

## The Love of God Shown in the Light of the Son John 2:23-3:21 (ESV)

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We're going to walk through some Scripture here today. As Steve said, it would be great if you get your Bible's out. If you don't have one, there's Bible's under your seat or the seat next to you. We're going to be in the book of John. And so, you can go ahead and kind of be ready because I'm going to move through there a little bit.

*23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*

*1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

*9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 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 works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever*

*does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”*

Stories, whether they are fictional or true, are often told in different ways. Now, I’m kind of old-school, so I like stories being told from the beginning. The very beginning is a very good place to start. Tell it from the beginning and go forward. However, some stories start in the middle. And so, this is an example by *The Gambler*. *The Gambler* is a book by famous Russian author, Dostoyevsky. It starts in the middle this way:

“At length I returned from two weeks leave of absence to find that my patrons had arrived three days ago in Roulettenberg. I received from them a welcome quite different to that which I had expected. The General eyed me coldly, greeted me in rather haughty fashion, and dismissed me to pay my respects to his sister. It was clear that from SOMEWHERE money had been acquired.”

So, it jumps right in the middle. There’s action. We start wondering what’s going on. That’s the way that story is told. It grabs your interest from this abrupt beginning. However, in today’s text the true story of Jesus is told from the very beginning. And not only that, unlike any book ever written, it’s told not just at the beginning, but the very beginning of time itself. In order to properly understand what God is saying to us in the text today, John 2:23-3:21, we need to take a quick tour through the first couple of chapters of John. Before we start down the book of John, it’s important to understand why John wrote this book. And it’s important to understand the purpose when you’re reading it. But we don’t have to guess because John tells us.

**John 20:31** but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The book of John was written to show that Jesus is the Messiah, that He is the Son of God, and that through faith in Him we can have eternal life. Therefore, we should remember that everything we read in the book of John in some way is part of that purpose. So we start in John 1, at the very beginning of time. By the way, before time began, God was there. He was the one who created time. He’s outside of time. So let’s follow along in your Bible’s in John 1. We’re not going to read all of it, but I’m going to set you up for where we are today.

**John 1:1-5** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

That was Jesus introduced. Now we’re going to see where Jesus is made manifest. And that’s in verse 14.

**John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

After Jesus is introduced and after He is made manifest, then He is named Messiah. And so for that, we go to verse 29. This is John the Baptist speaking.

**John 1:29-31** The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.”

So that is Jesus named Messiah. And then, Jesus’ mission is readied and He starts to call His disciples to Him. So what does He do? Well, let’s go to verse 35.

**John 1:35-37** The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

So He saw His disciples. He started calling the disciples, Andrew and Peter. And then He called Nathanael from under a fig tree. And so all of this starts to happen. He starts to call these disciples there in verses 35-42. Then, Jesus’ mission is confirmed. This is starting in verse 43.

**John 1:43-46** The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

Go down to verse 48.

**John 1:48-51** Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

And so then you go down and then there’s the wedding at Cana in chapter 2. So He goes to this wedding. They run out of wine, and His mom says, “Do something.” So He says, “Well, my time hasn’t come.” But He goes ahead and He says, “Draw water into these jars.” And they do, and then when they pull it out, it’s wine. So, His mission is confirmed there when He does that. And then what happens is His authority is shown. So He’s introduced, He’s made manifest, He’s named Messiah, His mission is readied, His mission is confirmed, and His authority is shown in verse 13. What happens there? Well, it’s the Passover in Israel, at Jerusalem.

**John 2:13-25** The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

So there you have His authority shown. And then today's message, we get into the Gospel given starting in John 2:23.

Now the thing you need to remember is that the chapter titles, the numbers of the chapters and the titles in the chapters in your Bible, those aren't divinely inspired. Those were put there by men later, to help us. And so, often, we see these breaks and we think it's something new happening. Actually, it's not. If you look at 2:23 and you see that's what's happening, the Passover feast and some believed in his name, and it goes down and goes right in to chapter 3. So that's what we're going to do. We're going to combine that.

The setting of the text today is in Jerusalem during the Passover. How long had the Jews been celebrating Passover? At that time then, about 2,000 years. Is it possible that for a large number of people, including religious leaders, that the ritual aspect of this had all but snuffed out the spiritual heart of what the Passover celebration was to be? It's important to note a couple of things.

