Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Responding to the Divine Offer of Salvation
Scripture: John 3:11-21
Code: 1506A

John 3:11 through 21, a discourse, the words of Jesus Christ regarding the meaning of salvation. John says Jesus Christ is God, proven by His...watch this...His words. And for the first time in chapter 3, Jesus actually speaks in terms of presenting His message. And it's the message of salvation. And John is, in effect, saying "Just listen to the message and you'll know who the messenger is." And so, here in verses 11 to 21, today as we come to it, we find the message on the meaning of salvation.

Now it's a simple message. And I do not intend to complicate this passage. It is very simple. It is perhaps the most...well, the most familiar passage in the Bible. And everybody whose had any connection with church at one time or another knows John 3:16 to one degree or another. "For God so loved the world," etc., etc. It's almost like second nature. So much so that very seldom does anyone stop to think what it means. But that is the context of this passage this morning, the meaning of salvation.

Now, in order for Christ to express Himself in His words, John allows this opportunity to open up in a format between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus has done some miracles at the Passover. Nicodemus has seen them. He comes to Jesus and he says, "Sir, we know You're a teacher from God, because You couldn't do those things that You just did unless You were." And with that introduction, Jesus begins a dialogue with Nicodemus on the subject of the new birth, of regeneration. That dialogue runs through verse 10 and the dialogue stops. And Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, you need to be born all over again...spiritual birth, born again, born from above." And the word used for "born again" is the same word exactly as "above." Born from above and born again, and that's no conflict, that's...that's perfect unity. Because the new birth is a birth from above.

And so, Jesus has told Nicodemus in the first ten verses that he needs to have the Spirit of God do a divine miracle that comes from God by reaching into his life and regenerating him, cleansing him and purifying him by the washing of the Word. But Nicodemus never got the message, unfortunately, he never got it. Jesus was trying to answer Nicodemus' question, how do I get in the Kingdom? That was the question in his heart. And Jesus says you've got to be a different man to get in the Kingdom. You know, it's like if you had a fish and you decided you'd like your fish to become a pet. So you bought a leash and a skate. And you laid the fish on the skate and decided you would walk your fish. Well, you might need to know that fish doesn't live on land, they've got to have water. And you take a fish out of its element and it can't exist, see. And Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, you've

got the wrong system of breathing to exist in the Kingdom. Your whole apparatus is wrong. You can't breathe through the gills of law works, Kingdom error. It doesn't work. You've got to be a new thing, Nicodemus. A new system." And so He says you've got to get born all over again before you can live in the Kingdom just like a fish would have to be reconstructed to live on land. But Nicodemus scratches and doesn't get the message.

People...as I said last time...people say, "Well, this is the story of Nicodemus' conversion." No it's not. Nicodemus does not get converted in John 3. He doesn't even know what's going on. He doesn't understand. You say, "Poor fella." You know why he doesn't understand? Do you want to know what causes ignorance? I'll tell you. Unbelief. And I'll prove that to you in a minute in this passage. If a person doesn't understand, there's one reason...unbelief. Why? Because the gospel's so simple. I understand it. I have a five-year-old son who understands it. It is simple. And when somebody says, "Well, I can't buy that, I don't understand that," the reason is they don't believe it so they can't understand it. And I'll show you how that works in a minute.

All right, now we're going to look at this passage as Jesus proceeds. Now He's told Nicodemus about the new birth. He's told him it's a divine thing, born from above, the Holy Spirit comes down and regenerates, recreates, new creature type thing. And He hasn't told him how to appropriate it, He hasn't said, "Now, Nicodemus, in order to get this new birth, you've got to do this..." He doesn't say that. No, no, that's a pure work from God. He's never told Nicodemus how to appropriate it cause Nicodemus doesn't even believe it yet. Why should He tell him, "Now here's what you do, Nicodemus," when Nicodemus is scratching his head saying, "I don't believe it?" He doesn't believe it, let alone want to do it. So in those first ten verses, Jesus doesn't tell him all about appropriating the new birth. He only gives him the divine side in terms of what happens on earth in a man's body in the new birth, in a man's soul. He doesn't give him all the details of how it happens and how to appropriate it because Nicodemus doesn't believe it.

