

John 19 – Not to Condemn the World

07/07/2024

Scripture 1: (Jn. 3:16-18 ESV)

"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. 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.

Scripture 2: (Jon. 2:1-10 ESV)

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying, "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.

Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'

The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"

And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

Sermon:

Because “*God so loved the world...*” is the first of two reasons which Jesus, through John, gave to Nicodemus (and us) to explain “Why” God the Father sent His Son, the “Word made Flesh”, the *logos* who is *theos* and *andros*, into the world.

You would think that love, *agape*, itself should be reason enough. Is love not a good enough reason for us? Do people not try to justify most things, by the reason of “love”? The world teaches that, “Love is love”, right? That “Love is enough”, right?

Together, even John and Paul tell us “All you need is love! Dah Da-Da-da-dah! All you need is love, love, love. Love is all you need.”, but those were the Beatles not the Apostles.

Yet, if one considers the consequences of that philosophy, they quickly see that “Love” is never enough; something more is **always** required. Acceptance, adoption, affirmation, promotion, submission, and obedience becomes required. So it is with all reliance upon “human love”; a love which does not naturally or easily manifest itself as *agape*, since sinful humanity is not naturally self-sacrificing in our depravity; therefore, it is a good thing for us that God is *agape*.

Still, the Apostle Paul proclaims us the good news that, “*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. {that is us} For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Rom. 5:6-8 ESV), that is because “*God so loved the world...*”, but even that is not the whole, or all of the “Why” for which God gave His only Son. God the Father also gave His Son because of “Who He Is”, because God is the Savior. He **is** the “God Who Saves” (1 Sam 10:19; Ps 7:10). John 3:16 is the first “Because” of our salvation, God's great love for the world, and 3:17 is the second “Because”.

Verse 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.*”, {...because, **so that** the world might be saved through him.}. Reading this verse, we tend to be more inclined to focus heavily on the first part rather than the second. We focus on the negative statement, since it becomes such a positive for us, “*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world...*”, because no one wants to be condemned. “*Judge not, lest ye be judged.*” (Matt 7:1; Luke 6:37-38), right? Alone, the first part of this verse would be a very easy Gospel to receive but again, that is not all there is to it. That kind of “good news” {a false gospel}, without the threat and promise of judgment, means that the status quo continues without the fear of consequence. Instead, we must remember that the second part is where the truly “Good News” is, “*...that the world might be saved through him.*”. That is the Gospel of salvation, not freedom from consequence, because by accepting it we must also admit to that most painful fact, “We Need Saving!”.

If the world and all humanity is truly fallen, as Scripture teaches us, and the LORD God simply chose to not punish our sin and wickedness, that would then be an act of gross injustice, not mercy.

- If someone does the crime, then they must do the time. We call that justice.
- If someone does the crime but, then they do “no time”, could any reasonable person call that mercy or grace? No, because that would be unjust. That is an act of injustice, without question or any debate.
- If someone gets off without punishment, does anyone besides the perpetrator call it “good”? No, because it is not just, right, or fair to the victim!

- God is the ultimate victim of our sin, “*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...*” (Ps. 51:4 ESV).

Please understand, the Gospel is not about freedom from our rightful consequences, that would be anti-nomianism {*anti-Law*}, yet that is a charge frequently leveled at the Gospel through misunderstanding and confusion (and because sometimes that confusion is intentionally made).

The Apostle Paul was accused of anti-nomianism by his Judaizing opponents, to which he responded, “*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*” (Rom. 6:12-18 ESV), which means that, even though we shall not be condemned under the Law, we are still obligated to keep it (perhaps **even more** obligated now) because of the grace that we have received through Christ Jesus.

However, the Gospel **is** the Gospel of salvation **and** part of that salvation includes freedom from (most of) our deserved consequences since God “...*gave his only Son...*” so that we “...*should not perish but have eternal life.*”, because “...*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 sent Jesus to take our condemnation upon Himself, so that the world might not be condemned but instead be saved.

