

**John 20 – This is the Judgment**

**07/14/2024**

**Scripture 1: (Jn. 3:19-21 ESV)**

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."

**Scripture 2: (Gen. 1:1-5 ESV)**

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

And God saw that the light was good.

And God separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

## Sermon:

Throughout His nighttime visit with Nicodemus, Jesus has explained:

- The **means** by which we are saved;
  - by looking up to the LORD in faith, *pisteuo*;
  - through an objective reminder of our need for salvation;
    - an earlier type being the example of the bronze serpent to remind Israel of God's discipline,
    - now the antetype of the cross which the Son of Man was lifted up upon, to remind us of the discipline and condemnation we deserve for our sin but which Jesus took upon Himself, to give us His righteousness;
- The **why** of our salvation;
  - because “*God so loved the world...*”;
  - to “not condemn the world”;
  - but to save the world through Him;
- The **how** of our salvation:
  - God “...*gave His only [begotten] Son...*” to be lifted up and suffer just condemnation in our place;
- Finally, He explains **what** we are saved from;
  - The judgment of the LORD and its righteous consequence.

But really, what is it? What is the judgment and its consequence? Jesus tells us here and it is probably not what you expect, because it is not how the popular American, Christian culture often teaches about hell.

If you asked the average American Evangelical, “What is hell?”, the common answer you will likely hear is, “separation from God”. Although that might sound right and good from a Christian perspective, it is not the Biblical perspective, unfortunately. It is an incomplete definition, yet that makes it completely wrong. Hell cannot be “separation from God” since the reprobate, the pagan, and the unbelieving atheist each spend their entire lives denying or opposing God, and try to get away from Him and His holy Law because they hate and fear Him; therefore, their ultimate punishment will not be giving them what they have always said they wanted.

So, what is hell?

Jesus says, “*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.*”. We need to pause here and look at the word “judgment” because what it is, what it means, and how we use the word today are not quite the same.

Following a declaration of condemnation against all those who do not have faith in Jesus Christ, we would expect that what follows “*And this is the judgment...*” will be an expression of God's wrath against the condemned; however, that is not what this sounds like.

The Greek word translated as “judgment” here, is the word *krisis* <kree-sis>and it is a word that we have carried over into English {mediated through Latin from the Greek} along with its original meaning. You will

better recognize the word by its more common pronunciation as “crisis” <cry-sis> and its properly used meaning as a “point or moment of decision”; a “judicial decision” as in needing to make a “judgment call”<sup>1</sup>. Usually we think a “crisis” is something negative: that it is something problematic and distressing; those are included elements but they do not define it. Whereas we often use “judgment” for what we really intend to mean the “consequence of judgment”.

A Judge faces a “crisis” at the end of every trial. When a Judge enters their “judgment”, they render a verdict (a decision) of “guilty” or “not guilty”, making their pronounced sentence the consequence of their judgment. A murderer is judged guilty and is thus condemned to death (or life in prison).

If you try swapping the words “crisis” and “judgment”, using them as synonyms, you will find that the negative sense of crisis is reduced, while the importance of judgment (its gravitas) is increased.

- The Cuban Missile Crisis was a critical time of decision, when good judgment (wise and prudent judgment) needed to be (and was) exercised by President Kennedy.
- The Financial and Housing crises earlier this century were times of decision for our government: whether or not to “bail out” the banks and lenders; and they were also moments of decision for us as individuals: concerning our general spending habits.
- “I am hungry. What do you want to eat?” is a more simple example of a crisis, yet one that is still potentially distressing.

Jesus told Nicodemus, “*And this is the judgment...*”: {this is the crisis}, {this is the point of decision}; but what decision needed to be made and who was needing to make it?

*“No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*

*‘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.’* (Jn. 3:13-18 ESV)

The decision was whether or not to save us and the decision was the LORD's. It was a Trinitarian decision.

