

The Gospel According to Jesus

John 3:14-21

Elder Quentin Smith, September 5, 2021

Well, good morning! What a great time of worship and thank you to Dan for making that so clear. I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to John chapter three. And we're going to primarily deal with verses 14 through 21. Today, if you search the 10 most popular verses in the Bible, if you Google the 10 most famous verses in the Bible, there are several contenders. Matthew 6:33, "seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Romans 8:28 pops up, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose." And then who can forget Jeremiah 29:11, a verse that is written to Israel and says, "For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you future and a hope." But the number one most famous verse, according to bible.ca, is our text today, John 3:16. And it was interesting for me to see that the children knew that and where it came from. It's the Gospel in one verse. It's God's eternal plan in one sentence. It's one that I'm confident that most of you could quote, and it's probably the first one you've ever memorized. And strangely enough, because you've known it for so long, you might have slipped into the habit of thinking about it as being simple, or even simplistic. Perhaps something that is Elementary, something that is for immature Christians. It's something that is at the beginning of your faith walk. You might think by now that it's not really deep enough for you because you've swam in the waters of sovereignty and eschatology at times. But my aim today is to revisit that and to remind you and rekindle for you the power that is packed into this passage of John chapter three verses 14 through 21, of which John 3:16 is the absolute pinnacle. It is the jewel in the crown. If you've sidelined this verse, because you know it, and have known that, then I'm glad you're here. If you've been tempted to think of it as something that you've outgrown let me remind you of Second Corinthians 11 verse three. I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. If there's one thing the world needs right now, and we all need a healthy dose of, please give me some simplicity.

Well, the context of this verse is a meeting. It's a meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was the ruler of the Jews and he was convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus had come from God. Why? Because nobody could be doing the miracles that Jesus was doing unless God was with him. But you see, that was inconvenient for him. It was uncomfortable because that was dangerous to his lifestyle to acknowledge that. So he came at night. What would you have told him? What would you have said to an older man, a ruler of the Jewish religion? What would you have told one of the wise elders of the land? Somebody who had been raised and steeped in ritualistic external religion, you've only got a few minutes? What matters? What message would you have given? Jesus tells him that he must be born again. There's no real clue in the text that Jesus was even asked a question. He just dives in and tells Nicodemus that he must be born again, born from above. The Greek passage talks about born again being born from above, born of the Spirit. It's something that God must do, and that you would see evidence of. Then he refers to the wind, just like you don't see the wind but you see evidence of the wind. So it is with salvation. So it is with being born again. It is this cosmic transaction that only God can do. But we must see evidence of it if it's real. It's a cosmic transaction with real life, visible results. And he exposes Nicodemus, his lack of understanding of this and even perhaps his unbelief, even though he's a teacher of Israel.

Then in verse 13 he pulls out the authority card, “No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.” Nicodemus hears how it is. I, as the Son of Man, have been there, and let me tell you that this is the way it is. He reminds Nicodemus in verses 14 and 15, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that whoever believes will, in Him, have eternal life.” He reminds Nicodemus of something that Nicodemus would have known very well. He tells Nicodemus, it’s always been about faith. It’s never been about works. When the Israelites grumbled in Numbers chapter 21 about being rescued from Egypt only to have no food or water, and they complained of being tired of manna in the wilderness, God sent fiery serpents and many of them died. But He told Moses to make a bronze snake on a staff so that if you were bitten by the snake and venom was coursing through your veins, and you could feel death approaching, you could look at the bronze snake and be saved, be healed. He executed judgment on them, but at the same time, gave them an opportunity to be healed. And just like that, the Son of Man must be lifted up so that whoever believes will, in Him, have eternal life. And then the pinnacle of our verse today, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”

I want to look today, if you're taking notes and I would encourage you to take notes always, for four lessons from this verse. I want to share with you four eternal truths from John 3:16 today. Four eternal truths about the Gospel according to Jesus. Number one, God loves and therefore gives. Most of you will be familiar with the fact I think that there are multiple words for love in the Greek language. We might say in English, that I love ice cream, or I love Christmas, or I love what you've done with your hair. Or I love you honey, to your spouse. And we intuitively know which kind of love it is. But in the Greek language there are four different words that flesh that out a little bit. The first one is ‘Philea.’ It’s the idea of brotherly love. Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. The second one is ‘Storge,’ which is that love and affection, the kind you have for your biological family. Then thirdly is ‘Eros,’ from which we get erotic or sexual love between spouses. And then fourthly is ‘Agape,’ and that is our word in this verse, “For God so loved,” God so ‘Agape’ the world. It’s a sacrificial love. It’s a love that benefits the receiver, even if it costs the giver. It’s the love that initiates, it’s a love that moves first. ‘Agape’ always moves first, and it’s one of the attributes of God. First John four verse seven through eight, “Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God. And everyone who loves is born of God and knows God, the one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” And just later on in that passage is another version, 4:19. “We love because He first loved us.”

