

Avoiding Hell, Part 1

Jon Benzinger

John 3:16a

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So four straight weeks in John 3:16, and the main thrust of that message is that God is a God of love. John, the man who wrote this book is called the Apostle of Love. He wrote the words, "God is love."

So, If you listen to people talk about God today, they know this. They've received this message that God is a God of love, but how we understand God's love is absolutely critical, see, because God's love is not sappy or sentimental. It's not really about God's feelings at all. God's love is not not passive and it's not permissive either. God being a God of love means this, that he acts and, when he acts, he acts in love by doing what's best, and what was best, according to 3:16, was giving His Son.

Now, there's a dark side to God's love or, better yet, a dark side to why God loves the world, and John's going to bring this truth out over and over and over again. The dark side to God's love is this. The world that he loves, the world of humanity is condemned, and the punishment of awaiting the world is hell.

Our text today, while acknowledging the reality of condemnation, the text is here so that all of us will avoid hell. Every single one of us so that you, that me, that we will all avoid going to hell. I know hell is laughed at as a figment of the imagination of religious elites who want to control people or hell is completely irrelevant because no one's ever going to go there, but Jesus put it this way. John 10... or I'm sorry... Matthew 10:28, "Not to fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Those are Jesus' words. In fact, he talks about hell more than anyone else in the New Testament. He taught that hell is real. He taught that it is very relevant for each and every one of us to avoid, but how? Heaven or hell, one will be the destination of every single person that has ever lived when they die. No waiting room. No purgatory. No soul sleep. No disappearance or annihilation. It's heaven or it's hell. It's eternal life or eternal death for all people.

What we've seen so far in John 3 is that God decided out of great love and compassion to rescue people from eternal death in hell. Let's get a better grasp of this. Look again at verse 17. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world. Notice that "for" at the beginning of 17. That means verse 17 is explaining verse 16, but notice verse 16 also starts with the word "for". That's because verse 16 is explaining verses 14 and 15, so when we put all of that together, why was Jesus given up to death on the cross? Verse 17 explains why by starting with the fact that it was not to condemn the world. Jesus leaving heaven, being born in Bethlehem, in poverty, in obscurity, then rejected, then murdered by crucifixion, all of that was not to condemn the world.

The word "condemned", prominent in these two verses, refers to law courts. It's the word used to declare someone guilty. It's to announce that someone is liable to be punished for crimes he has been found guilty of committing. Well, question, has the world committed any crimes against God? It sure has. The world here means humanity, yes, but this word means humanity in conflict

with God. Rebels, God deniers, God defiers, God haters, people who want nothing to do with God, and that's every single person. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned." 1 Kings 8:46 says, "There is no man who does not sin." Ecclesiastes 7:10 says, "There is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins," and that's the whole world, every people group, every ethnicity, every man, every woman. So to understand our text, so to understand how to avoid hell, first, you must, point #1) ***admit we're all condemned rebels. We're all condemned rebels.*** Admit it. Believe it. Own it. Embrace it.

The sentence of condemnation is the most true thing about every person on the planet today. As rebels against God, humanity stands condemned. Our rebellious world has committed a whole lot of crimes against God, and notice the middle of verse 18. Jesus didn't come here to condemn us. Why? Because we're all what? What does it say? Condemned already. This is humanity's current state of being. This is how everyone starts out, under divine condemnation, and here's the thing. No evidence is going to exonerate us. There's no hope that something we are or something we did or something we're going to do in the future will overturn our sentence of condemnation.

In other words, guilty is guaranteed. Human life, in other words, is like the time between the guilty verdict and the execution. It doesn't seem that way because we don't live in a prison, but that's what it actually is. The charges have been read. The judge has ruled. The guilty verdict has been announced. The gavel has fallen. The sentence is eternal death, in hell. People are simply awaiting the final consummation of that verdict that's already been announced over their lives, which is guilty, condemned. Which means that no one is neutral when it comes to God.

The tragic thing about that is that many people die without ever knowing that they're condemned. That's what evangelism and missions is all about. That's what church is all about. That's what good evangelism and good missions is. That's where it starts, that we're all condemned. This is why this church exists. This is why all of us are not in heaven right now, because people we know are condemned, but God sent His Son to do something about that. Like Jesus sent into the world, you've been sent into your world because the non-Christian world of people you know are condemned. They're lost.

And Here's the thing. You got to help them because what most people think is that, when they die, if they're going to exist after that, they're going to enter a room where there's going to be a scale, right, and there's going to be their good deeds and their bad deeds on a scale. They're just crossing their fingers that their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds because, "I'm a really good person anyway. I'm better than Hitler, so I'm good," but here's the tragic news about this. Your good deeds are never going to outweigh your bad deeds, number one. Which means, number two, there's no question about your guilt. There's not going to be a trial where the outcome is uncertain.

