

Wrought In God

Preached at East Winthrop Baptist Church, E. Winthrop, Maine

November 7, 2021

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Primary Scriptures from John 3:1-21

- I. Context from last week
 - a. Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, has been struggling to understand Jesus' teaching that one must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God.
 - b. Jesus made clear to him that it is not predictable whom the Spirit will bring to be born again.
 - c. He then points Nicodemus to heavenly things where Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, bringing to mind that Son of Man who stood in heaven before the Ancient of Days and was given a kingdom, which kingdom cannot be seen unless one is born again.
 - d. Then, for Nicodemus and those around, and even for us who read of it later, Jesus speaks of how this Son of Man will be lifted up, even as the bronze serpent in Moses' day was lifted up, that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.
- II. Understanding further this salvific work
 - a. From this point Jesus is building our understanding of who He is and why He has come.
 - b. In verse 16 He is both emphasizing and explaining more deeply what He already stated in the previous verses. We see in verse 16 both mercy and judgment.
 - c. The verse begins with "For," which is not "Therefore" as if he were concluding a discourse, but its meaning is really "because."
 - d. The Israelites in the wilderness in Moses' day were sinful and rebellious, and it was because of God's justice and judgment that they were going to perish from the poisonous serpents. But it is because of God's love of the Israelites that He provided the way of life, by faith.

- e. Likewise verse 16 carries over the implication that all will perish, and that justly, unless God provides a way. And we notice that here He is extending the reach of judgment from the Israelites to the whole world.
- f. Furthermore, although God was not obligated by anything outside of Himself, it is because of His love for the world that He provided a way not merely for extended life on this earth, as for those in Moses' day, but for life eternal.
- g. The surprise here for a Jew like Nicodemus was that Jesus spoke of God's love for the world, and not just for the Jews.
 - i. As stated in Ephesians 2:11-12 (No hope and without God)
 - 1. Such was the state of the Gentiles in the sight of the Jews.
 - ii. In some sense the statement of God's love for the world is a hearkening back to creation when God saw all that He made, that it was very good. God loved His created order, His world.
 - iii. The destruction of the flood was a judgment on sin that came about against those who had acted to destroy the order and the beauty of what God had created.
 - iv. When a person acts against that which God loves, he acts against God.
 - v. God also spoke to Abraham, telling him that in him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Thus God had from long ago intended His blessing to spread beyond the descendants of Abraham.
 - vi. And it is here where we see Jesus declaring the Father's love for the world being manifested in the sending of His Son that people all over the world might believe and not perish.
 - vii. Here is a revealing that God will give eternal life to all who believe, whether he be a Jew in Israel, or a Gentile in the farthest corners of the earth.
- h. One danger here we face is a vagueness in our language and in our thinking with respect to the way in which God loves the world.

- i. Some often take this verse, along with the statement in 1 John 4:8b that God is love, and deduce and proclaim that God loves every individual with the same intense, personal love with which He loves those who are born again.
 1. Consequently, they go and tell an unbeliever that God loves him unconditionally just the way he is and has a wonderful plan for his life.
 2. If that were true, then nothing needs to change.
 - a. Why should the unbeliever consider that anything he is doing is offensive to God?
 3. And the question arises as to how a loving God, loving in this manner, could send anyone to hell.
 4. If God loves everyone in this way, then how, at the unbeliever's death, could Christ then say, "Depart from me. I never knew you."
 5. Indeed, can we speak of God loving someone deeply and unconditionally and then also say He never knew him?
 6. Thus a theology of the universal love of God in such a particular way leads eventually to a belief in universalism in which everyone goes to heaven regardless of what they believe or do.
- ii. If we are speaking of such a view of God's love for the world, we are not being true to the Scriptures. The evangelistic call in the New Testament is not, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life."
 1. Jesus in Matthew 1:15 states, "...repent and believe in the gospel."
 2. When Jesus sent out the twelve in Mark 6:12 we read that, "They went out and preached that men should repent."
 3. In Acts 20:21, when Paul was telling of his service to the Lord, he states that he was "solemnly testifying to both

Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- i. So God’s love for the world is a general love for His creation - that which He wants to redeem and restore - as well as a particular love for those He has chosen; and it is not a particular love for every individual indiscriminately.
 - i. Jesus does state in Matthew 5:44-45...(Love your enemies...)
 - 1. So we see that there is, for a time, a general love of God even for His enemies, they being part of his creation and thus experiencing the common provision of God.
 - ii. But God has a particular and personal love for those who are His.
 - 1. The contrast is summed up in Malachi 1:2-3 (I have loved Jacob but hated Esau)
- j. As a result of God’s love for the world, particularly for those whom He has chosen to spend eternity with Him, we read that He gave His only begotten Son.
 - i. How do we understand the idea of God giving His Son?
 - 1. First, He gave His Son to be born as one of us. To live and die as one of us would mean that He could represent us fully.
 - 2. The very reason that this Son of Man is here standing before Nicodemus and the others is that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.
 - 3. Second, as we know, though it would not have been clear to Nicodemus at the time, God gave His Son to be our substitute, a sacrifice in our place.
 - ii. We must also ask why He is called God’s only begotten Son.
 - 1. It would cause confusion simply to say God’s Son, or even God’s only Son, because later those who believe in Him are called the sons of God.
 - 2. God did not give just any Son, but the one who is unique.