But graciously, from verses 11-21, Jesus begins to expand on appropriating the new birth. He begins to move out to show how this new birth becomes a reality. It needs to happen, He told Nicodemus. It has to happen, God makes it happen, it's a divine miracle. And now He begins to move into the how it happens. And as we come to these verses, I want you to see three things and I want to look at it negatively. The key word to verses 11 to 21 is the word "believe." It's at least seven times there, very key word. And believing is how you appropriate the new birth. God extends the new birth, the power to you begins to regenerate and in response to that process that begins, a man responds by believing. But you've got to have something to respond to, brother, and you don't respond until God begins the work. Jesus said, "No man comes unto Me except the Father draws him." And God reaches down and begins that process and then we respond by believing. And that's what Nicodemus hadn't heard before...and other things he hadn't heard, too. But basically, God begins it, verse 1 to 10, we see the human reaction in verses 11 to 21, as man believes in the initiating work of God in regeneration.

Now I want us to look at believing from the negative side. Three ways: the problem of unbelief, the answer to unbelief, and the results of unbelief...the problem, the answer, the results. Notice the problem of unbelief. This is in verses 11 and 12. And incidentally, folks, just as an aside, my philosophy of Bible exposition is this, first of all, I want you to learn the overview. I'm not nearly so concerned with all the little details now as I am that you understand the sweep of what is happening in the New Testament. Next time around the New Testament, whenever that is, we'll go inch by inch by inch with the details. But at this point, I want you to get the sweep of things so that we're not buried on little tiny points, but we can see the unfolding of all that God is teaching. And so I say that to say we're going to move rapidly over these verses. I want you to see the foreview of all of them, rather than the little tiny details that we could spend forever on with each verse, each word really in these.

All right, then the problem of unbelief appears in verses 11 and 12. These two verses prove a great fact...a great fact. Well, more than one, but they prove this fact. Now watch it. Unbelief is the cause of ignorance. Did you get that? That is really important. Unbelief is the cause of ignorance.

People come to me and say, "Well, what about those people over in Bula-Bula land who never heard?" They're ignorant. Do you know why they're ignorant? They're ignorant because Romans 1 says when they had the truth of God, they refused to believe it. They took the truth of God and perverted it into a lie. John 1:9, John's gospel, says that Christ is the light that lighteth every man. And this chapter says, but man loved...what?...darkness. If a man is ignorant, I don't care if he's ignorant because he's so philosophical that he wants to be some sort of a pseudo-intellectual, or if he's ignorant because he's a stark-naked savage, he is ignorant because he disbelieves. That is a very important truth. Unbelief begets ignorance. That's a principle all through Scripture.

That is why...now get this...that is why God holds men responsible. If a man couldn't help his ignorance, how could God hold him responsible for believing? When someone does not understand, it is because they will not understand because they don't want to understand. They disbelieve. That's the whole message of the first three chapters of Romans. That when they knew God, they worshiped Him not as God. Consequently, men are without...what?...excuse. Now I didn't say that, God did. Unbelief is behind ignorance.

Now, of course, you say, "Well, that may be why nobody comes to Christ when I present the gospel." Well, that might be, it also might be that you botch it up pretty badly. And that's perhaps a point to be considered.

All right, then, Jesus is going to show us that ignorance comes from unbelief. Now...now, Nicodemus has been saying I don't get it...I don't get it. And really what he's saying is I don't believe it...I don't believe it.

You say, "Well, how do you know he's saying that?" Well, verse 11 and 12 says that. Verse 11 says at the end, "You receive it not," because in verse 12 it says, "You believe it not." There it is right there. He didn't understand because he didn't believe.

Jesus takes off right at his ignorance, verse 10. "He answered and said unto him," and here's a shot right between the eyes, "Are you the illustrious teacher of Israel and knowest not these things?" Oh, not too much sarcasm there. Nicodemus, number one mucky-muck in the Sanhedrin, probably, or at least in the Pharisees, He says, "You are the teacher and you don't know this? You don't know that the Old Testament teaches spiritual rebirth? You don't know from reading the Old Testament that God's design has always been spiritual rebirth, not just doing the ditties of the law? You don't understand that? That's just because you don't believe it."

