

May 7, 2017

He Was Sent to Save John 3:17-18

Our text tonight is John chapter 3, verses 17 and 18. We'll read from verses 16 to 21. Before the reading we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do ask indeed that you would speak to us from your word this night, and that we would be given ears to hear and eyes to see, and hearts that understand and obey. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

John chapter 3, starting at verse 16: “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. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 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.” Amen.

I'm sure you've often heard it said that grace is unmerited favour, that grace is God giving a gift to someone who does not deserve the gift. It's true. But there's even more to it than that. Grace is de-merited favour. Not only do you not deserve the gift, not only do we not deserve the goodness of God to us, we actually deserve something different. We deserve something that's not grace. What we deserve is the judgment of God. We deserve condemnation.

It's right that we be condemned. It's right that God judged all of humanity in Adam. I mean, who's ever broken the pattern, from Adam on? Who ever broke the pattern? There were men along the way and women, there were faithful people along the way whom God used. Think of Noah. Think of Moses. Think of King David. You know, parade before your mind the parade of saints, the great people whom God has used, and then ask yourself, “What did each one of them deserve?” What did each one of them actually deserve, even apart from the fact that God had used them?

What was the first thing that Scripture tells us about Noah after the flood, after he's come out of the ark? It tells us that he planted a vineyard, and with all due haste he made wine and he got himself rip-roaring drunk, and fell naked on top of the bed in an open tent.

What does Scripture tell us about Moses? At that time, and not with a capital “s”, but the saviour through whom God was saving His people, the offspring of Abraham—what does it tell us about Moses? That Moses struck an Egyptian and buried him in the sand. He was a murderer. It tells us that he was aggravated, it tells us that the Egyptian man was persecuting one of Moses's, let's say, blood brothers—one of Moses's tribe. He was persecuting an Israelite. But it tells us that Moses struck the man and buried him in the sand. That's a murder. You know, when you bury someone in the sand, it's because you don't want the body found. He didn't want the body found because he knew that the law of Egypt would come after him. Later on, Moses struck the rock. He was commanded to speak to a rock, and he lost his temper and he struck the rock.

Think of King David. Everything was going just right—greatest king that Israel had ever seen. Think of the Psalms, the beautiful Psalms, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. No one had ever drawn into such a close relationship of loving worship with God than King David. And then one day, he saw a woman bathing. And not only did he see the woman bathing, but he invited her back to the palace. And it says he took her. And when she conceived and he heard that she was pregnant, well there was a problem. She had a husband. And so then he tried to run the deception—call the husband home, get him drunk, and then send him home to his wife. The numbers should just about match up, you know. Babies are born a little early at times. Send him home to his wife. Eight months' time, no one will know any better.

But the husband didn't want to go home to his wife. He was a faithful servant of King David and the armies of Israel. So then what did King David do? He put a message in his hand, a sealed message he put in the hand of a man named Uriah. What was the message? "Take this message," said David to his faithful servant Uriah, "and give it to the commander of my armies. His name is Joab. Give him this message." And when Joab read the message, the message said, "Take Uriah and put him in the most dangerous part of the battle. Put him right at the very front of the line, where men are most likely to die. And when the battle gets hottest, I want you to fall back and let Uriah die." Murder. He didn't swing the knife, he didn't shoot the arrow, he didn't draw his own sword. But he used his authority as a king to conspire to murder his mistress's husband.

What is human history, other than a history of failures, a history of sins? You know, it's been said that our best moments are just our least sinful moments. What can we do that's pure? What can we do that's right? Even when we do good, we're on the edge of temptation, aren't we. Even when we do well, there's this nasty little voice inside, trying to turn us aside.

And I confess before you, like everyone else here, I hope you're willing to confess, that nasty little voice—it's so easy to listen to it. It whispers so sweetly in your inner ear. It turns you aside so easily, that voice of temptation, that voice of sin, that voice of the world; indeed, at the back of it all, that voice of the Devil himself. I'm not saying that any of us are important enough to attract particular attention from the prince of darkness himself, but he's the one pulling the strings back there at the back of the dark kingdom. In the end, that voice of temptation is coming from him. And we listen.