But I want you to see that love is always displayed in action. Love needs a channel along which to flow before it is recognized as love, and God’s love is always recognized in the act of giving. We love because He first loved us, it’s a natural human response to love somebody who loves us in that way. Furthermore, the extent of that love is seen and the extent of the gift. How much God has loved us is recognized by how much He has given us. So let me ask you a question. How much do you love the Lord? Because how much you love the Lord is going to show up in your actions. It’s going to show up in your life, you can tell. And why is the church weak on faith? Why is there this propensity for such sin in the church today, worldwide? I think it’s because some of us don’t love God very much. And that’s because we don’t understand how much He loved us. We do not recognize how big His gift of salvation was because we fail to understand the extent of our sin. We have whitewashed over our sin and somehow, we don’t really feel the need for a Savior.

Turn with me to Luke seven verse 37. While you're turning there, I was interested the other day to be privy to a conversation that somebody had with a non-Christian. The non-Christian was revealing his understanding of church and it was basically that we are a club that meets on a Sunday and we gather around people who think the

same. That's very sad to me. Because the Church is the Church of the living God, people who've been saved from sin. We aren't a club of people who think the same.

Luke 7:37, now “there was a woman in the city who was a sinner.” And I think we understand from tradition that she was a prostitute. “And when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisees house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume and standing behind Him at His feet weeping, she began to wipe His feet with her tears and kept wiping them with the hair of her head and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the pharisee, who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this Man were a prophet, He would know who and what sort of person this woman is, who is touching Him, that she's a sinner.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ And he replied, ‘say it teacher.’ ‘A money lender had two debtors, one owed 500, denarii and the other 50. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?’ Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more,’ and He said to him, you have judged correctly. Turning toward the woman He said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman, I entered your house you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but she since the time I came in, is not cease to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with perfume. For this reason, I say to you, her sins which are many have been forgiven for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little.’ And then He said to her, ‘your sins have been forgiven.’”

Her great love and out-pouring, spending that degree of money in those days on an alabaster vial of perfume, showed that she understood the extent of how much she had been forgiven. He who is forgiven little, loves little. Well, how did we get here? Well, I think that it's because we don't really believe the narrative that God takes it seriously and will judge swiftly and punish eternally, without hesitation. Secondly, we live in a culture where we are comfortable. We're busy, we're distracted. We live in a culture where submission to authority is constantly in question. It's almost as if it's a game day decision, if I will, if I won't. We live in a world where there's a lot of intimidation and intimidation is inconvenient and time consuming to experience. So maybe I'll just keep quiet.

So our faith doesn't seem as urgent or quiet times with the Lord, not as necessary. Our times of refreshing and the Word of God gets sidelined. Our minds are dulled to Biblical reality and our hearts are numb with just trying to make it through. We don't recognize, and we definitely find it hard to acknowledge, the extent of our sin. I don't think we recognize the desperate situation that we are in by default. Verse 17, says to us, “God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged. He who does not believe has been judged already, because he did not believe.” we'll talk about this a bit later. But that's our default position. That's where I start. It's already been decided. If I don't experience the weight of that understanding, why would I need a savior? If we don't understand how lost we are, we are not going to feel the need to be rescued. But Jesus didn't remind us that, that is where we begin. He didn't come to condemn the world, He didn't need to, the world is already condemned. He came to save.

Point number two, God directs our belief. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him...” Let's be honest, there are frankly a lot of things to believe in, many causes to fight for, to be a part of social justice, Black Lives, abortion, gender equality, sexual equality, gender identity, sexual orientation, the environment and global warming, cruelty to animals. Species that are threatened with extinction, and all forms of abuse, marital abuse, sexual abuse, child abuse, most recently victims of tragic abuse in residential schools, elder abuse, drug abuse, mental health, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the family, and I'm

sure that your list would be more full than mine. And of course, some of these are very worthy. Most of them are tragic results of human sin, one person against another. Equally, some of them are sin of our flesh, in rebellion against God. But hear me today. God calls us first to none of these. God calls us first to none of these. He calls us to believe in Jesus. "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish." Why? Three reasons.

