

This morning we are going to examine a passage of Scripture which is probably memorized and quoted by more Christians than any other verse in the bible. And one of the reasons for this is the hope this verse gives to the world as it confirms with a promise the plan God has fulfilled to bring men back into fellowship with their creator.

But to keep this passage in its context let me start in verse fourteen.

JOH 3:14-18 "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Jesus is continuing to express to Nicodemus that He is the one who has fulfilled the Scriptures as the Messiah, the Savior, whom men must look to for their salvation.

We saw last week how the bronze snake represented Jesus Christ as the one who became a curse for us though He was sinless. And in doing this He has taken our curse for sin and has paid that debt to the Father for us.

In fact, at the end of verse 14 it is clear that for us to be reconciled back to God, the Son of Man must be lifted up. There is no other way. He must die for us if we are to receive eternal life. He must suffer the consequences of our sin if we are to receive His righteousness.

For the world to suggest that we can go to heaven or be friends with God in any other way but through Christ's death on the cross is to reject the only way by which we must be saved. Christ must be lifted up and as verse 15 tells us, only those who believe in Him may have eternal life.

And by the word believe the Scriptures mean a holding on to, a confidence in. Lots of people tell us they believe in God or even in Jesus, and yet they place no confidence in Christ's death or

subscribe to Him being the only way of salvation. That's not belief. At best it's a recognition of Christ's existence. But that won't save.

But as we come to our text we are going to consider the motivation for God doing such a thing to reestablish that relationship He had with man in the Garden of Eden, where paradise with God was meant to be the norm.

JOH 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

There are a number of things we can glean from this verse, not the least of which is that only God can do anything that would keep us from perishing, from being eternally separated from Him.

But it is His love for men which is the primary reason for God doing anything at all to bring men back into a peace relationship with Himself. And in our text there is a little word which accentuates the word love and gives us a sense of how much God wants for us to come back to Him.

It's the word *so*. God *so* loved. The idea is that this love has a specific object in His people, which is immeasurable. Paul expresses it this way as he encourages the Ephesian believers to meditate on this love.

EPH 3:17-19 "..... And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp *how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ*, 19 and to know *this love that surpasses knowledge* - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

What Paul is saying is that if we would begin to consciously consider what Christ did for us, as He loved us even unto death, it should revolutionize our lives and our appreciation for the gift God has given us in His Son.

But this love of God is no mere sentimentality. This word, love, which is *agapao* in the Greek, is a love that acts. It is a love that does whatever it takes to bring about the best for others. This is the kind of love we have in Christ. We now have the love of God.

ROM 5:5 "..... God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

The same love that caused Jesus Christ to die for our sins is the same love we now have in Christ to extend to the world. It is a love which sees their need and desires to meet it as we give them the truth of the gospel in this love.

Just as Christ tells us that He desires that none would perish because He so loves the world, we too have this love which desires that none would perish, and now have the ability and the good news to give to people to bring them out from under condemnation.

This love of God is extended not just to Israel but to the whole world. God commands that the whole world repent of their sin and embrace His Son for their salvation. But we're told that men have the responsibility before God to do this by believing and embracing this love found in the redemptive work of Christ.

And so, "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life." And by the way, you'll notice in this verse that men are confined to a death sentence by their very nature; thus the word perish. This is what is in store for all men outside of them embracing Christ by faith.

The natural man only desires the things of this world and thus are by nature God's enemies.

EPH 2:3 "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, *we were by nature objects of wrath.*"

But the good news is that we don't have to remain children of wrath, or God's enemies, if we would but trust Christ alone for our reconciliation back to the Father.

ROM 5:9-10 "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

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

Instead of perishing; instead of continuing to be enemies of God and thus suffer His just wrath, we can have eternal life. And when we speak of eternal life, we're not simply talking about the

duration of life. We're talking about the quality of this life. It is a life which emanates from God who is life.

When we consider eternal life we are actually talking about sharing in the life of God. It is certainly eternal in duration, but it's a life without any constraints of the curse imposed on mankind because of sin.

2CO 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

What does that mean? It means the curse which had dominion of our lives has been taken out of the way. The problem is that we still live in a cursed world and we still live with the old nature which is the result of the curse.

And so, in Christ, this new life is a reality in our present condition. But this new life has a future component which is the culmination of all of the promises of God that speak to a kingdom and an inheritance and a presence with our Savior on the new earth as we share in the ruling and reigning with our Lord in this future paradise. This is the hope of glory that Paul speaks of as our future reality.

But in the mean time we must take this new life and feed it with the spiritual things from God as the Spirit of God conforms us into the image of Christ. In speaking of this contrast of the old man or sinful nature, and the new man or new life we have in Christ, Paul points out to the Ephesians the necessity to make a choice to follow after the new life we have in Christ.

EPH 4:22-24 "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Since this new life comes from God who is life, it only makes sense that we would want to put on the new self in such a way where we reflect God who is true righteousness and holiness. And this goes back to the reason God has given us life in Christ and that is to bring Himself glory through us.

