

OPEN BIBLE CHURCH

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SERMON TITLE Eternity is at Stake

SERIES

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KEY SCRIPTURE John 3:16; Romans 10:13-15

SYNOPSIS Often, we focus too much on the here and now, when we should consider everything in the light of eternity.

HIGHLIGHTS



☞ Eternity is at Stake

A couple weeks ago we talked about Embracing an Eternal Perspective. Too often we are overly focused on the here and now rather than all of eternity ahead. Even some famous preachers focus on achieving your best life now when the Scripture tells us to set our hearts and minds on things above, and to think of our eternal future. Jesus himself spoke about eternity. He said there's an eternal reward for those who believe, but he also warned about eternal punishment for those who reject him. Church, we must remember that eternity is at stake.

Today we are in the Gospel of John, chapter 3. Some refer to this as the Good News in a Nutshell. Jesus is having a conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Now, most Pharisees hated Jesus, but Nicodemus was different. He wanted to understand Jesus. So, in their conversation Jesus talks about seeing and entering the Kingdom of God; he talks about being born again of the Spirit; he talks about the difference between earthly and heavenly things; he talks about his purpose in coming to the world; and he talks extensively about eternal life as well as God's wrath and condemnation. He reminds Nicodemus and us that eternity is at stake.

And, this chapter contains one of the most recognizable bible verses in the world:

☞ John 3:16-21 NIV

16 "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. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 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. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 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."

This classic bible passage begins and ends with God. "For God so loved... has been done through God." **It all starts and ends with God.** He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He was before all things. He created everything – the entire universe came from nothing but his word. This world, the galaxy and all of creation is not some random accident. It is the work of an all-powerful, all-knowing Creator.

Then, we get a glimpse at the very nature of this Creator. God loved the world. In fact, a couple of times in 1 John 4, we are told that **God is love**. It's not just something he portrays or conjures up. It is his nature. He loves.

God loves **the world**, that is, all of his creation even though it has become corrupted by sin. This world is not the way it should be; it's not the way he created it. Neither are we all that God intended ☞ us to be; we are **corrupted by sin, but God still loves us**. And, God's love for us is more than mere words. He demonstrated his love with a gift.



He gave. God doesn't just say he loves us – he proves it with a gift. He gave us Jesus. Since Jesus is one with the Father, and he is fully God and fully man, we can say that God actually gave himself for us. We've all heard of individuals who put themselves in harm's way in order to save loved ones. Most recently, we might think of Dan Marburger, the Perry High School principal, who intervened in a dangerous situation, ultimately sacrificing his life for his students.

God gave himself in the form of Jesus, in order to save us. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." A little later in Romans 5, it actually elaborates that we were enemies of God, yet he made reconciliation with us through his gift in Jesus. This is the essence of the Gospel, the Good News! What a gift!

Now, we come to the part that shows eternity is at stake. He says, "whoever believes in him shall **not perish but have eternal life.**" There it is. Eternity on the line. There is **eternal life available.**

Eternal life is exactly what it says – unending, never ceasing, living forever. And, in other scriptures, we see a fuller picture of eternity. No pain, or sorrow; living in perfect peace, without any corruption or degradation. Eternity is at stake.

But, there is also perishing, or destruction. To perish in the original language means to be destroyed, ruined, killed; given over eternal misery in hell. Other scriptures describe torment; sorrow; unending fire. Jesus goes on here to talk about **condemnation.** There will be a day of judgment and some will be eternally separated from God. The Bible talks about punishment, everlasting destruction and being shut out from the presence of God.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord

Eternity is at stake. This punishment with separation from God is actually **the default mode** for all people. Because we are all infected by this sin-corrupt world, we are by nature, separated from God. And, if left to our own tendencies, we are all destined for hell. But God doesn't want it to end that way. He wants to save us through Jesus. v. 17.

His plan is to save; to deliver; protect; heal; to preserve. God understands that eternity is at stake and he doesn't want anyone to be lost forever, eternally condemned.

