

LIGHT, DARKNESS, AND A LESSON IN HUMILITY

Light and Darkness

I hope last week's message from John 3:14-18 gave you an overwhelming sense of God's love for you and the security you have in that love for all eternity because of God's grace and your faith in Jesus Christ. As we learned last week, Martin Luther called John 3:16 "*the gospel in miniature.*" That is truly an appropriate and fitting description of the verse including the two verses that precede and follow it (John 3:14-18). So let us go back and review these verses and we will include verses 19-21 that will conclude this message about salvation and rebirth that Jesus provided for Nicodemus.

John 3:14-21 ESV:

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."

16 "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 deeds were evil.*

20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God."

Judgment will be the consequence of not believing in Jesus Christ as Savior. There will be no way to avoid judgment for those who avoid His message of salvation and eternal life. If you hear Jesus' message, the Gospel, and you do not accept it at some time before your death, it is the same as admitting you prefer your sin to His salvation. If a person refuses to come into the light and allow his/her entire life to be visible and evaluated, then it is obvious that the person is ashamed of certain things they have done and they want to keep them hidden in the darkness. They prefer to hang on to their dark deeds rather than to receive Christ's forgiveness and gift of eternal life in Heaven. It is a shame that so many choose this course. Yet Satan has made it easy for them by blinding them to the truth through a variety of different religious beliefs that encourage them to live in

their sin and to choose a god they believe would not punish them for what they consider their excusable shortcomings.

The image of ***Light and darkness*** is one of the major images used in John's Gospel. If you recall, we see this image right at the beginning in John 1:4-13 ESV:

- 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*
5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.
8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.
9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.
11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.
12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,
13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Why do sinners not run toward the "light of life"? Because they love the darkness in which they live. They prefer doing things the way they want even if it means judgment. Many deceive themselves into believing the things they do are not really bad. That is why our present day culture has legitimized almost every conceivable deviant form of behavior. Looking at pornography is considered something harmless. Never mind that it breaks a wife's heart if she discovers her husband involved with it. And never mind that it cheapens the view regarding sexuality for the young single or teenager, so that when they get married they will not be able to have a meaningful sexual relationship with one woman as God intended, our wives. Practicing homosexuality is considered OK because they say you were made that way. It is simply a matter of what a person chooses. Never mind that it spreads all kinds of social diseases including the killer "AIDS." And never mind that the Bible absolutely forbids it. After all, they say the Bible is out of date.

And they say abortion is a woman's constitutional right to choose. A woman should have the right to murder her unborn baby if she wants to, should she not? After all it is her body. In reality, however, her choice is to have unprotected sex and then murder the child so she does not have to be bothered with the life that is created within her, a life that has been placed there by God, and a life that has a purpose in God's plan. After all, He would not have created the life within her if He did not have a plan for that life. And we certainly do not want these young women to be aware of the fact that abortion will very likely give them an increased possibility of breast cancer, emotional disorders, and additional future health problems.

And then there is alcohol and drugs. Everybody should be allowed to have a good time, right? A little recreational drinking and drug use is not really going to hurt anyone. Never

mind that many alcoholics and drug abusers are hooked in an addiction after even the first drink or the first fix. And we certainly would not want to make people aware of the families that have been destroyed by these addictions. Not only is the addict's life affected, but also the lives of their family and friends. It will destroy one's health and frequently cause premature death if the addict is unable to stop.

Then there are video games and violent movies. But they are only a "harmless" form of entertainment, right? Kids get a kick out of playing cops and robbers, batman, and other such adventure thrillers. It has no effect on their emotional development, so they say. What is the big deal? The big deal is that there is a direct correlation between the amount of violence an emotionally disturbed child, or adult for that matter, is exposed to and their tendency to carry out such violence on other people.

I could go on like this all day, but let me close with one of my favorites. Music, or more accurately, psychotic screaming accompanied by cacophonous fingernail-on-the-blackboard screeching about violent sex, physical violence, degradation of women, and racial slurs.

Why does a college student murder 32 people on a college campus? Why do young teenagers murder 6, 8, 10, or more of their classmates? Because the prevailing mindset of the United States trains them to do such things. These things never happened when I was a kid and I believe they did not happen because the parents of that generation would have not allowed them to happen. If the parents of that generation had found out that a school was teaching tolerance of homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle, whoever was responsible would have been run out of town, if not worse. So what has happened to create such a contrast in morality in only a couple of generations?

Satan has been very clever in this regard. He took several avenues that started out very innocently and wholesomely and then gradually and ever so slightly began to desensitize the American people little by little with each passing year. He took music which was wonderful, tasteful entertainment in the 1940's, and allowed Rock 'N Roll to appeal to the young people of the 1950's because of the catchy beat and the sappy love songs that went along with it. Teenagers bought into some of those lyrics and little by little the morality of our country began to be more and more permissive of lowering the bar on morality and personal integrity. Movies, radio, and television followed right along. Soon music was calling for more and more rebellion against the standard customs of the culture and young people began rebelling in all kinds of different ways including the use of drugs and sexual promiscuity.