Notice it in verse 11, here's a little interesting aside, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, (or truly, truly, same word as amen, so be it when it appears at the end of a sentence), Verily, verily I say unto thee, We speak that which we do know and testify to that which we have seen and ye receive not our witness." What an interesting verse.

I want you...to show you just a little interesting thing in here you might miss. Notice that the pronoun used there is "we." We speak, we know, we have seen. And why does Jesus say "we", who is He talking about? Who is this we? Well, it's very obvious. It's talking about the little band of disciples. John the Baptist included, probably. We, those who are following Me, we who know the truth of God, we who know the revelation, we know what we're talking about. But you don't receive it. And I love the fact that He uses "we", you know why? This is beautiful.

Look back at verse 2 of chapter 3. Here comes Nicodemus to Jesus by night and says unto Him, watch this: "Rabbi," what's the next word? "We." Now this is beautiful. He comes and he says, in effect, he's saying, "I'd like You to know, Jesus, that I represent most of the important people. We feel, you know, we feel that You're definitely a prophet from God, or You couldn't do this." And he's speaking for Israel. He's speaking collectively for Israel. And so Jesus answers him, "Well, we...all seven of us...we know what we're talking about," see. He answers him the way he came to Him. He said, "We feel this way." And Jesus said, "Well, we feel this way." And there's the comradery of those around Jesus. Isn't that a beautiful thing? Nicodemus is saying, "I represent Israel." Jesus is saying, "Well, I represent My friends here, and we know." I like that. It's kind of nice to have Jesus speak for me. We...I like that. It's those little things that get me excited...know about that. I'm glad to be one of those we, aren't you?

So, He says, "We know what we're talking about. I'm not just coming off the top of My head with these things. I know what I'm saying." What do you mean, Jesus? Listen, there's no doubt about regeneration. That's a fact. There's no doubt about baptism work of the Holy Spirit. That's a fact.

There's no doubt about the new birth. That's a fact. There's no doubt about God's eternal decree for salvation for sinners that I'm about to unfold. That's a fact. I'm talking about what I know about. He's positive. Nicodemus was kind of..."Well, we think You might be a teacher..." Now we know what we're talking about. Just because you don't understand it, Nicodemus, doesn't disqualify it. See, that's the point.

Nicodemus in verse 9 is saying, "Well, I don't understand how that could possibly be." And Jesus says, "Well, wait a minute, you know, we know it is...we know it." Jesus wants Nicodemus to know that He is the truth. Jesus said, "I am the truth." Jesus said, "My witness is true." Jesus said, "I speak for the Father." Jesus and His little group of disciples knew the truth. They knew it. And He says, "Your problem, Nicodemus...watch it at the end of verse 11...you--and that's a plural you--you receive not our witness. You don't want it, Nicodemus. That's...be honest about it. There it is, you don't want it. It's there. It's true."

And that was Nicodemus' problem. I mean, he said...he...you can just imagine what's going on his brain: You mean to tell me that my whole life doing all these law-works and I've got to scrap it all and go back and start all over again...forget it. So He says, "You don't receive it. It's true, Nicodemus, I mean, it's so simple. It's our witness, we've seen it, we're telling you about it, there it is." Simple enough for a child. But you don't want to receive it.

Now look at verse 12. Why didn't he want to receive it? And why as a representative of Israel, Israel didn't want it either, did they? "He came unto His own and His own...what? They didn't want it either." He was speaking for Israel. He was typical of all Israel.

All right, verse 12, "If I've told you earthly things and you believe...what?...not," that's why he didn't receive it, he didn't believe it. Now do you see the point? He didn't understand because he didn't believe. It's a matter of believing. Then understanding. You say, "How do you know that?" Because, Paul says 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The natural man understandeth not the things of God." They're spiritually discerned. They can't...they don't register if you don't believe. So He says you don't receive cause you don't believe.