You would think—you would think, wouldn't you, that God sending His most special servant, His most special prophet, His most special spokesman, God sending His most special representative into the world—He would send Him with a sword. "Go into the world." You would think that God the Father would say to the Son, "I want you to go into the world. I want you to take a sword. I want you to take the armies of heaven at your shoulder, and I want you, as once we went through the city of Jerusalem and there we killed every sinner"—that picture that you get in the book of Ezekiel—"this time, just go throughout the world. Just go throughout the world, wipe them out, finish them off. All have sinned against me. All have fallen short of the glory of God. All are given over to wickedness. Every heart is evil. Go forth, my Son, and exact judgment. Do justice. Call it to an end. Let it be finished." That's what you'd think. I'd think that way. I confess, I would think that way. Isn't it good that people like us actually are not God?

You know, how strong is the desire for revenge? Every little hurt that comes your way, how strong is the desire to strike back? That nasty little voice—how good is it at justifying a sinful deed? How good is it at justifying a sharp reply, a sharp blow? How good is it at justifying a stab to the guts in an answer? “They said, this, therefore, say that!” “They did this, therefore, do that!” “They slapped a face, therefore, punch in the nose.” “They punched in the nose, therefore, draw a knife.” “They drew a knife, therefore, draw a gun.” How easy is it for that little voice to whisper in our inner ear? We think that way.

“But God so”—starting up from where we were last week, verse 16—“loved the world.” He so *loved* the world, He so loved the sinners of this world, that He didn’t actually send His Son as you would send a vengeful army. He didn’t send His Son as you would send an assassin. He didn’t send His Son as David sent that message to King Joab. He didn’t send His Son saying, “Arrange for the death of my enemies.” He actually didn’t send Him, did He? He gave Him. The sending was a giving. He *gave* His only Son, that whosoever believes 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 so loved the world that He gave His Son, He sent His Son, to bring salvation. Always remember, we are saved from the judgment of God. We’re not being saved from the world. We’re not being saved from the power of Satan. We’re not being saved, indeed, from our sins. Those things are given. They’re there. We’re actually being saved from God’s righteous judgment. We’re being saved by the Son from God’s righteous wrath, anger, judgment, justice.

In the end, everybody gets something good from God. Everybody. You see, justice is good and mercy is good. Everybody gets something good. The thing is, those who get justice don’t want it. And those who get mercy don’t deserve it. But everybody gets something good. You get justice or you get salvation. You get judgment or you get mercy.

All these things are good, because anything that comes for God, in the end, is good. He gives everybody something good, and His judgment, His justice, is good. But I’m telling you, His mercy, His salvation, His grace, expressed in the giving of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, is better. At the end of time, or the end of this present evil age, we’re told in Scripture every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Every knee—every knee will bow.

There are going to be those who bow, who bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and it’s going to be for them the worst moment that they have ever known. It’s going to be to them the acknowledgment of the Judge and the justice that that Judge is handing out. It’s the last thing they do before they’re consigned to eternal punishment.

And for others, it’s going to be the greatest moment of our life, the vindication of our faith. It’s going to be the thing that we have wanted to do from the very start—to worship God in the very presence of God, to actually in the very presence of God give Him the glory due to Him! To love Him in person! In person, to actually truly love and worship Him.

And you know what we’re going to remember as we look at the Son, as we confess that Jesus Christ is Lord? We’re going to see scars—scarred hands, scarred feet, a scar on His side. We’re going to see a scarred Saviour. Why? Because He was given. He was handed over. He was

given over in our place. God did not send the Son forth to judge the world, He sent Him forth to save. He sent Him forth to redeem. He sent Him forth to rescue, to cull back, to take hold of, to gather up, to be the good Shepherd who gathers up the flock, draws together the people of God. He sent Him forth to save a people like you and me.

Why was there no need that the Son condemn the world? Well we've already talked a little about this last week. The condemnation was already present. The condemnation was already there. If nothing changed, the only result would be that everybody who was perishing would perish. That was the state in which humanity was. That was the position in which mankind was—guilty. Already guilty. Already deserving judgment, justice, God's rightful vengeance, and wrath.

That's the state in which humanity was, and if the Son had not intervened, that's the state in which humanity would be, still. And those who were saved before He came? Well, Scripture tells us God overlooked their sins, knowing that the redemption would come, the Redeemer would come. And so those who were saved before He came, and those of us who are now saved since He has come, we're all saved by that one Saviour. We're saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's a line in Scripture, it says that Jesus is the Saviour of all, especially those who believe. You say, How can He be the Saviour of all? Well, go back. We read Genesis chapter 3. Ask yourself the question: When they sinned, why didn't God just finish it? Why didn't He just call it off? Why didn't He just obliterate humanity? Ah, He had a plan. He had a different idea.

