

The Shocking News About Your Greatest Need

John 3:16-18

As we continue our worship by focusing our minds on the word of God, I would invite you to open your Bible with me to John 3 for this message entitled, “The Shocking News About Your Greatest Need.” Our text for today is John 3:16-18 which is a shocking revelation Jesus gives to Nicodemus regarding God’s character and his heart for the world as displayed through the gift of His son.

Follow along as I read John 3:16-18. . . .

What do you need? *It depends*, you say, *need for what?* Ok, let’s put the question this way: What do you really need? What is your greatest need? What do you need above all things? And what do you need such that without that need being met, the worst thing that could possibly happen to you would happen? Many of you have the answer readily at hand, but let’s think through the logic of this issue.

In speaking about the virtue of contentment in 1 Timothy 6, Paul says, “But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” You look around the world, and food and clothing seem to be the most basic needs—fuel to keep the body alive internally and clothing to protect the body from the outside.

But is survival our greatest need? Is death the worst thing that can happen to you making sustaining life our greatest need? It would be, if death was the end. If death meant the end of your existence, that would seem to be your greatest problem, and therefore your greatest need would be whatever is required to extend your existence.

But death isn’t our greatest problem. Death doesn’t mean the end of our existence. There is life after death. If you or someone you know is skeptical about that, you can simply ask the question, “How do you know that there isn’t life after death?” And if the response is, “How do you know that there is life after death?” Your answer is as simple as this: “because there are many people who have died and been dead for hours and days, and even buried, and yet they came back to life.”

And if they say, “prove it,” you can say, “The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most well-attested facts of ancient history. It is so well attested that it changed the history of the world. There is more and better evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than that Plato and Aristotle even existed. So my friend if you want to deny that Jesus rose from the dead then the burden of proof is on you.”

Since Jesus rose from the dead, that validates everything he said and did. And what did he say that’s relevant for this question of our greatest need? He taught that there is a heaven to which some people go and there is a hell to which many people go. And when you die, as this body returns to dust, you will continue to live forever enjoying the glory of God or receiving the wrath of God.

If our greatest need must correspond to our greatest problem, and our life on earth is but an infinitesimal fraction of our everlasting life, then it stands to reason that our greatest problem, nor our greatest need can be bound up in the confines of life on earth. As basic as our instinct to extend this life is, it pales in comparison to considerations about what happens when we die.

Well, Jesus not only taught that there is a heaven and hell and that we will find ourselves very much alive when this body dies, he also taught that what happens to you when you die is not a decision left for that moment. It’s a decision made during this life. The good news about that is that as long as you’re alive on the earth you can do something about your eternity. The bad news about that is that once you die there is no second chance.

But understand that what happens when you die is not up in the air until you or someone else makes a decision. It is very well known. And this is where we learn about our greatest problem. Hebrews 9:27 says, “... it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.” What will that judgment involve? 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” The Apostle John saw a vision of this judgment and described it in Revelation 20 this way, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.”

Before you breathe a sigh of relief thinking the books of your life will show that you've done enough good to make it through to heaven, understand that you are not the judge. You are not the one who sets the standard of good to which you will be held to account. God is. So if you want to know in advance how you're doing and how you'll fare on that day of judgment, you would do well to consider how God views us. Romans 3:10-12 says, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Set against the goodness and righteousness of God, Scripture teaches in Isaiah 64:6 that even what we perceive to be our righteous deeds God considers to be a garment soiled with biological waste—it's repulsive to God.

So here's the deal: there may be all kinds of things about you that we would all affirm as positive and good and commendable, but there are other facts that are also true. Colossians 1:21 says that in our natural condition, we are "alienated [from God] and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds." Titus 3:3 says that we are "foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another." In Genesis 8:21 God declares the universal human condition: "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth."

Though we want to argue against this we can't escape the reality of it. We naturally want to defend ourselves, but in defending ourselves we prove the point—because God declares it to be true and we want to reject it. But we have no defense. No one taught you to lie and yet you began to lie before you learned to talk. No one taught you to steal and yet you began to take things from the hands of others when you were still in diapers. No one taught you to rebel and yet you held spontaneous violent protests when you didn't get what you wanted as a child.