Well, you know, I read that over and it really gave me a very interesting thought. We kind of hinted at it a couple of weeks ago cause I bounced back to chapter 2 verse 23, look at that one. It says when He was in Jerusalem--Jesus--at the Passover in the feast day, "Many believed." Now Nicodemus was surely one of those many because down in chapter 3 verse 2 it says, "We know You're a teacher come from God." So on one hand, Nicodemus says I believe and Jesus says no you don't.

So, wait a minute, what's going on here? The point is, there's one kind of believing and then there's another kind of believing. Nicodemus says, "Well, I mean, I know You're from God, I believe that much." That doesn't prove anything. That's not it. Sure, how could they deny He was from God with

the miracles that He did? But the question was, was Nicodemus ready to believe not that He was from God but that He was...what?...God? You see, Nicodemus' problem was, he...I don't think he was willing to admit he was a sinner. You go over to verse 20 and Jesus says in chapter 3, "For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light lest his deeds shall be reproved." You see, the Jews didn't even want to get near Jesus cause He exposed their sin, see. It was a painful process. I mean, they'd rather stay away from Him completely than be exposed. And so, they believed on the things that He did, but they didn't really commit themselves to Him.

You'll notice it in verse 11, "You didn't receive our witness." Oh yeah, they believed He was from God but they didn't believe He was God. And then in verse 12, I'm telling you, He literally devastates Nicodemus with another sarcastic statement. He says, "If I told you earthly things and you believe not, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

Now you know what Nicodemus has spent his whole life doing? Teaching heavenly things, see. And Jesus says, "Nicodemus, some teacher you must be of heavenly things, you don't even get the earthly things." Ooh... You say, "Well, what is this?" Well, it's very simple. What is this earthly thing He's talking about? Watch this...the new birth. Jesus reduced it, He says I tried to make it simple, I put it in earthly human terms, it is an earthly miracle. God reaches down and regenerates a man. I've been regenerated, me, John MacArthur was regenerated. Where did it happen? Right here on earth. Right in the state of Alabama standing in a weed patch beside a highway, I had the new birth. It was an earthly miracle.

Now Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, "If you don't even get the part that goes on earth, do you expect Me to go back up into glory and tell you all about what happened up there to make it possible?" He don't even get this part down here. In effect, some teacher... So Nicodemus was fairly well shorn by this time. And yet I know it was in love because by the time the resurrection of Jesus Christ appears, Nicodemus is a disciple and the love was returned to Jesus Christ.

But Jesus says, "I try to make it simple, but you're so...you know, up here, you can't understand the simple things, how could you ever understand what you think you understand?" And here was Nicodemus...didn't understand the new birth. So typical. If you can't understand the simple part that occurs on earth, the new birth in you, how are you ever going to understand the divine side that takes place in the decree of God in eternity past?

So, the problem with unbelief unfolds and Nicodemus is the example of every unbeliever. He is ignorant because he won't believe. And anybody who is ignorant of the gospel, I don't care whether they are someone who sits in a church and rejects or someone in the wilderness who rejects, it is simply because they refuse to believe the truth when it was presented.

You see, it's an interesting thing about unbelief. Unbelief understands nothing. Did you get that? Unbelief understands nothing. I don't care...you could tell a person the simplest thing in the world, if they weren't going to believe it, they'd never understand it. All right, so we see the problem of unbelief. Unbelief fosters ignorance.

Now, let's look at the answer to unbelief. And this very quickly. And as I said, we're just going to go over the top of these verses to show you what context they're in. Next time around, in a few years, we'll consider them detail by detail.

Verse 13 to 17 gives us the answer to unbelief. And the answer is very simple...believe...believe. And that's, of course, begun the process by God to which we respond. Verse 13, here's a beautiful verse, boy, this is something: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven." Isn't that terrific? You say, "It doesn't do anything for me."

