

“The Truth of the Matter”

(John 3:13-21 and 31-36)

November 13, 2011

Order of Worship for November 13, 2011,
Pre-service Song
Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Angel Tree

Call to Worship: Psalm 43:1-5 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“Come, Now is the Time for Worship”

Overhead

“There is a Hope”

Overhead

“I Will Call upon the Lord”

Song # 530

“The Steadfast Love of the Lord”

Song # 576

“I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

Song # 602

Offering and Offertory

Special Music:

Message: “The Truth of the Matter” (John 3:16-3:21)
by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song: “Take My Life, Lead Me, Lord” (I think this is new) Song # 664

Parting Word of Grace

Conclusion of the Study of Hebrews 13
5:30-7:00 pm. in the Henneker Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

November 13, 2011

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **Richard and Kerry Nakamura in Japan:** (Marjorie contact the Hurts for this request)
2. **President Obama:** the Lord will over-rule his decisions for the greater good of the nation; the Spirit will open his heart to spiritual truth; he will be protected from all evil
3. **The Missions Committee:** the Lord will give them wisdom for guiding the congregation in advancing the gospel and the Kingdom throughout the world; the Lord will guide them to specific spiritual and financial needs of our present missionaries; the Lord will open their eyes to new works to be done
4. **Military or Public Service Personnel of the week: Larry Dunn, State Patrol Agent** (husband of Tina Dunn): that God will protect Larry and his fellow agents on the street gang task force and bring them home safely each day; that he will allow the Spirit to work thru him; that our Father will also grant Larry’s wife peace and reassurance of His sovereignty
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Blaze Spon** (son of Blake and Tammy Spon) : Please pray for on going courage to continue to speak Gods Word in the work place and that the Holy Spirit would groom the hearts of those men and women that he works with.

The title for today’s message is “The Truth of the Matter”. The text is John 3:16-21 and 31-36. That is an impossible assignment, but I have every intention of finishing this entire message. So I hope you brought lunch.

We begin with what is probably the best known of verses in the New Testament, and for that reason the most problematic. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* Who of us has not taken that, lifted it up and held it as a precious, fabulous gift from the Living God? The difficulty is that there are those who have attempted to make the entirety of their faith hinge on one verse. That is a very foolish thing to do. Here is the rest of that passage (3:17-21):

“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. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe in him is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”

You see, if we stop with verse 16 alone, we conclude that God’s interest is in the salvation of men; that that is what He wants to accomplish. True enough, He does! But the interest of God in dealing with men is by no means limited to redemption and salvation. The interest of God in dealing with people is not even met in simultaneously – at the same time – satisfying His own perfect justice and expressing His mercy. We should understand that God’s perfect justice affirms God’s love for Himself; God’s mercy demonstrates His perfect love for us. The character of God is really spelled out for us in Exodus chapter 34:6-7. Listen to this description that God gives of Himself when Moses asked to be informed. This is what He says: *“The Lord passed before Moses and proclaimed, ‘The Lord the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’”* God will be merciful and God will be just. That is true. But God’s interest in dealing with us is an interest in revealing and substantiating the truth so that our lives are built upon the solid foundation of that truth which is unshakeable; it is the truth of our God’s character.

Now this is essential, for the root of evil in humanity, the defection of our hearts from God and the source of all sin and sorrow is found in the lie, that lie which the serpent gave to Eve in the Garden. It is needful for us to be clear that the essence of sin is not breaking rules; the essence of sin is breaking faith with God.

To believe a lie, is to believe what is false. To persevere in believing what is false is to willingly destroy and to distort your perception of reality. Lies blind the mind so that it no longer sees or knows the truth. Please understand that the first and most basic lie which Eve believed was not to believe that the fruit on the tree was good. It was not to believe even that she could become like God. The first lie was that God could lie, that God was capable of deceiving her and misleading her. It was that God in fact perhaps might not in truth desire what is best for man. Satan said to Eve, “Has God said?” and in so saying he unhinged her mind. For if God is not to be trusted, then nothing is to be trusted, for God is the source of all things.