The last prophet to speak for God in the Old Testament was Malachi, about 400 years before Christ. How long were the Israelites in slavery to the Egyptians? The Passover is celebrating the removal of the Israelites from Egypt. Well, about 400 years. So, there was a divine release from bondage for the Israelites after 400 years from Egypt, and now our text has been about 400 years since a prophet had spoke for God. And now the Israelites were both in physical bondage to the Romans and in spiritual bondage to their sin. Just like God moved in the plagues against Egypt in the Exodus, God was getting ready to move again, but in an infinitely more powerful way.

The Passover was a commemoration of God's freeing of the Israelites from Egypt. And now that Jesus comes on the scene, He would be called the Passover Lamb. He was coming and offering all people the freedom from the slavery to their sin. So, the events of the day here at the Temple had Jesus overturning tables at the Temple during the Passover. And the Jews demanded under what authority Jesus could do this. The key thing to understand as we go down this road, is that the Jews had an earthly mindset, but Jesus was speaking of spiritual truths. The context is that Jesus is making spiritual

statements and taking spiritual actions, but the Jews were seeing things on a purely physical or earthly plain. So now, with that setting, we go to our text today.

Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover and the text says many believed in Him when they saw the signs He was doing. However, verse 24 turns things around. It says Jesus did not entrust himself to a man. Who did He entrust Himself to? We know that in 1 Peter 2:23, Peter says that Jesus kept entrusting Himself to Him to judge justly. Well, who is that? That's God the Father. So Jesus did not trust men. He trusted God; the other persons of the Godhead, the Father, the Spirit. It says Jesus knew all people. He knew their hearts. It says He didn't need anyone to bear witness about man. He didn't need to hear people's words about themselves. He knew what was in men's hearts.

So for example, Peter at the Last Supper said, "Lord, I will die for you." And Jesus said, "Oh really? Before the rooster crows, you're going to deny me three times." And Judas. At the Last Supper He says, "What you're about to do, quickly go and do." Which is what? To betray Jesus. **Jesus knows the motives of our hearts.** And you know, we can hide that from other people. We can kind of hide the motives of our hearts. Our hearts are so deceptive and so deceived and so deceiving, even to ourselves. But God knows the true motives of our hearts. We need to remember that.

Here, we're at the end of chapter 2, and Jesus did not entrust Himself to a man. We see that in verses 24 and 25.

*24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*

Well then, guess what happens? A man shows up!

*1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*

That's what 2:24 is talking about. He understands what's going on there when this man is coming.

Events had happened that day. Jesus had overturned the tables of the money-changers. It's important to understand how significant this is. Jesus had interrupted and disrupted the normal course of the events at the Temple, during Passover! The Jews were really upset! They asked Him what sign is He going to give to prove the authority to do such a thing? They were basically asking Him, "Who do you think you are?!" We also know that many people believed in Him. So the conflict begins. Jesus takes an action. Jesus is confronted. Jesus makes a statement and some people believe in Him and some start to oppose Him. The division starts between those who perceive spiritual truths and those who only perceive the physical, here and now; the earthly things. And then after that conflict, where there once was a crowd, now there is just a few. The conflict now moves to a leader of one of those who oppose Jesus. And he is confronting Jesus personally. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews came to Jesus at night.

So before, a group of Jewish leaders had confronted Jesus and had demanded to know what proof He had for the authority He was doing such things such as turn over the tables in the temple. And now a single, solitary leader of the Jews comes to Jesus by himself and at night. Why at night? Is it possible that he didn't want to be seen by the other Jewish leaders? Or did he simply want to have a conversation with Jesus that was more private? John has already used very strong imagery language in the image of light and darkness. And he continues to do so throughout the book. This leads me to believe that John is suggesting that Nicodemus either didn't want to be seen or even more probably, had negative motives. Nicodemus starts with some buttering up, or at least some positive words. Who knows what Nicodemus was planning to say after that opening sentence? We don't know. But he opens by saying,

*2 ... "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."*

It is possible that Nicodemus was going to go from these relatively good words to a question, or to give a warning. We don't know. However, Jesus knew. Remember He had just said He knew what was in a man. So Jesus doesn't engage in friendly chit chat. He doesn't thank Nicodemus for the kind words. He doesn't think, "I now have one of the Jewish leaders coming to me. Maybe I can get him on My side and I can work with him." No. He pretty much brushes Nicodemus' words aside and makes an incredibly bold and amazing statement.