Well, let me tell you what, no man hath ascended up to heaven...now watch this...do you know, listen, every religious system in the world is man's attempt to crawl out of his natural box and find God? Mary Baker Eddy Patterson Glover Frye says, "If you read Science and Health and The Key to the Scripture, you'll crawl out of the natural box and you'll find God." Annie Besant and Madame Blavatsky, Judge Rutherford and Professor Russell and everybody else says just do this and that and you'll crawl out and you'll find God. The Buddhist says you put some porridge there and you rub and you can find gods. You sit under a tree and think yourself into nirvana, whoo, there's God, see. And the Mohammedan says you get on your knees and you do...you bow down and say your thing and you'll find God, see.

And everybody's trying to...you live in a natural box, see. Imagine it, a natural box, time-space box, outside supernatural, that's where God is. Can man pop out of his little box into the supernatural any time he wants, explode out there and say, "O God, there You are?" Sorry about that. Can't be done. You can't explode out of your natural box and find God. It can't be done. You are a creature confined to time and space. And Jesus is saying, "Nicodemus, the answer is not in religion because no man can crawl into heaven, discover truth, crawl back and say here's how it is." You can't explode out of your natural box. Listen to me, if you can't get out of your box to find God, what has to happen? God's got to come in. Did He ever do that? One time. Who was that? Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was God exploding into the natural world to tell us what it was all about. And Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, "All your religion is meaningless unless you accept the one who came from heaven with the divine revelation itself."

So, He says, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man who is in heaven." You say what? How could He be down from heaven and in heaven at the same time? It's no problem He's God...He's God. He's Jesus and God at the same time? Right. That's hard to understand. Right, impossible. We don't understand it, we just believe it.

So with that opening statement of His divine origin, He destroys all the religious processes. You can't find God. You either take what Jesus says, listen to this, you either take what Jesus says about God or you have nothing because God has spoken to us in these last days by His Son, see. That's it. You either take what Jesus says or you're a fool because you can't ascend into heaven and find the answers for yourself. Neither could any other man, only the Son of Man who came down from heaven and who is in heaven. Was at the time He came down in the form of God, is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

All right, now Jesus has been talking about new life and the new birth. And now there's a transition in verses 14 and 15, it's a whole new paragraph. And Jesus begins to explain the details of salvation. It doesn't happen by religion. It has to come from Christ. Now new life comes out of death. Old life has to die to bring new life. Sin produces death. "The wages of sin is..what?..death." If there's going to be new life, something's got to die.

Watch verse 14 and 15, very quickly. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life." And that's like a little paragraph just stuck right in the middle of this discourse. And you know what it is? It is a veiled prediction of the death of Christ. It's exactly what it is. He's saying in order for this new life to happen, in order for a man to be redeemed and brought to God, something has to die, something has to die. "Except a corn of wheat fall on to the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth fruit." "The wages of sin is death..." Somebody had to die for sin. Who died? Jesus Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree, died for sin and when we receive Christ, we die with Him, we rise to walk in newness of life. The new life that comes as a result of the new birth can only come because somebody died and bore the penalty of sin. New life only comes because somebody died. And here Jesus is saying I'm going to die...I'm going to die.

And He likens His death to the old story in Numbers chapter 21 of Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness. And He says just like Moses lifted up that serpent, so the Son of Man is going to be lifted up.

You say, "What's the parallel?" Watch this. Numbers 21, they're wandering in the wilderness, griping, belly-aching incessantly till God has had it with them and God says that's all, here's a plague. And God sent a whole lot of deadly snakes into the camp and they all got bit. And they were lying around in pain and dying. And they repented toward God. You know why? Why did they repent? They knew that they had deserved punishment. And God says, "All right, Moses, on the basis of their repentance, you take a brazen pole and a serpent, place it in the center of the camp. Anybody who looks at that will be healed instantly."

You say, "Well, how is that an illustration of Christ?" Now watch this. People who wanted to look at that brazen altar...brazen serpent would have to do two things. Number one, they would have to believe that it was really sin that caused the problem. Secondly, they'd have to believe that that serpent represented the healing power of God. You know why? Because you probably couldn't see that serpent from everywhere...not at all. You know what they would have to do? Their faith would be put to the test. They would have had to crawl....that camp was huge. I mean, there were people everywhere for miles around that tabernacle. They would have with that deadly poison acting on their system, they would have had to crawl perhaps several miles, in some cases, to get a view of that brazen serpent. Such a crawl would demand two things. Number one, the knowledge that indeed there was sin for which needed repentance. Number two, they would have had to have a lot of faith in that brazen serpent. And they didn't have faith in the brass, they had faith in God who set it up, right? So crawling to find that serpent involved two things, a recognition of sin and faith in God. That's what it involved.