2 Peter 3:9

He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

With eternity in mind, God's love led him to provide a gift in Jesus, so that we might be saved. **And, it all comes down to this:** "whoever **believes in him** shall not perish but have eternal life."



Now, this believing in him is not just a mental awareness of God. Even demons believe in God. ☞ No, this believing is more. It is to be **fully persuaded** to place confidence in something or someone. It is such a strong conviction of something that you put your **trust** in it. It's the little kid not only thinking that Dad will catch him if he jumps, but actually jumping, trusting Dad to catch him.

--Tim Hansel... One day, while my son Zac and I were out in the country, climbing around in some cliffs, I heard a voice from above me yell, "Hey Dad! Catch me!" I turned around to see Zac joyfully jumping off a rock straight at me. He had jumped and then yelled "Hey Dad!" I became an instant circus act, catching him. We both fell to the ground. For a moment after I caught him I could hardly talk.

When I found my voice again I gasped in exasperation: "Zac! Can you give me one good reason why you did that???" He responded with remarkable calmness: "Sure... because you're my Dad." His whole assurance was based in the fact that his father was trustworthy. He could live life to the hilt because I could be trusted. Isn't this even more true for a Christian?

This is the kind of belief we need to have in Jesus. The kind of belief that says, **"even when I don't fully understand, I will still trust and follow."** **"Even when it's scary, I will trust."** **"I want to know the 'whys' and 'how's,' but even if I don't, I still trust Jesus."** **"Even if he leads me into unfamiliar, uncomfortable territory, I will still follow."** That's believing in Jesus. It's more than a mind game – there is action involved. And, if that kind of belief is not there, God sees it as rejection.

John 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

☞ **Reject** = *apeitheo*, which has an obvious correlation to our English word, **"apathy."** Since belief involves action, you can't just be indifferent and uninterested. Ultimately, that kind of attitude is a refusal to believe and follow Jesus. And that kind of rejection results in God's wrath. His wrath is his anger exhibited in punishment. Once again, we see that eternity is at stake. We can receive eternal life or we can be subject to God's wrath.

John explained that because Jesus is the man from heaven, there is a heavy price to pay for rejecting Him. If you reject the Son, then you receive the wrath. To reject the Son is to reject His gift — eternal life. You can't tell Him, "I'll take the gift but reject You."

Eternity is at stake. This is true for you and for every person everywhere. We can suffer God's wrath or we can be saved.

☞ **Romans 10:13-15**

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?



And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Here, we see that eternity is at stake *and* you have a role to play. People need to call on the Lord. But first they need to believe in the Lord. But they can only believe if they've heard about him. And, they can only hear if someone tells them. Who is that someone? You and me. Eternity is at stake and **we can affect someone's eternal destiny.**

--Marcus Aurelius... "What we do now echoes in eternity."

--Abundant Hope International... *I appeal to everyone who reads this that you make deliberate choices of how you will leave your mark on eternity. Ask yourselves, "What have I done to make an impact that will last forever? Who can point to me in eternity and say, 'If it were not for you...?'"*

THANK YOU (by RAY BOLTZ)

*I dreamed I went to heaven and you were there with me.
We walked upon the streets of gold, beside the crystal sea.
We heard the angels singing and someone called your name;
We turned and saw this young man and he was smiling as he came.
And he said, "Friend, you may not know me now" then he said, "But wait;
you used to teach me Sunday school when I was only eight
and every week you would say a prayer before the class would start
and one day when you said that prayer, I asked Jesus in my heart."*

*Then another man stood before you; he said,
"Remember the time a missionary came to your church;
his pictures made you cry; you didn't have much money, but you gave it anyway;
Jesus took the gift you gave and that's why I'm here today."*

*One by one, they came, as far as the eye could see;
each life somehow touched by your generosity.
Little things that you had done, sacrifices made,
unnoticed on the earth, in heaven now proclaimed.*

*Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am a life that was changed.
Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am so glad you gave.*

☞ Eternity is at stake for you and everyone you know. What are you going to do about it?