

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 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 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 works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison). Now a discussion arose between some of John’s disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.” 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 3:16–36, ESV)

The Basis of Our Hope

This passage contains what is probably the most familiar verse in the Bible, where we have God demonstrating His love for the world by sending His one and only Son into the world to give life to those who believe. It’s well-

known for good reason, because it is on this rock of God's love that we find the basis of our hope. From this passage we see,

- **God's love extends to the sinful, idolatrous, God-hating world.** It's not 'God so loved those who believed in him' or 'God so loved those who were otherwise respectable people but got caught up in sin' - no, it's God so loved the world. The world in John is not the dirt, grass, and trees - it's humanity. In particular, humanity in express opposition to God. **What is the difference between God's loving the world and his command elsewhere for us to not love the world or the things in the world?**

- **His love for sinners is his motivation for sending Christ.** Don't miss this, as it is critical to understand - The Father sent the Son into the world to die on the cross because he (or they) loved you. Christ's death did not open up the door for God to be able to love us sinful wretches. God's love for us sinful wretches is what led to Christ's death. This is at the very heart of the gospel. As one writer put it, "Jesus Christ came to earth not in order to change God's mind, but to express God's mind."

Consider a couple passages that show us how God's love for us is what motivated sending Christ:

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:9–10, ESV)

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." (Romans 5:6–11, ESV)

Is this unfamiliar to you? Has anyone been taught otherwise?

This knowledge should give us a rock-solid assurance of faith in the midst of anything. **Why is that the case?** In Romans, Paul uses this gift of love as the foundation for his confidence in God in the face of trials, suffering, and death:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:31-34)

The message is clear: God gave up His most precious Son Jesus, so that we would have life. In the face of this, how can we not rest confidently in Him? We know that we are not condemned, because Christ died and was raised. Therefore, if He is trustworthy in the greatest sacrifice to meet our greatest need, we should not doubt that He is trustworthy in everything – because he has also promised that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

No condemnation...all things working together for good...eternal life... peace with God. That's the message of John 3:16 for those who trust in Christ. But, **what about those who don't believe?** In verses 17-21, John continues to develop the thought began in verse 16 and answers this question for us.

God did not send Jesus to condemn the world, but to save it through Jesus...but in verse 18 we see that those who do not believe are condemned. Why? They are condemned because they have not believed in Jesus.

The verdict against them is this: The light (that is, Jesus) has come into the world, and men have loved the darkness more than the light. **What does it mean that men loved darkness more than the light?** Their sinful thoughts, desires, and deeds are comfortably hidden in the darkness of their hearts, deceiving their conscience that all is well. One of the effects of light is to show things for what they really are, and one of the effects of

seeing Christ is that our thoughts, desires, and actions are exposed for what they really are – horrible, ugly sins. Those who don't believe Christ are condemned because they prefer to remain in darkness rather than have their sins exposed for what they are.

What is the right response to the light?

We who believe in Christ welcome the light. Upon seeing the horror of our sin, we flee to Christ for mercy. As we begin to walk in the light, Christ begins to live through us. Now, the same light that exposed our sin, exposes our new life for what it is – the very work of God in us through Christ. Those who come to the light in order to have their deeds revealed, what is revealed is that God has been working in them. By their deeds they show themselves to have been born of God.

Let us give thanks to God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” that he has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2Cor 4:6). In his death and resurrection we find hope, and His light shines to guide our path, exposing our sin and leading us in paths of righteousness.

But also remember that the same Jesus who says, “I am the light of the world,” also said “you are the light of the world.” **How is it that we shine the light of Christ in the world? What is the reaction we should be prepared for?** Therefore, let's be conscious of letting Christ's light shine out of us in such a way that when people see our love, compassion, and generosity, God gets the glory, not us. This not only includes our acts of love, but also the way we handle our sin and suffering. We should pray for the grace to recognize sin, and the strength to flee from it. If we sin against others, we should repent to them in a spirit of humility, knowing that not doing so would defame the name of Jesus. When wronged by others, we should be gracious, obeying Christ's command to love our enemies, and we should seek to overcome evil with good. In suffering, we trust patiently in the Lord, knowing that our afflictions are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. When others see our actions and hear our words, whether they praise us or persecute us, let it be because we faithfully represented Christ to them.

John the Baptist

As the scene transitions, we are presented once again with John the Baptist, bearing witness to Christ and correcting those who have the wrong understanding of his ministry in relation to Christ's. From this passage, we see that John and Jesus shared a ministry together for some time prior to John's arrest and execution. John's disciples notice that Jesus is attracting more and more of the people coming to be baptized and ask John about it. John's response is that this is exactly what should be happening - Jesus must increase, and he himself must decrease. John's experience should be all of our experiences as we introduce people to Christ and as Christ shines in us - we must decrease and he must increase. **What does it look like in our daily life for Christ to increase and us to decrease?**

The example of John and his disciples would serve us well in another way. John could be considered a religious celebrity in his day, and he had a very loyal following - many who were hesitant to leave him behind and follow Christ directly. In fact, there was an element of jealousy and concern about loss of influence. In some ways, John illustrates the danger with celebrity preachers in our day. Often, like John, these preachers are godly men just looking to obey God in the work to which he has called them. Many times, the cult of celebrity and personality that gets created around these people is a result of their disciples or handlers, who get a sense of importance or pride being connected with this well-known person and they end up creating the celebrity issue. On the other end, is you and me, who have a responsibility not to treat these teachers as stars, or to allow them to hinder us from being under the authority and shepherding of our own pastors.

Jesus as the Bridegroom

John celebrates as the friend of the bridegroom, who is Christ. **How is John's description of Christ as the Bridegroom an apt analogy for the work he has come to accomplish?** It's an apt analogy, because as we saw in the discussion of the wedding feast, that is the story of redemption. Christ leaves his Father to go rescue his Bride the Church, that the two might become one. Every heroic love story is a retelling, some better or worse than others, of this eternal love story. In fact, it would be accurate to sum up the story of the Bible as "Kill the dragon, get the girl."

The authority of Jesus

Jesus is the one who has come down from heaven, on whom the Spirit dwells without measure. He speaks the very words of God, because he came from God and because the Father has given all things into his hands. All human teachers, including prophets like John the Baptist are from the earth, but one - Jesus - has come down from heaven and bears witness to what he knows from the Father. Obedience to the Son is obedience to God and the same for disobedience. With Christ, life. Without Christ, death. This claimed authority of Christ puts Christianity on a different plane than any other system of beliefs. This should be a key component of our evangelistic and apologetic encounters - Christ is wholly unlike any other teacher or religious system. He comes and speaks with the authority of the Creator and governor of all things, and we have an obligation to hear him.