*3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Think about how startling of a statement this must be for Nicodemus to hear! Jesus did not reply to Nicodemus, but goes right to the heart of the matter. Jesus didn't want to take time for chit chat. He wanted to get right at it, and so He goes straight again to the spiritual. Just like the conversations with the Jews after overturning the money tables at the Temple, Jesus is making a spiritual statement. But listen to Nicodemus' response here. Nicodemus responds to Jesus with a very earthly reply.

*4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*

Nicodemus is thinking and speaking on an earthly plane. Jesus then replies again with a heavenly answer, an answer on the spiritual plane. **Nicodemus had an earthly mindset and did not know spiritual truth.** Then Jesus pretty much explains in greater detail, what He had previously said.

*5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*

I want to stop right here and I want to focus on the aspect of seeing the Kingdom of God and entering the Kingdom of God. Unless you are born again, you cannot see the

Kingdom of God or enter into the Kingdom of God. What does that mean here? I believe these are two very similar meanings. 1. See is the same as perceive. Unless you're born again, a person can't perceive the Kingdom of God. I think that's what was happening here with Nicodemus. He wasn't perceiving the spiritual aspect of things. He was perceiving only on an earthly plane. We know this because Nicodemus' response focused on the physical aspects of physical birth.

*4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*

2. Enter means to become part of, to become part of right now. Too often in the church, we think this means that when I die, I'll go to heaven. To enter into the Kingdom of God means that person enters into the state of being a person that is part of the Kingdom of God right then; right when they trust in Christ. **Seeing and entering the Kingdom of God starts as soon as we are born again.**

Nicodemus was not seeing or perceiving heavenly things. He just wasn't getting it. Not only was he not getting it, he could not get it. This whole conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus is a contrast between someone looking only at the earthly things (Nicodemus) and someone speaking in terms of heavenly things (Jesus). We know that because Jesus tells us so.

*12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*

Now, for us here today, how do we look at things in an earthly way, instead of a heavenly way? First of all, the first question we need to ask is: Are we born again? You have to ask yourself, "Am I born again?" If we see things only on an earthly perspective, it's a strong sign that we may not be born again. It is possible to get focused as a believer, on earthly things. It is possible to lose that heavenly focus. That's why we come to church every week. That's why we need the grace of the church. That's why we need God's Word. That's why we need prayer. That's why we need brothers and sisters in Christ to help us when we start losing that heavenly focus, to regain that heavenly focus and to not see the earthly focus. However, what if we never really see the heavenly perspective? If our perspective only consists of earthly things and earthly pursuits and earthly concerns, then we may not be born again.

Maybe you just go to church because you always have. A good question to ask yourself is, "Do I see heavenly things?" What would that look like? It would look like prayer. It would look like prayer being answered and seeing God answering prayer. It would look like seeing situations where things are happening in your life and you see God working. It may be difficult situations. It may be trials. You see them and you say, "Maybe God is helping me to see my dependence, my need on God. It may be little things that go well, seeing that "God loves to give good gifts to His children." You see it in that way.

What about problems in the world? All you have to do is turn on the news or look at the headlines, and you see all kinds of stuff. Do you fear or do you say, “I trust in God’s sovereignty”? “He’s got this! He’s in control.” Do I think there’s an answer to fix all the problems in the world? Political, or whatever? Or do I understand that the world is broken and God is working? He’s got a plan. It’s a spiritual work. Do I see myself in proper terms? A wretched sinner with no hope outside of Christ’s shed blood for me. Or do I maybe see myself as not so bad compared to others?

So Nicodemus did not see the kingdom of God. He didn’t perceive it. He saw the earthly view of things. They are having a conversation on entirely two different planes.

It’s like trying to get your child to see the point of something. Let’s say you have two children and they are fighting over a toy. You come over, you stop the fight and you say to the child who was trying to take the toy away from the other child, to ask for it nicely. You model this. “Now ask and say, ‘May I play with that, please?’” And you’re trying to model that for them. Now, the one thing I didn’t tell you about that is that these are twins. They are two boys. They’re twins, and they’re only 18 months old. They don’t even talk yet. So, when you say that to that child, “Why don’t you ask nicely if you can play with it?” he looks at you with questioning eyes and stomps because he’s just thinking, “Mine! That’s mine!” That child is not getting what you are saying. Why? Because he doesn’t have the capability to understand what you’re saying. That child is living in the 18 month old realm. That child can only see that they want the toy and they want it now.

