moment, while this text puts a mirror on your life, could you own it? That the real problem, the problem underneath all the other problems is really you, your sin, your dislike, even hatred for the truth.

Can you own that you know you're not really a Christian that everyone who knows you knows it, that the real you is already exposed. Can you own it that your love for sin and self is the problem. Can you own it that your life, the sin you enjoy is what's keeping you from coming to Jesus and being saved? Can you own that this isn't an intellectual thing, well, I just got all these questions. that those questions are really smokescreens because you want to hold onto your sin.

Can you own it that your real problem is not how you grew up or what you grew up in or even what happened to you when you were growing up, that the real per problem is not the person sitting next to you or the person at home while you're here or the one that abandoned you, can you own it that behind all those very real issues is another real issue, an even bigger issue and that issue is you love your sin. You fear being exposed, you hate what the truth has to say about you and that's why you reject Jesus. When you own that, you will see that God has a case against you based on your life and decisions.

That you have no hope of escaping a guilty verdict, that you will be judged, and you will be condemned, and you will go to hell unless you own it. And when you own it, you also see the truth that will set you free. Verse 21, "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." This is a kind of difficult verse to understand so let me just say straight out for the Bible nerds who are looking at that are kind of confused. This is not teaching salvation by doing what is true first, the text actually says, "Whoever comes to the light is at the same time doing what is true." In other words, in contrast to those who love the darkness and hate the light are people who are coming to the light, which is the same as the people in verses 18 and 16 and 15 who are believing in Jesus.

So, verse 21, to come to the light is the same as believing in Jesus. These people, as a result instead of doing evil, they notice they do what is true. They're responding in obedience to the light, they're responding in obedience to the message of salvation. By believing in Jesus, they're doing what God says to do in his word. And as a result of that they now, notice it says there, they they continue to do what is true. Their life is now faithful to the Christ that they believe in. They they put the truth to work in their life. It's people that seek to honor the Lord, who seek to make Jesus look great with their lives. And when that happens, notice verse 21. When that happens, when a person believes and lives according to the truth, the text says it is obvious that God did something already in their lives, that their works are being carried out in God, that God has worked in their heart and the result of that is that came to the light and they're now living in light of the truth.

Their self-centered, sin loving life has been replaced by God centered truth loving life. And if you can look at your life and see that you can be sure that true faith, real trust in Jesus in your life, you can be sure that is there is point #3) ***You recognize your life validates your faith. Your life validates your faith***, not your lips, your life, just as some prove they love the darkness by their lives. So, your actions prove that you believe in Jesus, your life based on the truth, verifies your trust in Jesus.

Light has come into the world in other words, and your life is the evidence, it's the case being made in your favor that you've come to the light, that you love the light, that you believe in Jesus and have been rescued from your sin. What is the proof of that? It's your life. Acts 26:20, we demonstrate our repentance, the text says we from our rebellion and we're trusting in Jesus. The proof of that according to the text, we prove our repentance by our deeds it says. That's the

opposite of Titus 1:16, which describes people who claim to believe in Jesus, "By their deeds they deny him."

True faith in Jesus is called the obedience of faith in Romans 1:5. Because when a person actually believes in Jesus, it produces obedience. John 15:8 puts it this way, doing good works proves that people are followers of Christ. It's the evidence, it's the verification. In other words, when you come to the light, when you believe in Jesus, it proves God has already been at work in your life. It proves your faith in Jesus is genuine. It's validated as the real thing, how? When your life changes. and what does that change look like exactly? What's the opposite of point number two?

You go from hating the light to loving the light. You go from loving the darkness to hating the darkness. You do the truth now, instead of doing evil, you come to the light instead of running from the light. This inner disposition, tendencies, passions, desires that used to be against God's word and despise his ways are replaced by God's spirit who now lives inside of you and causes you to walk in his ways, gives you love for the truth, the desire to live the truth that it's not like I have to do this. No, you get to do it. You want to do it. Instead of scurrying from the light, like a house plant when the sun shines in the house, turning the leaves towards the sun, your life now turns toward the light.

