



Welcome to Grace Communion International

March 14 , 2021

FOURTH WEEK OF EASTER PREPARATION

SERMON

GRACE FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY

John 3:13-21



SCRIPTURE READING

John 3:13-21 (ESV)





“13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

John 3:13-21 (ESV)





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.

John 3:14-21 (ESV)



19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.”

“20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.””

John 3:14-21 (ESV)

THESE ARE THE AMAZING TRUE WORDS OF JESUS

THAT YOU JESUS, THAT IN LOVE, YOU HAVE COME TO OUR
HOSTILE WORLD TO GIVE LIFE

AMEN



In the context of this scripture reading, Nicodemus came to see Jesus by night. He felt social pressure. He did not want to be seen by his peers to be conversing with Jesus.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. He knew there was something incredibly special about Jesus. He knew he was from God because no one would have been able to do the signs that he did without being enabled by God himself.

Jesus told him some amazing things about being born again. He began to teach him about the manner of entering the kingdom of God. The only way was by being born of water and the Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus there was a difference between being born in the flesh and being born of the Spirit. Being born of the Spirit is spirit, Jesus told him.

Jesus also told Nicodemus that one born of the spirit was like the wind. **“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.”**

Nicodemus simply could not understand what Jesus was saying. He heard the words but the meaning escaped him.

Example: Most of us have heard of nuclear physics. **This branch of physics deals with**

the structure of the atomic nucleus and the radiation from unstable nuclei. We hear the words but understanding what the words mean is another matter. After hearing a brief definition of nuclear physics, we may say “What?”

That is how Nicodemus felt hearing Jesus talk about being born again. He was left in wonderment and bewilderment! He heard the words but he did not understand.

Jesus told Nicodemus that if he did not believe when he told him about earthly things, how in the world would he believe Jesus told him about heavenly things.

Then he began to describe who he is. We either believe what he says or we don't. There is no middle ground.

The following is what C.S. Lewis said in his book Mere Christianity.

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [that is, Christ]: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg

—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.... You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” (From Mere Christianity C.S. Lewis)



During today's sermon, we are going to consider what Jesus said about himself and about God. We need to keep in mind that Jesus is both God and man in his being.

What he said has a huge impact on each of us individually, on the church and on the world.

“No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.” (Joh 3:13 ESV)



This sets the context for who Jesus is.

This is not the heaven we see with our own eyes.

This verse is certain proof that Jesus is God.

The epistle to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the Creator of the heavens. **“And, ‘You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands;’** (Heb 1:10 ESV)

When he ascended he went back to where he came from. **‘Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.’** (Heb 4:14 ESV)

Heaven is a created place. This may be a difficult truth to capture. The truth is God existed before anything was created. He is the originator of all things. In other words, heaven is not eternal only God is.

The first chapter of John is also very clear about who God is. The biblical account is

consistent. (Next slide).

“1 ¶ 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 were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

5 ¶ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

John 1:1-5 (ESV)



Jesus did not do anything apart from God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The life he lives, he lives for God (Romans 6:10.)

Consequently, being dead to sin, we are “alive to God in Jesus” (Romans 6:11).

These verses are consistent with the fact that God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit indwell one another but are distinct from one another being one God.

What we read here is very encouraging. Jesus came to a hostile world. He has life within himself. His life was the light of men.

He came into darkness. Darkness was not able to extinguish and snuff out the light because he is the light.

Darkness, the rule of evil, cannot overcome the life and the light of Jesus. (next slide – God’s eternal grace)

GOD'S ETERNAL GRACE



God did not have to create the world. He was completely sufficient within himself. He did not and does not need the world. The world was created aeons ago because God wanted to share the love he had within himself with others.

He created all that exists. He created the firmament and all its stars, a creation that is ever-changing and which he sustains. He created angels. From before the foundation of the world, he also decided to create man (man and woman) in his image. Because God's love, he created us with the freedom to make choices. Because he knows the end from the beginning, he knew that man would choose to live independently from him. He knew man would prefer darkness over light.

He created man with the purpose that we would share in his eternal relationship of love, not as God what is God but as human beings. In keeping with the fact that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have distinct identities, so human beings would also keep their individual identity.

There would be a huge problem with God before time decided how this problem would be handled and dealt with.

The problem would be dealt with consistent with God's character. God's grace is very much eternal! (next slide)

- “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, *“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,”* (Ex 34:6 ESV)
- “but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”” (Jer 9:24 ESV)
- “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.” (Joh 3:16-17 ESV)



As we consider the Lord’s character as we read about it, we can ask how can the qualities of “being merciful, gracious, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness go together?

(See Jeremiah 9.) We can ask the same question from Jeremiah as we read **Jeremiah 9:24**, how can God practice steadfast love, justice and righteousness at the same time?

Yet God is all these things. He delights when we know him in his very character.

Let us imagine a human judge.

Suppose a judge had before him a thief who had stolen from a bank to feed his family. Suppose that the judge tells him you can go home, he would be merciful but would he exercised justice? The man has broken the law and by being merciful, the judge would send the message that breaking the law has no consequence.

Or suppose, on the other hand, this judge would apply the law and send the man to jail as the law requires.

Would the judge be just? Yes

Would the judge be merciful? No

Would the judge show steadfast love towards this man? Not necessarily.

Evidently, human judges cannot possibly live all these godly characteristics.

But can God?

Now let us ask the same questions about God. (See John 3:16,17).

