

Responding to God's Love

Time: 30 minutes

【Introduction】

From previous chapter we have learned that Christians are born again by the Holy Spirit. Remember I said not everyone in this congregation may go to heaven? It is a scary thought, yet it is so real. Nicodemus asks that question, we too will ask the same question, how can we be born again? The answer: through faith in Jesus Christ. In the second part of Jesus' answer, we see once again a more profound explanation how we can be born again. John 3:16 is a verse that has been preached so many times, perhaps it is also hardest to preach, since so many have heard about this verse. A verse we have heard over and over again, the familiarity of this verse will not be taken granted. What I seek today is trying to understand this verse from its original context, following the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

God saves the world through His son (vv.16-17)

☐^{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.

In verse 16 there are a few things to note. The verse begins 'for God so loved the world', the word 'so' is there to describe the extension of God's love. 'So' indicates a kind of infinite, unconditional kind of love. How do we know he loves us? We know it because He gave his one and only Son. If you remember at the beginning of this book, John described Jesus being the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God. ☐^{1:1}☐ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1)

Therefore the relationship between God the father and God the Son is both inseparable and timeless. They have never been separated since the beginning and their relationship is closer than any relationship we can think of. They are One. One and Only shows the uniqueness of their relationship. If you understand how close their relationship is, you will start to understand how great God's love is for the world. The verb 'gave' is amazing, it means that God the Father and God the Son are willing to separate themselves for a reason, and this reason according to the scripture is God's love for the World. Ultimately, it is God the Father who loves Jesus most kills him, for you and for me.

Perhaps I may explain in this way. When people fall in love, they want to give each other their life. But when they break up for some reason, they are both heart-broken. It is like when you are completed by the other half, but all of a sudden this person is taken away from you. If you experience that kind of pain before you will know what I am talking about. It is like cutting yourself into two halves. It is often very sad to see a couple who love each other but they have to separate due to circumstances such as death. Well, the relationship between God the father and God the Son is even closer than the most intimate couple you can see. They are always one, from the beginning to the end. Yet God has to give up his Son, can you imagine how painful it is? When Jesus was nailed on the cross, can you feel his pain when he cried out in Aramaic, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" God is Holy and cannot have any association with sin. For Jesus to bear the sin of the world he has to separate himself from God the Father, in order to save the world. This cry is so real, so painful, so astonishing, that God the Father may separate Himself from Jesus on the cross for us. God SO loved the world.

Well, it will be difficult for us to even imagine, because we are not God. We can never fully grasp how deep his love is. When we are burdened by our sins, we may feel slightly the weight that Jesus carries when he bear the sin of the world. When we lost our loved ones, we may feel slightly the sorrow of the separation of the Father and the Son. But we will never understand fully, because all our relationships

are never as perfect and everlasting as theirs. But if you can, like many of us here, get a glimpse of this love. It will be impossible for you to resist such love. Why? Because this love is so great, so great that we must respond.

If you haven't believed in Jesus, I pray that you can make a decision today. Jesus died for our sins on the cross, and his resurrection gives us new life. God so loved you, that he sent his one and only son to die for you, so you will not perish but have eternal life. Repent today, if you haven't responded to God's love.

Believe in Him to escape condemnation (vv.18, 36)

^{3:17}For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

^{3:18}Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because

he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

^{3:36}Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath

remains on him." (John 3:36)

The next verse explains further the purpose of his coming. Already stated in verse 16, the purpose for Jesus to come to this world is for people to not perish but have eternal life. This is explained further in verses 17-18. Some people will ask the following question: Christianity is so exclusive. Those who don't believe in Jesus they are condemned to Hell. Isn't God loving? Why wouldn't Jesus die for everyone so that no matter people believe or not they can all go to heaven...? The only issue is, God is both love and just, for him to be just he has to condemn the entire world because of people's sin. Yet the primary focus of Jesus coming is not to condemn, but to save. The entire world 'stands' condemned already, just as John 3:16 says, God's wrath remains on those who don't believe. 'Stands' and 'Remains' means the condemnation was already there. God's wrath is already there at the first place, because the entire world

should be condemned. Therefore the purpose of Jesus' coming is really to save, not to condemn. Remember this, Jesus didn't come to a neutral world to save the bad guys, he comes to a lost world in order to save some. If you understand what sin is you will not be surprised why Jesus didn't save all. Sin comes into the world because of man's disobedience against God the righteous one, of course sin will continue remaining in this world when man choose not to repent but continue rebellion against God. As what is said, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

The reason for them to stay condemned, not because they were not condemned and now they are, but they were condemned before and now it vindicates to them again they are truly condemned as they reject God once again, but this time they rejects the direct representation of God, the son of God.

Often when people ask the question, "I am quite happy with my life. I don't feel the need to convert to Christianity. When bad things happen, it is just life. I am happy the way I am. I don't really need Jesus. I don't think I can gain much in life even if I believe in him." The problem here is that not only we don't understand how close the relationship between Jesus and the Father, but we fail to understand how broken our relationship is towards God. We didn't realize how sinful we are, how dark is our world and how helpless is our situation. We thought we are better than God. We thought we know more than God how to run our lives. That is how fallen we are. We are sinful enough that we do not realize how sinful we are. We are SO sinful that we believe we have total control over ourselves.

Illustration: Esther climbs out of her cot. When Esther was about a year and a half, she once climbed out of the cot while we were sleeping. It was a shocking experience for us. If you know how tall is our cot, you will be surprised, how someone who is as young as Esther may climb out of the cot. She ended up crying badly on the floor. We were shocked. We didn't know where she hit the ground, but I thank God we have the carpet otherwise the situation can be worse. I think Esther does that because she wants to come to our room and sleep with us. But instead of crying out for help, she chose to climb out herself.

