

**John 3: 17 and 18; “Not Sent to Condemn”, Sermon # 18 in the series – “That all May Honor the Son”, A Communion Sermon Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013, in the Morning Worship Service.**

We find here the Lord Jesus giving a disqualifier to the glorious mission for which God the Father had sent Him into the world. We are told that the Son of God was not sent into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Jesus was still speaking with Nicodemus, this very religious and highly respected teacher in Israel. Nicodemus did not understand the reasons why a person must be born again to enter the kingdom of God. I think that he thought that he had always been a pretty good person. Why would he need to change now? He had the respect and the favor of all the people. And then, he did not understand how such a thing as the New Birth came about either. How could a man be born when he was old? And so he was marveling over the words that he was hearing. Jesus, however, calls this marveling “unbelief” in John 3: 12. He said, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” But Jesus has not come to condemn Nicodemus, but to save him. So, in order for Nicodemus to begin to understand what he must do to be saved, He goes on to tell him of God’s great love for sinners in verse 16; a love so very great that He would send His own Son into the world rather than to condemn it. Verse 17 shows us God’s good will toward all mankind. God’s intention, Jesus says to him, is to save a whole world of those who would believe in Him. Before we partake of the Communion this morning, we want to see 3 ways in which the Father shows us His good will and His particular love to a world of lost sinners. 1<sup>st</sup> of all, God the Father is a God of justice, but He is also a God of Compassion. 2<sup>nd</sup> – God the Father has shown His great love to sinners in the plan of salvation itself. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – God the Father has shown His great love to sinners in His giving them assurance of His favor, that they will not be condemned.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – God the Father is a God of Justice, but also a God of Compassion.**

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” There are many reasons which relate to God’s justice, why He could have chosen not to show any mercy to Adam and Eve, back there in the garden of Eden, when they sinned and ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He could have chosen to show no mercy because He had given Adam and Eve so much, and required so little. Our God is very generous and giving in His essential nature. He is not stingy or mean. He had given them to eat of all the trees of the garden, and there was only one which He forbade their eating from. But Adam, when he sinned, was not deceived as Eve was. He ate the forbidden fruit because he did not regard God’s voice to him to be as significant as the voice of his wife at that critical point of his test. As a result of this, God in perfect justice, could have taken their lives and consigned them to the punishment of hell for all of eternity. Since He warned Adam that any act of disobedience would mean death, and death is not only the loss of the body but the loss of the soul, this would have been the greatest of losses, and the thwarting of God’s plans for man. But God had thought through this matter long before this.

Let us think for a moment about the perfection of God in His justice. Turn over to Deuteronomy 32, verse 1. “Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.” “Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass.” “For I proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God.” “He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.” Let us understand that the God is a God who is perfect in justice. If all that God does is upright and perfect, then the execution of His justice is always done in perfection. “All His ways are justice”. We see here, that we are to

ascribe greatness to our God, for without perfection in God, in all of His attributes, He would not be able to govern the world righteously or show mercy to any when they sinned. But God's strictness of justice is to be admired because God is also a God of compassion and goodness. Therefore, He always judges rightly. Sometimes I think that people, when they hear that Adam's sin in the beginning was what brought corruption to the hearts of all men, they then say, "If I would have been in that same position, I would not have eaten the forbidden fruit. But this is sheer foolishness to think this way. When Adam sinned, we all sinned with him and in him. We would have done exactly the same thing in the same circumstances. If the objection were true, these same people would never confirm Adam's sin by deliberately committing even one sin of their own. Adam had free will in this matter and chose wrongly. But now all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God because we confirm Adam's sin by our own fallen mind and will. Even the most moral of people who are not believing in Christ could still be condemned, in strict justice, by God. After Adam's loss of his original righteousness back in the garden, salvation can never be found by trying to keep God's law as a covenant of works. But to prove this point, and to point out the reason why all men need a better righteousness than their own, God gave His holy law to Israel.