You see, God could have passed that judgment and not have sinned. He could have judged, He could have destroyed and not have sinned, and not be doing anything wrong. But He had a different idea. He had a longer-standing idea. He had a plan that was in place before the world began. What was the plan? The Son would redeem a people unto God.

And so if God had passed judgment at that moment, and He did pass judgment, but if He had enacted the judgment, the final judgment, the judgment of fiery condemnation Scripture speaks of, where would you and I be? Would we ever have been born? Would we ever have been worshipers of the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ?

So He's a Saviour to all. He's a Saviour of all of humanity, but especially to those who believe. The people in the world who do not believe only live because of the grace of God. They only hear the word of God because of the grace of God. They only live in this world that is so suited to humanity because of the grace of God. They only see and hear the testimony of the Creator from all of creation because of the grace of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork."

That's the grace of God. Sure, hearts are hardened. They close their eyes, they close their ears, they close their minds, they will not receive the testimony of creation all around them. They harden their hearts and they draw down the wrath of God upon themselves. And yet, God sends forth His Son, the one who is especially the Saviour of all who believe. For all who believe, for all who have been given the gift of life, the gift of faith, for all who have been given life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we receive the blessings that ought to have been the blessings that the Son of God walked in.

Imagine it. Jesus walked the earth. The eternally begotten Son of God takes upon Himself flesh, He becomes incarnate. And that word, if you want to know what it means, it simply says He's taken upon Himself flesh. "Carne" is flesh. He's taken upon Himself flesh. He's become truly a man. And He's walked this earth.

Now what would you think—and didn't Satan capitalize on this idea, or attempt to—what would you think if you were the Son of God, without sin, born of a miraculous birth? What would you think? What treatment ought you to get?

You know, we've all got this idea that we ought to be treated in a certain way. Think of that. The three-year-old child thinks that they ought to be treated a certain way. You know, when a bigger kid bops him on the head and steals their toy, they don't just cry because they've been bopped on the head. They cry because they know that something wrong has been done to them. They know that they have been wronged. They know that they ought to be treated better than this. We all know it in our hearts.

The things that happen to us—I remember, you know, growing up. Some families were worse than mine, some families were better than mine. I'm not trying to make a big deal of this. I grew up in a reasonably dysfunctional family, and I remember laying awake in my bed in the middle of the night, after some crazy self-induced disaster had happened in our household, thinking to myself, "This can't be right. This just can't be right. People ought not to be living this way. People ought not to be treating one another this way."

I had no reasons. I was myself in my sins. But I had that desire in my heart that I ought to be treated differently, that my brothers ought to be treated different, that things should be different to the way they are. Somehow or other, there in the back of my mind, even if I could not articulate it clearly, I believed in the image of God, that man bears the image of God, and therefore ought to be treated in a certain way. As I said, I was not conscious of it, could not articulate that thought clearly, but that's the way it was.

The whole world has this idea that there's a way a person ought to be treated, there's something about a person that ought to be recognized. And I'm telling you that only the Scriptures, only the Christian worldview can give you any reason as to why that is so. The theory of evolution certainly can't. If the theory of evolution is true, and the Big-Bang theory, and we're just the result of chance and time, well, why am I even speaking to you? And am I actually speaking?

Because, my friends, if we're all random, and there's no such thing as communication, because random events don't communicate, and random gatherings can't speak, and can't use reason, and can't use appeal, can't communicate, can't relate, then why would I even bother trying? And why would you bother listening if we're just the result of accidental, random processes?

But the Christian worldview, the Scripture tells us that we were created in the image of God. All of humanity, desiring something better, all of humanity bearing in it this idea that there is something right, that there's got to be something better, there's got to be a way that a person ought to be treated, there's got to be a way that a person ought to be respected—all of humanity carrying this idea, and all of humanity crying, crying under the burden of not being treated as we should. There's nothing that causes a person to lash out more viciously than the feeling that

they're in some way being treated unfairly. Someone's made an assumption, someone's made a false accusation, someone hasn't treated a person with the dignity that they feel they deserve.

Now, these things can be blown out of all proportion, of course. I hope you realize, I'm not such a romantic that I don't understand that sin gets in the way here, and people get proud, and they think they're better than they are, and they think they ought to be treated better than they are, and they forget that they're sinners. But still, all of us cry out to be recognized as imaged-bearers. That's what we're crying out for. We're crying out to be recognized as the image-bearers of God. And all of us are.

