

Look with faith and live anew \* John 3

January 19, 2020 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

This morning we are launching into a brand new sermon series that will take us up until Easter – I’m calling it ‘Jesus is’ – who He is and who we are in Him.

One of my preaching profs once said, ‘when your people have a good sense of the broad strokes of Jesus’ life, you can start to get a little deeper into His teaching and character – I think we’re there as a church. Almost five years now and we’ve talked a lot about what Jesus did and so know we’re going to think more about who He was.

John’s Gospel famously has these ‘I am’ statements – seven times when Jesus says ‘I am’ the light of the world, I am the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life – that sort of thing – and I’ve filled out the list with some other ideas that will give us a big picture of who Jesus is.

And of course, then I want to take the next step and ask ‘if Jesus is this, what do it mean for us as His followers?’ If Jesus is the bread of life, what does that mean for us? If Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, what does that mean for how we live?

So this schedule will take us from now until Easter and I do encourage you to keep this with you – tuck it in your Bible so that at some point during the week, you can read and think about what we’re going to talk about on Sunday – I think that that will make Sunday even more valuable for you. And if you’ve never done that before, give it a try these next few weeks, and we’ll see how God shapes us as we think about who Jesus is.

Now this morning, we are going to look at a foundational aspect of Jesus’ character – a really central piece of who He is – Jesus is the Saviour of the world.

That’s a big statement, isn’t it? “The Saviour of the world.”

And it raises a lot of questions. Saved from what? Do we even need to be saved? Aren’t we all just nice people who get by by being good? I mean, I’ve got a lot of real world stuff to do and thinking about philosophical things like salvation just doesn’t fit into my schedule right now, thank you very much.

If that’s you, I would invite you to slow down just a little this morning, and listen to what Jesus has to say. Because it has eternal implications. Jesus draws the lines quite clearly here – there’s a way that leads to death and condemnation and there’s a way that leads to life and blessing and only He can deliver us from the one to the other. He says ‘I am the Saviour of the world; I am willing to be YOUR Saviour’ and I want all of us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt where we stand in relation to Him.

Turn with me in your Bible to John chapter 3 and we’ll start at verse 1.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:1-2 NIV).

Nicodemus is a neat guy. He’s gone to church all his life; he probably had gold stars/perfect attendance in his Sunday school classes. He’s memorized the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm – actually, he’s probably memorized the

24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> and Genesis and Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers – he is a righteous man in OT terms. If anyone could be saved by their good deeds, it was him. He's actually one of the most highly acclaimed teachers in all of Israel and he comes to Jesus because he sees something special in him. Nicodemus sometimes gets slack for coming to Jesus at night – as if he didn't want anyone to know – but you know what, at least he came. And I think he really does want to hear what Jesus has to say. I mean, in verse 2, he says – Jesus, you must come from God because no one could do what you are doing unless the Lord was with you. I think he's interested in hearing what Jesus has to say.

Now, have you ever been in a conversation with someone where you start talking about one thing, and then all of a sudden, they take over the conversation and steer it in an entirely different direction? That's what Jesus does here. Nicodemus says 'Jesus, we know you must be sent by God' and Jesus says, verse 3, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." (Joh 3:3 NIV).

Talk about conversation whiplash! I don't know what Nicodemus thought he'd be talking about in this conversation, but Jesus clearly knew. And I suspect that Jesus knew what Nicodemus needed to hear. Maybe Nicodemus wanted to talk about Jesus' miracles – but Jesus I think redirects the conversation and says – let's not miss the point. Let's make the main thing the main thing – and then He launches into one of his most famous sermons.

And rather than walk through it a verse at a time, I want to make the main thing the main thing and summarize Jesus' words into three points. In the next seventeen verses, Jesus says:

We need salvation. He is the Saviour. And salvation means a brand new start.

Jesus says to Nicodemus and He says to us: We need salvation. He is the Saviour. And salvation means a brand new start.

So first, we need salvation.

This comes really clearly from verse 19 –

19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. (Joh 3:19 NIV).