Though you were cute and cuddly, you were a liar, a thief, and a rebel at heart. As you grew up you didn't grow out of it—you simply became more sophisticated in your sin. You learned how to sin so as not to get caught or in a way that minimized the consequences. Now that you're grown, there are ways you've thought about sinning and the only thing stopping you is fear of the consequences—but the fact that you have a base thought to do those things proves that evil resides in your heart.

God is right—"the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." And the result of that resident evil in us is that when the day of judgment comes, no amount of good deeds can remove our guilty status before God.

It's been said that the moment we are born we begin to die. In the same way, the moment we are conceived, we are on the path to eternal condemnation.

This is our greatest problem. As image bearers of God we have rebelled against him. There is no need for a jury, and the judge does not need time in his chambers to deliberate because the verdict is clear: we are guilty and deserving of condemnation.

With every day that passes we are one day closer to judgment. With every fleeting moment we are ever closer to our sentence. Every attempt to escape justice only increases your guilt and the wrath due to you. Like the prisoner who fails time and time again to escape prison, his sentence only increases because in the process of escape he keeps adding to his list of crimes.

This is our greatest problem and therefore our greatest need is to have our guilt taken away. Our greatest need is for someone outside of ourselves to step in and take action and release us from this certain end. We need an advocate. We need a lawyer. If we can't deliver ourselves from the wrath of God maybe someone else can do it.

That brings us to John 3:16-18. In this passage we see three shocking qualities of God that address our greatest need. The first that we see in vs. 16 is God's giving love. The second that we see in vs. 17 is God's saving patience. And the third in vs. 18 is God's certain judgment. God's giving love, God's saving patience, and God's certain judgment.

Remember that we're in the middle of a discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus, though it's not really a discussion. When the camera pans to Jesus he reveals divine truth about life and salvation, and whenever the camera pans to Nicodemus he's scratching his head in confusion. This is less a discussion and more a private lesson in divine truth given by the Son of God to one of the elite teachers in Israel.

But unlike all the other interactions Jesus had with Pharisees where they exhibited no interest in truth, it seems that Jesus perceived a listening ear and soft heart in Nicodemus.

We don't know what questions Nicodemus wanted to ask Jesus when he came to him this night. But whatever they were, they were the wrong questions. Jesus didn't even give him an opportunity to get into his list. Instead, Jesus confronts Nicodemus out of the gate with his unregenerate condition and his need to be born again and believe in Jesus. We covered that in detail in vs. 1-15.

But Jesus didn't stop there. No doubt stunned at this unexpected revelation by the Son of Man, Nicodemus stays silent while Jesus radically alters his view of God and salvation and judgment.

Giving Love (vs. 16)

LOOK at vs. 16. . . .

In this verse which we studied on its own just a few weeks ago we see the giving love of God. God's love is not an emotional love, it's not a sentimental love, it's not a blind love. God's love was demonstrated through the giving of his Son to rescue those destined to perish.

Notice the first word, "For." This little word is important because it connects what he's about to say to what he's just said. What he has just said to Nicodemus must have been a shock to his system. What did Jesus just say? LOOK at vs. 14-15. . . .

Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, a biblical scholar and professional theologian, an expert in God's word, has no categories to understand the words "the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." Those words put together in that way would not at all connect with what he thinks he knows from the Scripture.

This is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1 that the word of the cross is a stumbling block to Jews. They can't comprehend a crucified Messiah. But it's not just a crucified Christ they have a problem with. Nicodemus must have been confused by the statement "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." Whoever? Do

you want to qualify that Jesus? Did you mean to say, “whoever among the Jews believes”? Or do you really mean “whoever”?

