

Main Idea: According to John 3:16-21, the new birth that Jesus called for is literally a *worldwide* reality. It's for the world., and that's true in two ways.

I. The new birth is connected with a worldwide offer (16-18).

- A. God gave His Son to the world (16).
 - 1. If you believe in Him, you won't perish (no matter who you are).
 - 2. If you believe in Him, you have the life of the age to come.
- B. God sent His Son so that the world might be saved (17-18).
 - 1. If you believe in Him, there is no condemnation.
 - 2. If you don't believe, you're already condemned.

II. The new birth is connected with a worldwide response (19-21).

- A. Some reject the light (19-20).
 - 1. They love something else (19a).
 - 2. They don't want to stop living the way they do (19b).
 - 3. They fear exposure (20).
- B. Some come into the light (21).
 - 1. They live by the truth.
 - 2. They value a clear testimony.
 - 3. They want it to be known that God has done a work in their lives.

Response: Let's take to heart what we've just learned about the world.

- 1. We need to see the world as God sees it.
- 2. We must remember that we belong to a kingdom that is not of this world.
- 3. We must be willing to sacrifice so the world will know what God did for it.
- 4. We must keep in mind that reaching the world happens one person at a time.

For many of us, our view of the world is too small, or to put it more bluntly, too *us*-focused. We tend to live with tunnel vision and are concerned mostly about the things that happen that affect *us*.

For instance, think about this for a moment, the number 24,000. Do you know what that number is? It's the number of children that die somewhere in the world of starvation and preventable diseases every day. Hear it again: 24,000. That is equivalent to:

- 1 child dying every 3.6 seconds
- 16-17 children dying every minute
- A 2010 Haiti earthquake occurring almost every 9-10 days
- A 2004 Asian Tsunami occurring almost every 10 days
- Just under 9 million children dying every year¹

The kids are dying of poverty, hunger, and other preventable diseases and illnesses. And yet the deaths continue day after day after day.

How is it that we can sleep at night? When just one child dies in our community of a preventable cause (like abuse or neglect), there's public outrage and action taken to make sure it doesn't happen again. And so should there be. Yet how can it be that Jose and Helena and Malik and millions of other children are dying, and it doesn't produce the same outrage?

You say, "Well, if we just had the resources, we could fix the problem."

Okay, consider this. There are 6.7 billion people on earth (in a 2007 study). What is the worldwide average income per person? The answer is \$7,000. The world's average income - total world income divided by total number of people - is about \$7,000. And yet only about 19 percent of the world's population lives in countries with per capita incomes

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ <http://www.globalissues.org/article/715/today-over-24000-children-died-around-the-world>

at least this high.² I read that if a person makes more than \$10,000 per year, that puts them in the top 16 percent. If they make more than \$50,000, they're in the top *one* percent.³

And as alarming as it is that thousands are dying physically every day, there's something that should grip us even more. There are more than 5,000 people groups in the world classified as "unreached" and "unengaged." "Unreached" means there's not an indigenous community of evangelical Christians with adequate numbers and resources to spread the gospel within that people group. And "unengaged" means that at present there is no church or organization actively working with that people group to introduce them to Jesus Christ who said He is the *only way to heaven*. 5,000 people groups. That's 1.5 billion people living in regions where nearly every person is born, lives and dies without ever hearing the precious news that God forgives sinners if they believe in His Son.⁴

Again I ask, how can we sleep at night? I realize we're talking about realities that have many contributing factors, but at least one of them, it seems to me, is that *the world isn't on our heart* like it ought to be. And to the degree that's true, we're a lot like a man named Nicodemus, and *not* like our God.

Which is why we're going to do two things. One, next month we're going to start reading a book together as a church for growth groups, a book that will push us to face the wonderful worldwide implications of our calling as disciples of Jesus. It's entitled *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*, by Pastor David Platt.

And secondly, we're going to do something about it right now. We're going to place ourselves under a text that makes it shockingly and absolutely clear that *the world is on the heart of God*. And that means, if our heart is in tune with His heart, the world will be on our hearts.

So what happens when the world is on your heart? Look at John 3 and you'll find out. Verse 16—"For God so loved the *world*." Who does God love? Americans? It's broader than that, isn't it? It's comprehensive. It's the *world*.

In fact, lest we miss the point you'll see the word "world" four times in verses 16-21 (twice in verse 17 and in verse 19). And as you scan John's gospel, you'll see it 56 times.⁵ The world...the world...the world.

