

Text: John 3:16-18,36 (Pew Bible pg.1052)

Title: “Compassionate Witnesses”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles today to what may be the most familiar passages in all of the New Testament, John 3:16 (Pew Bible, pg.1052). We need to be reminded of our essential identity as the Church. It's not negotiable or optional. Jesus said before He ascended to the Father in heaven, “You will be my witnesses.” Earlier He challenged His followers, “Follow Me, and this is what I will do ... I will make you to fish for men.” That's who we are as the people of God ... witnesses.

Last week we talked about the fact that we are *courageous* witnesses (because we will face opposition). Today we're talking about being *compassionate* witnesses because our loved ones and friends without Christ are in grave danger. Read John 3:16-18, 36.

Now these verses tell us so much about the salvation story ... how God, in love gave His one and only Son ... how the gift of eternal life is available to those who believe in Him.

This is Good News because there is bad news. The words of Jesus also reveal three stark, sobering realities about the human condition apart from Christ.

These realities about the human condition tell us why God was moved by love to do what He did in sending His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. And these realities tell us why we should be moved in the same way that God was moved. God looked upon our sad human situation and was moved with compassion and He acted. And if we are indwelt by the Spirit of this same compassionate God we will be moved with compassion to act with God in reaching to lost people in this horrible predicament.

What are these sad, stark, sobering realities of the human condition apart from Christ? (If you're taking notes, don't write anything yet.)

WE ARE PERISHING

This is another way of saying we are lost.

John 3:16 (NIV) - “Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

WE ARE CONDEMNED

This is another way of saying we've been judged guilty.

John 3:18 (NIV) - Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

WE ARE UNDER WRATH

John 3:36 (NIV) – Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

So if we are going to be sufficiently moved to become passionate and compassionate witnesses for Christ, we will have to understand these three stark, sobering realities about the condition of people without Christ.

Note: By the way, no one is saved until they are convinced and convicted that these three things are true about them apart from Christ. It is only when the Holy Spirit reveals this to us that we can realize our need for a glorious Savior.

So apart from Christ people are perishing because they have been condemned or judged guilty by God. And they are condemned because of God’s wrath against sin. So let’s start there and work back to the beginning.

1. GOD’S WRATH

We see this in John’s words...

John 3:36 (NIV) - Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

Wrath is God’s righteous reaction against evil. This word “wrath” doesn’t mean a sudden gust of anger; there’s another word for that. Sometimes God displays that. Here the word means a settled displeasure that God has against sin.

Let me put it this way: God is allergic to evil. He reacts to it. For us, allergies are a weakness. But God’s allergy to evil is a virtue. Righteousness reacts to unrighteousness. Holiness, by its very nature, reacts to un-holiness. God is unalterably committed to opposing all disobedience and sin. God cannot set aside His moral law without violating His own nature.

Romans 1:18 (NIV) - The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...

ILLUSTRATION – Now it may be hard for us to visualize or imagine the wrath of God because He is invisible. But we can visualize and understand what it means to be the object of someone’s wrath or anger. As children we knew the anger of a parent when we disobeyed them. Perhaps as adults we have know the anger (wrath) of an employer when we made a mistake on the job. As students we may know the anger (wrath) of a teacher when we have violated the rules, or failed to complete an assignment. We understand what it means to have the displeasure of another person crash into our selves. And we don’t like it; we fear it.

It’s one thing to feel the anger and displeasure of a finite human being. What must it be like to have the wrath of the infinitely holy, righteous Almighty God of the universe crash into our souls? How terrible it is to face the presence of a wrathful God!

This is the holy, righteous character of God ... He will not get over it. You go the Revelation and you see that God has planned a day when the full force of His righteous wrath will be unleashed on the unbelieving world. Revelation tells us that day will be so dreadful that people will call to the mountains:

Revelation 6:16 (NIV) - “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!”

And if a person has rejected Christ, John 3:36 says that this wrath is already on them.

Now I realize that people react negatively to this attribute of God. And some liberal theologians have sought to take wrath out of the vocabulary by which we talk about God. How could a loving God have this quality of wrath?

You wouldn't want a God who didn't hate evil. What would God be like if He were a God who didn't hate sin? That would mean that He either delighted in evil, or at the very least was not troubled by it. There's nothing about that that is worthy of worship. It is a virtue to hate sin and evil, as God does. And God calls us to this kind of holiness as well.

I know that still may not be resolved in your mind right now; but hang on. It's gets resolved as we move further into God's plans.

So the first stark, sobering reality is that we are under God's wrath. But there's something else we need to see if we are to understand the awful predicament we are in without Christ.

The next sobering reality is...

2. GOD'S JUSTICE

John 3:18 (NIV) - 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.

The word “condemn” means “to judge one as guilty.” So here we have the justice of God coming into the picture. What is God's justice? God's justice means that He always does what is right because He Himself is the final standard of what is right.

So because of God's wrath against sin, He must act accordingly ... God must judge sinners guilty (condemn). He can do nothing else. To act in any other way would be unrighteous and unjust.

Because we are unrighteous sinners, the only right and just thing for God to do is condemn us. He is never wrong in His decisions or His judgments.

ILLUSTRATION – A sad thing happened in a Major League Baseball game last year. With only one out to go, Detroit Tigers' pitcher Armando Galarraga was on the verge of one of baseball's loftiest and rarest accomplishments ... a perfect game. It would've been just the 21st perfect game in major league history, and the first for a Detroit Tiger.