It is essential for us to understand that this is the root condition of humanity separated from God, and then try to understand what John 3:16 means. The best, basic message of John 3:16 as of the whole New Testament and indeed of the entirety of Scripture is simply this: God loves you. God loves the world that He has made. But it is exactly that which we no longer believe. Eve doubted it and then she acted upon her doubt. Humanity is now consigned to deep uncertainty regarding God. We do not believe that God is to be trusted when He says that He loves us. The general perception of humanity is that God is out to impose His arbitrary and generally unpleasant will on us, and that as He imposes His will upon us, we lose our freedom to pursue what is good and best and pleasant and joyful in life. Now it is well known that the Bible uses repetition in order to emphasize a truth that it wants us to grasp. So if you turn to John 3:17 you notice what remarkable emphasis we have presented to us here. In John 3:17, *“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.”* What is the object of

God’s interest? It is the world, it is the world, it is the world. What does it say about the world? God loves the world. He cannot be more emphatic. God stands before the world and He says, “I love you”. But that is not all that is said. Because of course God knows, and so do we, that behind His affirmation of His love there is the reality of our doubt and our suspicion and our having stepped away from Him and no longer trusting as a child what He has to say. So consequently you come to the eighteenth verse. In the eighteenth verse again we have a threefold repetition. *“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.”* What is the repetition now? Believe! Believe! Believe! Belief or non-belief in Jesus as the Son of God is the critical difference between seeing and receiving or not seeing and not receiving God’s love.

Some weeks ago we looked at the difference between knowing and believing. Because of the fall the relationship between these is tricky. On the one hand it is perfectly obvious that you cannot believe in what you don’t know. So it is necessary to know things. But at the same time I think all of us recognize it is quite possible to know something and not believe it. We have to make a distinction between what we might call “Beliefs” and “Convictions”. In this case beliefs are generally formal or semi-formal sets of supposedly truth statements that we say we believe. But our convictions are what we actually believe because we act on them. Often those are rather different from what we outwardly profess as our beliefs. Indeed, it is almost universally the cast that individuals think they are the exception to the rule for what everybody else should do. There are a few examples I can give, simple: “I don’t have to go the speed limit, though most people should.” “I can eat this and not have any problems, but you shouldn’t!” “I in fact can eat lots of this and have no problems, but you shouldn’t.” “I don’t need as much sleep as you do.” “I can drink; it is not a problem for me.”

In verse 18, when John talks about belief, he is talking about what we act upon, not what we profess. Let me pose a situation for you: If you believed that right now Jesus was in room 14 teaching, how many of you would stay here and listen to me? You would be idiots if you did. But Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of heaven and everything else will be added unto you.” How’s it going? That’s a stopper. The distance between professed faith and conviction is whether or not we act on it.

John goes on in verses 19 and 20 to explain what he means by unbelief. This is what he says, *“This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”* Please notice that at no point in that verse does it indicate that the person denies the light, says the light doesn’t exist, doesn’t even deny the fact that the light might be true. It just says “I don’t want it; and I do not want it exposing me!” And so the person stays away.

Now when it comes to this matter of sin and our relationship to God, most of us are troubled and well we should be. We know, for the Scriptures are perfectly clear, that in this matter of unbelief all of us sin. That is the clear and grim affirmation of Romans 3:10-18. I won’t read it; you can go and look at it yourselves. It simply says with absolutely no qualifications, “For all have sinned...” “None seek God.” We also know from Romans 7:12-23 – I won’t read that section either – but you know that section, where Paul cries out and says, “I cannot comprehend myself; the things I know I should do I do not do, and things I know I should not do, I do! What’s with me?” Every one of us can say, “I know what is with you; it is the same thing as with me, and my soul grieves.” And indeed it should grieve.

What John 3:19 tells us is that when the unsaved directly encounter Jesus, whether through some Christian witness or hearing a sermon or a message, or perhaps reading some portion of the Bible, but always if they are touched by the Holy Spirit and convicted of who they are before God, they recoil and they say, “No, I’m ducking, I’m out of here: don’t crowd me!” That is what John indicates when he says people love the darkness rather than the light, for whoever does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest they be exposed.” By contrast, those who are saved, even if reluctantly, are drawn into the presence of God.

When you get this far in reflecting upon what these verses actually say to us, you can see why it is a whole lot more pleasant just to memorize John 3:16 and drop all the rest of it off. What we are confronted with by reading all the way

down to verse 20 is that salvation and condemnation is an inseparable pair. If someone says “No” to Jesus, they are self-condemned.