Television and movies, which, for the most part, were quality forms of entertainment in the forties and fifties, blended right in with the same pattern of moral decline. The board of censors for motion pictures that was made up of the clergy from a number of different denominations voluntarily gave up that watchdog position. Consequently sex and violence gradually became more and more acceptable, until today when just about anything goes. People enjoyed television shows like "I Love Lucy," "Milton Berle," "Red Skelton," "Bob Hope," "Perry Como," and many more. But then came the

rebellious years of the 60's and 70's with the Vietnam War and the Nixon resignation. We began to see more and more violence on TV along with some pretty harsh language. We have now evolved to the point where sex and violence is about the only thing you can see on the major networks. And if it is not sex and violence it is news reporting that is not trustworthy, not accurate, and is aimed at stirring controversy, which it seems people have come to consider a form of entertainment.

Where are the gentlemen? Where are the ladies? What has happened to the term "Good sportsmanship"? Where are the clean-cut young people? Where are decency, integrity, and honesty? They are still there but those qualities are rapidly losing out to the attitude of "life is all about me," and "I'm going to grab as much pleasure as I can get while I can, and I don't give a _____ about how it affects other people."

Those attitudes, my friends, suggest that people love the darkness more than they love the light. They prefer to live in darkness where they can enjoy the things they do and not feel guilty about them. People have always been sinful but today it is becoming more and more prevalent confirming John 3:19-20 ESV:

*19 And this is the **judgment**: the **light** has come into the world, and people loved the **darkness** rather than the light because their deeds were evil.*

20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

How do people today feel when you tell them about the light that is in the world in the person of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ? They all too often react in a manner that makes it clear that they will determine who God is and what He expects of them by their own supernatural power. What nonsense! What they really want is to create their own god who will be tolerant of their behavior and assure them that everything will be okay in eternity, if there is an eternity. They want to persist in their evil deeds, and this keeps them from coming to the light; for the closer the sinner gets to the light, the more his/her sins are exposed. And it is not intelligent reasoning that keeps people from trusting Christ; it is the moral and spiritual blindness that keeps them loving the darkness and hating the light.

You may be interested in knowing that Nicodemus finally did "come to the light" when he identified with Christ at the cross. Somewhere along the way Nicodemus had accepted Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world for all those who would believe. John 19:38-42.NLT:

38 Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus' body. When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away.

39 With him came Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes.

40 Following Jewish burial custom, they wrapped Jesus' body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth.

41 The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before.

42 And so, because it was the day of preparation for the Jewish Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

People love **darkness** not for its own sake but because of what it hides. Just as natural light shows up what is otherwise unseen, so Christ, **the Light**, exposes people's deeds as "evil."

Unbelievers have no worthwhile meaning to their lives. They deceive themselves by making something up that they like to believe is meaningful, but when you do not have the Holy Spirit of Christ in your life, you in reality have nothing that is worth anything from an eternal perspective. Such people are afraid of walking into the light of Christ's truth because if they do they know those make-believe things they have created to be meaningful will be illuminated for what they really are, worthless. Believers, those who have been redeemed and saved and who now have the Holy Spirit of Christ living within them, are drawn to His light, the truth of His Word, and they welcome His teaching. Though **the light** exposes their sin as well, they respond with repentance and faith, and they try as best they can to live according to **the truth** as we are told in 2 John 1-4 and 3 John 1-4 NLT:

1 This letter is from John, the elder. I am writing to the chosen lady and to her children, whom I love in the truth—as does everyone else who knows the truth—2 because the truth lives in us and will be with us forever.3 Grace, mercy, and peace, which come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ—the Son of the Father—will continue to be with us who live in truth and love.

4 How happy I was to meet some of your children and find them living according to the truth, just as the Father commanded.

1 This letter is from John, the elder. I am writing to Gaius, my dear friend, whom I love in the truth.

2 Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit.

3 Some of the traveling teachers recently returned and made me very happy by telling me about your faithfulness and that you are living according to the truth.

4 I could have no greater joy than to hear that my children are following the truth.

By being born again, given a new life, they live differently than they did formerly when they too chose **darkness** rather than **light**. Their new lives are lived by faith in Jesus and His Word of truth. The Holy Spirit of Christ working in their lives gives them new power, goals, and interests that they were not capable of having before their rebirth. In 2

Corinthians 5:17 NLT, Paul writes:

17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

And in Ephesians 2:8-10 NLT, Paul writes:

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.

9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

*10 For we are God's masterpiece. **He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.***

There is another aspect of sin we need to briefly cover. It is one thing to love the darkness because it hides one's sins, but it is also a sin to be walking in the light and know what is true, what is the right thing to do, and then not do what we know Christ's Spirit is leading us to do. That might not be considered loving the darkness, but it is a sin none the less because one who does not do what the light shows him/her is right, is guilty of sin. James 4:17 NLT tells us: "Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it." Also we read in James 1:19-27 NLT:

19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

20 Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.