She didn't realize how vulnerable she is, and she doesn't know climbing out will bring her more danger rather than giving her comfort.

I think that is how helpless and sinful we are. To the extent that we do not know we are so sinful. We do not realize any personal effort trying to escape condemnation will cause us falling into greater danger. A child is constantly in danger. We are like a child constantly in danger of running life our own way. When we reject Jesus, we remain condemned, but this time we fell into another greater danger, because we directly reject the son of God. As the author of Hebrews says, Jesus is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being. ^{1:3}The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." (Hebrews 1:3)

We are SO depraved, yet He is willing to send Jesus to this fallen world, to be judged, condemned and crucified, in order to save some. The more you realize how close the relationship is between Jesus and the Father, and the more you realize how broken our relationship is with God, the more you know how loving God is when he sent his one and only son. God SO loved the world.

The imminent danger

^{3:19}This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ^{3:20}Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ^{3:21}But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." (John 3:16-21)

In verses 19-21, John uses metaphorical terms, light and darkness, to represent this condemnation.

Earlier in this chapter, John has already used this metaphor. ^{1:5}The light shines in the darkness, but the

darkness has not understood it."」 (John 1:5) He now explains further the reason of their rejection. In verse one the darkness didn't receive the light because they did not understand. Here he points out the fundamental reason of man's failure to understand Jesus as the light is because of their evil deeds. They remain condemned because they fear their deeds are exposed.

Yesterday, some of us went to Han's house for dinner. Ian's mum has just come back from an overseas trip. She was quite excited and showed us a set of photos she took in China. While people are marveled by these photos, Ian's mum mentioned they were edited by Photoshop. She said, 'you really can't believe in the cosmetics advertisement. Rather than having the transformation over the years, they can achieve better result in seconds, using Photoshop.' Why do people use Photoshop to edit their photos? Because in real life no one is perfect. May you have some pimples, or wrinkles, or you are not satisfied with your skin type. Maybe you are too tall, too short, too fat, or too thin. Of course all these are comparative measures, but people use Photoshop in order to hide areas they think is not perfect. I told people it will be easier for my photos, all they have to do is change the aspect ratio, from wider to narrower... The point being, we do not want to take photos that show our problems. The scripture says people don't want to believe in Jesus fundamentally because they don't want to be exposed of their evil deeds. I found it is quite true. Many do not want to face our true self. They will try to escape from the light. By refusing the light of Christ, unbelievers face the deepening of the condemnation already hanging over them because of their sinful lives.

Verse 19 says this is the verdict, or this is the judgment, which means judgment does not occur only in future. For those who didn't accept Jesus now, they are already condemned, their judgment is now. Of course they may still have a chance to believe, that is exactly the reason why these verses still exist, but at the moment when they reject Jesus, it is true that they remain condemned. Not only they remain condemned, they run into deeper danger of rejecting God face to face.

Verse 21 is peculiar, especially the way it is written, 3:21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Why do we need the second part of the verse, "so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." Without this phrase, people may think that those who do good deeds will come to God because of their own merit. It is not because people are righteous therefore they come to God. These people are keen to show that their good deeds have been done through God. It is God's grace. Those who do evil is responsible for the deeds, but those who do good is due to the grace of God.

When we know the fundamental of people's disbelief is due to their sinful nature, and their evil deeds, then we should put more weight into prayer. You will understand you are not trying to change them so they become good people, you are praying they may see God's love and become repented sinners. We often didn't put enough weight in prayer. Can I ask you how much have you prayed for our last gospel tea party? Raise your hand if you did. Pray, brothers and sisters. We know perhaps not everyone here will go to heaven. What shall we do then? Look at the person sitting next to you. Of course you can tell them that you hope they can go to heaven, but it is even more important to pray for them that their repentance is real. It is more important to pray for non-believers, that they will repent immediately. It is not fun constantly under God's wrath, the danger is real, and the danger is imminent. In fact, you may run into deeper danger when you reject Jesus again today. You may deepen the distance between you and the all loving God. God SO loved the world, therefore he HAS already sent Jesus, now you don't have to wait to be saved.

Conclusion

In the previous account, Jesus uses the copper snake as an example to show that look up to Jesus for life is the only way to be saved. Jesus knew this Son refers to himself. Jesus is using a third person view to

explain what will happen to him in first person. Jesus himself knows his destiny, and he chooses his destiny. When God gave his Son, his Son also gave himself up on the cross. This work is Trinitarian. The Holy Spirit also needs to guide people to be born again. Therefore, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit all participate in this act of salvation. God SO loved the world. He loves the world so much, that all of his being is involved in this act of salvation.

Let me summarize today's sermon:

1. The more we know how close God's relationship is with Jesus, the more we realize how great God's love for us, for he gave Jesus for us.
2. The more we realize how broken our relationship is with God, the more we realize how great God's love for us, for he himself satisfied our punishment.
3. The more urgent we realize our fallen condition, the more we realize how great God's love for us, for we do not have to wait to receive his grace now.
4. The more we realize how God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit all participate in this act of salvation, the more we realize how great God's love for us.

After you hear today's message, and understand more about God's love for us. You may respond by repentance, asking God for forgiveness, for not knowing him. Or you may respond by petition, pray for people for true repentance, away from the fallen condition. Or you can praise God, praise him for his great love. Or you can thank God for not deserving such love. God SO loved us, and we should respond with love. No matter which way you want to express your love towards God, do it now. The sense of urgency is clearly present in the text. Don't allow yourself to distance even further from God by rejecting Jesus. Don't wait, we may not be here tomorrow.

Let's pray.