- God the Father had to decide **whether or not** to give “...*His only [begotten] Son...*”, to “...*send His Son into the world...that the world might be saved through him.*”.
- God the Son had to decide **whether or not** He would go, **whether or not** He would descend from heaven to be lifted up upon a Roman cross so “...*that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*”.
- God the Holy Spirit had to decide **whether or not** He would bring Jesus, God the Son, into the world by conceiving Him with His mother, Mary.

The Father willed the Son to go; the Son went in perfect obedience; and the Holy Spirit brought Him and supported Him. The Triune God worked together through this crisis in perfect unity.

<sup>1</sup> <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/crisis>

Thus the judgment is that God would save His Elect. {We affirm that this judgment occurred “*before the foundation of the world*” (Eph 1:4) as the covenant of redemption and that the consequence of this judgment is the covenant of grace which was inaugurated by Christ through His life, death, and resurrection; otherwise, if it occurred sometime later, then it would suggest that this was God's “Plan B” and that His original plan and sovereign decree had failed or been thwarted by humanity and our sin.}

After the LORD decided to save us, then “... *the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*”. God sent the *Phos* who is *Logos*, *Andros*, and *Theos* into the *kosmos* in order to do what needed to be done to save us. However, people (humanity) *agape'd* the darkness rather than the *Phos*, because all of our works are evil since our nature has been corrupted by Adam's sin.

So, first there was the judgment: the crisis, the decision; now we come to its consequences.

“*For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*” Sinful humanity does not like the Light, it prefers the Dark. Sinful humanity always prefers Satan to Jesus Christ. The unregenerate always prefer to try and hide themselves under the cover of darkness, forgetting (or hoping and wishing that Scripture is a lie when it says) that God is omniscient: that He sees and knows all things, including all of our petty secrets; that there is no hiding from Him and that everything will be one day revealed and judged.

Everyone who remains trapped and consumed by and in their sinfulness, hate and fear God. They try to flee from His holy presence; running away from His light to seek the deepest darkness possible. But:

- Job warns us, “*For his eyes are on the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps. There is no gloom or deep darkness where evildoers may hide themselves.*” (Job 34:21-22 ESV);
- Isaiah declared concerning these wicked, “*Enter into the rock and hide in the dust from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty. The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up-- and it shall be brought low; against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; against all the lofty mountains, and against all the uplifted hills; against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft. And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away. And people shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.*” (Isa. 2:10-19 ESV); and
- John describes the fulfillment for us, in the Revelation, “*When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. **Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"***” (Rev. 6:12-17 ESV)

The wicked always try to hide from the true God. They even try to cloak their sin beneath a veneer of self-righteousness and respectability. They call evil “Good” and good “evil”; repeating their lies often and loud enough in the vain hope that everyone will begin to believe and trust it<sup>2</sup> and thus they try to redefine absolute truth (Isaiah 5:20). They offer the innocent something that seems sweet and true, but is in reality poison and false.

Are you starting to see the problem with that popular definition of hell and why it is not Biblical?

The wicked **do not fear** separation from God, they want it. The wicked crave space between them and God; they seek to put as much distance between themselves and the LORD as possible, but it is never enough for them and can never be because they cannot escape Him. What they fear and hate most is His presence, trapped beneath His all-seeing and all-knowing gaze, rightfully feeling shame for all their wickedness as their secrets and sin are exposed in His purifying light. They feel convicted and suffer reproof in His presence because, when forcibly compared against His matchless, perfect righteousness and holiness, they cannot deny the truth. They must convict themselves and they must declare the rightness and justness of their punishment. Truly they are “*without excuse*” (Rom 1:20) and will suffer His burning wrath (Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29; Rev 19:20, 20: 9-10, 21:8), eternally being consumed yet never utterly destroyed.

But when will this consequence begin to happen? When “...*the light [came] into the world...*”, whenever and wherever the LORD's presence comes into proximity with sinfulness, because He cannot even look upon sin without it experiencing His wrath (Habakkuk 1:13).

Do you remember Isaiah's reaction and response when he found himself standing before the LORD? He cried out, “*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*” (Isa. 6:5 ESV). Isaiah feared his own destruction, until a seraph touched his lips with a burning coal brought forth from the heavenly altar; sanctifying him through the application of Christ's atonement.