To appreciate the impact of these words on Nicodemus, you have to understand that the Pharisees led the nation in promoting ethnocentrism and racism. They saw the world through the lens of Jew and Gentile. If you’re a Jew, you’re the chosen people of God. If you’re a Gentile, you’re worse than a dog. In the mind of a Jew, to be a Gentile was so offensive to God that if a Gentile was to have any favor with God, they would first have to become a Jew through circumcision, ritual washings, and submission to the Law of Moses.

After all, God chose Abraham and through him and Isaac and Jacob the Lord established a nation. The rest of the world was left to worship their false gods, while Israel worshipped the one, true, and living God.

The world—Gentiles—hated the Jews and throughout the centuries one nation after another mistreated, attacked, and conquered the people of God. The Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and now the Romans were world powers that abused and conquered the nation.

Then there were the smaller people groups like the Philistines, the Ammonites, Edomites, the Moabites, and others who often attacked Israel chipping away at their borders. Then there were specific cities around the outskirts of Israel who were a constant source of harassment—Damascus, Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and others.

Because of the way the nations brought harm to Israel, the Lord spoke through many of the prophets and pronounced judgment and condemnation on them. Zephaniah 2 is just one example, “Gaza shall be deserted, and Ashkelon shall become a desolation; Ashdod’s people shall be driven out at noon, and Ekron shall be uprooted. Woe to you inhabitants of the seacoast, you nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left.” And it goes on and on declaring judgment on Israel’s enemies.

After so many centuries of being attacked and mistreated by the surrounding peoples, Israel loved to hear that justice was coming. Sure, there was justice that

was coming on themselves due to their own sin, but it's always easier to receive discipline when you know your enemy is getting it worse.

The Lord had never expressed hatred for the nations, but Israel interpreted their status as the chosen people of God as a sign that they were better than everyone else. The Lord had given Israel the Law, the sacrifices, and the covenants. No one else received those gestures of love and affection from God. The Lord didn't establish a relationship with any other nation—only Israel. Yet Israel was attacked, persecuted, and hated by the world. So they repaid evil for evil and returned the world's hatred with hatred.

In fact, though persecution of the church from the Jewish leaders started very quickly, do you know what ramped up Jewish hatred of Christianity? It was that Jewish believers in Jesus Christ had the audacity to claim that Gentiles could be saved.

We see this so vividly in Acts 21 when Paul visited Jerusalem with his ministry partners, including Trophimus who was a Gentile. After several days Paul was arrested by a mob under the false charge that he had brought Trophimus into the Jewish court of the temple.

So the Roman soldiers had to break through the mob to grab Paul before they killed him, and Paul ask the soldiers if he could address the crowd. Speaking to them in Hebrew, he told them about his former life as a persecutor of the church, and the crowd was silent.

Then he told them about his vision of the risen Jesus and his conversion, and the crowd listened. Then he them about how the Lord told him to flee Jerusalem because the Jews wouldn't accept his testimony, and the crowd kept listening. But then he said that the Lord told him, "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles." And the Scripture says, "Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live." And they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air." So great was their hatred of the Gentiles that Paul's statement that God told him to preach to the Gentiles sent them into a frenzy.

And yet here is Jesus in our text, speaking to one of the nation's leaders, and he says to him, "whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world." Clearly, God does not share the hatred of the Jews. God doesn't hate the world, God loves the world. God doesn't hate Gentiles, he loves Gentiles! That would be shocking news to Nicodemus.

But there's more shocking news. What kind of love is this? It's a giving love. God gave his only Son. Though the doctrine of the Trinity was not clearly revealed in the Old Testament, there are hints at it. Here is a brief theology of the pre-existence of Christ as the Son of God in three passages. That there is a divine person who God considers to be his Son is revealed in Psalm 2 where the Lord says, "I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." And then the Son says, "The Lord said to me, You are my Son; today I have begotten you." God's King—his anointed one—is his Son.

And then David writes in Psalm 110, "The Lord says to my Lord—literally, Yahweh says to my Adoni—"Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." David's Lord, who is the coming King, lives in God's throne room before he takes his place as King over the world. God's Son existed before he came into the world.