First of all, sin is first conceived in the heart. James tells us in James one verse 14 that, "each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust and then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin. When sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." So sin begins in our hearts. Jeremiah 17 backs that up in verse nine, "the heart is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick, who can understand it." And that Hebrew word for sick is a very interesting word because it means terminal, in-curable. So if the heart is that sick and sin comes from the heart behavior, it comes from the heart, it's not gonna take a rocket scientist to understand that the human heart is capable of great evil. And the sinful effects of the human heart toward others will continue as long as there are sinful people. So any injustice, or any sin or any evil is only going to be rectified when the heart is cured. Without that, we're just doing behavior modification. Which is why we are called to believe in Him, because it's only when we believe in Him that He gives us a new heart and the behavior which flows from that heart is changed.

Let me give you a verse, in Ephesians 4:28, to illustrate this, "let him who steals steal no longer. But rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with the one who has need." That is Biblical transformation. A thief who is stealing ceases, he now works with his hands, doing what is good in order that he might have something to share with those in need. That doesn't happen without God changing your heart. You say you have a problem with pornography. Say you have a problem with same sex attraction, or gambling or racism or whatever flavor of sin you can think of. I can't help you truly, without you being saved, because your heart has to be changed. You have no reason, you have no motivation to stop that sin. Because you will continue to love your sin more than you love God.

Reason number two, Jesus is going to rectify all evil. And He's the only one who really has the power. He's the one who has the power, because He's the one who has ultimate authority. We've seen some powerful men come and go. We've seen men who have tried to prevent people coming into the country, they've tried to build walls that have other people pay for them, only to have a judge undermine all of that. The most powerful man perceived in the world, unable to carry out promises that he made. The reason, limited authority. And so folks, we can be bent out of shape, we can be distressed and distraught. And sometimes we should be. Some people have even been vengeful regarding all of this, spouting forth on social media. And yet we're not equipped to deal with it. And that's because it's His job to make it right. Jesus says, "make room for my wrath." And He'll do a much better job of holding accountable and punishing evildoers.

Number three reason why He calls us first to none of these: He also tells us that what we are seeing in the world is part of His divine judgment. Romans chapter one is clear that God gives people over to their lusts and their sin...you want to do this fine. Here you go. Experience the judgment that comes ultimately, from you're continuing down that path. So God gave them over to the lust of their heart, to impurity. God gave them over to degrading passions, homosexuality. God gave them over to a depraved mind. And in the list following the depraved mind Paul tells us that people will become inventors of evil. And if that does not describe our world today, then I don't know what does. So if the world is under judgment from God, how do we think we're going to fix some of these things? It's impossible for us. So rather, He calls us to believe in Him. What's the result of that?

What's the result of us believing in Him? Well first of all, peace. John 14:1, "do not let your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in Me." Now there's one thing that we also need along with simplicity, it's peacefulness. Your heart can only not be troubled if you believe in God and "believe also in Me," Jesus says, and then unity comes as well. This is a very interesting observation, John 17:20, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word. That they may all be one, even as you, Father, are in me, and I in You, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me." So believing in Jesus not only changes the heart, it routes out sin and therefore the evil acts. But it also brings peace when we understand that God is in control in unity, which is evidence that God sent Christ and is the evidence of God's love. Now, when you look around the world today, when everybody is involved in all of these different things, do you see unity? Or do you see division and fighting and bickering and arguing back and forth. COVID is just one example of how it has divided us, we need to get back to believing in Him. So for absolute clarity, involvement in some of these things is not wrong. We as Christians have a tremendous influence in some of these areas, but it's not the primary calling of the Christian. The primary calling of the Christian is multifaceted. It is first: faith in God, secondly, to love for others and thirdly, to be message bearers of the Gospel. We point people to Christ with evidence of changed lives. Nobody's going to listen or want to hear what you have to say unless they see your life as evidence of that. But we, we are always prepared to give a defense for the hope that is within us in a very hopeless world. That's what we were saved to do. Works of faith that God prepared beforehand that we should walk in.