What's going to happen? I don't know. Am I going to make it? Am I not? The evidence is already in. Your fingerprints are on the murder weapon. Your alibi does not check out. The trial is simply to announce to already condemned people this is what your sentence is and this is where you are headed. If they have one bad deed on the scale, one sin, they're hoping that, "Hopefully, my good deeds will outweigh them." The issue is do you have one deed, one bad deed on that scale. If you do, condemned. And, if we're honest, we have numerous, and we're condemned for each and every one of those crimes against God.

You might be you might be like, "Wait a minute, so, one sin means condemnation and hell, seriously?" Yeah, it does. and What we have to realize is this concept of hierarchy of being, so

let me illustrate it this way. If I throw a rock in my backyard and I hit a spider and it explodes in death, you might be like, "dude, that's pretty cool. Do you have a video of that?" You might want to see that, right? I'm excited to tell you, and you're like, "Yeah, watch this," and I show you the video like, "That is awesome." Some of the guys in here, you know what I'm talking about. The women, not so much, but but that's what would happen. But let's say change it from a spider to a cat. Now I know there's not much of a difference between those two, but let's just say let's just say I changed it from a spider to a cat. I throw that rock. It dies. I show you the video. I'm excited. You'd be like, "Okay, you're you're sick." If I changed it from a cat to a dog, which is like an infinite change between those two, if I changed it from a cat to a dog and I show you the video, I'm excited to show you me throwing a rock and killing a dog, you'd be like, "That's not good. That's disgusting. What is wrong with you being excited about that?" If I did the same thing in a video, but it's a human, you'd call the police, and rightfully so.

Now, take the infinite leap from us to God, and you start to recognize that this hierarchy of being a thing, when it comes to God, he is the most wonderful, most perfect, most virtuous being there is so that even one crime against him is enough for eternal hell because that sin is an eternal offense against him. So we we take God and bring him down here and like, "What's the big deal? We get sinned against all the time. We forgive and move on." That's not the God of the universe. The God of the universe is infinitely worthy and infinitely wonderful and infinitely virtuous, so a sin against him just one time means eternal hell. But The dirty little secret is we don't just have one sin on our scale. We have thousands, and if we really are honest, we really understand what sin is, we actually have millions on that scale. Sins against an infinitely perfect being means eternal punishment fits the crime, which also means that our good deeds are never going to outweigh our bad deeds. There's no scale.

I was trying to explain this to my son this past Friday. Good deeds don't cancel out your bad deeds. I was trying to help him think through this, and so I said, hey, if you punch your sister, which he didn't do by the way, but if you punch your sister, that has to be punished even if you keep your room clean right. He's like, "Oh, well." I said, "Here's how it would go, buddy. Thank you for keeping your room clean. Good job. Now, I'm going to punish you for punching your sister because it's right and good for me to punish you for doing that even though you cleaned your room," and and, me even saying that, you're like, "duh, of course, that's not rocket science. That's obvious." Our crimes have to be paid for even though we've done good things. They don't cancel each other out.

It's not complicated, but we we like to complicate it when it comes to God to avoid the reality of our sin and to avoid the consequences. It's not complicated because of our sin. You and I start out with an eternal death penalty hanging over our heads all day, every day. No matter where you go, what you do, what you don't do, who you are, what you've done in your past, what you hope to do in the future, this is us, condemned.

Now, look back at verse 18. We all start out condemned what? Already. That's the dark side. We are condemned, and that's where God's love comes in to send and give His Son to the world. Verse 17, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned." Did you hear that glorious word "not"? Notice, God did not send His Son into the world, but why? In order that the world, this world of rebels, might be saved. Two kinds of people in this text, on the one side, those who are condemned in their sin. On the other side, those who've been rescued from condemnation for their sins. Whoever believes in Jesus, God's son, verse 18, notice, is not

condemned. Jesus did not come here to condemn you. Condemned may be what you are, but it does not have to be final. You can get a stay of execution. You can be eternally pardoned.

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn and crush rebels. He sent Jesus here to be sacrificed, to save sinners from the condemnation that we already exist under. So when it comes to avoiding hell, it's the best possible news, namely, point #2) ***understand God rescues rebels from condemnation.*** That's what God does. He rescues rebels, those who rebel against him. ***He rescues rebels from condemnation.*** That's why in the Bible God is called a savior and a deliverer. That was the idea we wanted when we gave this church a new name. We wanted it to be Redeemer, a title for God, a title for the savior to say he is a God who redeems and saves. This is what he does out of love for sinners. He saves them. He rescues them from condemnation, from his own wrath against them for their sins, for their crimes against him. He sees rebels, has compassion on them with no hope of rescuing themselves, and he loves them by taking the initiative to send His Son and give him over to death, lifting him up on the cross all so that rebels will be rescued.

