



# Light or Dark?

John 3:16-19

Sermon for July 10, 2022

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We are studying the New City Catechism this year, because it is a great summary of what we believe as Christians. This is week 28 of this year, so I will read the question 28 and the answer for us.

## **Question 28: What happens after death to those not united to Christ by faith?**

At the day of judgment they will receive the fearful but just sentence of condemnation pronounced against them.

They will be cast out from the favorable presence of God, into hell, to be justly and grievously punished, forever.

Question 28 speaks about a truth that makes us uncomfortable. Not everyone is saved. Not everyone will go to heaven. Hell is real, and our sin means that we are separated from God forever unless we are saved by Jesus. If you are a Christian, it is because God chose you in love. That was the main point of last week's sermon. Today we will look at one of the most famous verses in God's word. In John chapter 3 Jesus is meeting with Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a religious teacher with a lot of questions. Jesus is explaining to this man the most important things in the entire world.

Darkness or light.

Good or evil.

Heaven or hell.

Life or death.

Listen now the words of Jesus.

## John 3:16-19

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

17 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.

18 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.

19 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."

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

*"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."*

Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth. Jesus, we worship you because you are full of mercy and love. Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God. Amen.

Christians often memorize John 3:16 and 17. We quote these verses frequently, because they capture the most important truths of Christianity. Through Jesus, God offered eternal life to the entire world, not only the Jewish people. Jesus came to earth so the world could be saved through him. What do we need to be saved from? That is the important question we will be thinking about today. If you don't think you need to be saved, you won't understand why Jesus is called Savior. You won't see why God the Father gave his Son. That's why I want to begin with verses 18 and 19.

Please look with me at John 3:18.

18 "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."

When you look at the verbs in this sentence, are they past, present, or future verbs? They are present tense. Jesus is describing the problem that he came to solve. Everyone is separated from God without Jesus. We are born into a broken world, with hearts like our first parents, Adam and Eve. Like them, we prefer to do things our own way.

Imagine a wall separating everyone who is perfectly innocent from everyone else in the universe. On one side of the wall are all the people who have committed sins, even one sin. Those who have never sinned are on the other side of the wall, with God who is holy and perfect.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:48:

48 "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

God is holy and cannot allow anyone stained by sin to be in his presence. How many of us deserve to be on God's side of wall? None of us, right? Some people have committed big, terrible sins that are very visible. Many of our sins are silent, and private. Whether they are visible or invisible, we all have enough sin to keep us out of God's presence. God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden to punish them for their disobedience.

Jesus taught a lot about God's punishment for sinners. We find that teaching hard to accept if we think we are innocent. When I was a new Christian I was studying the 10 Commandments. When I began reading those commandments, I thought I deserved a passing grade. Then I learned more about the evil motivations of my heart. I realized that I was guilty of breaking all of the Commandments in one way or another. I broke God's laws and I broke God's heart. I was condemned because of my behavior, and my attempts to justify myself.

Human beings rarely intend to do evil. I think we rarely make a conscious choice to break God's law. Instead we lie to ourselves. We rationalize our behavior so we think we are doing good. Maybe you cheat on a test at school, because you think the teacher didn't give you enough time to prepare. Or you steal from your employer because they don't pay you enough. Or you lie because you want to avoid a difficult situation. I've done those things. I believe most of you have, also.

One of the scariest verses in the Bible is found at the end of the book of Judges. There was a lot of sin and evil in Israel at that time.

Judges 21:25 says this:

25 "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

When everyone does what is right in their own eyes, we have many problems. Vladimir Putin lied to the Russian people to convince them that attacking Ukraine was a good thing. Putin attacked another country because it was right in his own eyes. Many companies care more about profit than they care about their employees or the environment. They treat their employees badly and pollute our rivers and oceans. This is right in their own eyes because profits are the most important thing to them. Husbands and wives neglect and hurt each other because they value their ideas and desires more highly than their spouse. Why are people like this? It began at the beginning. God gave very clear instructions to Adam and Eve, but they did what was right in their own eyes. They did not obey God, because they wanted freedom more than they wanted God. What did Adam and Eve do after they disobeyed God? They looked for darkness and distance from God. Our shame makes all of us look for darkness and distance from God.

Look again at John 3:19 please, where Jesus said:

19 "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."

When I was a restaurant manager in Alexandria we had a problem with some thieves. There was a storage area behind the restaurant, and people were stealing things. The thieves climbed over the fence, so we built a taller fence. They climbed over that fence, too, and continued stealing from us.

One day a police officer was having lunch in the restaurant. I asked him to look at the storage area and give me his advice. The police officer said, "You need some bright lights over this area. That will stop the thieves." I was surprised. How could lights stop thieves who were willing to climb over a tall fence? The police officer told me, "Thieves don't want anyone to see what they are doing. They feel safe if they can steal in the darkness." We added bright lights behind the restaurant. It worked, because the police officer understood the same thing Jesus spoke about in verse 19. "People loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

We think that darkness will hide our shame and sin. But the darkness also hides the truth from us. That's why we cannot understand our situation on the dark side of the wall. We deceive ourselves and believe we have good reasons for breaking God's law. We listen to Satan the great deceiver. Do you remember what Satan said to Adam and Eve, when he appeared to them as a serpent in Genesis 3:1-5?