I want to tell you a story. It's a renovation story, surprise, surprise. Many of you will be aware that we started a project about a year ago. It's an ambitious project, but we took out the second-floor ceiling, we took out most of the second floor, some of you were there with me. When those rafters came down, they were placed in a pile by the builders...discarded and I looked at that pile. I picked those big timbers up, beautiful old growth for some of them 14-15 feet long, and I piled them neatly in the pile dreading the day that I would have to deal with them. But in my mind thinking I could burn these at least. But as time went on, people wanted to buy those from me. And I started to realize, especially with COVID, that they had value. And I started to recognize that wood was very expensive. And so ultimately, with your help some of you, thank you. I started on that project. And I took those boards, and I took out the nails and the screws and the old floorboard that was on them. And I started to pretty them up and I put them in a pile once they were cleaned up. Now those floorboards have become shelves for books, and they've become doors and they will become furniture.

Redeemed, restored, repurposed. We are those rafters. Before Christ, we were in a pile, we were discarded, ready to be burned. After Christ, the floorboards removed, washed clean, the screws and nails taken out, restored and repurposed to serve Him. When the Israelites were judged for the grumbling and un-thankfulness, and God sent fiery serpents to bite them so they would die, He gave them the opportunity to be rescued. Moses put that serpent on a staff and all they had to do was look in obedience and in faith and be saved. There was nothing grand that they had to do. There was no works of righteousness involved in that, it was an act of faith. It was how God would save them. In the same way, Jesus was lifted up on a cross. He died at the hands of men, according to the will of God. We look to Christ lifted up, He died, was buried, was resurrected, and now is ruling from heaven. There is no feat of righteousness that we can accomplish that would qualify us for salvation. The wood did not jump up and fix itself. The wood didn't get prettied up and get my attention and so there is no way that we qualify for salvation. If there was, the glory would go to us and not to Him.

You see, it's only pride and hard heartedness that would have kept the Israelites from dying from the snake venom in the wilderness, refusing to look at the bronze serpents and be healed. And you say that makes no sense? What do you know? It's only pride and hard heartedness that stops people from looking to Christ and being saved. The ignorance that fails to recognize our sin and our default position as being in great peril, and the stubbornness to not yield to God and simply believe in Jesus. If you're in that place today, please don't let another day go by where you lie on that woodpile. Allow God to come in and remove the glue, and the broken floorboard of all the bad experiences that you've had in life. Let Him take out the screws and the nails of all the pain that you've suffered and be liberated from that which is causing you pain. Redeemed, restored and repurposed.

That brings us to a third point. First point, God loves and therefore forgives. And let me just add a postscript to that. I think I want to talk to the men very briefly. I think our wives do a much better job of moving first with love. And I would ask that if we're honest, we would accept that in terms of how they love us sacrificially. And I want to put a challenge out there to the men and to the husbands especially, to work on being a man who moves first. To work on being a man who initiates loving kindness, it is a godly thing that we are called to do. Second point was, God directs our belief to believe in Jesus because only when the heart is changed, can the behavior that results in sin against others change. Third point, God saves from judgment. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him" (number three) "shall not perish." The Greek word used here for perish is a strong word. It's the same word that is used of Herod in Matthew 2:13, who was, "seeking the Christ child to destroy Him." That's the word. It's the same word in Mark 1:21-28 with demons speaking to Christ saying, "Have you come to destroy us," 'Apollo' mine to destroy, to utterly ruin. That's the word for perishing. And while we've alluded to this earlier, logic demands that if you can be saved from perishing, then perishing must be an option. Perishing must be a reality for some, if Jesus says you can be saved from it. That's just logic. And if you're not a Christian, you must understand that this is your desk. To me, without believing in Jesus Christ, this is our default position outside of Christ. Well, when did that happen? When you didn't believe in Jesus. But you say, but I haven't rejected Jesus outright. But the question is, do you believe in Jesus? And if the answer to that is no, then you have been judged already. You either believe or you don't, and until you believe you will perish when you die. That is the default position, until you believe.