And then the prophet Daniel writes in Daniel 7, "I saw in the night visions and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." God's royal Son will be an everlasting king.

When the Old Testament speaks of God the Son, it primarily focuses on his role as conqueror and king. That is what Israel expected the Messiah to be.

That is what they hoped Jesus would be. You can understand, then, why the Jews rejected Jesus. They were looking for a general, a commander, a ruler, a king. Jesus didn't exhibit any of those qualities and he rejected their attempts to make him king.

What Jesus reveals here in vs. 16 is what the Jews didn't know, namely, that the Son would serve multiple purposes. And his first and most important purpose was not to rule on the earth, but to rescue perishing souls. If Jesus didn't fulfill this role, if

he didn't solve our greatest problem, the truth is there would be no one for him to rule over.

When God gave his Son and his Son didn't fulfill the expectations of the people, it wasn't enough for them to simply ignore him. In disbelieving him they couldn't simply walk away and disregard him. No, his extraordinary teaching and endless display of power elevated their expectations, and when their expectations came crashing down, they hated him and they crucified him.

Mark 15:29-32 let's us hear the mocking words that Jesus heard as he hung on the cross. It says, "And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe."

Oh if they only knew. We're all familiar with the song "Mary Did You Know?" Someone should write a song, "Israel If Only You Knew" We have some songwriters and poets in our church—here's an idea for you. It may be out there, but I've never heard a song written about the people who mocked Jesus on the cross.

They twisted his words about destroying the temple, but he gave up the temple his body to destruction in order to rescue them. They scoffed at him rebuilding the temple in three days, but in three days he rose from the dead. They urged Jesus to save himself, but he hung on the cross to save them. They urged him to come down off the cross, but if he did that they would perish forever. The priests and scribes claimed that they would believe if he came down from the cross. He did the greater work of rising from the dead and they still didn't believe.

Though the Jews put Jesus to death out of hatred, Jesus was not a victim. He was in complete control. The night before he died he instituted the Lord's supper which we'll celebrate today. And he said as he passed around the bread, "This is my body, which is given for you." When he gave them the wine, he said, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus' life was not taken from him, he gave it so that by

receiving and satisfying the just wrath of God upon himself, he could offer forgiveness and eternal life.

God's Saving Patience (vs. 17)

God's giving love is the first shocking quality of God we see Jesus reveal to Nicodemus. Next we see God's saving patience. LOOK at vs. 17. . . .

Here Jesus clarifies the purpose of the coming of the Son of God into the world. He came not to condemn, but to save. Why would Jesus need to clarify this? Because as we've seen, Nicodemus—and indeed all Israel—expected the Messiah to come as a conquering king. They were looking for one who would cast the Roman Empire out of the land, establish the throne in Jerusalem once again, and rule the nation and even the world.

It's not hard to understand why they would think this. Back in Psalm 2 where the Lord says to his anointed king, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." The Lord goes on to say, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Going back to Psalm 110 where the Lord says to David's Lord to sit at his right hand until he makes his enemies his footstool, when that time comes it says, "The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth." These and other passages created the expectation that the Messiah would come and conquer and rule and reign.

And indeed that day will come, but what the Old Testament is less clear on, and what Jesus makes clear here, is that there's more to the Messiah's work than conquering and reigning. And by clarifying this Jesus pulls threads together that the prophets of old left loose. Earlier I read a portion of Zephaniah 2 where judgment is proclaimed for the nations. But then in Zephaniah 3 we read this, "I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering."

This is one of a number of passages where the Lord declares that those who are not of Israel will worship and serve him. But the unanswered question in the Old Testament is, “How will this be? How will the enemy of God’s people and of God himself turn to the Lord? How will the nations so lost in idolatry turn to the one, true, and living God?”

Jesus gives us the answer. “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” God provided a Savior who would not just be the political and military savior of the Jews, but who would save people from every tribe and language and people and nation from the wrath of God. Though one day he will bring the justice of God on his enemies, he would first come with the offer of salvation—the offer of forgiveness and release from the penalty of sin.