But what if I told you these children were 3 or 4 years old? Then it’s possible they’d have the capability that you could do that. You could model that and ask the child to ask for that from your brother. And they might kind of learn that, and it’s a good thing to do. But, if they are only 18 months old, they don’t have the ability, they cannot understand what you’re saying. They can’t do it. That’s kind of like here with Jesus and Nicodemus. He’s saying to Nicodemus that without being born again, which is a work of God by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is not there. And so there is no way for Nicodemus to see things on a Heavenly plane. It’s not possible. God has to do the work in Nicodemus’ heart and God the Holy Spirit needs to come in to Nicodemus’ heart in order for Nicodemus to see or perceive the Kingdom of God. So Jesus continues to explain in verse 6.

*6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

Nicodemus, still on the earthly plane says, “How can these things be?” So, he is completely flummoxed and cannot relate to what Jesus is saying. Why is that? I believe it’s because Nicodemus is not spiritually reborn, so words that are spiritually related make no sense to him. **God is sovereign and it is the Spirit of God that sovereignly causes spiritual life in dead souls.**

The key of this verse is that God's Spirit is like the wind. It blows where it wishes. Remember, God is one God. He is made up of three persons; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We call this three in one aspect of God, The Trinity. The verse here is speaking of God the Holy Spirit. Jesus, God the Son, is speaking of the work of God the Holy Spirit. Jesus is saying that the Spirit of God is sovereign and sovereignly decides who to touch and who to bring from spiritual death to spiritual life. So, now Jesus lays out for Nicodemus what the problem is. Nicodemus is thinking on an earthly plane and Jesus is speaking about a heavenly plane. And Jesus rebukes Nicodemus, and basically says, "You're a teacher of Israel? You should be all about the Heavenly things and you are missing them." Let's think about this. It's kind of like this.

Let's say you go to a restaurant with friends or family. You go to this restaurant and you're all sitting down. And you're looking forward to some good-tasting food. The food is brought to your table and it's not good. It's not good at all. In fact, it's not good for anybody at the table. None of it is good! So you go to the owner of the restaurant and you're like, "So, let me ask you a question. What do you think is important to have at your restaurant?" He starts to talk about the lighting. He starts talking about the decorations. He starts talking about the outfits that his staff wears. He starts talking about the music that is playing. And then you say, "You never mentioned the food. You're the owner of a restaurant and you don't know that having food that tastes good is one of the most important things?" Jesus is like that to Nicodemus.

*10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 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.*

Here, Jesus goes into more detail and goes further and speaks about himself, the Son of Man. He asks Nicodemus the question, "If I have told you earthly things and you don't believe, how can you believe about heavenly things?" He is basically saying, "You can't!" Jesus is saying that it is clear that Nicodemus does not have spiritual life in him. Then Jesus proceeds to tell Nicodemus heavenly things. In fact, the most serious, central heavenly or spiritual thing anyone can ever know is that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life.

First, Jesus references Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness. So that was about the Israelites again. They had left Egypt. They had come out of Egypt, the Exodus. And they were grumbling. It says they were grumbling against God in Numbers 2. They were grumbling against God. "This food is all the same. There's not water. I don't like this." They're grumbling. They're sinning against God. And so what does God do? He sends snakes, vipers, poisonous vipers. And they start biting the Israelites and the Israelites start dying. Then that gets their attention. They go to Moses and they say, "Please pray for us. We have sinned against the Lord." So, they recognized their sin and that they'd sinned

against the Lord. “Please pray for us.” So Moses does. And then God tells Moses to make a serpent, a snake, on a pole and raise it up. Anybody who is bitten by the snake, when they look at that, they won’t die. Well, that’s crazy! That’s a crazy thing! But you know what those people did? They looked on the pole. They had been bitten by a poisonous viper. They saw people die. They were going to die. And so what did they do? They did what God said.