You might be thinking, "Okay, so it says God loves the world. What's so earth-shaking about that?" The fact is, we'll never appreciate John 3:16 as we ought if we don't see the flow of the whole passage. To understand this text, we need a context.

The context, as we've seen in recent weeks, is a conversation that happened one night two thousand years ago between a religious Jew named Nicodemus and Jesus. In that conversation Jesus told Nicodemus that if he wanted to enjoy the eternal blessings of God's kingdom, something had to happen to him that he could not accomplish. He had to be *born again*.

So the subject that sets the stage for John 3:16 is Jesus' teaching about the new birth. Three weeks ago, we considered the necessity of the new birth in verses 1-3, two weeks ago the nature of the new birth in verses 4-8, and last week the evidence of the new birth in verses 9-15.

And what is the evidence of the new birth?⁶ Based on what Jesus told Nicodemus in verses 13-15, the evidence is *faith*, and specifically faith that works top-down, inside-out,

² http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2007/10/07/average_earnings_worldwide/

³ Observation by David Platt, in the book *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*.

⁴ David Platt, p. 158.

⁵ John emphasizes "the world" more than any other gospel writer (56 out of 78 times in the gospels).

and even more specifically faith in the person of Christ and in the work He accomplished on the cross. Which means, when a person is born again, they demonstrate genuine faith in Christ.

Which raises the question, where? Where did Jesus say God intends for the evidence of the new birth to be seen? You guessed it. According to John 3:16-21, God intends for the evidence to be seen *worldwide*, and He makes that clear with two points.⁷ One, there's a worldwide offer in verses 16-18, and two, there's a worldwide response in verses 19-21.

I. The new birth is connected with a worldwide offer (16-18).

What's the offer? Jesus presents it in two ways. First, He says that...

A. God gave His Son to the world (16). I know that for many of us, these words are familiar, but hear again the greatest announcement ever made.

“*For God.*” “For” is what scholars call “an explanatory conjunction.” That means we’re about to hear an explanation of what Jesus just declared in the previous verses. Why did Jesus say in verse 15 that *everyone* who believes in Him has eternal life?

“*For God so loved.*” We’re talking about an offer that has to do with God initiating the demonstration of His love. God by nature is love, and God determined to put His love on display. For whose benefit? An exclusive few? No...

“*For God so loved the world.*” What does He mean by the “world” here? The word “whoever” that follows indicates He’s not talking about the world system, nor creatures in the world like dogs and horses. He’s talking about *people*, the people of the world, men, women, boys and girls. And of course, these people are sinners, rebels going their own way in His world.

If that’s the case, why are they on His heart? I don’t know. They shouldn’t be, not after what they did to Him. In part, it’s because He created them alone in His image with the capacity to reflect something about Himself.

William Hendriksen explains, “Mankind is like a mirror. Originally this mirror was very beautiful, a work of art. But, through no fault of the Maker, it has become horribly blurred. Its creator, however, still recognizes his own work.”⁸

Quite frankly, He could have thrown His broken mirror into the trash pile. It is His work and He has the right to do with it as He pleases. And that’s what His image-bearers deserved. But He chose another course.

For God so loved the world. What happens when you love the world? “*That He gave.*” So if you love the world, and there’s a need in the world (like children starving to death and unreached people groups perishing without a gospel witness), then you give. That’s what love does. Love takes action. It gives what it has. For God so loved the world *that He gave*. And what did God give to a needy world?

“*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.*” The Greek is *monogenes*, “only begotten.” In Hebrews 11:17 the same word speaks of Isaac, referred to as Abraham’s “one and only son.”⁹ God gave nothing short of His most prized

⁶ As far as the evidence goes, Nicodemus didn’t have it (10-12). He didn’t understand (10), didn’t accept (11), and didn’t believe (12).

⁷ Some Bibles cut off Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus after verse 15, but I see no reason to end it before verse 21.

⁸ William Hendriksen, p. 140.

⁹ See also Luke 7:12 (“the only son of his mother”) and Luke 8:42 (“his only daughter”).

possession (I use the term carefully), His unique, one of a kind, in a class all by Himself *Son*.

But why? Why such a costly gift? Here's why. God had an outcome in mind. Notice the purpose clause, "...that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." There's the appropriate response to this gift, "that everyone who *believes*." Literally, "that everyone who *is believing* (it's a present tense participle which indicates that the appropriate response to this gift isn't to take it, unwrap it, and throw in the closet)." It's to believe with the kind of belief that keeps believing.