And so, those people stung by the poison of deadly snakes would drag their poisoned bodies distances, great distances to see that thing. Jesus says it's just the same with Me. Men bitten and poisoned by that old serpent Satan, when they look at Me with two things, the same two things as in Israel, a recognition of their sin and the knowledge that in My death is the healing power of God expressed on the cross. With those two things in mind, instant healing. Do you see the parallel? So He says as Moses lifted up the serpent, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. And He also said, "If I be lifted up...what?...I'll draw men unto Myself."

He says importantly at the end of verse 14, the word "must." Do you know that the Son of Man must be lifted up? You say, "Why, why did He have to die?" Well, two reasons really. Number one reason is a principle that God put into action long ago. "Without the shedding of blood, there is no...what?...remission for sin." Number two, love. God's sacrificial system demanded it. Number two, love demanded it. Number three, justice. God said I've got to punish sin. Somebody's got to bear it. So Jesus had to die. And so, the person bitten by sin can look at the uplifted Jesus Christ in faith believing and be healed spiritually. Beautiful, beautiful truth.

And notice the gift of that healing in verse 15 is eternal life. You say, "What's eternal life?" Listen to me. That is not a quantity of life, it's a quality of life. You want to know something wonderful? If you're a Christian, do you know you're already living eternal life? It's exciting. Well, the old body's going to drop off one of these days, but that doesn't mean anything. You know what we're like? We're like a butterfly in a cocoon. A butterfly's alive in there. It's developing. Something going on and one of those days, whew... And all of you on the inside, God is forming you more and more like Christ and someday the cocoon shatters and you escape immortal...eternal life. You're already...the process is going on right now. You're never going to die...physically, no big thing.

And the other alternative is to perish, verse 15, in hell. So He says, "Whosoever believeth..." What does it mean to believe in Christ? What does it mean. Here's what it means, listen. Three things, now watch it. To believe in Christ, number one...to believe that God is the loving Father that Jesus said He was...did you get that? That's the first thing. To believe that God is the loving Father that Jesus said He was. Secondly, to believe that Jesus is God and that everything He says is true. Thirdly, and this is fantastic, an unswerving, unchanging, unquestioning obedience to that belief. Belief that God is the loving Father Jesus said He was. Belief that Jesus is God and everything He said is true. And an unswerving, unquestioning, unchanging obedience to that belief. That's saving faith. It's not just saying we know You come from God. No....it's putting your life in His hands.

Well, then He comes to the expansion of this thought in verse 16 which is probably the most well-known verse in the Bible. I'm merely going to read it to you. I'm not going to beggar its language by describing it. Listen to it. Try to listen with an ear that perhaps has never heard it before. "For God...and watch that next word...so loved." Have you ever thought about how much is in those two letters? Think about it. So loved...what do you mean "so"? So it's indescribable. So that it couldn't be spoken. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Salvation in believing.

Now verse 17 is a very important verse because it's directed right at Nicodemus. I mean, this is a shot right at Nicodemus and the Jews he's representing. Now watch this. "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world." Now wait a minute, now hold it...what are you saying here, Jesus? Listen to this. The Jews had the common idea that when Messiah came, His first act would be to wipe out the heathen and the Gentiles, same thing. And back in Amos' day, the children of Israel were jumping up and down saying, "Boy, wait till the day the Lord gets here and those Gentiles get theirs," see. You can look it up in Amos 5, verses 18 to 20.

And in that, Amos says, "Wait a minute, you're...you think the day of the Lord is going to be light, watch out...it might be darkness." Ohh. You know what happened? Not only did Jesus Christ not come to destroy the Gentiles and to judge them, something got flipped. Because of Israel's disbelief, He blinded the Jew and turned to the Gentile. Boy, Amos knew what he was talking about. He said, "Don't get so excited about the day of the Lord being light, it just might be darkness." And it was. And Israel is still blind, aren't they? Till God unwraps their eyes. Strange twist.