Look with me at verses 19 through 20, where Jesus defines the judgment. He says, "This is the judgment," there's your definition, "this is the judgment that the light has come into the world, and men love the darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil, hates the light, and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." So judgment, Jesus says, is for those who love darkness more than they love the light, for those who do evil. You see, when we love to sin the verse says we hate the light. When we love to sin, we hate the light. Why? Well, it's because we hate being exposed. We can relate to that. We don't take criticism very well. Not me of course. We don't like to be told what to do. We don't like to be subject to another's authority. And when we want to be left alone to sin, we don't want to be exposed, or humiliated, or judged. We want to do what we want to do without any interference. And just think about how defensive we all are when somebody tries to correct us. So when the light comes along, and it exposes us as sinners, we are super uncomfortable with that. And if we're proud and stubborn and not prepared to give that sin up, because we love it, we hate to be reminded about it. And so what do we do? We intimidate anybody who brings us that reminder. And we go on the offensive. And we say this is how I was made. My dad had an anger problem. We call it hate speech. And we call it judgmental, and we call it discrimination. And we try to silence anything that is going to expose me as a sinner before a Holy God, "for everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light." And folks, that is the route of persecution. John the Baptist had his head cut off, he was decapitated,

because he pointed out Herod's adultery with his brother Phillip's wife. Those are dangerous waters. But the truth is, there is a separation between light and darkness and it is permanent. Light and Darkness, sheep and goat, saved and unsaved, eternal life and eternal suffering. It's critical that we understand this default position. But we first need to understand it in our own lives to be saved and to understand the extent of the gift and therefore to love Christ according to the extent of the gift. And when we understand that in our own life, the weight of that sin and the understanding of the salvation will make our heart like Mary Magdalene whose heart was in our passage in Luke 7, or the tax collector in Luke 18. And we won't be like the pharisee in Luke 18, who stood afar off and said, I thank you God that I'm not like other men, like this tax collector. I do all of these things...

And when we do then we'll be in a position to come alongside somebody else and talk about this salvation in the spirit of humility, and grace because we understand that we've been recipients of the same, but there is a warning. That if we are messengers of Christ, no matter how humble, we might be seen to be attempting to limit their sin. We might be interpreted as judging them by exposing their sin to light, you may receive some hatred, even some persecution. And so remember that we cannot judge people for any type of sin. You don't need to be saved from your pornography. From your lust, from dishonesty, fraud, adultery, homosexuality, you don't need to be saved from your grumbling or your slander or your gossip. You need to be saved from your sin. We all do. Because all of these are merely manifestations of sin. There are flavors of sin that we were involved in before we were saved. Ephesians 2 tells us that we were all by nature, children of wrath. So don't get up in arms about somebody's homosexuality when you're watching pornography. Don't judge this honesty, when you are gossiping. Don't call out the government on social media when you grumble and complain. See, we were recipients of grace to cover our sins and be saved. And we need to walk in grace away from that flavor of sin in our sanctification.

Alright, so we are at risk of perishing. That's our default position. What does it mean to perish? Well, God has determined that there'll be a punishment for sin, for the rebellion. And God has determined that that penalty will be a death. You either die yourself, or you accept Christ's death. And our death looks like being separated from God for an eternity in a place that he has called hell. It's an eternal lake of fire and suffering. So next time we're tempted to sin, I want us to just think a little bit longer and recognize that that's how God feels about sin. He has created this place, and frankly, our guilt and our sin are not in question. There's nothing we can do to redeem ourselves. But Christ went to that cross to buy us back from that. And that was an acceptable gift in the sight of God. And so what it means is, we believe in Jesus and it means that to believe that we're sinners, which is not hard, because you know your heart. And we need to trust that God has prepared judgment, and he'll punish without hesitation or apology because He has warned us that because we're sinners, we're destined for hell. But just like Moses lifted up the bronze snake, we look to Christ, to believe in Him. Then God forgives us our sin, and He heals our heart. He accepts Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. His death becomes a substitution for our own and we are saved from perishing. Praise God!

I think it would be remiss though if I didn't talk briefly about Satan's response to our default position. Satan is in the business of deceiving. So what is his strategy? Well, his first strategy is to say like what he did in Genesis 3. "God really didn't say that." And so what he does is he twists the truth or he outright denies that there is perishing. And so he uses people to question what God has clearly said, to question the existence of Hell, even us as pastors and church groups. Rob Bell denies that there is a hell. The Seventh Day Adventists believe that there is no hell, there is no eternal suffering that if you're not saved that you are simply annihilated, there is certainly no eternal aspect to hell, certainly no suffering. And I know that the defense of the doctrine of Hell is beyond the scope of the sermon but let me just give two verses, Luke 16:22 to 28 and Matthew 25:41. You can read those afterwards.

