

JESUS' URGENT TENDERNESS TO US

(Lord, Let our Hearts Be Broken with the Things that Break Your Heart.)

John 3:17-21 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Dr. Bob Pierce worked tirelessly to help Vietnamese Christians fleeing communist rule in Viet-Nam in the mid 1970's. After a visit to suffering children on an island in Korea, Bob Pierce wrote a prayer in his Bible: "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God." Dr. Bob, fighting leukemia back then, worked himself to exhaustion assisting orphans, widows, and refugees during the last hours before the collapse of the South Vietnamese government. He fought frantically to save the lives of evangelists and pastors marked for death by the communists. He personally arranged for planeloads of these precious pastors, missionaries, and their families to be flown out of South Viet-Nam's capital, Saigon to freedom before South Viet-Nam fell on April 30, 1975. His prayer has become famous today. "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God." Last Monday on February 6, 2023, a 7.8 earthquake with multiple aftershocks struck southern and central Turkey and northern and western Syria. As of yesterday, 2/11/23. at 5 PM, there were 28,192 deaths. I pray, "Lord, let our hearts be broken by the things that break the heart of God."

Today, we turn again to Jesus' final words with Nicodemus. Jesus' words to Nicodemus carried an urgent tenderness—a heart of love reaching out to Nicodemus. Jesus, the Son of Man, told this teacher in Israel, "Whoever believes in Him (speaking of Himself) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already." Those words had to grip Nicodemus' soul. Would to God we could see and hear the love in Jesus' eyes and in His voice that night, as He said, "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." Today, in verses 17-21, Jesus gave His apologetic, His divine explanation to Nicodemus and to us, for why He came into our world.

He gave the purpose of His incarnation. These last words of Jesus to Nicodemus point straight to His virgin birth, His incarnation, as He came to earth as God in the flesh. Jesus told Nicodemus in essence, "God the Father sent Me from heaven into this world to save you. Will you believe in Me and receive Me? This is the 21st century since Jesus first came into the world. Throughout the centuries people have been asking, "Why did Jesus come from heaven to earth in the flesh to live, die, be buried, rise from the dead, ascend to glory, and promise to return?" John here explained four realizations everyone must face when asking why Jesus came to earth as the Son of Man. If we grasp these realizations, we will carry out our mission for Christ with the same heart He has, a heart broken by what breaks the heart of God.

JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO RESCUE US FROM OUR CONDEMNED CRISIS.

(I.) John 3:17 says, "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." As born-again believers, we are all missions-minded. Most churches and mission agencies begin with an awareness of this realization that Jesus' mission is a rescue mission. Yet we often veer off from this divine mission for which God the Father sent His only begotten Son to earth. Why? Perhaps the reason is we don't examine our rescue mission often enough to make sure it holds true to the words of Jesus; and that it holds true to the heart of Jesus when He came to earth. These words Jesus gave Nicodemus,

came from His broken heart for this lost world. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Jesus knew His coming and His appearance on earth, in every situation He faced, constituted a crisis in the lives of everyone He met. He saw Nicodemus, just as He wants us to see people at work, in our neighborhood, and on our mission for God. Our rescue mission must always be on our hearts, or our hearts will not break with the things that break the heart of God. No one can live and die who hears of Christ’s coming to earth, without facing their “condemned” crisis. This condemned crisis was not the crisis Nicodemus expected to face that night. The ancestors of Nicodemus, for centuries, insisted that at Jesus’ coming to earth, He would condemn the heathen, punish all nations that oppress Israel, and that Israel would be free from judgment. Nicodemus and the Pharisees, as many today, forgot the words of the prophet Amos in Amos 5: 20, who spoke of the day of Lord, saying, “Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?”

The Jews saw Messiah’s coming as the Son of Man being exclusively for them, punishing others and freeing them from oppression. Jesus was aiming His words squarely at Nicodemus’ false hope, the false hope of the Jews. Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus why He came to earth--to reveal this teacher’s condemned crisis. Was Nicodemus expecting this? No! Jesus came to this condemned world (the Greek word is **kosmos**) bringing His rescue plan that everyone needs to be saved, even Nicodemus. The word Jesus used for condemn, was **krino**, meaning to judge or condemn eternally. What would have happened if Jesus had come incarnate to judge the world? That might have been another worldwide flood, or a fire, or some other destroying judgment. The intent of the incarnation of Jesus was not to condemn sinners or to bring judgment, but to bring the greatest gift the world has ever known.

I ask each of us this morning, “Is our heart for others, both our saved brothers and sisters and for the unsaved, a heart that breaks with what breaks the heart of God?” Jesus told us to be like Him, not out to judge or condemn the world. In Matthew 7:1, Jesus used the same word, **krino**, saying, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” If we judge others harshly and speak harshly of them or to them, we are off Jesus’ mission. We will soon find ourselves being judged harshly by others. If we judge others with grace and mercy, we will find grace and mercy ourselves. Many born again believers go through life with a judgmental, condemning, critical spirit. When we focus on other’s faults, and not our own, we fail to overlook offenses as God commands us in I Corinthians 13. Psalm 119: 165 is desperately needed in church work and mission work. “Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing shall offend them.” Let’s remember Jesus is the judge. He appeared in the flesh, not to judge others, but to save sinners like us by His shed blood on the cross.