You know, the broken mirror—it's such a wonderful illustration, that's why it keeps getting recycled by preachers the world over. The cracked mirror—it still shows an image. It's distorted, it's out of shape, but the image is still there and you can still recognize what it is that's standing before that mirror. And we're the cracked image-bearers, the distorted image bearers. We're the ones who distort the image of God.

How desperately—how desperately do we seek out love. How desperately do we seek out love? How desperately do we seek out fellowship, companionship? How desperately do we want to be recognized as people, and loved as people, and respected as people? And Scripture tells us that those people, we, all of us, are under the condemnation, under separation from God. Our sins have made a separation between us and the God who created us.

And so the Son, the Son of God, He walks the earth. No sin in Him. No sin. Does no wrong. Does everything right. Filled with love and grace and righteousness and virtue. Oh, you would think—you would think, wouldn't you, that everything in His life must therefore go right. Everything must therefore be good. Everything must come His way that's good: Wealth? No, He's born in a stable, to a carpenter. Respect? No, a prophet is without glory in his hometown. Honor? No, the high-up people in the kingdom in which He walked hated Him. They called Him a liar, a Sabbath-breaker. Well at least, at least He would be given a fair go, wouldn't He? No. No, fair go. No fair go.

The judgment that fell upon the Lord Jesus Christ, it was a dehumanizing judgment. It was the judgment designed, not only to break the image of God, it was designed to actually destroy the image of God. Think of what the Romans did. Flogged—flogged until the bones were bare on His back. In some cases—and we're not given that much detail by the apostles, but in some cases, those people who were flogged in that way were flogged to the extent that you could actually see their internal organs—the organs within their body. Their skin was separated from their body so thoroughly.

Did He get a fair trial? No. Crucified. Crucified. In all likelihood—you know, in modesty, if you ever see a painting or a stained glass window or something, and it's supposedly Jesus being crucified, well, what they don't usually tell you is that the Romans usually crucified a person stark naked, because the whole purpose of crucifixion was to de-humanize them, to shame them, to destroy all respect for that person as a human being. And so they were usually crucified naked, and it may well be that the Lord Jesus was actually crucified naked. People laughing, laughing and ridiculing Him as He died.

Christ got nothing fair. He got nothing that He deserved. All of us, you know, we all cry to be recognized as people who bear the image of God. We've all got this idea in our minds of how we ought to be treated, and how was He treated? He was treated the way we ought to be treated, really, in the sight of God. He was treated the way we ought to be treated in the sight of God. We ought, as sinners, to be under the judgment and the condemnation of God. Those things that happened to Him ought to have happened to all of us; and yet they happened to Him so that they will not happen to us. They happened to Him so that they will not happen to us. The righteous judgment of God will not fall upon us, because it has fallen upon Him.

Jesus got none of the things that we desire—not any of them. Those who knew Him best, those who loved Him, those with whom He had fellowship—all of them failed. He asked three disciples to pray. How did they go? They fell asleep. They fell asleep. He's praying with tears, sweating drops of blood, and the very people for whom He will intercede, the very people for whom He will substitute—having a lovely snooze. Abandoned, alone, not recognized for who He is, not recognized for what He is.

What we deserve, He got, and the things that we desire, those things He didn't get. He didn't get the comfort. He didn't get it. Why? 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.

Jesus didn't come to pass judgment. There was no need to pass judgment. The judgment was already passed. We read it in Genesis chapter 3. "From dust you have come, and to the dust you will return." In another place it says, "The wages of sin are death." You see, the judgment was already standing. The condemnation was already chalked up. It was there. It was pre-existent.

If God wanted to judge the world, He didn't have to send His Son into the world to judge the world. But you see, God had a different plan. He had a different idea. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, from time eternal, had a better plan than that. The plan that they had was to *save*—to save, to call people back into fellowship with the living God, to draw people back into worship and communion with the God who created them, to take that broken image and to—better than repair it—remake it. To remake it.

What's that song say? It talks about how we have gotten more in Christ than Adam the first every lost? He lost so much in sin, but in Christ we've been given so much more. For now, we are indwelt by the Spirit of God. Now there's no longer a temple of stone. Why? Because the temple of human hearts is in the world, the temple of hearts given over to the worship and the glorifying of God, the temple that is the living temple—living stones, as Peter calls us in First Peter.

Who are we? Each and every one of us, a living stone in the living temple of the living God. No longer is there the curtain of division, that great thick dark curtain that stops anybody and everybody from entering into the holy place. It's open—thrown open! Jesus died, the curtain was torn down! And we, fools that we are, nobodies that we are, sinners that we are, we enter into the presence of the living God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are actual worshipers in the Holy of Holies!