What does that mean? It means your mind wants more light, your heart rejoices in the light. You make decisions that match the light of God's word. You seek to do the truth because you love the truth, you love to live the truth. Like the leaves in the sun, your whole life is now oriented to the light of the world, which is Jesus Christ. He becomes everything, to live is Christ for you. And the truth is salvation found in him, defines everything that you are.

So, does your life validate your commitment to Jesus? Does how you live prove who you are, that you've come to the light, that you are a follower of Jesus. And and we always say this. I always say it, I'm not talking about the perfection of your life because no follower of Jesus is ever sinless in this life. First John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and prove that we're not saved." But like the leaves directed at the sun I'm talking about the direction of your life, which is determined by what you love. And since you've come to the light when you believe in Jesus, now you love the light, now you love the truth and that love for the truth cannot help but be in the words of verse 21, clearly seen coming out of your life.

That 180-degree transformation will always be obvious. It can't help but come out of your life that the whole direction of your life has dramatically changed. Gone from hating the truth and hating the light to loving the truth and light with all of your heart. So, we take a step back and look at John 3verses1-21. You think about it, we have seen what each person of the trinity does to save sinners from their sin. Think about the father plans and directs salvation, he sent the son, verse 17. He gave his Son, verse 16. The Son executes the plan. He accomplishes salvation by his death and resurrection. And then the spirit takes the salvation Jesus accomplished and then applies it to individual people when he gives them new life. When he births them again.

We've seen that people are dead in their sins, unable to please God, don't want to do his will, actually hate his will. They're filling up the cup of God's wrath for their sins, by their rebellion, their hatred for Jesus, their love for their darkness, their disdain for his ways. And what we've seen is that what that shows is that they're under divine condemnation and doomed to hell. And yet maybe more clearly than any other passage in the Bible we've also seen that God loves sinners, that he not only sent his Son Jesus, but he gave his Son up to death on the cross for

sinner also that they would be saved, that they would be born again and that when they are born again, they believe.

And when they believe they avoid hell, have eternal verses life, and go to heaven forever when they die. And the proof that that's real is that they will love the truth, do the truth, and so prove that God has already worked in their lives by transforming their lives. So, it's like an A to Z of salvation, this text, a salvation that starts in eternity passed with the love of God for people he knew would sin against him. And it culminates an eternity future with all who are trusting in Jesus as their savior and Lord. However, if that's you going to be there one day, you're not there yet. And this life that we're in now is a battlefield between God's truth and the world's lies, between the light and the darkness, between perishing and eternal life, where everyone we interact with is on one side of the battlefield or the other.

And both sides are doing their best to flip people from one side to the other. It's the world trying to flip people away from Jesus. And it's the light, the truth, flipping people out of hell. And this text not only exists to expose this reality, but exists to ask which side are you on? And if you're on the side of the light, on the side of Christ, then you, me, it's good that we hear these truths and meditate on them and think about them. That's great, good reminders. But this truth is here so that we will take these truths to others and flip as many people as possible from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Christ.

So that in eternity, there will be people who say, yeah, I'm here because God loves sinners. Yeah, I'm here, I'm not in hell because Jesus died for sinners. But I'm also here because of her. I'm also here because of him. That in the wonderful grace of God, he used that person to speak his truth through the light was shined and the light came on and I believed. That's why we're not in heaven yet, so that until we do, may God use us not just to be lovers of the truth. That is incredibly wonderful, but that our love for the truth will be seen in spreading that to as many people as possible until we all go home. Let's pray.

Father, it is obvious why you have used this passage to save so many millions of people over the centuries. All the distractions that are out there fade away in the light of these truths. And so Father as we're about to leave here and go get lunch or do whatever else we're going to do today, please don't allow us to move quickly away from these truths. Please would you allow us to not only understand these things, but to see all of reality, all the people we interact with in light of these things. We need you for that, we really do. We're prone to wander, so we need your help. We need your grace. So, for every single one of us, take our thoughts, take our hearts, take our affections, and align all of that more and more with this truth today, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.