When you look at verse 5 here, of Deuteronomy 32, you will see why the nation of Israel failed to keep God's covenant with them. "They have corrupted themselves; they are not His children, because of their blemish: a perverse and crooked generation." "Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people?" "Is He not your Father, who bought you?" "Has He not made you and established you?" You see, God was very generous and did all these good things for the nation of Israel; bringing them out of their bondage, and providing for their many needs day by day, and yet they rewarded Him with their unbelief. They corrupted themselves and many of them proved that they were not really His spiritual children. They fell in line with their own natural depravity of heart. Listen to Stephen Charnock: "This is natural to man as he is corrupted." "What was the venom of the sin of Adam, is naturally derived with his nature to all his posterity." "It was not the eating of the forbidden apple, or the pleasing his palate that Adam aimed at, or which was the chief object of his desire, but to live independently of his Creator, and be a God to himself. (Genesis 3: 5): 'You shall be as gods.'" "That which was the matter of the devil's temptation was the incentive of man's rebellion; a likeness to God he aspired to in the judgment of God Himself, who is an infallible interpreter of man's thoughts; Behold, man is become as one of us, to know good and evil, in regard of self-sufficiency and being a rule to himself." "The Jews understand the ambition of man to reach no further than an equality with the angelical nature; but Jehovah here understands it in another sense; God had ordered man by this prohibition not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; not to attempt (to obtain) the knowledge of good and evil of (by) himself, but to wait upon the dictates of God; not to trust to his own counsels, but to depend wholly upon Him for direction and guidance." "Certainly he that would not hold off his hand from so small a thing as an apple, when he has his choice of the fruit of the garden, would not have denied himself anything his appetite had desired, when that principle had prevailed upon him; he would not have stuck at a greater matter to pleasure himself the displeasing of God, when for so small a thing he would incur the anger of his Creator." "Thus would he deify his own understanding against the wisdom of God, and his own appetite against the will of God."

What Adam deserved, and what we all deserve, is to be condemned forever for our many confirmations of Adam's sin; of our choosing to act independently of God's will which is revealed in His word to us. And this is what God could have determined upon every one of us, even from the foundation of the world, had it been His purpose to do so. Listen to Jonathan Edwards on this: Speaking on Romans 2, verse 2 he says, "When it is said, 'The judgment of God is according to truth', the meaning is that God's judgment will be a true judgment; he will judge things as

they be, or that his judgment will be conformed to the nature of things.” “Now the act of judging with regard to any crime is twofold, viz. declaring the guilt, and sentencing to punishment.” “God shall do these according to truth.” “His declaration of guilt shall be as the case is indeed, and His sentence to punishment shall be that which shall be agreeable thereto.” “His declaration of guilt and His sentence to punishment shall both have the same language, and the language of both shall be true.” “Hence it follows that if God did not (give) sentence to that punishment that sin deserves, His judgment would not be according to truth; and therefore God is obliged to punish sin as it deserves.” (Blank Bible, P. 977, 978) This, my friends, is what all men deserve; condemnation. But God is not only a God of justice, He is also a God of compassion. He would not have all men perish. And so –

**2ndly – We see that the way that God the Father has shown His great love to sinners is seen in the plan of salvation itself.**

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” “He who believes in Him is not condemned...” God’s purpose in sending His only-begotten Son into the world was not to have Him come declaring a message of condemnation, even though all were guilty, and stood condemned. His purpose was to have Him come bringing a message of God’s good-will to all sinners. God Himself would reconcile the world to Himself through His Son. He would make His appeal to man, and reason with him through His sending His Son. The Lord Jesus Christ, coming into the world, was intended by the Father to convey the most joyful of tidings; that God Himself had from all eternity planned another way that His justice could be satisfied. That way was that the Lord Jesus would become the substitute for sinners. He would take upon Himself our human nature without being fallen as we are; He would come and do everything that was necessary to satisfy God’s justice, both in terms of obedience to God’s holy law, and in terms of bearing the punishment due to our sins. Now pause, dear saints, and rejoice once again with me, here and now, as we approach the Communion table, that our Lord Jesus was willing to undertake such a daunting and personally painful task. For although the Father sent the Son into the world to fulfill all righteousness on our behalf, He Himself was willing to come because He loved the father, and because He loved you with this greatest of loves that we cannot comprehend.

Think of what He has done in righteousness for you, O believer. He denied Himself where you were sinfully indulgent. He was calm and patient where you were frustrated and angry. He was pure where you were sinfully impure. He was content where you were impatient. He was full of love and concern where you were indifferent, or perhaps even hateful. He loved God with all of His heart when you had no love for God at all. He hated sin, when you were willing to compromise with it. He loved and pursued righteousness in every particular, where felt like living for yourself. He was joyful and cheerful, when you were sinfully sad and unbelieving. All this He did in your place; His perfect obedience and His righteousness imputed to you by the Father, when you first believed in Him. His obedience makes us for all of your disobedience; all of your falling short, and all of omissions of duty. There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. All of your shortcomings and all of your sins have been forgiven and you have been justified; you have been declared righteous by His precious grace. Romans Chapter 5, verse 18 says, “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.” “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” As we come down to the Lord’s table now, let us remember the precious obedience of our Savior.