You know, you see the pictures and you read the description of that tabernacle in the wilderness, and that little cubed room, that little cubed room that was the Holy of Holies, into which no one could ever enter except the high priest, and that but once a year with sacrifices. And I admit, and I'm sure you feel the same, don't you feel just the surge of curiosity? Oh, how I would've loved to have seen that. What did that look like? What was that like?

And so we see documentaries, and they remake those places for us, and we see them, and, "O! Isn't that interesting?" And I've seen people, and I'm not trying to be at all belittling, I've seen people worship the re-creation of the Holy of Holies. They've worshiped the re-creation of that little cubed room with the ark of the covenant in it and the two angels over it—or is it four angels over it—worshiping the cherubim.

My friends, we get something better. We get something better in and through and by the blood of Christ. We're actually worshipers in the *true* Holy of Holies. We're worshipers in the very heavenly presence of God! The eyes of faith can see this. The eyes of faith can see this. We worship in the presence of thousands. We worship in the presence of thousands upon thousands of fellow worshipers. We're amongst that great number entering into the presence of God.

Now you know, I realize as I say this that there are differing interpretations, and there's probably differing understandings here in the room. But did you notice—if ever you read the book of Revelation, and it talks about that great city that comes down out of the clouds wearing a wedding gown—did you notice something about that great city? It's a cube. It's a cube. What was the Holy of Holies in the desert, in the tabernacle? A cube. What was the Holy of Holies in the temple that Solomon built? A cube.

But now how great is the cube! In the book of Revelation, it says it's about 1,250 miles cubed. That goes from here past Brisbane, inland—inland from Brisbane. All right, it goes past Roma. It goes further out than Roma—out to about Charleville. It comes south. It goes back down over the Victorian border, and then back across to here, and it's that high, and we can't even imagine something that high.

Now I'm not going to argue about it, whether you want to talk about that was a literal city descending from heaven. It doesn't matter. What I do want you to see is this, that the cube is so enormous. The Holy of holies is now absolutely and utterly stupendous. It's filling the earth. It's greater than great. It's more than we can really truly imagine.

The Holy of Holies has been expanded. Why? Why? Why do you take a little room that once only a priest could enter into once a year, and now you've made it so big we've never seen anything that big upon the earth? Why? Well, what are we? What are we a nation of now? What are God's people now? Priests—priests under the Lord our God. We actually, in Christ, exercise a priesthood, praying and interceding for the world around us.

So if you've now got a kingdom of priests, and you've now got million upon million upon million upon million priests, what do you need in terms of a Holy of Holies? A big place. A mighty big place to get that priesthood in. And I think that's the picture we're being given in the book of Revelation.

Even if it's literal, even if it's literal, that's still the picture we're being given in the book of Revelation—that the Holy of holies is now so stupendously large, because the kingdom of God is now so stupendously enormous that the priesthood, the living saints in the Lord Jesus Christ, who pray, who intercede in the very presence of God, is now so enormous that you can't get by with a standard temple. You can't get by with a standard Holy of Holies. You've got to have something crazy!

The Son came not into the world to judge, He came into the world to save. The condemnation was already present. The condemnation that closed us out of that holy place was already there. We couldn't go in. And now, through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, by faith, by the gift and the power of the Holy Spirit, we practically live there! We practically live there!

Honestly, how much do you pray—and I don't mean deliberate prayer, I don't mean, you know, there is a deliberate prayer pattern in my life. There are times when I'm consciously, deliberately praying. But there are times I'm consciously, actually aware of the presence of God throughout every day of the week. You realize you're praying, you realize you're thinking about Scriptures, you realize that you're giving your heart over to the Lord, day by day by day by day. We don't visit that place once a year—we're there 24/7. In the Spirit, by the power of God, we live there. We're already living there.

The Apostle Paul says that we are new creations—the new creation, that new eternal creation that is without sin, new heavens, new earth—he says it starts in us. We! It's as though we're already there. That's what he's trying to communicate to us. Why? Because God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. For He did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

Think about that thought—that idea of condemnation. Not only were we under condemnation, but we were increasing the condemnation. We couldn't make it less, we could only make it greater. Our attempted good works were sin. Our attempted obedience was pride. Our attempts at placating God increased the anger that was rightfully coming towards us. The condemnation never grew smaller, it only grew greater.

But God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world. Jesus didn't come to pass that final judgment. Not that time. He's going to come again. He's going to come again. When He comes again—when He comes again, that will be the final day. When He comes again. We got the Lamb. Next time we get the Lion. We should always remember that. We're saved through Him.