So what was happening there? Well, they sinned. They grumbled against God. They sinned against Him. Then God brought judgment. Death! And then they realized there’s a consequence for their sin. And then God brought a solution. Look at this snake on the pole, and you won’t die. Why would He do that? Could it be that He was trying to show them that they had this great dependence on God? That they needed to recognize this great dependence on who God is? And they were helpless to save themselves. They were going to die of those snake bites. They had better look at this pole because that is what God had provided as a solution. Well guess what? That whole thing back in Numbers 2 was a foreshadowing of Jesus’ coming. And then Jesus refers back to it in this scripture. He refers back to it and says, “Just like that, that’s what is happening here.” So there’s a parallel there. So now Jesus is saying, “People need to look to Me for their healing.”

Then, we get to the most famous Scripture of all. It’s known quite well. John 3:16.

*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.*

Notice the use of the word “world.” What does “world” mean here? How does that compare to the use of the word “world” for example, in 1 John 2:15? “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father cannot be in him.” Well, there are two different ways in which the word “world” is used in Scripture. In the case of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world” refers to people, that is creatures, God’s creatures, us. He loves us. He holds out the ultimate gift of love, the shed blood of Jesus to pay for our sins, and He holds that out to all people who would come to believe.

The other way the word “world” has meaning in the sense of “Do not love the world,” is in the world system of thinking. That is the anti-God, man-centered, I don’t need God, God-hating way of thinking and living. Idols of money, comfort, pleasure, power, position; those make up the world that we are not to love.

**John 15:18-19** If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

**1 John 2:15–16** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

**Matthew 5:14** You are the light of the world.

This is kind of an interesting one. Why would the world need light? Because it's dark. This anti-God world system of thinking is a dark place and the light of the world is Jesus Christ. **God loves the world (people), but God hates worldly, anti-God thinking.**

Other words to focus on in John 3:16. Gave.

*16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave...*

Who gave? God gave. What is gave? It's giving something. It's a gift. God didn't loan. God didn't bargain. He gave. It was an absolute gift.

His only Son. What did He give? Jesus. It was an act of love. And this is parallel to the ram that was caught in the bushes when Abraham took Isaac up. God said to Abraham, "I want you to go sacrifice your son, Isaac." So they went up to the mountain and just as Abraham was going to obey God and sacrifice Isaac, God stops him. And then they notice that there was a ram caught with his horns in the bushes. And that was God's grace. God had provided the sacrifice. Jesus here is the sacrifice that God provides for our sin.

Whosoever or whoever may believe. Who is this referring to? It's referring to whosoever may believe. That's what it's referring to. And believe is not just mental assent. This is not saying, "I know that Jesus is the Son of God and I know He came to take away the sin of the world." This is a trust. This is placing my life in His hands. So you might even say, "Whosoever places his whole life in His hands." You can just put that in there.

*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.*

What is perish? Well, it's not to die physically. We're going to die physically. It means to not die spiritually. It's not to have ongoing spiritual death and separation from God forever. And notice it says, have everlasting life. It doesn't say *will* have everlasting life. It says, *have* everlasting life. When you believe in Christ, you have everlasting life right now.

So, we have this famous verse, John 3:16. It's on signs. People bring it to the sports games. Athletes put it on their face. But do you know that there are verses that come directly after 3:16? And they're not so popular. Let's go through those.

*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 works were evil. 20 For*

*everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”*

In essence, what Jesus is saying is **God’s love is shown in the light of the Son. We either continue to reject God, love our sin, and stay condemned, or we come into the light of Jesus and live.** It lays out earthly and heavenly. It lays out darkness and light. It also identifies why people don’t open their hearts to spiritual truths; because of love of their dark works. People, that is, us in our natural state, do not want to be convicted of sin because that is uncomfortable. We, in our natural state, we like our sin.

So let’s look at God’s love. What is God’s love like? It’s sacrificial. It costs a lot! And it’s complete. It’s absolute! There is no more that is needed. It covers all. God’s love is sacrificial and complete. So what are we to do with this? Well there are two applications I want to share with you today.

### **1. Be born again.**

This is not something that we can do ourselves. It’s purely a work of God. Note Jesus’ words about the work of the Spirit. It’s like the wind. We can’t control it. It goes where it wants, it does what it wants. All we can see are its effects.