By the way, that's why we must see this verse in its context. Where do you get that capacity to believe with a belief that keeps believing? You can't manufacture it. It's the result of the new birth that God's Spirit produces.

And when the Spirit produces that new life in a person, what specifically does that spiritual baby believe? "That whoever believes *in Him*," in God's one and only Son.

Parents love to hear a baby speak his or her first word. What's the first word that comes from the mouth of a child of God? Does he or she call out to a generic God? No. He cries, "Jesus!" That's the evidence of new birth.

And what is it that God gives to such a person who believes in His Son? First...

1. *If you believe in Him, you won't perish (no matter who you are).* Perish. "I give them eternal life and they will never perish," says Jesus in John 10:28. That's the plight of every person who's been born only once. He's going to perish. But not the person who believes in God's Son. What's more...

2. *If you believe in Him, you have the life of the age to come.* Eternal life. Unending life. Everlasting life.

There's so much more we could say about this verse (if you are interested in more, check out our website for an entire sermon on it¹⁰). But what I want you to see now is the worldwide scope of this offer. And lest we miss it, Jesus hits it again in the next two verses.

Verses 17-18—"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the *world*, but to save the *world* through him. 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." Ponder that...

B. God sent His Son so that the world might be saved (17-18). Again, the words are staggering when you consider them in their context. Jesus is talking to a Jewish man. In the first-century Jewish mind, when Messiah came He was going to save the Jews and condemn the pagan nations. But Jesus says that God didn't send His Son to fulfill that narrow agenda. Jesus says that...

1. *If you believe in Him, there is no condemnation.* And it doesn't matter who you are. Notice the words...*world...world...whoever...whoever*. The whole planet is on God's heart. That's why He sent His Son. And if you believe in Him you will never experience His condemnation, no matter what color your skin is, no matter what pagan deity you once worshipped, no matter how vile your lifestyle once was. He won't it against you if you believe in His Son. And if you don't?

2. *If you don't believe, you're already condemned.* That's what Jesus said. Your sentence has already been declared. All that awaits is the final execution. Or as the final verse of the chapter puts it, "Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." For the person outside of Christ, God's wrath isn't just coming, but it's already here and will remain forever.

¹⁰ It was a Thanksgiving message a year ago entitled, "Giving Thanks for the Greatest Gift Ever Given."

The question we're asking is, *where?* *Where does God intend for the evidence of the new birth to be seen?* The answer is *the world*. He extends a worldwide offer, and brothers and sisters, if we have benefitted from that offer we now have a responsibility. More about that in a moment, but for now, a second point.

II. The new birth is connected with a worldwide response (19-21).

How does the world respond to God's amazing offer? By using the metaphor of light, Jesus says the world responds in two ways.

A. Some reject the light (19-20). Verse 19 begins, "This is the verdict." The word translated "verdict" comes from the same root translated "condemned" in verse 18. This is the verdict. This is the condemnation. What is? It's this. Verse 19 says, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

Please realize, my friend, that the condemnation for those who refuse to believe isn't just that they will one day perish. It's the fact that they right now refuse to believe and are choosing to love the darkness.

We do not enter this world morally neutral. We enter this world ignorant of God and gladly so. It's not just that we can't see. It's that we love the darkness in which we live.

How extensive is this problem? Verse 20 begins, "Everyone who does evil." Who does that include? Who does evil? Who violates God's commandments? We all do, right? And what's true of everyone who does evil? According to verse 20, their behavior problem is rooted to a heart problem. Notice verse 20 again, "Everyone who does evil *hates the light*, and will not come into the light *for fear* that his deeds will be exposed."

Some of you are very burdened for family members and friends who don't know Christ. You've talked with them about Christ, or tried to anyone, but they don't want to hear it. Why is that? Why is it that some people reject the light? Jesus tells us why right here. He says they have three problems.

1. *They love something else (19a).* "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light." Why doesn't your friend want to come to the Jesus you love? Don't miss this. It's because he's already in love. With what? He loves *darkness*. In other words, he loves living his life his own way rather than God's ways. That's darkness.

God says to get rid of lustful thoughts, but he wants to feed them. God says to seek first His kingdom, but he'd rather build his own. That's why he rejects the light, not simply because it doesn't make sense to him, but because his heart is already consumed by another rival love.