"1 The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made.

One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"

2 "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied.

3 "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat.

God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.' "

4 "You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman.

5 "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."

Satan directly contradicted the Word of the Lord. He told Adam and Eve that they would not die if they disobeyed. Satan wanted them to believe that there were no negative consequences to our sin. Many people today continue to believe Satan's lie. People get angry with us if we talk about hell. This is nothing new. 1,800 years ago, a pastor in North Africa named Tertullian said this: "People laugh at us for proclaiming that God will one day judge the world."

We want to believe Satan's lies that God will not judge or punish sin. We also lie to ourselves. Have you ever heard your heart whisper to you, "it's okay, no one will know!" We want to believe we can do bad things without consequences. Please look at our wall illustration again. Jesus said in John 3:18, "whoever does not believe is condemned already." Because we are descendants of Adam and Eve, we begin life on the dark side of the wall. We are born with a sin nature that hides from God.

Unless someone comes to rescue us, we will remain on this dark side of the wall, separated from God. We prefer to do what is right in our own eyes, but we all feel shame about it. We numb ourselves with entertainment, food, and substances so we can't see the danger we are in. And when we die, the separation continues. Our souls live forever, either on the dark side or the light side of the wall. After death, the dark side is hell, the light side is heaven. Hell will be terrible because people who lived in darkness on earth will see more clearly after they die. People in hell will understand that they were separated from God on earth, and they will be separated from him forever.

Some part of every human soul understands this. Everyone feels separation and shame, including atheists and people of every religion. That is why every culture in the world looks for a way to atone for sin and remove shame. We make criminals atone for their sin by going to jail. Some people light a candle or give money at a temple. Some people serve the poor or ask their ancestors to help them. People in Indonesia throw fruit, money, and animals into the volcano Mount Bromo. In the past, this same Indonesian tribe sacrificed human beings to appease the angry mountain.

There is a Hindu festival in honor of Gadhimai, a Hindu goddess of power. This event includes the killing of 250,000 animals. That is a lot of blood. But is it enough to satisfy the goddess and take away the sins of the people? No. They repeat the event every five years. My friends, sin and shame cannot be removed by jail, or money, or candles, or even blood sacrifice.

Listen to what the New Testament book of Hebrews says about this in Hebrews 10:4, 11-14.

4 "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,

14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."

Do you see what God says here in his Word? One single offering was sufficient to solve our problem. One sacrifice for sins opened a way through the wall, so people could move from darkness to light. Because Jesus Christ is the only human being who ever lived a sinless life, he could offer his body as the final sacrifice. The death of Jesus on the cross was a perfect sacrifice that satisfied the righteous anger of God. Jesus paid a debt he did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay.

Look with me again at the first two verses of our text, John 3:16-17.

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

17 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."

God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. Who would give away their child? Today in the news we read about desperate families who do not have enough food. Some have sold their young daughters to be married to an older man. They do

this for money because they are literally starving. I can't imagine making such a painful, desperate decision. I can't imagine being so hungry that I would give away a child to get food.

My friends, think of the love that God the Father has for you. The Son of God was sold for 30 pieces of silver to purchase your freedom from sin and death. That's what verse 16 means.

16 "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Before Jesus came to earth, Jewish people were the only ones in God's family. But now anyone can be a child of God. Anyone in the world can be saved through Jesus. Anything you have done can be forgiven. Any shame you carry can be washed away. Satan wants to deceive you and keep you in darkness. Satan wants you to remain separated from God in this life and forever after. But there is a way through the wall. There is a light that came into the world to show the way back to God.

Jesus used seven different metaphors in the gospel of John to explain one simple message. Jesus said:

"I Am the Light of the world."

"I Am the Resurrection."

"I Am the Good Shepherd."

"I Am the Bread of life."

"I Am the Way, Truth, and Life."

"I Am the Vine."

"I Am the Door."

Many of you have already walked through the door. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus opened the door for the resurrection of your soul. The Holy Spirit has given you spiritual eyes to see the light and trust in Jesus as Savior. Maybe some of you are still on the other side of the wall. Are you in darkness, far from God but eager to come into his family? The name Jesus means "God is salvation." Or "Jehovah saves." Do you understand that you need to be saved?

Listen to Romans 3:22-25:

22 "We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ.

And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

24 Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight.

He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.


25 For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin.

People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood."

Are you ready to walk through the door and get on the other side of the wall? You can be made right with God, if you believe these things about Jesus. There is a prayer in the worship guide you can pray today if you are ready. Please talk to me or one of our leaders after the service if you have questions about this. Or if you want someone to pray with you.

Eternal life begins now on earth for all who are united to Jesus. Please don't stay in the darkness! Jesus the Light will show you the Way through the Door to eternal life. Let's pray to him together now.

Jesus, you are the Savior who left heaven to rescue us. You didn't have to. But you are the Good Shepherd. You left the 99 to come and rescue me, and my brothers and sisters. We don't understand why you chose to love us and die for us. But we receive your love and salvation with grateful hearts. We pray and sing to you with joy. And we go out into the world to tell others the good news. Please save our neighbors and friends and family, for their good and your glory. We ask this in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

 One Voice Fellowship