The section ends with John saying, *“But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”* That statement demands a little bit of attention and clarification. If you read it lightly or quickly a person might conclude that John is saying people can be saved by their works. If they do what is true they come to the light, demonstrating to all that they have been wise and good and superior to those who don’t, but that is not what John is saying. What John is saying is that those who do what is true are those whose deeds are carried out in God. They may not know that. Indeed, how many of us can give personal testimony to the realization after the fact that God has been actively present and actively working in my life long before I knew it? He has directed me and shaped me and prepared me so that when the Word of the gospel came to me I suddenly said, “Oh, that’s it; I see. I get it!” And we look to our neighbor and say, “Don’t you get it?” and our neighbor looks at us like we are out of our mind. So the person who comes to the light discovers that the light has been shining on their life and drawing them to God all along. Amen. What distinguishes or separates or differentiates those who are saved and those who are not saved is not that some people sin and some people don’t. All people sin. What separates people is that some believe and some do not.

There is a wonderful verse, quite as lovely as John 3:16. It is part of Peter’s sermon. It says, *“...there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* Let me ask you, have you placed your faith in the name of Jesus Christ? You know that God’s love for you comes uniquely through Jesus Christ and all that Jesus has done in dying for our sins, rising up again from the dead to demonstrate that there is no more judgment against those who have put their faith in what He has done. If you cannot say “Yes” to what I just said, you need to. If you never do, you are condemned.

John 3:31-36 is the second section [for today’s message]. What these are, these little portions, are actually John the Gospel writer’s commentary as he helps us understand who Jesus is. This section, John 31-36, is transitional from Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus the Pharisee member of the Sanhedrin to the woman at the well in Samaria, which is in the fourth chapter. This is what we read.

“He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

[John] repeats here some of what he said in the Prologue, and if you are not familiar with the Prologue you want to just go back and read chapter 1:1-18. Obviously we don’t have time to do so now. In the Prologue he had already indicated that Jesus is the Word and that Jesus is the light and that Jesus is the life of men. Already he had introduced all of these concepts, which is why it is good to go back and review them. Jesus, because he is the Word of God, is the one who comes from above. Twice John says in these verses that Jesus is above all; He is above all. You and I are encouraged, we are challenged, challenged right down within ourselves: do I exalt Jesus above all? Is that where I place Him? Is He first and foremost in every consideration of how I live my life? It is likely that, in these verses, 31-32 in particular, that John the Gospel writer has John the Baptist primarily in view, confirming John’s own words in 3:27. We looked at these earlier, in an earlier message when I talked about John the Baptist. Go over to verse 27. In the 27th verse, John the Baptist is giving a testimony and this is what he says: *“John answered and said, ‘A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.’”* John the Baptist recognized that you have to receive from God whatever will abide as truth that is sufficient to sustain you in life. But the statement here also applies to all of humanity. At issue at this point, whether in John the Baptist’s words or in what John the Gospel writer is saying, has to do with the limitations of our knowledge. There are two things that severely limit our knowledge. One, of course, is sin. We already know that from a reflection upon what happened with Eve. Sin enters into the mind, enters into the heart and it distorts everything so that we can know nothing truly. But it is not simply a matter of sin; it is also a fact that we are finite creatures. Who of us

can comprehend God? None of us can comprehend God! We are finite, and therefore we are limited in what we can know even apart from the consequences of sin.

This bears again upon what we see Satan doing in playing with Eve’s mind. Remember that the deception worked by Satan on Eve was to persuade her not only that God was not to be trusted, but that she could become like God. I hope by the time we get done with all of this you say to yourself, “I am going to go back and reread Genesis 2 and Genesis 3 until I’ve got it!”

So [Satan] pours into her mind the notion that she can be like God, this frail mortal creature now separated from God by sin. What this creates in Eve, and what you and I have inherited, is the illusion of autonomy. How many of you saying to yourself, “I am enjoying the illusion of autonomy”? You don’t do that! But you do kick against the goads of dependency on God. The assumption and the desire is deeply rooted in all of our thoughts and desires to this day. It is one of the defining characteristics of fallen humanity. “I can handle this.” “I can do it.” “Leave me alone, I’m ok on my own.” All of which you are [tacitly] saying to God. An essential aspect of salvation is to restore our dependence on God.

Contrary to our spontaneous reaction or response to this, which is that to be dependent is to be made less, to lose standing, to be exposed as deficient (a favorite picture: “Oh, grow up; you’re just a little boy hiding behind your mother’s skirts!” “Well, I don’t want to be hiding behind my mother’s skirts! I want to be a big guy, a big person! I’m all independent and capable of taking care of everything myself! I am going to be the leader, the big man, the great guy. I don’t need God.” How many men have been seduced by that lie in our culture? I will not presume to walk into the mind of a woman and how she works this out! I have not been happily married as long as I have been by not being wise enough to know what to avoid!