- Isaiah's experience reminds us that, while our sanctification by the Holy Spirit is often painful for us, it is only a temporary pain and far less painful than the alternative.

Truly, we and all the wicked are “without excuse”. We have known and have been able to see the truth of this reality from the beginning of our existence. We can see the very real effect of God's judgment whenever we look up towards the sky. God has been telling us and warning us about the very real penalty due our sin since the six days of Creation. Turn back to Genesis 1 and you will begin to see it.

“*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.*” God created the heavens and God created the earth, but God did not create the darkness. Darkness is not a created thing; it is the absence of a thing. It is a lack or a negative impression. It is a vacuum. It is un-creation. Darkness is “Not”. Like darkness, sin is also something not created by the LORD. Sin is unfaithfulness (not faithfulness) to His Word which is why Scripture uses “darkness” as a metaphor for sin.

Remember when John wrote in his first epistle, “*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in **darkness**, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the **light**, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*” (1 Jn. 1:5-7 ESV). Darkness is “not” light. Darkness is the absence and opposite of light, just as sin is disobedience or lack of

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/joseph-goebbels-on-the-quot-big-lie-quot>

faithless. Sin is “cosmic treason” (RC Sproul, Holiness of God) because it is not fidelity to the Sovereign Creator King. Sin is “not” righteous.

“*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.*” Then God created light. God established righteousness and goodness. He established them absolutely. Light was created possessing and illuminating the moral standard for creation.

Then, “*And God separated the light from the darkness.*”. God separated the light from the dark. He divided them. He placed a barrier between. He establish the initial “Either/Or” binary. Everything became: either light or either dark; there could be no possible mixing of the two where the light would remain light. Grey is not light, instead it can only be dark.

- The Light is moral good while the Dark is immoral evil. Both darkness and sin are defined by their nature of “not-ness”.

So too, God separated the righteous from the wicked. He separated the living from the dead, the spiritually alive from the spiritually dead. While still affirming the reality {the historicity} of the {6-day} creation narrative, we can also understand this as an illustration of His work in election metaphorically: predestining some to the light while predestining others to the dark; as John wrote about the *Logos*, Jesus, “*In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*” (Jn. 1:4-5 ESV). Therefore, if the Spirit of Christ dwells within you, then you carry the “*light of life*” with you wherever you are, and the Holy Spirit is shining inside you, driving away the darkness of your sinful nature; burning it away in the same purifying fire of sanctification that Isaiah experienced.

Whereas, “*...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.*”. Those who are “born again”, those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit are drawn to Christ, drawn to the LORD in faith like moths to a flame. We come to Him gladly because “like” attracts to “like”; because by being filled with and possessing His light, we want to unite in Him, joining the light we carry with His primary light and increase His glory in its brilliance!

“*...whoever does what is true...*” are those who do what is right; who follow the “*way of the righteous*” (Ps 1:6); followers of “the Way” of Jesus Christ (Acts 24:14). They are those who obey the LORD out of their love for Him. Love draws the righteous to God in the light, while fear drives the wicked away from Him, out towards the darkness.

- Truth is good. It is a morally pure absolute of substance.
  - Truth is unchanging and unchangeable.
  - Truth is universal: that which is true, is always true for everyone, always.
  - Truth is reliable and unassailable.
  - Truth is inarguable.
- Lies and falsehoods are evil; a moral absolute, devoid of substance.
  - Lies constantly change and are intimately personal.
  - Lies are never true, even for those deceived into believing them.
  - Lies are undependable, crumbling with the most minor opposition.

- Lies are easily disprovable.

God is good and Satan is the “*father of lies*” (John 8:44). Their children, their followers, and all who belong to them, echo their respective fathers by walking their same path: walking either in the darkness or in the light.

But **why** do those who love and follow the truth {come to the light}?