Well, they had the idea that when God...the day of the Lord came, Messiah arrived. Man, it's going to be glory for Israel and wipe out everybody else. And so what does Jesus say? Look at it, verse 17, "For God sent not His Son into the world to...what?...condemn the world." That's not the point of His coming. The point of His coming is not to redeem Israel and condemn the world, but that the world through Him...what?...might be saved. See? You see how that hits right at the issue? That's the point. He came for salvation. Not just for Israel, but for the whole world. That's exactly what God meant, they should have known that. In the Abrahamic covenant when He said, "In thee shall all the

families of the earth...what?...be blessed."

Very quickly and very obviously, we've seen the problem of unbelief and the answer to unbelief. Look very quickly, and this is very simple, we'll just consider in a couple of minutes, at the results of unbelief. Verses 18 to 21...unbelief seals final doom. Verse 18, "He that believeth on Him is not condemned," that's right, isn't it? You believe in Christ, you're not condemned. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ." All right, but...now watch this, "But he that believeth not is condemned...when?...already." Now that's an important word. Because the act of condemnation is yet future, isn't it? The great white throne, the sentencing. That's future. But the truth of condemnation already begins now. You might say that the Great White Throne is merely the execution of the sentence, right here is the trial. And a man who doesn't believe in Jesus Christ is condemned right now already, isn't he? Because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Then the people come to your door and say, "Well, Jesus was one of many gods..." Heh-heh...the only begotten Son of God. And they say, "Well, you don't understand what begotten means." The only begotten Son of God means what it says. And condemnation happens already, right now in this life. The sentence awaits, the condemnation is now for the one who doesn't believe.

And notice the character of the condemnation, verses 19 and 20. "And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world--that light is Christ--men...what?...love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." You say, "People don't believe in Christ because they don't understand." Wrong...wrong. "People don't believe in Christ because they just are ignorant." Wrong. People don't believe in Jesus Christ because they love their sin, right....they love it. Well, that's what it says. They love darkness. They're just like those slimy little bugs, when you turn the light on they run under the rock. Expose them to the light and they run.

It's tragic that men love darkness...but they do. Let me read you a verse. Romans 1:32, listen to this. He's describing the sinner, now listen, "The sinner who knowing the judgment of God that they who commit such things are worthy of death--watch this--not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them." They love it. So somebody says to me, "I just can't understand the gospel, I just can't understand it." You know why? You don't believe. You know why you don't believe? You don't want to believe. You know why you don't want to believe? You love your sin. That's why. Your deeds are evil. You're not about to step into the light unless begins a regenerating process in you. Men hate the light. There's no ignorance in Romans 1. There's no ignorance here. There's a love of darkness.

All right, then verse 20, "For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light lest he deeds should be reproved." They're not about to get exposed. So they hide under the rock of their sin.

Now Jesus closes this very great sermon here on salvation with an invitation. And verse 21 is an invitation. And I'm sure it just kind of had a special point at Nicodemus because He says this: "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." And He switches gears and says, but the believer, ah, he basks in the light because they show that his deeds are godly deeds. And in effect He's saying, "Nicodemus, you can come to the light, you can love the light when it reveals godly things." That's a great passage. And it closes with a great invitation, to come to the light.

Let me conclude by this. People often ask: how can love and condemnation go side by side? How can God say I love you, I'm sending Christ to die for you, I love you, and I want to express My love to you but if you don't believe, you're sentenced to hell forever? You're condemned. How can God do that? That's such a dichotomy of attitudes.

Let me show you how that is. Very simple. Do you know that something intended for love can turn into condemnation very easily..very easily? It's like the guy who went to the art museum, you know, say for example in France. And he saw all the glorious things in the Louvre, all the beautiful paintings and he walked out and said to the curator, "I don't think so much of your pictures." And the curator would say to him, "Sir, these pictures aren't on trial, you are."

You want to know something? Don't tell me you don't see anything lovely in Jesus Christ, He's not on trial. You are.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).