Again, considering these verses alone or only in part, is a grave mistake of interpretation because otherwise, you risk believing a Gospel that is patently false, forgetting *part* of Who God Is: the Savior. The God Who Saves.

But salvation is not just something that God does or gives. “To Save” is Who He Is. “Savior” is as much an attribute of God as Him being: Just, Righteous, Holy, Merciful, Gracious, Loving, Wrathful, Jealous, Incomprehensible, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, and Simple {saying that God is “Simple” merely states that God cannot be divided into constituent or component parts; one cannot separate His Love from His Wrath or His Just nature; His 100% is 100% “all of the above”}. It is the LORD's nature to save, but if there was never anyone to save, then we would not know it about Him. We could not know the LORD's saving grace, except for His **temporary** allowance of our sin.

There is a sense which tells us that humanity **needed** to fall into sin, in order for us to be brought to our greatest good in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:28); we needed it, God did not need it. One could almost say that the world needed to need saving because of who God is, otherwise God would not be Who He Is. Regardless, even in this need, we must still believe that God is not the author of sin or evil, even as He permitted it.

Yes, that sounds confusing, I know. I tried to rewrite that sentence several times and it still sounds like a George Michael lyric {“I want you to want me. I need you to need me. I'd love you to love me. I'm begging you to beg me. I want you to want me.”} but I have no better way to say it.

- Think about it, how could the LORD be a Savior, if there was never anyone to save?

This remains good news for us because we do need saving, by our own account, without God having to do anything to cause us to need it.

Consider the case of Jonah and his prayer from within the belly of the fish. *“I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.”* If there was ever a guy who needed saving, then it was Jonah but there are a few details which we tend to gloss over during this part of his story.

1. What did Jonah need saving from?
 1. He needed rescue from the belly of a fish. He was trapped and buried deeper than any man could ordinarily survive.
2. Again, what did Jonah need saving from?
 1. He needed saving from drowning in the sea and so God saved him by sending a fish to swallow him.
3. Why was he at risk of drowning in the sea?
 1. Jonah was in his predicament because God put him there, *“For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.”*
4. Why did God put him there?
 1. As divine discipline.
5. Did God cause Jonah to be tossed from the boat?
 1. No, Jonah volunteered, in order to save the others on the boat.
6. Why did Jonah volunteer?
 1. He volunteered because a storm threatened to destroy their vessel.
 2. He volunteered because he knew that God had sent the storm to punish him.
 3. He volunteered to sacrifice himself, because he was guilty of disobeying God's command and the other people on the vessel were innocent, and undeserving to share in his punishment.

Jonah needed to be rescued from the consequences of God's just wrath: to be rescued from God for his sinful disobedience. Now, in his repentance and contrition, Jonah asked the LORD to save him from God, Himself, and God was pleased to save him. *“And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.”*

But that is not all that we should learn from Jonah's prayer. Jonah also looked to the LORD with hope through faith in God, *“Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’”*. Although he had no bronze serpent to gaze upon, nor any cross to meditate on, Jonah looked up to the LORD from the belly of a fish, in the midst of the deep, with faith and trust because he knew who the LORD God is. God is the Savior!

He continued his prayer with an expectation born from confidence in God. *“The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.*

Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay.”. Hearing that last sentence, one might think that Jonah was trying to offer God a bribe, that he was assuming a transactional posture by offering to give the LORD something he thinks God wants, if God would do what Jonah wants; but he was not. Instead Jonah prayed out of the confident assurance of God's sovereign love and His divine deliverance because he knows that God is the Savior. Jonah trusted that God had already decreed his salvation. Jonah knew that, “*Salvation belongs to the LORD!*”.

Jonah knew a lot about who God is. He knew that God is omnipotent and that God is sovereign over all things. He knew that God is omniscient and that God is gracious and forgiving towards those who repent of their sin in faith. Jonah knew that because that was **why** he tried to flee to Tarshish. Jonah knew that, “*Salvation belongs to the LORD!*” and he did not want to see Ninevah, the capital of Assyria, an enemy of Israel, saved and delivered from God's judgment!