This is why Jesus is called, John 4:42, the Savior of the World, not just the Jewish people, not just some people, but all people everywhere, even the most wicked of people. John 5:34, Jesus words are spoken so people would be saved. John 10:9, he is the door. He is the access to salvation from condemnation, and this would've been blowing Nicodemus' mind because the popular belief in Jesus' day was that when the messiah would come, he would rescue and save just the Jewish people and execute the world, execute all the rest of the people, the massive humanity, all the non-Jews. He would judge them for their rebellion, their idolatry, their wickedness. That's what he was coming to do, but all the way back in Genesis 3, Genesis 12, all the way back to the very beginning, it was always God's goal to save the world, to rescue sinners against him.

John 12:47, Jesus did not come to "judge the world, but to save the world." Now, not only did God send His Son to save the world, but by lifting him up on the cross. that means that God saves the world by condemning His Son instead in their place. It's not just that the world is not condemned. It's that Jesus takes that condemnation on himself. That's what the cross is all about, him dying in the place of the world as the world substitute so that the world would be saved from condemnation.

See, too many people want Jesus to be judge now, but now he is Savior. He saves so we can avoid condemnation for our crimes. Verse 18, "We can be saved from that condemnation." Verse 17, "We will not perish, but have eternal life." Verses 15 and 16, "All because Jesus was condemned in place of rebels." Romans 8:34 asked the question, "Who is to condemn?" Who is there to condemn you? Who who exists that can condemn you? The rhetorical question assumes the answer. Nobody. Why? Paul continues, "Christ Jesus is the one who died." He died. He took the condemnation, and then it says, "More than that, he was raised." God accepted that sacrifice and raised him from the dead, who is now at the right hand of God, perfect fellowship restored, who indeed is interceding for us. Translation, he took our condemnation upon himself. He received all of it in humanity's place as a substitute as if he sinned our sins, as if he deserved our condemnation, as if he received it, as if he did it himself even though he did nothing to deserve it.

He didn't pay for his own sins. He didn't have any. He took ours, and he did it so that rebels against God like you, like me, guilty for each one of our sins, can be saved, rescued, freed

forever from condemnation. Romans 8:1, "There is now, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ." What that means is that the door of the arc is still open. Judgment has not fallen yet. Condemnation, while true has not been ratified. Rescue is still available to who? Verse 18, what does it say? Whoever. Whoever you are, whatever you've done, whatever you're planning to do, whatever's been done to you, whoever you are, anyone and everyone, rescue is offered. But just like the arc, that door is not open forever.

Look at verse 18 again. 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. You see, the popular belief about the coming of the Messiah wasn't completely false because the Messiah would have two comings, two arrivals, two advents, the first, to save, yes, but the second coming, the second coming is for judgment, and it's for judgment upon those who, notice the text, verse 18, who've not believed in the only Son of God, Jesus Christ. He will return not to save, but to punish sin, to establish justice, to restore peace and harmony and what is right to the world. His glory will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. He will rule and reign for a thousand years. All judgment belongs to him, and that judgment will be just and it will be true, which means it will be based on reality.

How people will fare on that day is determined by their relationship to the Judge. All people everywhere, in other words must, point #3) ***realize condemnation forever remains on those who reject God's Son. Condemnation forever remains on all who reject God's Son.*** The first two "nots" in these verses are good news. The last two though are bad news. Listen to them again. Whoever does not believe, bad news, is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. To not believe is to reject, to dismiss, to disregard, and if that's you, the text says you're condemned already. You're simply proving your condemnation by your rejection, by your refusal to believe in Jesus, the only Son of God.

Notice the text says to believe in his name. That means to believe in all that he is, all that he said, all that he did and, since his name is Jesus given to him because he will save his people from their sins, it is to say to him I I I don't believe in that salvation. I don't need that salvation. I don't need forgiveness. I don't need the condemnation to be removed and be safe. I don't need any of that, Jesus. I don't need forgiveness. I don't need to be washed clean for my sins. It's to say I I don't need any of that. But by rejecting him, by rejecting this message, what happens is there are implications for that, and it's not just it's not just avoiding salvation, but then also it's making God a liar. Why? Because this is God's message and it's saying, yeah, I don't believe that. I don't need that.

1 John 5:10 puts it this way. Whoever does not believe, God has made him a liar. Why? Because he's not believed in the testimony that God is born, that God is given concerning His Son, and the testimony is this. That God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son, but you're like, yeah, I'm good. I don't need that. No, you're not good. You're condemned, and you will stay that way forever. 2 Thessalonians 2:12 put it this way. All people will be "condemned who do not believe the truth," and, therefore, had pleasure in unrighteousness. Sin was just too exciting, more desirable, more wanted, more wonderful than Jesus, and the result of that, just so there's truth in advertising, you make that decision, reject Christ, condemnation remains and its condemnation now in eternal hell in the future. This is why the condemnation is already there. It remains unless a person believes in Jesus. Notice, what they believe in is the name of God's what in the text? His only Son. That word "only" again. He's one of a kind, special, unique, precious, wonderful son.