“...so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

They come to God because as His chosen children of adoption, we possess assurance in our faith. We know, because the Holy Spirit within tells us, that we are approved of by the LORD because of Christ's work for us. Therefore, we want to be in His presence; we are glad and joyful to be invited in! We come to the light because God takes pleasure in the good works we do in His Name and for His sake. Although the works are not good in themselves, His Spirit redeems and sanctifies them, perfecting them for Christ's sake and for God's glory, when we do them out of our love for Christ and when we desire to please Him and be like Him. We do good things for Him, not to earn His approval or favor but because we already have it. We bring our works to Him because He takes pleasure in our desire to please Him and, as we do these things to increase His glory, we are confident that Jesus will share His glory with us before all the world (John 5:44; 1 Peter 5:4). So, we joyfully bring our works to God's light because we want to see Him, see them, and to see Him take joy in us and our efforts.

- We may not want to admit it, but really, when it comes down to it, all of our “good works” are like a child's piece or artwork or report card that we bring for our parents to hang on the refrigerator.

So, to summarize as we conclude Nicodemus' nighttime visit:

- The “judgment” was God's “crisis”, His decision to enter into His creation and save the Elect;
  - The Elect whom God separated from the wicked, as like the light and the dark, imputing the righteousness of Jesus Christ to them. He divided them, one from the other, so that there could be no mixing or mingling; predestining them to be either righteous or wicked: giving the righteous a living, loving heart of flesh but giving the wicked hard, hateful, and dead hearts of stone.
- The consequence of that decision was that when God entered into His creation, when the *Logos* who is *Theos*, *Andros*, and *Phos* appeared:
  - The wicked and sinful humanity tried to flee from His presence (remember, even Peter begged Jesus to leave him alone in Luke 5:8), but when they could not escape, they tried to destroy Him instead.
  - But the righteous, the Elect, those called by the LORD are drawn to Him in love and devotion, faith and obedience.

The ultimate spiritual truth of reality is that God is very present. God is omnipresent: He is everywhere, in every time and place. Therefore, hell cannot be “separation from God” because there is no where, no when, that God is not. However, since it is impossible for us to “escape” His presence, it matters how we respond to it:

- do we want to flee from Him in fear; or,
- do we want to approach closer to Him in love?

Those whom God loves and who love God back, bask in His presence experiencing: joy, peace, satisfaction, love, gladness, and life eternal; while those whom God loves {While God “hates” the wicked and “hates” sin, He still continues to love His creation, even in and through His judgment. Even as God “desires all people to be

saved” (1 Tim 2:4) because of His love for them, He does not seem to “will” all to be saved and that there are degrees to His love.} but who hate God back, suffer in His presence experiencing: fear, hatred, pain, sorrow, wrath, eternally dying in torment (Rev 20:10).

Since we are all be in the LORD's presence forever, it is far better to say that heaven is “union into the **love** of God” and that hell is “separation from the **love** of God”.

Now, knowing and believing that, we are each faced with our own “crisis”; our own moment of decision; our own judgment.

Jesus Christ came into the world to call all His righteous Elect to Himself, and one day soon He will return. Therefore, each of us must still decide how we will respond to His light.

- Will you respond to Him with love and desire? Will you go to Him and let Him burn out and drive away all the darkness which hides with you? Will you worship, praise, and glorify Him and enjoy Him forever? Or,
- Will you respond to Him with hatred and fear? Will you seek to flee from His presence in futility? Will you suffer the penalty of your sin, a moral debt that you can never repay or satisfy? Will you wail, curse, gnash your teeth and suffer in torment forever?

Remember, the grace and mercy found within the Gospel of Jesus Christ is freely offered to everyone, but each of us are still obligated to respond to Him, one way or the other, according to our true heart's desire. The LORD predestines, but we must still respond accordingly.

So if you hear Him calling, do not harden your heart (Psalm 95; Hebrews 3, 4). Instead heed His Word and call upon the Name of Jesus Christ in faith and know that you will be, that you are saved (Rom 10:13) “*[because] 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.*” (Jn. 3:16-17 ESV).

Jesus saves and He will save you by faith in Him alone and He will save you for God's glory, for His glory alone, because He loves you and it pleases Him to save you. So, be joyful and glad. Rejoice because Christ has come and will come again; Christ has come to save, in the *agape* of God.

**AMEN**