Let us look at the facts of the case against human beings. God said from the beginning that choosing from the tree of good and evil would bring death. That was the law declared in Genesis to our first parents, Adam and Eve.

How is God merciful and showing steadfast love?

He tells us very clearly that God the Father doesn't count our sins against us anymore (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). He tells us that we are completely forgiven of our sins. We are reconciled to him.

If the story ended there, would God be just? Would he be just and faithful if he had said, 'Sin is not that important, it does not really matter, so I will just let it go'.

The obvious answer is that God would not be just. He would not be faithful. But he is faithful and just.

Let's say, to bring into a personal level, that a criminal would harm and injure one of your children. If a human judge would not apply the law, we would then feel betrayed and not treated with justice.

What did God do? In love, he gave us his beloved Son because he loves the world. Jesus having become human and having lived a perfect life, being sinless, accepted from before the foundation of the world that he would become sin for us. He had no sin.

Being both God and perfect man, he confronted darkness. He accepted to be shamed and humiliated in our place. He accepted to be crowned with a thorny crown. He accepted to do this while we were still his enemies, as we read in Romans 5.

He accepted to lay down his life. After being severely beaten and mocked, he accepted to be laid on the ground on a Roman cross and to be nailed to it. He was then lifted up. When he was lifted up, people jeered at him. They taunted him. They gambled his clothing. Becoming sin for us, he took on himself the worse we can be. He took on the consequence of sin which is death.

Jesus on the cross fulfilled the law and the prophets. He took upon himself the

consequences of sin and death for all of us.

On the cross, in Jesus, because Jesus is also God while being human, he demonstrated the quality of God's character.

On the cross, Jesus, the God man, was merciful and gracious. We were forgiven of all of our sins because we died with him when he died ('For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died'; [2 Co 5:14 ESV]).

He was merciful as he always has been because our sinfulness, our sinful nature died with him on the cross because he represented all of us.

He was loving because we did not deserve what God did for us in Jesus Christ. In fact, we did not want to have anything to do with him before our eyes were open to this truth.

He was also just and faithful. He kept true to his word. Sin was not just discounted as anything. Sin is serious. It causes death, not just physical death but eternal death. Jesus paid the price.

Because of what Jesus did, his one acts of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men [Romans 5:18].

Because of what Jesus did, because of his awesome gift of love and grace, we now live to serve him. We have been made new creations [**'and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised'**. (2 Co 5:15 ESV)]

Who God is in his character no man can be.

This is why this season, preparing for the celebration of the resurrection reminding ourself of the death and resurrection of Jesus is such good news.

- “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.” (Joh 3:18 ESV)

“28 ¶ Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” 29 Jesus answered them, “**This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.**”” (Joh 6:28-29 ESV)

Response-ability

What is our work?



We have been given the freedom to believe or not believe this supreme act of love expressed in Jesus Christ on the cross.

For us to believe, God has to reveal himself to us through the Holy Spirit in his time. Not everybody has eyes to see this now. When God opens our eyes to this wonderful truth, our responsibility is to believe and trust. Our responsibility is to trust in what Jesus has done on the cross for us.

Through his death and resurrection, we have been given a completely new life. We cannot create this new life ourselves. It is a gift of grace.

We have been given the gift of response-ability, as James Fowler says in his book, CHRIST AT WORK IN YOU, The Continuing Function of the Risen Lord Jesus, page 112 PDF. (show on slide).

It is God who produces in us “both to will and to work for his good pleasure”, as the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians.

As a result of God giving us “both to will and to work for his good pleasure”, “a work” is expected of us (See John 6:28 -29). This work does not save us. Jesus saves us. This

work responsive work is a means to grow in our relationship with Jesus. As we grow in our relationship with Jesus, we also grow in our relationship with God the Father through his Spirit indwelling or living in us.

Our work is to continuously believe in what Jesus has done and to respond in the obedience of faith.

As we saw in last week's sermon, we become the temple of God. God lives in us and transforms us. Consequently, the Christian life will not be a passive life. It will be a continually active life because Jesus in us, through the Holy Spirit, is active. As we response to him, in the good work he has prepared for us, we will not be unresponsive. Being a disciple of Jesus is a lifelong journey.

- “19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.
- 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.
- 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.” (Joh 3:19-21 ESV)



John is describing how people reacted to Jesus when he came to the earth.

People today have the same reaction to Jesus as the Jews and the Romans had over 2000 years ago.

“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.” (Ro 8:7 ESV)

When God opens our minds and gives us the gift of repentance, we are to participate in his work in our lives by letting go of the wicked things we carry and do. In other words, we need a willingness to accept Jesus cleaning up his house which is, as we saw in last week’s sermon, both our individual body and the church.

As verse 21 says, in repentance, we respond to Jesus by keeping his word and by letting him lead his life in us. In this way, it becomes clear that our deeds are carried out in God. Once God opens our minds, we become attracted to Him. As we grow in our relationship with Jesus, sin and wickedness become less and less attractive.

As we can see, God’s grace is eternal and will last forever. Grace is from eternity to

eternity. It never stops because it flows out of God's very character and being.

When he returns to this earth in his grace, he will give all people who trust in him this full gift of eternal life. We will see God's completed work of ridding us and the world of all traces of rebellion, evil, sin and death.

Let us thank him for this eternal unmerited gift of grace for which he paid so higher-priced so that we could have a relationship with him from now on to the fullness of eternity!