ROM 11:36 "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

1CO 10:31 "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

We need to bring Him glory today, knowing that we will bring Him glory for all of eternity, because we are the fruit of His love as He has purchased us and brought us to Himself. He has given us His resurrection life and we need to live as those resurrected from the dead, as we look forward to eternity.

This is the objective of God as He sent His only begotten Son into the world to save us from our sin.

By the way, when we talk of God's only begotten Son, or as the NIV puts it, One and only Son, we're not talking about begotten in the same sense as an offspring. Many of the cults will use this and other verses to make the case for the Father giving birth to a son which is to suggest that the Son had a beginning and is therefore not eternal, and therefore not God.

The NIV comes closer to the sense of what this passage means when it says, One and only Son, which doesn't suggest birth, but uniqueness. The Son of God is eternal as the first few verses of the gospel of John clearly point out. He is also creator God as both John and the writer of Hebrews makes clear.

John 1:1-3 ^{NAU} In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*

HEB 1:1-2 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us *by his Son*, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom *he made the universe.*"

There is only one true God who made the universe and that is the God who has revealed Himself in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

By, the way, when John speaks of God so loving the world there is a tendency to suggest that every human being in the world is the object of this redeeming love. This simply is not the case.

All throughout Scripture God has demonstrated how He has chosen a people for His own possession. We could start with Adam. Adam did not have a choice as to whether or not he would be one of God's chosen. He was simply chosen to be created for

God's glory and man's benefit in sharing in a relationship with his creator.

Since the fall it is not uncommon for God to speak of reaching out to the world with a message of hope while at the same time qualifying who in this world would share in this hope.

There are many examples of this in the word of God. Noah comes to mind along with his family. God chose them, we are told, because "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord", (Gen.6:8).

Well, in what way did He find favor with Noah? We're not told. The word favor in the Hebrew could also be translated grace. Since grace is a gift did Noah find grace because of something he accomplished for God, which would then make it a wage, or did Noah receive a gift simply because God chose to grace Noah?

The same could be said of Abraham. Are we told that Abram was looking for a way to serve God in his life and that God obliged him by giving him a promise to make him a father of many nations?

No. In fact, Abram was simply living his life out and God chose to approach him and simply told him to move from one place to another with a promise attached to it.

Genesis 12:1-3 ^{NAU} Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

What is instructive in both cases of Noah and Abram is that they both responded in faith to the promises of God, but we are not told that they were seeking God at the time. Rather, God chose to approach them and they believed and it was reckoned to them as righteousness. In both cases they were in the world moving in their own direction but they were chosen out of the world by God according to His will.

Another classic example is how God demonstrated his love toward the world by choosing one group out of the world to be the means by which the Messiah would come into the world to redeem a people for Himself.

They were called the Jews. I don't hear many people in the church saying it was unfair of God to choose a particular people to represent Him in the world while not choosing the Amorites or the Hittites or the Egyptians.

You see, simply because God so loved the world does not automatically translate to the entire world being saved as is quite obvious. So, what kind of love is that? Well, the synergist's answer is that the love is there from God but man must make the choice, man must believe, after all it's the one believing that will not perish.

Quite true. But we need only go back to the beginning of this gospel to discover the attitude of men toward the love that God sent into the world.

John 1:5 ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 1:10-11 ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

But of course you didn't read the rest of the passage Drew because if you go to verse 12 you will see quite clearly that some did in fact receive Him as they exercised their faith.

John 1:12 ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,

And I would agree that there were those who did receive Him as they then became children of God.

But it would behoove us to continue to read the next verse.

John 1:13 ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Here's the point. Though God so loved the world the world hated this God and was not even able to come to God because of their hate toward Him. And this is the crux of the problem as to why God must choose a people out of the world as He loved them enough to come from the Father with the express purpose of bringing them into His kingdom.

John 6:39 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

John 6:44 ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

The apostle Paul makes it quite clear in Ephesians 2:1 that all men are dead in their trespasses and sins, and dead men don't respond to anything.

Oh, but wait, Lazarus did. But ask yourself, did Lazarus respond to Christ's call before or after the Lord gave him life? That's right, we are born from above, not by the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

As we move on in our text our Lord reveals something else about His mission in coming into the world the first time as He was born of a virgin, as He became man and ultimately gave His life for the penalty of our sin.

JOH 3:17 "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Some of your translations read, "God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world." The word judge infers a judgment unto condemnation. And so, in verse 17 we have the comparison of condemning and saving and what Christ's role was some 2,000 years ago, which was to save sinners.

This doesn't mean that Jesus Christ will not judge the world. In fact, we know that He will.

ACT 17:30-31 "... God commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

This judgment is in reference to the Great White Throne judgment at the very end when all men will stand before God. And Jesus Christ, together with the Father will judge.

JOH 12:47-48 "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. 48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."

