



God Did Not Send His Son For This...

The Incarnate Word Series: #5

John 3:16-18

David Sunday

Christmas Eve Service, December 24, 2014

Merry Christmas to you and to your families! I want to draw your attention tonight to the most famous passage in all the Scriptures: John 3:16. It says, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* Everyone knows that verse. You might think, “After that, what more needs to be said?” This has been called “the Bible in miniature.” It’s the best news in the world. Some people have asked, “Couldn’t the Bible end right here with John 3:16?”

But there is more that needs to be said because inside everyone’s heart there’s a gnawing fear that maybe God’s out to get me. That maybe my condemnation is inevitable. That no matter how much good news there is in the Bible, the bad news about me is so bad that someday I will be doomed. That fear lurks in many hearts.

One pastor I love put it like this: “Our hearts deeply feel underneath our beliefs, down at the deepest substratum of our thoughts, down at the level of intuition, an unconscious, unchosen feeling, something way down deep inside whispers to us that God isn’t really satisfied and at any moment, the hammer might fall.”

God wants to banish that fear from your heart tonight. God wants you to know there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). He doesn’t want you to feel like you’re being called into the principal’s office, wondering what’s going to happen. He wants you to know for certain that every accusation against you has been answered, every sin has been punished and every trace of guilt on your record has been banished forever. He wants you to be free from the dread of condemnation so that you can rise, shake off your guilty fears and experience a future filled with hope and peace with God, knowing your sins have been forgiven. That’s why God doesn’t end the gospel message at John 3:16. He gives us John 3:17 to assure us.

Look at what it says after John 3:16. *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world...”* I need to hear that. I need to be assured of that. *“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

Now that’s not what we would expect. That’s not what comes naturally to our thought process. For God to send His Son into this world at all is an amazing thing. Into this world where school children are slain in Pakistan, where police officers are killed in New York, where racial turmoil and family brokenness and grief and sorrow all seem to reign too often. God sent His Son into this world, “where hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, goodwill to men.” This is not a world in which the greater part of humanity is lamenting over our sin and searching for some way to be saved from our sin. No, this is a world that, year after year, the popular vote results in a landslide against God’s government. We want to do it our way. It was into this world that God sent His Son. Who will not tremble before Him?

In the Old Testament, God sent angelic messengers to visit people; sometimes visiting highly favored individuals. But often in the Old Testament, these messengers would be ministers of God’s wrath. Think about Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). Think about the night in Egypt when the Angel of Destruction came through and only the blood that was on the doorframe could protect the house from destruction (Exodus 12). So when God sends His Son into the world, it’s not a foregone conclusion that He’s coming on a mission of mercy. Furthermore, God knew how this world would receive His Son. He knew that Jesus would come into the world—this world that was made through Him—and the world would not recognize Him. He would come to His own and His own would not receive Him (John 1:11) but rather would thirst for His blood and end up beating and scourging Him and nailing Him to a cruel cross (John 19). God knew that would be His Son’s reception in this world. He knew that He would be sending His Son into enemy territory; it would have been perfectly just for God to send His Son into this world to bring condemnation once and for all. But John says God did not send His Son for this. *“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.”*

Does this sound like good news to you? Before you answer too quickly, think about this question: What about justice? Justice must be satisfied. Sin must be condemned. Evil must not be winked at. The only people who think sin should be automatically forgiven are people who have never experienced what it’s like to be deeply sinned against. Once you’ve experienced that, you care about justice. A world in which there is no judgment? That’s not good news; that’s chaos. That’s a war zone of terror.

So, what about justice? If God did not send His Son into the world to condemn, what about all the evil that's in our world? And in us? Well, that's what the cross is all about. You see that the shadow of the cross looms over the manger in Bethlehem. God's Word says in Romans 3:25 (NIV): "*God presented Jesus Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice.*" Jesus came to die that we may live. He came to bear the condemnation of my sins, your sins, the sins of this world that demand and deserve justice. He came so that we could be acquitted of all condemnation and be set free from guilt, declared righteous forever. In fact, John 3:18 says, "*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.*" The only condemnation that remains in this world is for those who reject God's Son and the salvation that He came to bring into this dark world.

I plead with you tonight, dear ones, do not refuse God's love-gift to you in Jesus. Do not reject this love. God is offering you a clean conscience. A bright and everlasting future of joy and peace. These are tidings of comfort and joy. God has opened wide His heart to you in Jesus Christ. Do you know what He's saying to you? He's saying, "We can be friends. Nothing in you ever needs to come between us again. My love has found a way to satisfy My wrath. Justice has been done on the cross. Amnesty has been declared. Forgiveness is free and full for all who will believe in My Son." That's what God is offering to us in Jesus.

An old advent hymn describes it beautifully, drawing from Isaiah 40:

Comfort, comfort ye My people,
Speak ye peace, thus saith our God;
Comfort those who sit in darkness,
Mourning 'neath their sorrow's load;
Speak ye to Jerusalem
Of the peace that waits for them;
Tell her that her sins I cover,
And her warfare now is over...

Yea, her sins our God will pardon,
Blotting out each dark misdeed;
All that well deserved His anger
He will no more see nor heed.
She has suffered many a day,
Now her griefs have passed away,
God will change her pining sadness
Into ever springing gladness.

(Comfort, Comfort Ye My People, Johannes G. Olearius, 1671)

That's written by someone who understands John 3:17—that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn but to save.

I have two questions for you tonight in light of this wonderful news from a God Who did not send His Son to condemn us but to save us. The first has to do with your relationship with other people. We're going to be doing a lot of relationship time over the next few days. I want you to think about this: What is it that people tend to experience when you come into their life? When you come into their world? Do people get the sense that you've come to condemn? Or do

people get the sense that you've come to show them God's salvation in Jesus? Shouldn't our approach to people reflect the kind of approach God made to us when He came into our world? Shouldn't people get the sense from us that we do not come to condemn but to love and to show mercy? That's the first question.

The second question has to do with your relationship with God. Do you doubt that God's heart is tender toward you? Do you doubt that God is eager to receive you? That He is loath to condemn you? If so, I want you to listen to these beautiful words by Martin Luther who loved that Baby in the manger. Listen to what Luther says:

Behold Christ, lying in the lap of His young mother, the virgin. What's sweeter than the Babe? What more lovely than the mother? Look at that Child, knowing nothing, yet all that is belongs to Him; that your conscience should not fear but take comfort in Him. Doubt nothing. Look upon this Lord of peace and your spirit will be at peace. See how God invites you in many ways. He places before you a Babe with Whom you may take refuge. You cannot fear Him. For nothing is more appealing to man than a babe. Are you affrighted? Then come to Him, lying in the lap of the fairest and sweetest maid, and you will see how great is the divine goodness which seeks above all that you should not despair. Trust Him. Trust Him. Here is the Child in Whom is salvation. Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience and guilt if you come to judge this gurgling Babe and believe that He is come, not to judge you but to save.

Beautiful and tender was God's approach to humanity on Christmas morning. Let us trust Him and thank Him. Trust Him that His desire is not to condemn us but to save us. He wants us to know there is no hesitancy; there are no reservations; there is no wishing that He didn't have to save those who believe in His Son, Jesus. His heart is open wide. He isn't holding any grudges. He isn't holding out to see how well you're going to perform in 2015 to see whether He's going to be willing to save you or not. Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing, realizing He came not to condemn you but to save. Christ the Babe was born for you. Receive Him. Rejoice in Him. Trust Him. And be at peace in Him. Amen.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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