This good news, this gospel, was proclaimed all the way back in Psalm 2 which we keep referring to. In light of the coming conquering king, the psalm ends with this appeal, “Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” To kiss the Son is to worship him. More than a millennia before Jesus came, this call went out to the nations to come under the rule of God’s Son, to serve him, to worship him because all who take refuge in him will not perish when he comes in his wrath.

This is why Jesus came. He came to offer forgiveness to his enemies. He came to rescue those who are destined for wrath. Though condemnation is what everyone in the world deserves, he came to save those who would believe in him.

In this we see the saving patience of God. Do you know that God was not obligated to offer salvation? God is obligated by virtue of his perfect justice to judge sin. More than that, he is obligated by virtue of his promises to exact justice on all those who’ve sinned against him. What he is *not* obligated to do is delay his justice. More than that, what he is *not* obligated to do is offer salvation. Even more than that, what he is *not* obligated to do is to give his Son as a substitute to receive justice on behalf of those whom he saves. This is what makes God’s saving patience so shocking.

Romans 3:23 says that the wages of sin is death, which means that the moment you and I sin we deserve to perish under the just condemnation of God. But because we don't perish right away, Romans 2:5 says, "because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." So from the time you and I are born, unless and until God saves us, we amass an ever-increasing weight of judgment against us.

Like a branch bent low as it holds up snow until it can no longer bear the weight so the judgment of God hangs low over us and only God's patient hand holds it back. But the time will come when his restraining hand will be removed.

In my reading plan his week I read from Numbers 13-14 when Israel refused to go into the Promised Land, once again forgetting who their God was. In response God threatened to destroy them, but Moses interceded. And here's what the Lord says to Moses. "I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it." My friends that is patience! Even his judgment of that generation was patient. The nation tested the patience of the Lord time after time after time, and yet the Lord demonstrated that he is indeed, "Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

Though God is a God who is slow to anger, that doesn't mean he is obligated to postpone judgment. Just two chapters later in Number 16 we read about the rebellion of Korah and how the Lord judged him in the presence of the nation by opening up the earth and swallowing him, his family, and his possessions. Then there's Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 whom the Spirit killed the moment they lied about their generosity to the church. God is fully within his rights, and fully aligned with justice, and always capable of bringing judgment instantly against sin.

But there are times—in fact most times—when he chooses out of his grace to be patient. Why is he patient? Why does he show kindness by withholding judgment for a time? Well, there are all kinds of reasons—first of all, human history would have stopped with Adam and Eve if he didn't. But there is an even greater reason given to us in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all

should reach repentance.” God’s patience is designed to give you more opportunities to repent.

To those who think they can sin with impunity, Paul writes in Romans 2:3-4, “Do you suppose, O man . . . that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

Oh my friend, if you’re living in sin thinking you will get away with it, and perhaps strengthening your conviction is that you have gotten away with it, know that the wrath of God is hanging over you and the hand of God that stays his wrath can be removed at any moment. And whether it’s removed today or 50 years from now, make no mistake, it will be removed. But the reason his hand stays his wrath is not so you can enjoy more of your sin, but so that you can repent, turn from your sin and turn to Christ before it’s too late.

God’s saving patience is displayed in that Jesus, the Son of God, did not come the first time to condemn. He came to save—to call all people to cast themselves on his mercy and plead for forgiveness and find in him their only hope for eternal life. Because one thing is certain and that is that while God is patient, God’s judgment is faithful.

God’s Faithful Judgment (vs. 18)

This is the third shocking quality of God. God’s faithful judgment. LOOK at vs. 18. . . .

In saying this shows us God’s faithful judgment I’m borrowing language from vs. 19 where it says, “And this is the judgment.” Judgment there is the noun form of the verb translated condemned in vs. 18. The act of condemnation is the result of the proclamation of judgment. Put another way, consequences follow the verdict. That’s really what the word “judgment” means—verdict. It’s a decision. Condemnation is what happens when God’s verdict is “guilty.” And when God’s judgment or verdict is “righteous,” the result is “no condemnation” and even “eternal life.”