But why? Why do people love cheap substitutes rather than loving the most beautiful person in the universe? There's a reason, and Jesus identified it at the end of verse 19, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light *because their deeds were evil*." Look at the word *because*. There's why people love darkness. It's because their deeds are evil.

That seems backwards, doesn't it? It seems like the verse should read, "Their deeds are evil *because they love the darkness*." And that's true, of course, as Jesus taught elsewhere (Matt. 15:19 "For *out of the heart* come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."). But here He makes it clear that the reason people love other things is because...

2. *They don't want to stop living the way they do (19b).* "Because their deeds were evil."

The fact is, we're born with a double problem. We do wicked things because we have wicked hearts, but we have wicked hearts because we refuse to let go of our wicked actions.

Your unsaved friend has a track record, just like you once did, that makes it impossible for him to change and live a God-pleasing life. His past sins are like ruts, and he can't get out, and to make it worse, he doesn't want to get out. Which is why no matter how many new year's resolutions he makes, he keeps getting sucked back into his old life.

I find Barclay's illustration helpful. He talks about a person who loves the symphony and wants to introduce his friend to the bliss of high class classical music. But his friend has never even heard of classical music (he's a bluegrass man—that's my thought, not Barclay's). So the man takes his friend to the symphony concert. What happens? In but a short time, the friend starts fidgeting and looking around the hall, bored out of his mind. As Barclay puts it, "The experience designed to bring him new happiness has become only a judgment."¹¹

So it is with the natural man and the message of God's Word. Unless the Spirit of God does something to that person's heart, he or she will listen to the glorious sound of God's offer of salvation, music that is sweet to your ears as a believer, and that person will be bored out of his mind, or worse.

Why don't some people come into the light? They already love something else. They don't want to stop living the way they do. And thirdly...

3. *They fear exposure* (20). Notice the end of verse 20, "...and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." Why doesn't your unsaved friend want to come to church? Why does he look for ways to stay away from God's Word? The answer is *fear*. He doesn't like the feeling of being exposed, and that's what happens when God's Word is proclaimed.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

That's what God's Word does, it shines the light on the heart, and that's what the sinner doesn't want to happen. He's afraid that his deeds will be exposed.

By the way, it's not just the unsaved person who does this. The unrepentant Christian does the same. Do you want to hear a sermon from God's Word when you have known sin in your life? Hardly. So what do you do? You look for ways to get away from God's Word, don't you? You take the overtime. You go to the reunion. You fix that broken drain at the house. You do anything to stay away from church.

And even when you do come to church, you look for ways to avoid having your sin exposed by the Word. And so you take extra duty in the nursery, or look for other ways to stay busy. You might even come into the worship service, but rather than listening, you read your Bible. Why? So you can control the content you'll hear. And most people won't even detect it. You'll appear to them as a normal, hard-working, devoted follower of Christ. But you'll know the truth. You'll know that there's something very specific that God wants to change, yet you refuse. Why? Why do you reject the light you know you need? It's because you love something else, and you don't want to deal with that something else, and you fear having that something else exposed.

Beloved, I've seen this so many times in my 23 years of pastoring, and I've seen it in my own heart too. Let's not play games with God. We're not fooling Him. Why would

¹¹ William Barclay, p.139.

we want to stay away from hearing a message from the One who gave His precious Son for us? That's the way the lost world treats Him. They reject the light.

Thankfully, by the grace of God and because of the new birth He produces...

B. Some come into the light (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.”

There's a stark contrast here. Do you see it? What's true of those who reject the light? Three things. They love something else. They don't want to stop living the way they do. And they fear being exposed to God's Word. And what's true of those who come into the light? Just the opposite, also three things...

1. *They live by the truth.* “Whoever *lives by the truth* comes into the light.”

Sometimes people say to me on the way out, “Pastor, God's Word really stepped on my toes this morning!” Now who in their right mind would subject themselves to something that they know is going to cause them pain? Here's who. People who have resolved to *live by the truth*. Not by their feelings. Not by the latest fad. By the truth of God's Word. And why would motivate them to do that? This would...

2. *They value a clear testimony.* “But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, *so that it may be seen plainly.*” That's interesting. They don't fear exposure. They welcome it. They don't hide from the truth. They embrace it. But why? Notice that purpose clause. They want it to be *seen plainly*. In other words, they want a good and clear testimony. They don't want *anything* tarnishing their reputation because they know their reputation is reflecting on the One who gave them a new life.