In John 3:16-18, Jesus used the word “world” times. Jesus came to earth, not just for the Jews. No! Jesus’ redemptive rescue plan embraces the whole world. Nicodemus heard that God’s born-again salvation plan was through Him, the Father’s Son. (v.17) This word **saved** Jesus used, means more than deliverance from the punishment of sin. It means rescued from sin itself, given everlasting life. *There is no greater crisis in anyone’s life than the decision on how we will respond to God’s purpose in sending Jesus. Helping the world face this crisis is why we have churches, pastors, teachers,

and missionaries. This crisis is everyone's crisis. No one's sin is too great to be forgiven. No case is incurable. Jesus is the Mediator of our salvation; the Advocate who has never lost a case. He is the Physician who has never lost a patient. 2ndly,

JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO REVERSE OUR CONDEMNATION VERDICT.

(II.) John 3:18 says, "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." In John 3:18, Jesus changed the picture from talking about life and death to a courtroom scene, which pictured His judgment. Jesus here described two possibilities: "Whoever believes in Him (Me) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already." The difference in believing and not believing is no longer just perishing or having eternal life. Now Jesus spoke of being condemned or not condemned. A judge says "condemned" or "not condemned," "guilty," or "not guilty." This is courtroom, legal language. When God the Father sent His Son into the world, He did not send a bull, a sheep, or a goat. God sent His costliest gift, His only begotten Son. Paul wrote in Romans 8: 32, "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?"

Jesus was telling Nicodemus He came into this condemned world where everyone is condemned. We were all born in sin, and the wages of our sin is death. J. Vernon McGee preached many years ago, "There are a great many who feel that the world is on trial today. It is not. The world is lost. Our position is something like a person in prison being asked whether or not they will accept a pardon. That is the Gospel. It is not telling a man that he is on trial. He is already condemned. He is already in prison waiting for execution." The Gospel is a pardon is offered to all. Will we accept Christ's pardon?" Jesus never came to a neutral world where His appearance moved some folks from neutrality to being anti-Jesus, and others from neutrality to being pro-Jesus. No! Nobody is neutral. We all sinned. and we are all guilty, perishing under God's righteous wrath, already condemned. One day there was a tour of a national museum with an art gallery. The tour led the tourists past many awesome paintings, known the world over. One tourist said to the guide, "I don't think much of these paintings." The gallery guide answered the man quietly, saying, "Sir, I would remind you that these pictures are not on trial. Only those who look at them are on trial."

This is as it is with Jesus. When we are confronted with Jesus, the Son of Man, if our soul is lost in wonder when we see Jesus, and we see our sinful selves, in need of salvation, then God is calling us to faith. As condemned sinners, when we receive Jesus, we are no longer condemned. Our divine verdict is reversed. We are born-again. When sinners look at Jesus, and see nothing, and look away, they are condemned already, because they have not believed in the Name of the Son of God. The believer who believes in Jesus will never face the eternal judgment that we all deserve. Born-again sinners are seen by Jesus as without guilt, justified in the sight of God. Unbelievers refusing to admit sin and repent in Christ's presence, don't need to wait for the final judgment to know their final verdict. Sinners stand condemned, awaiting the Great White Throne Judgment. When we preach, teach, testify, and believe the truth of John 3:18, it changes our mission. It changes our approach. It changes our emphasis. It changes what is important in our messages, in our small group lessons, in our Sunday School classes, and in our mission to this lost world. Born-again believers don't forget who we are—hell bound sinners whose verdict has

been reversed. We don't speak down to sinners because we once were under the same condemnation. We look for God's work of grace in fellow-Christians and we camp there. We pray God's blessings on those we may not understand or those with whom we have differences. When Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, he called for an end to a conflict between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. (4:2-3) Paul called a yokefellow in the church to help them agree in the Lord. Why? They were two sisters who had labored side by side with Paul in the Gospel, and Paul added, that both their names were written in the Book of Life.

JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO RENDER JUDGMENT ON LOVING DARKNESS.

(III.) John 3:19 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."

On our rescue mission, this is why many we meet are judged as guilty before God. Though all of us were born in sin, with a sin-nature. Yet the reason for this judgment is because many sinners refuse to love the Light, and to receive the Light. Salvation is offered to all in Jesus, the Light of the world. Jesus came not to condemn or judge the world, but to save those who will repent, believe, and receive Him. Yet, if Jesus' light is rejected, that rejection results in Jesus' judgment because many, even the majority love and choose the darkness over the light. If everyone believed and loved the light in Jesus, there would be no judgment. It is unspeakably tragic that so many prefer darkness to the Light in Jesus, but it is even more tragic that most people love darkness and hate the light. The power of sin and death is opposed and against the light. To those who love the darkness, the light is seen as a hostile light. To believers, God's light is Son-shine, the actual truth and reality of God revealed in Jesus.