But one faulty decision by an umpire cost Galarraga a place in the record books. A Cleveland Indians player hit a ground ball toward first base. The Tigers' first baseman fielded the ball and tossed it to Galarraga, who was covering first, apparently in time to get the runner out.

But umpire Jim Joyce stunned the everyone we spread his arms wide, calling the runner safe. Coaches and players screamed in protest. The nearly 18,000 Detroit fans wildly booing.

After the game Jim Joyce watched the video footage of the play and realized he had made the wrong call ... and he had cost Galarraga a perfect game.

God never makes the wrong call. The fact is that mankind had a perfect game going in the Garden of Eden when man walked in perfect fellowship with God. Adam and Eve sinned, and God made the right call. According to His righteous wrath He had to condemn them ... and every human being that has ever lived because we sinned with them.

God's judgment is always perfect. He condemns no one who doesn't deserve to be condemned. He never makes the wrong call when it comes to His judgment.

Now again, we don't like this picture of God. But let me ask you again, would you want a God who is not just? Would you worship a God who doesn't always do what is right? I know that is unresolved in your mind right now, but just hold on. It all resolves in the end.

So the stark, sobering reality about us without Christ is that we are objects of God's wrath, we are condemned by God's righteous justice, and that leads to...

3. MAN'S PENALTY

How are we punished or penalized by God for our sin? The answer: we perish.

John 3:16 (NIV) - "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.

To perish is the opposite of being saved or having eternal life. It means death as opposed to life. It means being destroyed as opposed to being preserved. It means loss as opposed to gain.

Now to be perishing is both a *path* and a *destination*.

- PATH - Apart from Christ, in our present condition, we are perishing ... hopelessly lost in a life without purpose or direction.

1 Corinthians 1:18 - For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

- DESTINATION - And in our future condition, to perish means eternal destruction. And the place where this perishing occurs for eternity is called hell.

Matthew 7:13 (NIV) - “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

The word “destruction” is the same word as “perishing” and it means “hell.”

The opposite of this is the eternal life that comes through Christ. So if you perish, you don’t get eternal life. There are only two options available to humans: believe in Christ or perish.

This is the stark, sobering reality about people who are without Christ. But God isn’t content to just let it be that way. You see God is not only a righteous God who, in His wrath, judges unrighteousness, resulting in sinners being sentenced to perish. We also know that God is a God who is the embodiment of love.

2 Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

1 Timothy 2:4 (NIV) - who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Now how can the wrath of God against unrighteousness and the love of God for unrighteous people be reconciled? How can the justice of God be satisfied against people who deserve judgment?

It can only happen at the Cross of Calvary. We go back to John 3:16 for the answer.

John 3:16 (NIV) - “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.

When Jesus says that God “gave his one and only Son...” He is talking about the all that was happening at the Cross.

At the Cross the fury of God’s wrath against sin was displayed in justice. How? By unleashing all that wrath against His own Son ... a sinless sacrifice and substitute for us.

So there is an eternal, unchangeable requirement in the holiness and justice of God that sin be paid for. It will either be paid by the sinner, or by a substitute who stands in their place.

Notice that not everybody will benefit from what Jesus came to do. It says “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The rest will perish, and not have eternal life.

To perish all a person has to do is ... nothing. In our sin we are already under the wrath and condemnation of God. To receive eternal life all a person has to do is believe.

We believe in a person, Christ. We trust Him. We put the full weight of our confidence in Him. This also means we receive Him, and the life He came to give us. And in that instant, we are born again ... we are united with the Son of God, and we have his life.

Thank God that in sending His Son He dealt with each of those three stark, sobering realities about us. Apart from Christ we are under the wrath of God, but when we receive Christ...

1 Thessalonians 1:10b (NIV) – Jesus ... rescues us from the coming wrath.

Apart from Christ we are under the judgment and condemnation of God for our sin, but when we receive Christ...

Romans 8:1 (NIV) - There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Apart from Christ we are perishing because of our sin, but when we receive Christ...

John 10:28 - I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

CONCLUSION

Long ago the Father said to His Son Jesus Christ, "There is something I want you to do for me: I have some enemies that deserve to perish, and I want you to go and die in their place, so that they can have eternal life." And Jesus came and died and victoriously rose again from the dead.

And today the Father is comes to us to say, "There's something I want you to do for me and with me. I have some enemies who deserve to perish. My Son died on the Cross for their sins so that they might be forgiven and escape the punishment for their sin. There's a problem. They don't know it. I want you to go and tell them the Good News.

People all around are in grave danger. Tragically, most of them don't know they are in danger and in peril. The big question for Christ-followers is this: Will we respond heroically to the danger? Are we compassionate enough to alter our lifestyle, our schedule, our agenda so we can join God in rescuing these who are perishing all around us?

ILLUSTRATION – There's a story that goes like this: One day an old man was walking along the beach. It was low tide, and the sand was littered with thousands of stranded starfish that the water had carried in and then left behind. Since the starfish still seemed to be alive, he thought about picking some of them up and putting them back in the water, but he reasoned that he could not possibly help them all, so he chose to do nothing and kept on walking.

Soon afterward, the man came upon a little girl on the beach who was frantically throwing one starfish after another back into the sea. The man stopped and asked the child, "What are you doing?" "I'm saving the starfish," the child replied. The man replied, "Why waste your time? There are so many you can't save them all, so what does it matter?" Without hesitation, the child picked up another starfish and tossed it back into the water and said, "It matters to this one."

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