It's like this. Everything isn't preference. Some things are objectively good and objectively beautiful, and some things just aren't. So if you don't see it as beautiful like when you go to the Grand Canyon, you see the Mona Lisa, you listen to Beethoven's 9th Symphony and you're like, "Yeah. Whatever. It's no big deal. It's not beautiful." That opinion, that judgment, that rejection condemns you because you don't see what is objectively beautiful, by not seeing it, you're condemning yourself for that. It doesn't say anything about the actual beauty of the thing. In the same way, if you reject God's one and only precious son, the son that nothing is better than, that condemns you, not him. When you stand before him as your judge, it won't be to be condemned. You, your sin and your refusal to believe in Jesus already did that. All that's left will be execution.

So The question for all of us is do we want to live with the sentence condemned hanging over our heads every day, all day, for the rest of our lives and when we die? Do you want to risk all of that just to keep your sin? That's suicidal. It's what that is. Do you not care that at any moment your lifeline could be cut by death, and then it's too late, and all that putting it off and when I'm older and maybe tomorrow and I'm just fine, I'm saved when you know and everybody else knows that you're not fine. All of that will torment you as you experience the results of your condemnation. This Jesus who is maybe irrelevant or unnecessary or just plain silly to you now will not be on that day.

And I'm just the messenger. My job is simply to tell you the truth in love, for the eternal good of your soul. God sent His Son so that you do not have to experience condemnation, and the way that you get in on that is believing in him, trusting in him, giving your life to him. "When you do," our text says, "you will be saved from the condemnation that you so richly deserve for all of your sins." God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. He takes pleasure when the wicked turn from their sin, trust in His Son and live. I mean, think about it. Could it really be that you don't have to be judged for all of your sins? Could it be that, your condemnation for your crimes against God, that they really could be erased, that your punishment really could never be experienced by you, that there is a stay of execution granted, something better than a pardon?

Pardon admits that guilt is still there, but this is different so because when it comes to Christ, when your case comes up, the judge will slap the gavel down while saying, "Not guilty," case thrown out for lack of evidence, no crimes have been committed. Why? Because it's not just that Jesus is condemned and pays for your sin, but He will trade your resume of sin for his perfect resume of sinless perfection. It's not just that your part and, yeah, you did the crime, but uh we're just going to look the other way. No. All of your crimes are erased, punished in the substitute and replaced by a record of perfection, acquittal therefore guaranteed, a declaration that you are right with God forever applies. Is it really possible that that's a reality, that this is really the way things are, that Christ was punished so that you personally would be forgiven, that he was crushed so that you personally would go free, that he was sent so that you personally would be saved? It is true. He rose from the dead. Just believe. Rid yourself of everything that would keep you from him and just believe.

As I close, one last thing, if you're here today because your mom told you that the one thing she wanted from you on Mother's Day was that you would go to church with her. If you're here today because your mom bribed you with lunch after church, listen. This is why she wanted you here, so that you would quit the rejection, come to Christ, humble yourself and believe.

Listen, I'll be at that back door, shaking hands. Don't go out that middle door, these two side doors and try to sneak away from me. There is something more important than your mom's lunch today. God used your mom to give you physical life, but he sent His Son so that you would have eternal life. Believe. Trust in him, and you don't have to wait till that back door to talk to me. You can do it right now in your seat. Give your life to Christ.

Let's pray.

Father, I pray for each and every one of us here that the truth we've heard today would be personal, that we wouldn't look at it or receive it and just like, "Oh, that was really interesting," but that you and your grace would allow these truths to penetrate that any resistance there might be and that you would allow us to assess ourselves in light of these truths. For some, this is simply a reminder, a blessed reminder of the salvation that you've accomplished for us. We can't take credit for that. We're not great and wonderful people who earned our salvation. No. We come humble, broken, sinners who need a savior and, because you are a God who loves and saves, it is appropriate for us to sing to you, to worship you, to live for you, and it's it's a passage like this that reminds us of that.

For others, they're still in condemnation because they have not believed in Christ. Please use this truth to draw them closer to you, and then there are those who believe that they're saved when they're really not. May you use this text to open their eyes to this reality and help them to see that it's some kind of mental agreement, some kind of high five to God on a couple times a year, some kind of belief that God exists is not the same as trusting your life and your death to Jesus. That kind of trust changes the direction, the motivation, the passions of our lives, and so, for each of us, each kind of person listening to us, listening to me now, I pray that you would draw us closer to the truth. Help us to see ourselves in light of this truth. That would be evidence of your kindness, your goodness, your grace to each and everyone. Please pour out your grace. I pray this for the glory of your name. Amen.