“When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.” (Jon. 3:10-4:2 ESV)

Truly, {Salvation **does** belong to the LORD!}. God saves people, **because** God wants to save people, **because** His nature is to save people.

Yet in order to save us (to save the world) from our deserved condemnation and still also remain perfectly just, our condemnation had to go somewhere else; it had to be suffered by someone else. Someone had to volunteer to sacrifice themselves to save us, as Jonah volunteered to save His shipmates. That someone else was God the Son: Jesus Christ, the Son of Man; because “...*God so loved the world...*” and this time, it was the innocent person volunteering to sacrifice themselves for the guilty.

Thus, the world, **we** are “...*saved through Him.*” as all of our condemnation was imputed to Him, and His righteousness is imputed to us. Thus we receive the benefits of this transaction, eternal life, through “...*[believing] in Him...*”. **That** is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that is the very best of good news for us, if we believe **BUT** that is also the very worst possible news for us, if we do not believe.

Moving on into Verse 18, we encounter another serious touch point between the Reformed and Arminian positions because whichever view a person holds, defines who they consider the ultimate sovereign authority and power over and in creation.

Jesus continues by explaining to Nicodemus, “*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.*”. We have already established that believing in, trusting in, and by our having faith in Jesus Christ is the only operative means through which any person is saved, period. This verse adds a new understanding to the necessity of faith for salvation and that is the opposing consequences of “faith” or “no faith”.

- “*Whoever believes in him is not condemned...*”, and
- “*...whoever does not believe is condemned already...*”

Once again, we find ourselves in an “Either/Or” circumstance. It is one or the other. There is no other option possible. There is no “middle ground” or “3rd way” compromise. It is only: “not condemned” or “condemned”. This forces us to ponder certain questions:

- Which do you want to be: not condemned or condemned?
- Do you even have a choice?
- Is your will “free to choose” or is it “bound” in some way or another?

If you honestly believe that it is your choice to believe in and trust Jesus Christ, then might you also be able to choose to not believe, if you wanted? Could you choose to want to not trust Him?

This is where the Arminian separates from the Reformed believer.

- The Arminian will say that it is their choice. The Arminian will say that Jesus' death upon the cross made salvation **possible** for the whole world that “*God so loved...*”, provided only for if they decide to take advantage of the opportunity to receive this effect. Really, when a person is presented with the choice of either being condemned or not, **nobody** will choose condemnation.
 - This perspective makes Man sovereign over their own salvation because through their need to choose, God's saving grace becomes contingent upon their decision; taking the power of salvation away from the LORD and placing it within the hands of man. Yet if this were the case and everyone chose according to what they considered as their own best interest, then everyone would choose to be saved; except the evidence shows that they do not. There are plenty of people who have most assuredly chosen to follow “*the way of the wicked*” (Psalm 1:1) and revel in their sinfulness and reprobation.
- Whereas the Reformed Christian will say that it is God's sovereign choice. The Reformed Christian will say that Jesus' death upon the cross made salvation **effective** for all of God's Elect, chosen people; a people called out of the world which “*God so loved...*”.
 - This perspective preserves God's sovereignty over salvation. The Elect receive it, they do not choose it because God first chose them. It is given to them and then they decide to respond to it with obedience and love because they no longer want or desire to do otherwise. Their desires are transformed through regeneration. Those who are “born again” want God instead of all the false promises of sin and Satan in the world. Now they cannot choose to not want God because we know that this is our best interest. The Elect respond to God's work of salvation with love, faithfulness, and obedience and therefore choose to live in the “*way of the righteous*” (Psalm 1:6).

God chose the Elect back “*before the foundation of the world*” (Eph 1:4) and He decided who He would save, way back then. God decided “*whoever*” would believe in Jesus, His Son, and He decreed that they would believe. He decreed when and where the Holy Spirit would give them a new heart, full of faith and love. The LORD knows who shall believe because He foreordained it; He knows it because He said that it would happen, in just such a way. His foreknowledge of this matter is perfect because as the sovereign, He is in control and He decided everything that shall ever be. He is the first cause while our responsiveness in faith is a secondary cause because He decided that we shall not be condemned.