Verse 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.” 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. Notice that it says the condemnation already stands. Notice that it says those who believe in Him are not condemned. There's only one way to turn aside that condemnation, and that's through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not by works. It's not by merit. It's not by being a good and nice person. How hard it is to break that idea.

You know, as I said earlier, we've all got the idea somehow or other, everyone's got the idea that I'm a person, and I ought to be treated in a certain way. Sin has poisoned that idea, and that idea becomes, I'm a person and I can work my way there. I can do enough good. I can balance up the scales. I can get in God's good books. I can do something that God will be pleased about. And the answer is, No, you can't. No, you can't.

If you want to get to heaven by good works, it's easy, theoretically: Obey the law of God perfectly, from a pure heart, for the perfectly right reason that you only want to give glory to God and God alone, that you only want to give glory to God and God alone. Obey perfectly, from a pure heart, with perfect motives, and God will accept your good works. If you want to try, you can start now. Good luck with it. Good luck with it. Come back when you're worn out. Maybe then you'll be ready to hear the gospel. Come back when you've hit the wall, because you won't get there. You can't do it. I'm telling you, you can't do it. If you must try, well, try. But you will hit the wall. God will not accept your works. He will not give you any assurance. He will not give you any peace. Why? Because He gave His Son. He gave His Son.

What right has any puny human being to say, "I don't want Jesus, I don't want that Saviour—I want to be saved another way, I want to be saved a better way"? What right has any human being got to think that way? "I reject faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I reject His claims as King and Lord and Saviour. I'm a good person. I know I'm a good person, in the depths of my heart."

One of my Facebook friends a few weeks back put up a little—you know, people do this, they put up their thoughts often on Facebook, and he spoke in his thoughts about the need to be constantly convicted of sin so that you're constantly returning to the Lord in repentance. And, you know, he's a Christian guy obviously, and lots of Christian friends, and there are heaps of people, "Amen, brother, amen!" You know, "We need to hear this every day," etc., etc.

And then someone—it was a woman, could've been a man, doesn't matter, but it was a woman. Someone puts this comment in. "I don't need to hear this kind of stuff. I need to hear positive messages, uplifting messages. I'm humble enough as it is, thank you very much." That was honestly what she said. "I'm humble enough as it is, thank you very much." She thought she was so humble, she was proud of being humble. You know, she's like the person that said, "Yes, I am perfect. And humility is my second greatest asset." She was proud of her humility, or what she imagined was humility.

I just look at these things and think, "Oh, there's a possible sermon illustration there." I didn't want to get involved or get into a great Facebook argument with someone. There's no profit in it. But there was certainly a worthwhile illustration there. She was proud of what she imagined was her own humility. How ridiculous. I mean, it's laughable. I'm glad you're smiling, because it appeals to me. It's one of the stupidest funniest things I've seen for a long time.

How can you be proud of your own humility? And yet, there you go. In sin, someone managed it. The sad thing of course is that person is obviously involved in some kind of church somewhere, and obviously thinks that they're a Christian, and obviously thinks that they're in the right with God. Either the church which she attends does not preach the gospel, or she's closed her ears to it, and she's living in the delusion of her own self-righteousness. That's the sad side to it.

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. What do we need? What does a person desperately need? You know, what must a person have? How does a person get there? How do you get to faith in the Saviour? How do you get to the knowledge of God?

Well, we've worked our way through John chapter 3, and we've understood I hope by now that you need to be awakened by God. You need to be granted life by the power of the Holy Spirit. You cannot see the kingdom of God unless you be born from above. You cannot enter the kingdom of God lest you be born of water and the Spirit. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. How would that feel to a person? How would you know that that is happening in your life? How would you know that you're being drawn from condemnation to salvation? How would you know that God is at work?

Well, my friends, you'll know that God is at work when you start to see yourself the way God sees you; when you're not proud of your humility; when you're not proud of anything about yourself; when you're abandoning all hope; when you've come to understand that you deserve nothing other than anger and judgment and justice and you deserve to have God destroy you, obliterate you, and send you to hell for an eternity of suffering. When you are actually understanding that that is the situation you are in, it's a pretty good sign that God is starting to open your eyes.