3. He is His begotten Son because He is of one essence with the Father, and not adopted or even created.
 4. At the Council of Nicaea, the church put forth a definitive statement after wrestling with many heresies, and the section about the Son reads as such: “[I believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...”
 5. God’s love for the world could be expressed in no greater way than giving this unique, most beloved Son of His.
- k. We then read that the one who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.
- i. That must mean that there is no further requirement than believing in Him. For otherwise there could be the case where someone believes in Him but fails to meet the other requirement, and fails to gain eternal life, which would invalidate this statement.
 - ii. But belief in Him is not mere intellectual assent that He exists, or even that He is the Son of Man and Son of God.
 - iii. James speaks of a vacuous faith that is merely such an assent – a mere statement of words about who you believe Jesus to be. James 2:19 states, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”
 - iv. Belief rendered in the Greek language has a much richer meaning.
 1. The preposition used is not simply in, but into. That is, whosoever believes into Him. There is a full committal.
 2. Kenneth Wuest in his Greek word studies describes the meaning of “believing in” in this way, with reference to Paul speaking to the Philippian jailer: “He exhorts him to entrust the salvation of his soul into the hands of the

Lord Jesus. He exhorts him to commit that work of saving his soul to the care of the Lord. That means a definite taking of one's self out of one's own keeping and entrusting one's self into the keeping of the Lord Jesus."¹

3. So we relinquish all efforts at saving ourselves, and entrust our salvation entirely to Jesus Christ.
4. Such faith does not come naturally. Ephesians 2:8 states, "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."
5. So this faith, by which we entrust ourselves to Jesus Christ for our salvation, is given by God.
6. But if the faith needed to believe is given by God, then why do we call people to repentance and warn them of the wrath to come?
 - a. Going back to last week, we do not know whom God will call or at what point in their lives He will do so.
 - b. God uses means. He is not only willing to use you and me, but He commands us to go and tell others.
 - c. It is a great joy, for God and for us, for Him to use us to lead someone to salvation.
- I. This verse has been used well, and it has been twisted.
 - i. We can sidetrack ourselves when we strive to have someone pray a prayer stating just the right things, particularly when there is no evidence of the work of God's Spirit in their lives.
 - ii. Some believe just saying that prayer automatically saves someone.
 - iii. It is as though we are offering a proposal, like an insurance contract, and hoping the recipient will sign the contract.

¹ Word Studies in the Greek New Testament (Volume III); Kenneth S. Wuest; p. 38

- iv. Sadly, many today signed the contract, so to speak, and later become disappointed with it. They turn away from Christ and His people.
- v. We have heard more recently of a number of high profile exits from the Christian faith, or rather what they thought was the Christian faith. It is happening as John wrote in 1 John 2:19 (They went out)
- vi. As a corollary, we can get tied in knots as we lead someone in such a prayer, thinking that they may not be saved if we do not cover all of the bases and say all of the right words.
- vii. Or we stress over and over that they must be sincere, and whether or not they are saved depends on their level of sincerity.
- viii. Such efforts come from a theology of mysticism or a type of self-effort.
- ix. The truth is that if the Spirit is working in a person to bring him to be born again, you can do nothing to stop him!
- x. You are there simply to aid in the birthing process, which will happen with or without you, but God delights Himself to include you in the process, and you will be thrilled to participate.
- xi. So, yes, show them this verse, but show it to them in context, and not in a shallow way.
- m. The promise, then, for those who entrust themselves to Jesus is that they will not perish.
 - i. We know that He is not talking about biological death, for there are many examples of believers who died in the New Testament, such as John the Baptist and Stephen.
 - ii. Jesus is talking in an ultimate sense here.
 - 1. In Matthew 25 we read first in verse 41 and then in verse 45 what He is referring to.
 - 2. Such an end is dreadful, but we need to know of it.
 - a. That we might fervently warn others about it.