My friend, the question isn't whether I can point to a lot of good things in my life. A good testimony goes further. The question is whether there are any sins in my life that are marring my Savior's honor. The fact is, I am a sinner. Every day I have sinful attitudes and thoughts and desires, and sometimes these unseen sins erupt into visible sinful words and actions.

It's true. Unlike my Savior, I'm judgmental and critical and fearful, and sometimes I'm unkind and selfish and slow to reach out to hurting people. Since that's a given, so must this be a given. I need to be coming into the light on a regular basis. Every week I need to be putting myself under the teaching of His Word. Every day I need to place myself in and under His Word. Why? So the Lord can expose my sinful attitudes, thoughts, desires and actions. And once He exposes them, then I can confess them and receive His forgiveness for them and get to work on replacing them.

That's what people who come into the light do. They do it because they value a clear testimony. And why is that important to them?

3. *They want it to be known that God has done a work in their lives.* Notice the end of verse 21. “...so that it may be seen plainly *that what he has done has been done through God.*” If you're a child of God, it's because God did something for you, right? He's done a work in your life, specifically, He gave you new birth so that you believed in His Son and received the gift of eternal life.

Here's the mark of a true Christian, my friend. A true Christian wants it to be known that God has done, and continues to do for that matter, a good work in his life. The spotlight is on God. When people look at his life, he wants them to think well of God.

There's a worldwide offer and a worldwide response. So let's respond.

Response: Let's take to heart what we've just learned about the world.

We need to do four things.

1. *We need to see the world as God sees it.* From God's perspective, what's true of the world? It needs a Savior. Sinners need a Savior, right? Indeed, that's why God sent

His Son. But that's also why the Son sent someone. Who? His disciples. Jesus said to His Father in His high priestly prayer, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world (John 17:18)." That means if we are looking at the world the way God does, we'll see ourselves as His instruments to reach the world.

Like Robert Thomas did. I read his fascinating story last week on *Christian History Timeline*:

In 1865 Robert Thomas arrived in Korea and became, in essence, the first Protestant missionary to the ancient land whose name means "chosen." The following year Robert learned that an American boat, the *General Sherman*, was going to try to establish trade relations between Korea and the United States. He offered to accompany the boat as an interpreter in exchange for a chance to spread the gospel. As the *General Sherman* sailed up the Taedong River toward Pyongyang. Robert tossed gospel tracts onto the river bank as the ship proceeded.

In response, angered Korean officials ordered the American boat to leave at once. Eventually the Governor of the province, Pak Kyu Su, attacked the ship and eventually set fire to it.

As the sailors fled from the boat, the Koreans killed them. Robert had to flee with the rest. He leaped from the boat carrying a Bible, crying out to his attackers, "Jesus, Jesus!" in Korean, offering them the Bible. His head was whacked off with a stroke of a machete according to one account.

But God worked in the heart of the man who killed Robert. Convinced by Robert's beaming face that he had killed a good man, he kept one of the Bibles, wallpapering his house with it. People came from far and near to read its words. A church grew. A nephew of Robert's killer became a pastor.

Today 40% of South Koreans are Christians and the nation has some of the largest congregations in the world.¹²

Do we see the world as God sees it? Robert Thomas did. The world is full of people who are perishing, and we need to see them.

2. *We must remember that we belong to a kingdom that is not of this world.* That's what Jesus said in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." Don't get too attached. In the world, but not *of* the world, that's our assignment. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15)."

3. *We must be willing to sacrifice so the world will know what God did for it.* How are 1.5 billion people in 5,000 unreached people groups ever going to hear about Jesus? Remember, the offer is worldwide. So how will they hear? I don't know the complete answer, but I know it involves *sacrifice*. The sacrifice of time, of money, of sleep, of health, of life. Like Robert Thomas gave.

Are we willing to give our lives, our children, our best church members, our retirement years, and our money so the world will hear? And what about our neighbors? Will we make sacrifices even this week so they can hear? For God so loved the world that He gave. Will you follow His example?

You say, "But the job is too big! What can I do? I'm just one person." This...

4. *We must keep in mind that reaching the world happens one person at a time.* As we finish, don't think of the world in generic terms. Ask the Lord to put one person on your heart, and ask Him to use you this week to love that person for Him.

¹² <http://www.christianhistorytimeline.com/DAILYF/2002/09/daily-09-13-2002.shtml>