Now listen: the reality is that to be dependent on God is to be drawn into the fellowship of the Trinity. Listen to this verse: 2 Peter 1:4, *“The Divine Power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”* Our dependency on God is here stated as having all things pertaining to life and godliness and being called to Christ’s own glory and excellence so that we are able to partake of the divine nature through God’s promises. You should be on the floor and so should I at the sheer wonder at what is here extended to us as creatures. You see the reality is we are ennobled to greatest extent that any creature could ever be ennobled by being drawn into the eternal fellowship of the Father, and the Son and the Spirit.

Returning to the Gospel, John makes a double statement in verse 32. First he declares that the message Jesus brings is not a second hand report, something communicated to him by an angel, even the angel of the Lord as was the case with Moses. Rather Jesus’ message is a firsthand report of what Jesus himself has seen and heard. John is referring her to Jesus’ direct communion with the Father. Second, John reiterates what John had already said in the Prologue, that no one receives Jesus’ testimony. A question might reasonably arise in our mind. John says no one has received Jesus’ testimony, but surely John received His testimony, and what of the other apostles? In Matthew 16:16 Peter has a direct testimony: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. So it is hard to know exactly what John means by saying that no one has received the testimony [of Jesus]. I can scarcely imagine the state of mind of the apostles as they lived those three years with Jesus. Did you ever think about that? What we know from the Gospels is that guys were all over the map in trying to know who Jesus was and act appropriately. Perhaps the clearest indication of the idiocy of their minds, the blindness of what they were about, is that on the night of Jesus betrayal, the very night in which Jesus talks about His death and institutes the communion, do you remember what they guys talk about? “Who’s going to be the biggest guy in the kingdom? Is it going to be you or is it going to be me?” You think to yourself, “O man; what’s with these guys?” There are a couple of extremely important statements that you and I should take as precious affirmations of the reality of God’s love. John 17:12, there in the upper room Jesus is praying right before the end, and this is what He says: *“While I am with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”* How did the disciples survive? It was because the Shepherd would not let them go. If Jesus had withdrawn His hand from them, as it were, what would have happened

to them? You know what would have happened to them, because he did [withdraw His hand]. When Jesus was arrested and put into trial and when He hung upon the cross, His hand is withdrawn from those men and what happens to them? They scatter: gone! Then, John 20:22-23, after His resurrection Jesus meets with the disciples in the upper room, before His ascension, and there we are told Jesus said to them, *“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘receive the Holy Spirit.’*” In that moment our glorified Lord Jesus Christ entrusted those precious men to the care of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit would not let them go. Nor will he let you go, for that is the care of our Lord.

Verse 32 John is primarily referring to the historical record of the response of the people in Galilee and Judea to Jesus. Even those who followed after Jesus and in their way loved Him – and we cannot doubt that Jesus’ mother loved Jesus nor that John the apostle loved him – even these did not receive Jesus’ testimony according to the truth of Jesus’ works and words. That is why they all ran away. They didn’t have it in themselves to remain. But do you know what one of the most powerful testimonies to the truth of the gospels is? [It is that] those cowards, those self-centered, immature and cowardly men, immediately after the resurrection of Jesus Christ are willing to and in fact did die, every one of them for Jesus Christ rather than deny him. You and I should be amazed. More than that, you and I should want that depth of conviction. Indeed you and I are going to need it in the coming days.

That is what John refers to in verse 33. Verse 32 speaks of people who are responding to Jesus in the normal way of things. But by now you should realize that faith in Jesus is not normal. John makes his point here by saying those who receive Jesus’ testimony, that is, who receive it as or in agreement with the way Jesus gave it, who receive it for what it really is, he says they set their seal to the fact that God is true. The kind of reception John refers to here is what we might call coming to saving faith. It is the decisive or the definitive realization that the testimony of Jesus is true. So decisive is this realization that John likened it to a seal. How many of you know what a notary is? A notary public puts a seal of authenticity: bang. It says that this document is true; it is the exact and right representation of the will and the intention of the person who has it notarized. (Of course in our corrupt culture that means almost nothing! But it does not mean nothing to God!) What he is actually saying here is that the seal is stamped upon the heart of the believer by the Spirit of God. This in fact is exactly what Paul says in Ephesians 1:13; just listen to this in light of what we have just heard: *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed...”* – stamped with the stamp of the Holy Spirit regarding the truth of God, the unshakeable truth of God – *“...and with the promised Holy Spirit.”* What is sealed is the truth of God in our hearts. Jesus’ testimony was a testimony about God. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies and promises which God had given through the prophets through the long ages preceding. In His words and His deeds and the circumstances of His life Jesus validated the truth of God.