So, what are we to do if we are not born again? If you’re saying, “I’m not perceiving the spiritual.” You may say, “You know, I’ve come to church a long time, but I don’t really perceive the spiritual.” Or maybe, “I’ve never been to church before and I know that I’m not born again.” Or, “I’ve been coming for a while, but I know I’m not born again.” I don’t know where you are. But are you perceiving the spiritual? If you’ve never experienced that, if you’ve never perceived the spiritual, seek God. That is the thing to do if you’re not born again. Seek God. Ask Him. Open your heart to Him. Surrender your life to Him. If you have the desire to do that, that is a great thing because God even gives that desire to do that. Scripture says if you seek God with all your heart, you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart. So what’s the next thing? So if you’re born again, the next thing to do is to

### **2. Love like God loves. How we love in the church is one of God’s greatest means of evangelism.**

I want to say that again. How we love in the church is one of God’s greatest means of evangelism. There’s a lot of times in this culture that we live in, in America and the Western culture, it’s very individualistic. There’s a lot of “Me and God.” There’s a lot of truth to that. But primarily, when you look at the New Testament, it’s written to the church. The church is God’s means of working in this world. So loving in the church is one of God’s greatest means of evangelism. And how can I say that? Let’s look at John 15:9-17. This is what this Scripture says.

**John 15:9-17** As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

We are the “one another.” Here are some things to think about. How does knowing that God’s love is both sacrificial and complete motivate us in how we love in the church? What about disagreements? And I’m not talking about serious doctrinal disagreements. I’m talking about just disagreements. Maybe I have a personality conflict with somebody. Or maybe I don’t agree with how something is being done in the church with money. Or I don’t agree with music. Or I don’t agree with some way we do something. Or I work with somebody in a ministry and I really don’t get along with them, or something. How do we handle that? What is love in that look like? Well, it looks sacrificial and it looks complete.

What about engagement; time and focus? It takes time and focus on relationship with others in the church. Take time to engage with others in the church, to show love, to get to know, to spend time with one another. Care and compassion with those in need spiritually, emotionally, physically, financially. There are so many needs. People are hurting emotionally, physically, financially. And we have the compassion offering today. And you’re so generous to give to that. And as a church, we can help people. But care and compassion with those in need in our church are a priority. And then submission to the Elders, so that there is unity and joy and peace in the church. Jesus died not just for individuals, but for the church. He gave Himself up for her.

Being in Christ is a call to build up the church. Love, strive for unity, serve one another, submit to Elders as it says in Hebrews 13:17. The love we have for one another and the unity that is present is what God intends to be the greatest witness in the world for the Gospel; that it’s real. We are to love the unlovable. Who are the unlovable? We’re the unlovable. We’re to love one another and understand that God loved us as unlovable and we’re to understand that we are to love the unlovable, and that’s us.

What is love? It doesn’t always feel loving to the one receiving it. Parents know that about children. “If you love me, you would do this. If you love me, you would do that.” And then as a parent you’re like, “No, actually, that’s not too loving. That wouldn’t be good for you.” So it doesn’t always feel loving to the one receiving it.

It has pure motives. We have to check our motives. We have to say, “Am I doing this so that I’ll look good? Or am I doing this because maybe I think I’ll get something?” And we have to really check our hearts because our hearts are very deceptive. So it has pure motives. We need to look at what’s for the other person’s good. And is it for God’s glory?

So again, to those here who are not born again by the Spirit of God, the message is: be born again! Seek God. Ask God to be merciful to you, and He will! He will come into your life and forgive you of your sin, save you and give you eternal life right now.

To those of us who are born again and are part of the church, 1 Corinthians 13 is the Bible’s application for responding to God’s love for us. And Steve Weaver, when he was up here, he said we’re going through most of the New Testament. Well, we are. I’m going to just jump down to verse 4, here.

**1 Corinthians 13:4-13** Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13 is the Bible’s description of how we are to love like God loves. The context of this passage is written to a church and is speaking to those in the church about how to relate and love one another in the church. So, as I read these verses, I want us all to think about how these verses apply to each of us in our relationships here at Bethany Baptist Church. Loving like this in the church brings light to a dark world. It shines forth for all to see, and causes people to take notice and to wonder. “There must be something about this God that they serve. Look at how they love one another.” And in doing so, it brings great glory to God.

It all starts with God taking the initiative in doing for us what we could not do. And that was at the cost of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, God the Son. That grace is so great, so amazing! Because God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. So by genuine faith in Christ, we can go from being citizens of this earth to being citizens of Heaven and be empowered to love like God loves in the church, to the glory of God.