Turn to John chapter 16. We'll start reading from verse 5, Jesus speaking to the apostles, or the disciples, in the upper room: “⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, “Where are you going?” ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

What's He saying? “He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:” verse 9, “concerning sin, because they do not believe in me.” The work of the Holy Spirit, among many other things, is a work of conviction. The Holy Spirit should be at all times opening the eyes of a person, that they see themselves for what they actually are—sinners. Sinners deserving the wrath of God, sinners deserving the judgment of God.

There's no such thing as conversion apart from conviction. There's no such thing as tripping happily into the kingdom of heaven. If you don't know you're a sinner, I'm telling you my friend, you do not know the work of God. You do not know the power of the Holy Spirit. “Concerning sin,” says Jesus, “because they do not believe in me.”

And so the first thing that a person becomes aware of is their sinfulness and their sin in not submitting to Christ, not submitting to Jesus, not believing His words, not being faithful to His teaching, not believing the things about Him that are revealed in Scripture. A person's not under this conviction when they say that Jesus was a great teacher. They're not under this conviction when they say that Jesus was a compassionate man. They're not under this conviction when they say that Jesus taught us the way to love.

Jesus was a great teacher. Jesus was a compassionate man. Jesus did teach us the way to love. But when they're under the conviction, they say and they know that Jesus was the Son of God, and He went to the cross bearing sins, and I'm a sinner. Jesus is God the eternal Son of God, and He reigns on high even now. Jesus is the one to whom I must answer. Jesus is the one whom God has sent into the world to be a Saviour. The convicted sinner knows that they're a sinner, knows that they're in rebellion against God, and knows that Christ is the Saviour sent forth by God. They know that they're guilty of not believing in Him.

Isn't it funny— isn't it funny, the world's in a state of condemnation. God sends forth the Saviour. God sends forth His Son, who bears the sins of many upon the cross, who redeems, who cleanses—the Saviour, the only way to God. But what's the situation for anyone who hears this message and will not submit? What's the situation for anyone who hears this message of God's salvation in and through the death of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and will not accept the conviction of sin? What's the situation of anyone who rejects the message and the word of God? The condemnation is even worse. It's increased. It makes things worse for them, not better. They sin against the light. Now not only are the ignorant sinners, they're deliberately, knowingly ignorant sinners.

Scripture doesn't tell us that everybody gets the same treatment, either in heaven or in hell. It doesn't tell us that. It tells us that people are rewarded according to their works. It tells us, therefore, that those who knowingly sin, those who knowingly sin against God, those very people suffer the worst condemnation.

Those who are children raised under the sound of the gospel, with praying parents, who will not submit to Christ—they suffer the worst condemnation. Those who come alone who hear the gospel, who even acknowledge the truth of the gospel, and they know—they know that what is being said is true, but then they realize that—"Hang on. Hang on. If I submit to this, I've got to give up that. If I surrender to this, I've got to let go of that. I'm going to lose friends. I'm going to lose a girlfriend. I'm going to lose a boyfriend. I just renewed my subscription. I'm going to lose a whole year of money on that subscription." Whatever it is—whatever it is they want to cling to. "I won't become a Christian now. My best friend's twenty-first birthday party's coming up in three weeks' time. I want that one last blinder."

And who knows? Who knows, as they tempt their fate? Who knows, as they test God, as they test the Holy Spirit of God? Who knows if ever, if ever the grace of God will bring that conviction one more time? Who knows? What does it say, for example, to the farmer who built bigger barns and said, "Now I'm happy. I've got everything I need, and I can store all my wealth up."? "You fool. This night your soul is required of you. This very night, you're going to be in the presence of the living God. You fool."

The one under conviction, this conviction from the Holy Spirit, is one who flees the judgment to come, who runs from the judgment, runs from the darkness, into the light; the one who's willing to say, "I know my friends will think I'm an idiot. I know that they won't understand that I no longer want to go to that enormous booze-up of a party. I know that my boyfriend, girlfriend, significant other," whatever word you want to use, "is going to reject me for becoming a Christian." My mother, father, brother, grandmother—whatever it might be. But they can't help but flee to the light. They're under what Scripture calls the full conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Turn to the book of First Thessalonians chapter 1. We'll start reading at verse 2. First Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 2, Paul speaking to the Thessalonians: "²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."

When the gospel comes with power in the Holy Spirit with full conviction—full conviction—that's when the Apostle Paul has hope for people. That's when the Apostle Paul rejoices—when the Spirit comes with power and with full conviction. And what happens when a person is taken by the Spirit with power and full conviction? They only ask one question—"What must I do to be saved? How can I be saved, and how can I escape this burden of sin?"