Again, the point Jesus is making here is that, though He has the authority to judge all men that judgment will be reserved for a future time which is connected to His second coming. His first mission in the earth as the God/man is not to condemn them but to

secure a people for Himself so to avoid that condemnation by receiving Him as their Lord and Savior.

And so, as it pertains to Christ's first coming into this world, God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. But that part of the world who continues to reject the Messiah will not escape condemnation.

JOH 3:18 "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

What we see here is that God puts the responsibility of accepting this eternal life squarely on the shoulders of men. They are given the responsibility to choose life. If they will not choose life they cannot blame God.

All people are commanded by God to make a choice and if they will not choose Christ by faith then they have chosen death and they have no one to blame but themselves. They can't blame their parents, they can't blame their teachers, they can't blame their neighbors or their environment.

They alone will stand before God for the choice they made in this world. And the choice they make will not have anything to do with God not making a way of salvation, but will have everything to do with man's sinful nature and his desire to glory in that sin because that's what he prefers which is why the natural man will never choose God and why God must choose a people for Himself.

Again, this goes back to the mission that Christ was sent on by the Father that we saw in John 6:37.

John 6:37 ³⁷ "*All that the Father gives Me* will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

And as we come back to our text we see clearly why the Father had to make a choice to redeem people out of the world that He calls His own.

JOH 3:19-20 "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

The light has shone into this world. Jesus Christ is that light. But men love the darkness. They hate the light because the light exposes their darkness, their sin, and they do not want to have their

sin exposed because they don't want to give up their sin. That's the nature of man.

And you can see how man will try and reconcile his sin even when his sin is exposed. Invariably when people I have worked with over the years find out I'm a Pastor one of the first things they do is tell me how they once went to church, or have a cousin who goes to church. They become defensive; a little nervous as they try and interject something spiritual into the conversation.

Why? Because now they have someone they think is going to condemn them for their sin. They feel they now have to watch their language, their actions and so on. They've been exposed for who they are.

But, it's not my job to condemn anyone. I wasn't given life in Christ to condemn people, it's my job to point them to the only one who can save them from condemnation. In fact, all of us in Christ have been given a ministry of reconciliation, so as to point people to the One who reconciles men to God.

2CO 5:18-20 "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

And yet, the very message of reconciliation tells people that they are by nature not reconciled to God because of their sin. It always comes back to the individual to turn away from their darkness which leads to death, and unto the light who is Christ and life.

And that's what this message of hope is all about. It's life and death. This is no joking matter. But the invitation is there.

JOH 3:21 "But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

As verses 18-20 speaks of man's responsibility before a holy God, verse 21 speaks of the sovereignty of God in turning the heart of man to receive this light and life in Christ. Look closely.

"But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light." This phrase does not suggest that living the truth is a prerequisite for coming

into the light, as though one has to clean up their life before they can come to Christ.

This would be contrary to all that the word of God teaches about salvation being a gift of God. Rather, what we see here in John 3:21 is the outworking of Christ in the life of a person whereby they demonstrate they have life by the fact that they live by the truth, or as some of your translations put it, "he who practices the truth."

One who practices the truth comes into the light because the light has already shone in the heart of that person who then is able to practice the truth. The bottom line is that the light of Christ of necessity must shine first in our hearts and then the practice or living by and in the truth, who is Christ.

How do we know this? The end of verse 21 shows us. "... So that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

In other words, what we have done in coming to the light has been accomplished through God. God is the One who opened our eyes so that we could see. God is the one who caused a birth from above, which is the context of this whole chapter, as Nicodemus is the one receiving this discourse from Jesus who is talking about how one is born again.

And so, in the sovereignty of God, this person who is practicing or living by the truth, in verse 21, as he comes to the light, does so only as he has been born from above, born from God Himself so that he is able to no longer love the darkness, but now sees the light and is able to move toward the light as he forsakes the darkness of his sin and embraces the only one who can forgive him of his sin.

This by the way is the reason we as believers can continue to walk in the light. We have the Spirit of God residing in us, empowering and filling us so that we can let this light shine to a sin-filled world. The apostle John points this out in his first epistle.

1JO 1:5-7 "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

What John is saying is that only those who have life can live it. And this is why the fruit of the Spirit is manifest among those who are indwelt with the Spirit. It is God working in and through us as His life pulses through our hearts and is shown by the life we live to His honor and glory in the power of His Spirit.

PHI 2:13 "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

God personally gave you life in Christ. God personally gave you His Spirit and God personally continues to take that life which He gave you and uses it for His good purpose and will. But, because we have the light and the life we must always seek Him who is that light and life. We can't do it without Him.

And part of that work is to bring the life giving message of Jesus Christ to a world which is steeped in darkness. We can't open anyone's eyes and we can't give them life, but God can. Our job is not to condemn the world, but to love the world with the truth, and then to walk in that truth to the honor and glory of God.

HEB 13:20-21 "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."