Jesus’ purpose in all things is to make the Father known as the God of grace and truth. Only if people come to believe that will they be saved. Jesus’ role as the final or ultimate revealer of the Father is clearly stated in verses 34-35. Hear what he says, *“For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands.”* That is probably one of the most powerful Trinitarian statements in all of Scripture. We are told that the Father does two things for Jesus his Son. He gives Him His words, and He gives Him the Spirit without measure. When the Son of God set aside His divine prerogatives to be born as a man, the Father who loved Him even as he sent him into the humiliation and horror of death for our sins, gave to Him the unlimited power and presence of the Holy Spirit, by whom, though living in a body like ours subject to all the temptations of sin, Jesus was able to not only not sin, but to live in perfect submission and obedience to the word of God. In this regard, Jesus lived by faith.

Jesus lived a sinless life through the power of the Holy Spirit. That was critical for being the sacrifice for our sins. But no less critical for our salvation is the affirmation given here that Jesus utters the words of God. As it says in Hebrews 1:1, Jesus is ultimate prophet: *“...in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”* Beloved, I cannot fathom how anyone who has even a minimal faith and understand of the Christian religion can keep from reading the Bible. Here are the written words of God given to us by Jesus and written down by His servants. As a young man (this is so important to me when I was a young man)

David wrote this in Psalm 119:99, *“I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.”* How can we neglect God’s word?

We are almost done! John concludes with a stark warning in verse 36. *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God [now notice what it says] remains on him.”* Not “suddenly arrives, but “remains”. There are two truths: the person whose lie is characterized by disobedience is a person who does not believe. Such a person does not have eternal life. Don’t anybody ever come to me again, as people always do, and say, “Well, my cousin accepted Jesus when he was ten and he has lived like hell ever since. Do you think he is saved?” “What?” A life of disobedience indicates there is no faith. Such a person needs to be saved, not reassured. The second [truth] is that all who do not believe remain under the wrath of God. We are at once reminded of Paul’s statement in Ephesians 2:1-3, *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”* Heaven forbid that I should remain under the wrath of God! Beloved, the love of God is extended toward us in order that we might escape God’s wrath. We in our brokenness and in our weakness and in our extreme neediness find God almost incomprehensible, for God is perfect in each of His attributes. He is no less unswerving in His justice and righteousness than He is in His loving-kindness and his mercy. If this was not so He would never sent His beloved Son to endure the cross. Here are the facts: God’s forgiveness and mercy are available. God’s justice is absolutely certain. This is a good day to take advantage of His mercy and thereby escape His judgment.

Please pray with me: Father, You Who for love’s sake sent Jesus to die, not to die any normal death, to die a death which in its innocence and freely given love would absorb Your own perfect justice against all our sin: Father, You extend this love to us, and You ask us to believe, and in that belief, to obey, by Your grace may it be so with each of us. We ask, our Father, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Discussion/Meditation:

1. Three purposes were given for the salvation of men: to redeem people from judgment and the power of sin; to manifest or display God’s perfect justice and mercy; and to reveal and confirm the truth of God’s character to humanity. Do you characteristically think of all three?
2. “The essential dynamic of sin is not breaking rules; it is breaking faith with God.” Comments?
3. The Bible says God is committed to our good, but in your experience how do people “hedge their bets” in terms of having faith in or trusting God?
4. “Beliefs” describe the way we think the world ought to work; convictions are how we think the world really works.” Agree or disagree?
5. What is the difference between disbelief, uncertainty, and complacent ignorance?
6. What are the two lies Satan persuaded Eve to believe and how do they relate to our ability to know the truth?
7. What is wrong with the statement, “I don’t need anyone’s help, Jesus is enough for me!”
8. How faithful to Jesus were the disciples before Pentecost, and how faithful after? What do you think made the difference?
9. What is the significance of Jesus receiving the Spirit “without measure”?
10. According to John 3:36, what is the proof of belief in the Son?