What must I do to be saved? Oh, I wish I could hear that question asked. I really do. I wish I could hear that question asked. How often have you ever heard it in this hard-hearted nation today? How often have you ever heard someone say, "What must I do to be saved? What must I do to escape the wrath of God? What must I do to have eternal life?"

How often have we ever seen someone under a true, deep, and genuine conviction? How often do you ever see a pastor who's willing to let someone stay in their true, deep, and genuine conviction—until the Spirit of God has done His work? I want to see that. I want to see that. I want to see the work and the power of the Holy Spirit in our life, in our town, in our church, in our nation. I want to see heartbroken sinners. That's what I want to see.

Well my friends, if we want to preach a gospel that breaks hearts, we've got to be brokenhearted. We want to preach a gospel of conviction? We've got to be convicted. You want to preach a gospel of power? Well you've got to have come under the power of the Holy Spirit and His conviction that breaks your heart, and brings you to nothing in your own sight. Then, and only then, does the church become a church that preaches a gospel powerfully, that sees people brought into the kingdom with power. Then, and only then, do you see that awakening message breaking hearts.

People say it's the modern age—it's the modern age. There's too many distractions. They've got the X-Box, they've got the movies, they've got YouTube, they've got the computers, the iPads, they've got the games. People can only think for twenty minutes now. A pastor told me that—people can only think for twenty minutes. You say, Why's that? Well that's how long the TV show runs between the ad breaks.

You see, there's a person called the Holy Spirit. There's a person called the Holy Spirit, and He speaks through Scripture and through His people, speaking His words from Scripture. And that person called the Holy Spirit, He's more powerful than the X-Box, and He's more powerful than the computer games, and YouTube, and videos, and you name it—everything else, all the other nonsense distractions that we've got in this world. He's more powerful than drug addiction and alcoholism. He's more powerful than all of those things. He's more powerful than self-righteousness. He's more powerful than all those things. He can break all of those things. I think the problem, my friends, it's not the message, it's not the gospel, it's not time. I think the problem, my friends, might indeed be with the servants of God. It might indeed be with us.

Have we come under the conviction? Are we brokenhearted preachers, teachers, friends, lovers of our neighbours, servants of God? The problem might just be us. What do you think? Do you think I'm on to something there? We might be disobedient servants. We might be servants who do not love the Lord our God as we ought. We might be servants who do not love our neighbour as we ought.

In the end, the gospel is a gospel of repentance and faith. Repentance—even for Christians, born again, mature, growing in the Lord. It's a gospel of repentance and faith, trusting and believing the word of God, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit. There's no point relying on gimmicks. We don't need gimmicks, we don't need shows, we don't need song, we don't need dance. The only songs we need are the praises of God upon our lips. We don't need anything other than the true, brokenhearted conviction of sin that comes by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that strengthens, inspires, and empowers true preaching of the gospel. God will do the rest. God will do the rest, if His servants would but obey, humble themselves in the presence of the living God, and repent!

The biggest problem with the world today is the church. I don't mean the false church, and I don't mean the churches filled with false teachers. I actually mean the evangelical church, where the gospel is preached. The biggest problem today is the church, because the church is not brokenhearted. The church is not under conviction. The church has taken things too lightly, and taken too much for granted, and given up on trusting in the power of the Living God. The problem is, we think like the world. We think like the world, we try to do things the way the world does things, and we get nowhere.

My friends, it is for us to obey the Lord our God. It is for us to trust in the Lord our God. It is for us to do things the way God says they ought to be done. He says, Put your trust in Jesus Christ. He says, Be repentant. He says, Be thankful. If you meet a Christian who's not thankful, there's a reason they're not thankful, and that is they don't actually know that they're saved, and they don't know what it is that they've been saved from. They think they're pretty good. "I'm pretty good."

The weight of the word of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, should be crushing us, and at the same time, remaking us. We should be being broken and being remade, over and over and over again. When we're convicted, when we're under the power of the Holy Spirit, I'm telling you, God will bring the right people before your face, and you will have the word to say at the right time. He will use us. He always has done things that way. That's what Scripture tells us. My friends, the world was under condemnation. All of us were under condemnation, and that rightly so. But God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. We'll close in prayer.

Father in heaven, I do indeed pray that we would be a people who have come under the full conviction and power of the Holy Spirit. I do indeed pray that we would be a people who have learnt to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbour, and to love your word, and to build our lives upon your word, and to think your thoughts after you, from your word. Father, forgive us. We indeed have failed, again and again and again. We need your help. We need the help and the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to be filled with the Spirit. Father in heaven, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.