If you're into writing in your Bible, you could highlight that statement 'men loved darkness instead of light' because that's the quintessential human problem. Without Jesus, we love darkness more than light. We find sin more appealing than holiness. We love what we desire more than what God desires.

Certainly that was my experience before I knew God. I remember in our house, we had a mug that said 'The true measure of a man is what he does when no one's looking.' And I thought 'yes, I agree with that and I think that's totally right!' And yet the problem was that when people weren't looking, I was doing things I wouldn't want them to see. I loved the darkness more than the light.

And before you go thinking that I was some depraved, sicko monster, let me say this – I wasn't. I was a pleasant, polite, volunteering, church-going, A+ student. But I loved myself more than I loved God. I loved the darkness more than the light. I was jealous of other people's successes. I was selfish and greedy for acclaim. I did things that I knew were not right.

Now, from a secular point of view, you would probably say – oh, well, nobody's perfect – that's just you learning how to grow up and be a morally complicated human being and yet look what Jesus says – verse 14 –

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,  
15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life (Joh 3:14-15 NIV).

Wait, what? Talk about conversation whiplash. Let me explain.

Jesus here says that my situation was similar to something that happened in Israel's past. See, in Numbers 21 (verses 4-9), we hear about this time when the Israelites grumbled against God. He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and carried them safely through the desert, providing for them, keeping them safe. And in return, the people of Israel loved the darkness more than the light. They looked at God's mercies and spit in His face. They said 'we know better than you!' and so in response, He sent fiery snakes into the people to punish them.

That, Jesus says, is my situation without Him. When I loved the darkness more than the light; when I took God's gifts for granted, when I said 'God, you have no authority in my life,' I was rebelling against a gracious father and so I deserve to get bit. I deserve wrath. I deserve condemnation for rejecting the God who made me. In short, I need salvation. I need a Saviour.

Fortunately, Jesus says, He is that Saviour.

Yes, God held His people accountable for their sin, but He also made a way for them to be delivered from it. He said 'Moses, take some bronze, make a snake out of it – put that thing up on a pole, and if anyone looks at it, trusting me to forgive their sin and save them from wrath, they'll live.'

And when people looked with faith, God saved them and they lived.

And that, Jesus said, is how salvation works for us to. Verse 14 -

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,  
15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.  
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.

See, I was just as guilty as the Israelites were for rebelling against God. And in all fairness, I should have borne the penalty for my sin. But God showed how deeply He loved me, by sending Jesus to bear my sin, in my place, so that when I looked to Him lifted up on the Cross, He would forgive me and give me life. When we look to Jesus with faith, our sins are forgiven and we LIVE. New life now and eternal life forever.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God knew that we loved the darkness more than the light. He knew that we loved ourselves more than Him. And yet He is so rich in mercy and love that He chose to give His one and only Son to be our Saviour, if we will only believe.

He saves us from sin and the penalty of sin and He promises us eternal life but not only that - Salvation means a brand new start.

See, salvation is not simply putting some pearls on the same old sinner. Salvation is not simply saying you trust Jesus and then going on as if nothing had changed. Salvation means being born again – complete spiritual renewal – being changed by the Spirit of God from the inside out.

That's why Jesus says to Nicodemus at the very beginning of this passage - 3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (Joh 3:3 NIV).

See when we are first born, it's a wonderful moment – a precious moment where our parents give us life – and that's awesome. But we are born fleshly beings. Verse 6 - 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (Joh 3:6 NIV). We're born with the sin nature that goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. And that makes us just like those Israelites in the desert – slow to give God thanks for His constant grace, quick to say that we know better than Him. We can't enter the kingdom of God like that. We need to be born of the Spirit; We have to be born again.

And that, Jesus says, is what happens when we believe in Him.

When we look to Jesus on the Cross, admit that it was our sin that put Him there, and trust Him to save us and give us life, we are born again. Brand new start. Renewed from the inside out by the Spirit of God. Forget the way you used to live because that's old news. You have everything you need to walk in God honouring ways, in the light of life.