The Bible's very clear. And of course, if there is no hell if there is no punishment that God has put up, then it begs the question if Jesus says we have to be saved, the question is, saved from what if there is no eternal punishment? Satan also encourages business and distraction, the thorns and the thistles that choke that seed in the parable of the Sower. And he lulls us into complacency. He says, we have time, you can think about that when you're older, live life, eat, drink, and be merry right now. But James tells us that in the midst of his pursuits, the rich man will fade away.

This brings us to our final point. Point number one, God loves and therefore gives the love that moves first. Number two, God directs our belief to believe in Jesus. Number three, God saves us from judgment, from our default position. Number four, God rewards for eternity. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Point number four, eternal life is a concept that is somewhat difficult unless you go to the Bible to figure it out. John 17 verse 3 says, "This is eternal life," and this is Jesus speaking before He goes to the cross, He says, "This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent." That's pretty concise. Jesus says, eternal life is knowing God and knowing me, not knowing about God, but knowing God.

I was reminded about Matthew 7 verses 21 to 23, at the scene of judgment, where many will try and say to the Lord, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name, cast out demons and in your name, perform many miracles,' then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'" 'Depart from me, I never knew you,' those must be some of the most terrifying words that anybody would hear beyond this life, because it is irredeemable, it will be being in the presence of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit and the faithful for eternity in a place that He has called heaven. The Bible also talks about an eternal state, new heavens and the new earth which will be created. And here's the rub. Church activity, and church attendance and doing things in the name of Christ does not mean that we know Him. And the claims of the charismatic health and wealth movement for prophecy and casting out demons and healings and miracles, things that have been done deceitfully in the name of Jesus will be exposed. But beyond that purposeful deceitfulness, there are many who have attended church for years, who do not know Him. And there's a sober warning to us in that, that there are tares amongst the wheat as Pastor Jeremy preached recently. You can attend church for years, and be a part of that community, in that club, and yet never have been saved. Never known Christ. Never have your sins forgiven. But true believers have fruit in keeping with their faith. Verse 21, "He who practices the truth comes to the light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." So what are the fruits they love? The light, not darkness. They practice the truth. That is, they live and walk sincerely and honestly with Christ in relationship because they know Him. They're not afraid of exposure to the light because they've got nothing to hide. In fact, the pastor says they come to the light. Any sin has been confessed to God already. We live in, walk in, light. What liberation! What a privilege! What a joy! What a light burden! And they give glory to God for the fruit. They hold up God as being responsible for any change in their life, and they glorify Him.

So let me speak first to the church. This is incredibly important that we get this right. If you start a journey in the wrong direction, you're not going to get to the destination. And so the Gospel according to Jesus is a foundational principle that we must get right. There's no room for pride in our lives when we understand our default position was in His judgment outside of Christ. And there's nothing that we brought to the equation. And maybe you've been coming to church for years. And maybe, just maybe you've missed the Gospel. And I would urge you to do what Paul says in Second Corinthians 13 verse 5, "Examine yourself to see if you're in the faith." And ask yourself the question, am I that person that Isaiah 66 verse 2 talks about, where God, the eternal Creator, the Lord

of the Universe, says, to this one, "I will look to him who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at my Word." But if you're not a Christian, maybe you were invited here today, maybe somebody loved you enough to prod you, speak into your life. Maybe you have a friend who just wants you to experience that liberty and peace and that salvation. Don't take that personally. It's not a judgment. It's a desire that you would be saved.

Let me read and finish first Corinthians chapter six. "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards nor violators, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." And then he says this, "Such were some of you." That is the church. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Spirit of God. So, no matter what you are guilty of, God will forgive you if you have the right attitude and you cry out to the Lord to ask Him to save you in sincerity and humility. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that if you believe in him, You shall not perish, but have eternal life." Let's pray together. Father, I'm so thankful for this reminder of the simplicity of the Gospel. And Father, I pray that the Word would produce within us a humility of sincerity, thankfulness, that the weight of our sin would truly inform the weight, the extent of our joy. Thank you for the gift of Christ. We pray that we would live in that way and thank you for these reminders from your Word today. Help us to go in joy. In Jesus name,

Amen.