21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.

22 But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.

23 For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror.

24 You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like.

25 But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

26 If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.

27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

How folks react to the light indicates how they feel about their new birth, their new life. How do you respond to the light? In these first 21 verses of John 3 we have been looking

at what it means to be born again. We have been given the answer in John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* Rebirth is possible because of God's great love.

Now Let's move on in chapter three as we learn more about **A Good Servant**.

John 3:22-30 ESV:

22 *After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.*

23 *John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized*

24 *(for John had not yet been put in prison).*

25 *Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.*

26 *And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."*

27 *John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.*

28 *You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'*

29 *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore **this joy of mine is now complete.***

30 *He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.*

In this passage we listen in on a conversation between some of John the Baptist's disciples and one or more Jews. The bottom line here revolves around the issue of whose baptism is approved by God, the baptism of John the Baptist or the baptism of Jesus. John the Baptist recognized his place as a servant of Jesus and that as Jesus' ministry expanded John's role would be diminished. John had announced the coming of Jesus and had thus fulfilled his mission. These are the last words by John the Baptist recorded in this Gospel.¹

Until **John the Baptist** was arrested by Herod and put into prison, his ministry continued even after Jesus' ministry had begun. John the Baptist did not want anyone to follow him any longer. John's ministry was to point people toward Jesus and urge them to trust in His teaching. But think about what might happen in a church when there are two popular pastors who are both gifted preachers and teachers. It is very likely that people will begin to favor one against the other and get caught up in competition and comparison.

This matter of purifying, which means the same as baptizing, was important to the Jews (Mark 7:1–23). Under the Old Testament Law, it was necessary for them to keep themselves ceremonially clean if they were to serve God and please Him. Unfortunately,

¹ Hughes, Robert B.; Laney, J. Carl; Hughes, Robert B.: *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 469.

the Pharisees added so many extra traditions to the Law that the observing of it became a burden.²

John's disciples, whether intentionally or unintentionally, were putting him into a position of competing with Jesus. How did John the Baptist handle this situation? He began by stating a biblical fact: "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (John 3:27). Paul spoke of a very similar situation in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 NLT:

1 Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life.

2 I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready,

3 for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?

4 When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world?

5 After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us.

6 I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.

7 It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow.

8 The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work.

9 For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.

Our blessings come from God alone and He alone deserves the glory as we learned in Isaiah 42:8 NAS:

"I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another."

Warren Wiersbe comments, "*Then John used a beautiful illustration. He compared Jesus to the bridegroom and himself only to the best man (John 3:29). Once the bridegroom and bride had been brought together, the work of the best man was completed. What a foolish thing it would be for the best man to try to 'upstage' the bridegroom and take his place. John's joy was to hear the voice of the Bridegroom and know that the Bridegroom*

² Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 3:22.

had claimed His bride."³

The illustration of the Bridegroom would have been meaningful to the Jewish people because God had a "marriage covenant" or "promise" with the nation of Israel.⁴ Although Israel broke those vows and had to be punished, God will one day in the future fulfill those promises to Israel. When Israel rejected the Messiah, Christ, God offered the promise to everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike. Anyone who trusted in God and the Son He sent to forgive the sins of the world would be saved. Those who received the gift at that time founded the Church, the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:1–3; Ephesians 5:22–33). One day the Bridegroom will come to claim His bride and take her to her new home in Heaven (Revelation 19:6–9; 21:9ff).

It is enough for John the Baptist to be Jesus the bridegroom's friend, the friend who was sent by God to be the matchmaker. John had the privilege of bringing together Jesus and His bride, the Church, those he came to seek and to save. It is enough for John to rejoice that he could simply be able to stand there and hear the bridegroom's voice, as a best man to the blessed marriage. It was not only John who must decrease, but also the old establishment, which he represented. We will see how this unfolds beginning in chapter 4.

A Presbyterian pastor in Melbourne, Australia introduced J. Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, by using many superlatives, especially the word *great*. Taylor stepped to the pulpit and quietly said, "*Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master.*" If John the Baptist in Heaven heard that statement, he must have shouted "Hallelujah!"⁵

Let us take careful note of John's words in verse 30, "*He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less,*" or as another translation says, "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*" No glory seeking, no self-exaltation, but also no self-depreciation or self-degrading. Just a simple statement of fact—a statement that puts all the priorities in order: "*More of Jesus, less of me.*" Think what would happen in ministries today if all God's servants maintained that attitude. In fact, what would happen if you and I lived every day with that attitude: "*More of Jesus, less of me*"?

³ Ibid.

⁴ Isa. 54:5; 62:4ff; Jer. 2:2; 3:20; Ezek. 16:8; Hosea 2:19ff.

⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 3:22.