We need a Saviour. Jesus is that Saviour. And salvation means a brand new start.

That's John chapter 3 – Jesus is the Saviour of the world.

Now let's bring it home and apply it in our lives.

In the past I've used the phrase 'Look with faith and live' to summarize this passage – I want to use it again today but add one more word – Look with faith and live anew.

If you've been here awhile, you've heard the first part before. When we look with faith on Jesus, He saves us from sin and gives us life. We will not perish but have eternal life.

But what I want to highlight today is that He doesn't just give us eternal life later; He gives us new life NOW. BRAND NEW START. The old is gone, the new has come. If you are in Christ then you are a new creation! *NIV 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

That should have a ripple effect that goes out from our hearts to change every part of our lives.

Grumbling and complaining belong to the past.

Guilt tripping people into doing things belongs to the past. Self-centred pride belongs to the past. You are a new creation!

So let me ask you – where do you stand in light of this truth?

Jesus has told us. We need a Saviour. We have all sinned and told God we know better than Him and so we all stand condemned by our maker.

But in His grace, God has given us a Saviour. God has offered to deliver us by trusting our Saviour. Have you?

Have you admitted – ‘I’ve loved the darkness more than the light - I’ve done things I’ve known were wrong – I’ve told God in word and deed that He isn’t worth much’?

If you haven’t, then look, with faith, and live. Admit your sin to Jesus and then turn from it and live for Him. Trust Him to deliver you and make you new and He WILL do it! God has demonstrated His love for you by sending His one and only Son into the world so that if you will only believe in Him, you will have eternal life. Receive it. And when you do, God promises not only eternal life, but a brand new life with Him, walking with Him all through life until eternity begins.

I mean, think about why this all came about! Nicodemus came to Jesus to say - ‘Jesus, You speak with the authority of God.’ And then Jesus, speaking with the authority of God says ‘You need a Saviour; I am that Saviour; Salvation means a brand new start.’ How are you going to respond? We know from John 7 and John 19 that Nicodemus later stood up for Jesus in the midst of the Pharisees and he was there to take to take Jesus down from the cross. He looked with faith and lived a new life. How about you?

Now listen, I know that many of us here have heard this passage before and we’ve gone to church for many years; is there anything here for us? And I would say – yes – this is a very important check up moment to say ‘Have I believed and does my life reflect that conviction?’

Frederick Bruner says ‘Being members of the Synagogue or of the church does not automatically mean being members of the reborn people of God...’ (179). Nicodemus had a sparkling pedigree that should have gotten him into the Kingdom, but no – he had to be born again by the Spirit of God. And frankly, I went to church for many years as an ‘old flesh’ kind of guy, warming a pew on Sunday but living for myself every other day.

When I come to your house to visit and talk about your spiritual wellbeing, I’ll have failed as your pastor if all you can say is ‘I’ve gone to church all my life.’

I want you to be able to say ‘I’ve trusted in Jesus, been made new and I go to church because I love the Lord and I love His people.’ I want you to be able to say that since you trusted in Jesus, you are a qualitatively different person from who you were before and there’s fruit to prove it.

Now I know that many of us grew up going to church, and it might be hard to put your finger on a decisive before and after born again moment, but I want you to be able to know that you’ve made a clean break with the past and felt a spiritual renewal that made you love the light more than the darkness. That doesn’t mean sinlessness; we are all going to struggle with sin until eternal life begins, but it does mean that we keep coming back to Jesus, that our desire for sin decreases and that living for him becomes our life’s priorities. That’s new birth, whether you can put a date on it or not.

I want to encourage you, whether this is your first time hearing it, or your eighty-first time hearing it, to look with faith and live anew.

A couple years back, Keith Urban had this song that got to number one on the Canada Country Billboard that lists the influences in his life. Ultimately, it says "I learned everything I needed to know from John Cougar, John Deere, John 3:16." Coming from a Massey family, I'm not so sure about the John Deere part, but absolutely I think he's right about the last one. All you need to know about life is in John 3:16 – look with faith in Jesus and live anew.