God only deals in certainties, He does not deal with probabilities or potentialities. God does not play dice with the universe. God plays with a stacked deck; a deck stacked by Him for our good and for His glory alone! Every card that God holds and plays is an Ace.

Unfortunately, we are still left with trying to understand the unfortunate “other side of the coin”: those who are condemned already. This is why, whenever we talk about this doctrine of predestination, we should always remind ourselves of the negative side along with the positive.

There is a term which few of us enjoy employing, because it is an ugly term and it does not feel gracious or loving. Unfortunately it is a necessary term: “double” predestination; but it is not meant the way its detractors explain it. It is a needfully complex term because it is an expression of biblical theology {whole Bible theology}. So, please allow me to try and explain it simply:

- God created. God created everything, including mankind (as male and female).
- God created man and woman with a free moral will, able to choose either good or evil.
- God permitted Adam and Eve the capacity to sin. He allowed our forebears to choose evil and thus fall into sin and wickedness and to require saving.
- However, before creating, God had already decreed that Man should be allowed to Fall {we know this because it happened and nothing happens against God's permissive will} **and** that the LORD would save some of fallen humanity, the Elect (His children of adoption John 1:12), from out of the world {the *kosmos*}.
- {We interpret this as, “*before the foundation of the world*” (Eph 1:4) God the Father entered into a covenant with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (a covenant of redemption), whereby: the Father would give the Elect to the Son (predestination; John 6:39), who would Himself deliver them from their bondage to Satan by satisfying their moral debt of sin upon the cross (earning our salvation; John 15:13), and the Son would then send the Holy Spirit to them (John 14:16-17) for the Spirit to apply this earned salvation to them via regeneration, sanctification, and glorification (Romans 8:28-30).}
- Yet, despite Adam and Eve damning all mankind to the fires of hell through the secondary cause of their freely exercised choice, the LORD, by His eternal decree predestined some {the Elect} unto salvation (by His sovereign choice) while {logically} others were predestined unto reprobation and damnation (by Him sovereignly choosing to **not** save them).
- {How does He choose which to save and which to condemn? We cannot say, except that we know it is not according to our works. We can only acknowledge that is according to His sole sovereign and ineffable will.}
- {Jeremiah and the Apostle Paul both try to explain this difficult doctrine through the example of a potter who makes some objects for “honorable use” and some for “dishonorable” (2 Tim 20-21). The clay cannot command the potter regarding what he should make of it; the potter holds all the right and power for deciding (Romans 9:21-24). The LORD may choose, at any time and according to His will, to build up or to tear down according to His eternal decree and plan saying “*Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated.*” (Mal. 1:2-3 ESV).}

That is double predestination. The doctrine does not teach us that God unfairly sends some people to hell and others to heaven. What it teaches is that God very **fairly** sends some people to their chosen hell, while **unfairly**

sending other people to heaven by rescuing them through the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, His Son. (Please also see the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 3.) No one ever said that God is or must be fair; however, He is just.

The good news is that, the LORD God is not a bully. He does not amuse Himself through torture or the application of His wrath, like a young child attacking an ant hill with a magnifying glass, burning the ants as they try to flee. If someone must suffer His wrath, it is either because they deserve it or chose it, as in the case of Jesus Christ. The LORD God is the Savior: He saves some, when He is obligated to save none. **That** is what makes our salvation a gift of God's free grace and mercy and not our just reward. He gives us mercy, not justice. That is **why** "Jesus Saves" and that is **what** He saves us from.

- Because "...God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."
- Because "...God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..." not "...to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Jesus loves us so much that He gave us Himself, to save us from the just condemnation we each deserve. This is why, when we pray, we ought to ask God for His mercy to be given us and never ask that we receive justice.

We may trust and be confident that the LORD will enact justice, in His time and in His way, just as we are confident that He has, He is, and He will save us (He will save His people) because that is just **Who** God is.

Our God is "The God who Saves". "*Salvation belongs to the LORD!*"

Hallelujah!

AMEN