- b. And that we might realize how truly great is our salvation from it, evoking a deep thankfulness that should mark our lives.
- n. Whereas we who entrust our salvation to Jesus are promised we will not perish, we are promised also that we have eternal life.
 - i. In John 17:3 Jesus states, “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”
 - 1. Whatever else eternal life entails, the fullness of it is that we know God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son.
 - 2. If that prospect does not awe and excite you, then you have a low view of God.
 - 3. God holds the superlative degree in all things good.
 - a. Though the beauties of heaven will far surpass the beauties of this fallen earth, the beauty of God will far surpass all of those.
 - b. The majesty of a grand vista, or even of the stars stretched across the heavens, pales before the majesty of God.
 - c. The great joys that you may have experienced thus far in your life, amount to little before the joy, the utter ecstasy of being God’s child in His presence.
 - d. And the love with which you have been loved by others on earth is minimal in comparison to the love wherewith God will love you throughout the very depth of your being through all eternity.
 - 4. Further, God is infinite, and there will always be more to discover of Him throughout all eternity.
 - ii. That eternal life starts when we are born again. If it is truly eternal life, which it is, then we cannot lose it, for then it would not have been eternal life.

III. Repercussions

- a. Moving now in John 3 to verse 17 we read that God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.
 - i. This statement should be obvious, for if God had wanted to judge the world at that time, He would not have gone through the trouble of having His Son be born to a woman and grow up to be a man.
 - ii. I should note here the continued use of the word “world.”
 - 1. It is here stated that God sent His Son that the world should be saved through Him.
 - 2. If the meaning of world here is every single individual, then either
 - a. We end up with theology of universalism and a contradiction with other passages that teach clearly that some will be going to eternal punishment, and others to eternal bliss.
 - b. Or Jesus failed to accomplish His purpose.
 - 3. However, if the meaning of the word “world” here means particular people not from the Jews only, but from every tribe, and tongue, and nation, then we have a consistency with the rest of the Scriptures and thus an accurate view of what is meant.
- b. Verse 18 then brings a distinction in the judgment of God. This judgment is referring to the divide between perishing and having eternal life.
 - i. He who believes in Him is not judged.
 - 1. What great good news!
 - 2. We know our sins, our failures, and our lack, and though we rejoice at being saved, I think we have at times feared that day of judgment.
 - 3. Jesus is telling us here that those who believe in Him, that is, into Him, are not judged.
 - 4. Hallelujah!

- ii. He who does not believe has been judged already.
 - 1. But I thought Jesus did not come to judge, but to save.
 - 2. All of us were guilty in Adam, and additionally we have broken the law of God countless times.
 - 3. It is the law that has judged us guilty already.
 - 4. Those who do not believe into Jesus, He is saying, bear their guilt and can be sure of their punishment.
- c. Verses 19-21 then make clear that the judgment is true and right, and what are the evidences of such.
 - i. Since verse 19 speaks of judgment, then we know from the previous verse He is referring to judgment on those who do not believe.
 - ii. The emphasis here switches from belief to deeds, but only because deeds are the outworking of beliefs. Someone can say whatever he wants about what he believes, but in the end his deeds will reveal what he truly believes.
 - iii. Whatever unbelievers thought of themselves, or of each other, when the light came into the world, that is, when Jesus Christ came displaying in His life His perfection in godliness, then rather than loving Him for His own sake, they loved the darkness because their deeds were evil.
 - iv. Many of the Pharisees, though they thought they loved God, were consistently trying to snuff out the light, to kill Jesus, because He exposed them for who they really were: unloving, self-aggrandizing hypocrites.
 - v. Jesus made the situation quite clear in John 8:41-44 (Your father, My Father)
 - vi. We see clearly how God's judgment is just.
 - vii. Further, in verse 20, we see that all who do evil do not come to the light for fear their deeds would be exposed.
 - 1. No one wants to think of his deeds as evil or be accused of such at least while there is fear of judgment.

2. Therefore he carries out his wickedness secretly, under cover of literal darkness, or lies, or denial, or blame-shifting, or deceit, or power, or the dark activities of others.
 3. Jesus says that we who are His are salt and light, and so we should not be surprised at those who would silence us because their evil deeds are being exposed as such.
 4. At this point it should be clear that they will not change and will not come to Jesus unless the Spirit does His work and they are born again. Pray that it be so.
- viii. Finally, we see in verse 21 that good works are the external evidence of the internal reality of one who has been born again.
1. Those whose deeds proceed from a new heart have nothing to be ashamed of.
 2. Moreover, they flourish in the light knowing that it will be evident that those deeds have been wrought in God.
 3. To use other language, we look at Ephesians 2:8-10
 - a. God has saved us and prepared beforehand good works for each of us to do.
 - b. That is, He has made us new creatures in Christ, and then prepared good works that are tailored to our personality, gifting, skills, relational and geographical placement.
 - c. And at the same time that those good works accomplish something outside of us, they accomplish something inside of us as well.
 - d. We are changed day by day into the image of the One who saved us, just as one who is born grows to maturity, and people will say, "He is his Father's son."