How does one receive *that* judgment? By believing in him. That’s what it says here in vs. 18, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned”! The only way to escape condemnation is to believe in him—to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The only way

to get out from under the impending wrath of God is to look to Jesus Christ and embrace the truth that though you deserve death, that he gave his life to take the place of sinners, and that out of his death comes life—eternal life to all who trust in him.

But notice the verb tense here, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned.” Notice that it does not say, “will not be condemned,” but rather “is not condemned.” This means that this is not a future promise—this is a present reality. This is why Paul says in Romans 8, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”

If you believe in Christ, know that every time you sin—which is every day until you see Christ face-to-face—the death your daily sin earns does not even register on your account because it was already paid for by Christ at the cross. There is no sin you can commit which God forgot to nail on the cross. There is no debt Christ forgot to pay on your behalf. There is no uncashed check lingering that the Lord neglected to account for.

All the accumulated justice due to you for your sin—past, present, and future—has been poured out on Christ on the cross. As Jesus proclaimed before his last breath, “It is finished!” He drank the full cup of the wrath of God down to the last dregs and there is no a drop left for you. For you there is no condemnation but only grace and mercy and love—if you’ve believed in Christ and placed your life and eternity in his hands.

In this great exchange where your sin was placed on Christ, God’s faithful judgment on you, the believer, is that you are now righteous in Christ and therefore free from condemnation. If you believe on Christ, know that this is true of you.

But there another faithful judgment God makes. For you who do not believe in the Son of God, in Jesus the Christ, you are found guilty. LOOK at the second part of vs. 18. . .

Notice that this, too, is in the present tense. It doesn’t say that you will be condemned, but that you are condemned already. This is not just conveying the certainty of your future condemnation, it conveys that your sentence has already

begun. Like Pharaoh of old, he hardened his heart in rebellion against God, and as a result God confirmed his choice by continuing to harden his heart. That was the beginning of Pharaoh's condemnation.

Romans 1 reveals that God's judgment on those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness is to give them over to the sin. Romans 1:24 says, "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity." Vs. 26 says "God gave them up to dishonorable passions." Then vs. 28 says, "God gave them up to a debased mind." Just as sanctification is a progressive reality which will be fully realized when Christ returns, so is condemnation.

If you reject Christ now, do not think that you can easily turn to him later. Because God's present judgment will mean that the longer you reject Christ, the further you will go into sin and the more calloused you will be against the truth.

My friend, if you do not believe, you are condemned. The writing is on the wall. The verdict has been made and its in the hands of the judge. The bailiff stands at your side ready to escort you to your punishment. There are no appeals to be made, no possibility of parole, and no one to commute your sentence. You have but one hope.

No matter how far down into the darkness you've descended, no matter how long your rap sheet, no matter how vile your sin, your only hope is to accept the reality of your sin and turn to Jesus. Look to him whose death on the cross paid for whoever would believe on his. Trust in his finished work as your only hope. Plead with God to forgive you and free you from your sin and sentence.

Give up the idea that your life belongs to you and give it up to him who died and rose again to save sinners like you. And know that when you do that, the flood of God's grace and mercy will overflow to you. Your sin will be immediately washed away and you will be forgiven and set free—not to live for yourself, but for him. It is only by believing in him that God's faithful judgment on you can change from condemned to not condemned—from guilty to righteous. Do that today.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are possible signs that a believer has made survival their greatest need?
2. What have you thought or heard others say makes them ready to stand before the Lord?
3. How does what this passage says about the love of God differ from how people often talk about the love of God today?
4. If the Jews' expectation of the Messiah made the gospel a stumbling block, what expectations do people have of God today that make the gospel foolishness or a stumbling block? How should this impact how we share the gospel?
5. If Christ already paid the price for our sins, what does that mean for our current relationship with God?
6. If our greatest hope is beyond this life, what does that mean about the way we should live this life?
7. Read Matthew 6:25-34. How does Jesus compare our physical needs and our spiritual needs and the importance of each?