

**9.27.09 / John 3:16-21**

This section of text ends the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus has been completely confused by the conversation thus far, and Jesus has responded by claiming both that what he has explained is not that hard, and that, as Son of God, he has access to much more difficult information. It should also be noted that this section may or may not be part of the quotation. There are no end quotes in Greek, and while some translators believe this section is John's commentary on the Nicodemus story, and not Jesus' continued explanation to Nicodemus, we don't know for sure.

**What did it mean for those who first heard it?**

The opening verse is extremely familiar to us, sometimes with people-waving-signs connotations. It is worth noting that "For God so loved the world" translates a Greek expression that, more so than the English, indicates that this is a description of God's love for the world. "Only", "one and only", and "only begotten" all translate a term meant to indicate uniqueness. This is important, as John also works on the "children of God" theme, and so this term separates Jesus out as a special sort of son without negating the idea that ordinary human beings could be children of God.

The term "condemned" is "judged", with the sense of "judged and found guilty". This ties the condemnation to the judgment criteria later in the passage.

It would also be worth reviewing last week's notes on "name", since it is clear that "believing in the name" means something more than intellectual acceptance of the name of God's Son as Jesus, and not Bob. After all, under those criteria we'd all be damned, since "Jesus" is an Anglicized version of a Latinized version of a Greek version of a Hebrew or Aramaic name.

We should also note that John uses light/dark and true/false an awful lot. This is but one early discussion in which these terms are used to describe Jesus and the things opposed to Jesus. A full study on these terms would no doubt bring additional meaning to this passage, but it would require reading the entire book of John with your Community Group and then discussing how these terms reference each other. In lieu of that, you may find it helpful to do this yourself and share some thoughts with the group.

This passage works on two major Johannine themes: the present reality of God's Kingdom, and passive judgment. The first of these themes is also sometimes called "realized eschatology". It refers to the idea that the eschaton (the end of the world) is already felt here and now. For John the Kingdom of God is already here, but not all the way, and people are already entering the Kingdom here and now.

The second theme is the idea that active judgment, the arrival of God to judge and then punish or reward, has not yet come, and yet people are already judging themselves. In the gospel according to John, Jesus is someone people react to, and in their reactions they judge themselves. As they see Jesus, and hear Him, and come to know more about Him, they either accept Him and love Him, or they turn away from Him. And, as John stresses most heavily that Jesus is God, they are accepting or rejecting God in this.

These two themes play together in today's passage. The second line asserts that at the time of the story, Jesus is not here to actively judge. He is here to save the world. God is currently acting in that mode, sending his Son, and sending Him with a mandate to save, not condemn. However, in this great revelation we find that people are judging themselves anyway! Some are rejecting salvation, condemning themselves. In verse 19 we learn how this judgment works: light has come into the world. The Kingdom of God has broken in. A new way has been shown,

God's way. And yet people would rather stay away from the light, the Kingdom, the works of God, because their own deeds are evil. And, benefiting from this evil (in their minds) they do not wish to abandon evil, or have it found out for what it is. At the same time those who desire God's will want to come into the light, so that they will be exposed as true followers.

In this way John, perhaps more than the other gospels, points out that the works of God will be actively offensive to some. But, at the same time, John is the one who opens his gospel with, in the twelfth verse, a discussion of becoming children of God. This is not an esoteric exercise in determining future location. Rather, some people are already becoming children of God, and some are not. In John 8:44 the alternative is presented: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

So, despite the fact that the aim of Jesus is to save, not, at this time, judge, His presence in the world, and the presence of the Kingdom that He brings, draws battle lines and initiates the conflict, anyway.

It is probably best to direct questions at these last ideas (please see *WeeklyQuestions\_TheGospelUncut.pdf* for this week's additional application questions):

- 1) What is offensive about the gospel in John? Would everyone come to Jesus if they just knew him?
- 2) What is belief as described in the gospel of John? What does a saved person look like?
- 3) What is the benefit of "coming to the light"? Is it present, future, past, or more than one of these?