**3<sup>rd</sup> - God the Father has shown His great love to sinners in His giving them assurance of His favor, that they will not be condemned.**

“He who believes in Jesus is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God.” As we come to observe this Supper, I must ask you what is the basis of your assurance of salvation? I am aware that some Christians have great assurance from the moment of their conversion, while some Christians struggle with it long and hard. Those who have great assurance right away, following conversion, cannot have it as a result of looking at the evidence of fruit in their lives, for they have not been a Christian that long, and as a result there may not be all that much in the way of fruit yet. What is it then? I believe that their great assurance comes from their clear views of seeing Jesus as their substitute, not only in His perfect obedience, but more especially in His sufferings for them. 43 years ago the Lord saved a man from His sins who from all outward appearances was not a great sinner. Indeed, he was a very moral man. He had gone to church all of his life, and then at 58 years of age, he began to wonder if he really knew the Lord or not. He had begun reading Charles Haddon Spurgeon sermons from the 1861 volume of the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit. He had read about ten of them. He was enjoying them very much because of the way that the truth of the Bible was being so simply but powerfully preached. He came to Spurgeon’s sermon called “None but Jesus”, which was on this very verse that we are looking at today. And these were the words that he read:

“On nothing else must thou trust, He is to be the only prop and pillar of thy confidence, and all thou addest thereunto will be a wicked antichrist, a rebellion against the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus. But take care if your faith save you, that while you look to Christ in all these matters you view him as being a substitute. This doctrine of substitution is so essential to the whole plan of salvation that I must explain it here for the thousandth time. God is just, he must punish sin; God is merciful, he wills to pardon those who believe in Jesus. How is this to be done? How can he be just and exact the penalty — merciful, and accept the sinner? He doeth it thus: he taketh the sins of his people and actually lifteth them up from off his people to Christ, so that they stand as innocent as though they had never sinned, and Christ is looked upon, by God all though he had been all the sinners in the world robed into one. The sin of his people was taken from their persons, and really and actually, not typically and metaphorically, but ready and actually laid on Christ. Then God came forth with his fiery sword to meet the sinner and to punish him. He met Christ. Christ was not a sinner himself, but the sins of his people were all imputed to him. Justice, therefore, met Christ as though he had been the sinner — punished Christ for his people’s sins — punished him as far as its rights could go, — exacted from him the last atom of the penalty, and left not a dreg: in the cup. And now, he who can see Christ as being his substitute, and puts his trust in him, is thereby delivered from the curse of the law. Soul, when thou seest Christ obeying the law — thy faith is to say, “He obeys that for his people.” When thou seest him dying, thou art to count the purple drops, and say, “Thus he took my sins away.” When thou seest him rising from the dead, thou art to say — “He rises as the head and representative of all his elect,” and when thou seest him sitting at the right hand of God, thou art to view him there as the pledge that all for whom he died shall most emery sit at the Father’s right hand. Learn to look on Christ as being in God’s sight as though he were the sinner. “In him was no sin.” He was “the just,” but he suffered for the unjust. He was the righteous, but he stood in the place of the unrighteous, and all that the unrighteous ought to have endured, Christ has endured once for all, and put away their sins forever by the sacrifice of himself. Now this is the great object of faith. I pray you, do not make any mistake about this, for a mistake here will be dangerous, if not fatal. View Christ, by your faith, as being in his life, and death, and sufferings and resurrection, the substitute for all whom his Father gave him, — the vicarious sacrifice for the sins of all those who will trust him with their souls. Christ, then, thus set forth, is the object of justifying faith.”

The man that read those words was my own dear father, and in the margin of that volume of Spurgeon are written these words: “May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1970”. “The moment of my conversion to Christ”. His conversion was instantaneous. His assurance of salvation was immediate. He knew that God had met Christ on the cross and punished Him there in his place. He believed in Jesus, seeing Him as his substitute for righteousness and the One who suffered for His sins, and He was saved, and he had great assurance all through his Christian life. It was because he placed his whole soul’s weight upon the word of God, that Christ had done these things for him. It is this kind of simple trust and simple faith that saves and also brings along with it, the assurance of faith which will not waver. God is true. He sent the Lord Jesus into the world so I would not be condemned if I believe the gospel. It is Christ sufferings that prove that I need not bear the

guilt of my sin a moment longer. The true and faithful love of Jesus Christ was demonstrated in His actually suffering what we as sinners deserve to receive, if he had decided not only to arraign us, and accuse us, but condemn us for what we have done, or not done, which has dishonored His holy name. This is what we rejoice in now, as we partake of these elements. It is that Christ has suffered; Christ has died, so that my condemnation could be taken away, and I not be led away to suffer under God's eternal and righteous judgment.