Darkness is the very opposite of the truth and light in Jesus. Yet millions stake their very lives on loving this darkness. For unbelievers, it is not an ignorant choice, but a deliberate choice, a choice for which every hell-bound sinner is responsible. The appearance of Jesus clarifies that unbelief is man's choice and belief is God's gift. If any person will not come to Jesus, that person will perish forever, magnifying God's justice, for Jesus took our sin in His body on the cross, and His atoning mercy has been rejected. If any person comes to Jesus receiving eternal life, we magnify God's grace in our salvation. How can we be callous in our message—when the heart of Jesus is broken over the choice of millions to reject Him? In Ezekiel 18: 32, we see the heart of God as He cries out, "Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God, so turn, and live." 4thly,

JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO REVEAL HIS EXPOSING/POLARIZING LIGHT.

(IV.) John 3:20,21 says, "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." Whenever Jesus appears or we appear before others, speaking His name, there is a division. Some escape judgment as God reverses their verdict, and others go away into judgment. Paul described his Gospel ministry in II Corinthians 2: 16, as "to one a fragrance of death to death, and to the other a fragrance from life to life. Though Jesus never came to judge, His judgment is happening as He spoke in John 9:39, saying, "For judgment I came to into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." On our rescue mission, those who listen to the message of Christ know He digs into our souls. Jesus is telling us by His appearance, people are condemned by what they love and hate. There are always these

two responses to the light. The first is negative. Because sinners do wicked things, and all our works are evil, v. 19, sinners run from the light not wanting their evil works to be exposed, so they not only prefer darkness, but love darkness. Sinners know light exposes their sin, and that is why most sinners will not come to the light. The guilt of all sinners lies in us; Jesus is not to blame.

The second response is that when Jesus, the Light of the world shines on sinners, it can break us, and lead us to repentance and faith. When our sinful deeds and thoughts and feelings are exposed in Jesus' light, there are chains forged in the furnace of our sinful desires that try to prevent our coming to Jesus. Jesus says in v. 21, "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. This is mysterious but it is true that when we choose to come to the light, to have our sins exposed by the light, this coming to the light and this repentance, believing and receiving Jesus is carried out in God. It is only by His power, by God's grace. This doing of what is true is because of the work of God, not of us. Paul said in II Cor. 4:7, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."

When we are walking in the light, all of us will find our sin being exposed. If that isn't happening, have we been with Jesus? When God's Spirit bears witness with our spirit—Romans 8:16, born-again believers respond by admitting our sin to Jesus, and turning from our sin, and it's in that repentance that we find forgiveness and cleansing. For some sins, we will have to do this over and over again. Some sins are very difficult to gain victory over. John wrote in I John 1:9 that when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Beloved, if we know the Lord, God exposes our sin—and we don't run to the darkness, but we run to the Light and throw our repentant, confessing hearts and lives into Jesus forgiving arms. Let me close with a true story of how God does this.

In his book "Let Your Life Speak," Parker Palmer, a Quaker, tells the story of how God used his friends to shape his profession as an author. Parker was offered to become the president of a small Bible college. Parker was certain the job was for him, but he honored the tradition of the Quaker community, which is to call on a dozen trusted friends to engage in a "clearness committee," a process in which "the group refrains from giving you advice but spends three hours asking you honest, open questions to help you discover the honest truth about yourself and to help you discover God's will. Parker wrote that the initial questions were all very easy, until someone simply asked him, "What would you like most about being our college president?" He wrote, "Finally, they were getting deeper than inside my head, and into my heart. He spent over a minute thinking, and then he said, "Well, I wouldn't like giving up my writing and my teaching.... I wouldn't like the politics of the presidency, never knowing who your real friends are.... I wouldn't like having to glad-hand people I do not respect simply because they have money.... I would not..." Gently but firmly, the person who posed the question interrupted me, saying, "May I remind you that I asked what you would most like?" Parker responded impatiently, "Yes, yes, I'm working my way toward an answer." Once again, the questioner called Parker back to his original question. But this time Parker felt compelled to give the only honest answer he possessed, an answer that came from the very bottom of his heart, an answer that appalled his friends and even him as he said it. "Well, I guess what I'd like most is getting my picture in the paper with the word President under it." There was a long silence. Finally, the questioner broke the silence with a question, "Isn't there any easier way to get your picture in the paper? Parker Palmer finally had let Jesus light shine on him. He said, Being your president had much more to do with my ego than anything else. Had I taken your job, it would have been very bad for me and a disaster for your school." The truth broke Parker's heart to say, for it was breaking God's heart.

God knew how to expose Nicodemus by showing him His light. Ultimately, though Nicodemus took it slow, becoming a secret disciple, he came out after Jesus

died, putting his life on the line, and with Joseph of Arimathea, probably being removed from the Sanhedrin. Right now, God is seeking revival in our hearts. He is calling for us to come to the Light. Whether we are pastors, elders, deacons, deaconesses, leaders, or disciples in His kingdom, He is calling us to come to the light. When we come to the light and love the polarizing light, as it happened at Asbury University and Seminary, revival broke out and it is still going Friday night. If God has shown His light on your life as He did for Parker Palmer, come to the altar today and let your heart be broken with what is breaking the heart of God.