

September 30, 2012

Satan's Favorite Lies

## **God Grades on a Curve**

John 3:14-21

### **Opening words:**

A lie is an untrue statement designed to deceive someone. When was the last time you told a lie? You lie when you shave a few years off your age. You lie when you shave a few years off your weight. When was the last time someone lied to you? Our world is filled with Satan's lies. The Adversary is an excellent liar. His lies may sound logical but his lies are not Biblical. How many of Satan's lies have crept into your belief system? In this sermon series, we are looking at some of Satan's favorite lies. To date we have looked at two. The first lie was exposed was the lie: *God can not be trusted*. The second lie we exposed was the lie: *Some things can not be forgiven*. Today, we look at the third lie: *God grades on a curve*. May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture lesson, John 3:14-21.

---

### **John 3:14-21**

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."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 they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people 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 their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

---

In the year A.D. 381, Gregory the Nazianzus wrote these words:

He began His ministry by being hungry, yet He is the Bread of Life.

Jesus ended His earthly ministry by being thirsty, yet He is the Living Water.

Jesus was weary, yet He is our rest. Jesus paid tribute, yet He is the King.

Jesus was accused of having a demon, yet He cast out demons.

Jesus wept, yet He wipes away our tears.

Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeemed the world.

Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the Good Shepherd.

Jesus died, yet by His death He destroyed the power of death.

Today, I want to talk about my favorite topic, Jesus! If you are ready to hear about our Lord and Savior say, "**Amen!**" With these words in mind let us look at the scripture lesson together. We find ourselves this morning in the third chapter of John.

The entire chapter is nothing more than a conversation between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus. Prior to our reading we are told Nicodemus is no ordinary citizen.

He was a member of the Jewish Ruling Council. What does that mean? It means he was a member of the true religious elite in their society. He was one individual set out when they had questions about the law or questions about God. The scene is unique because this time Nicodemus is the one who is looking for answers. That is one of the reasons he went to Jesus at night. He wanted to hide his identity. However, he also wanted to have Jesus' complete attention. The busy day was complete. Listen to what I am about to say. He did not go to Jesus because the Master had a long list of academic degrees. He went to Jesus for one reason, the Master's miracles. Risking his social standing, he went to Jesus to ask a single question. It is not an easy question to answer. It is not a question that was unique to Nicodemus. It is a question that every person has asked. It is a question that you and I have asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" How do you answer that question? I have never met a single person who wanted to stop existing when they drew their last breath. Does anyone here want to live for eternity? How do you answer the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Some people believe every world religion leads you to eternal life. In their opinion, every world religion is really nothing more than a different path to heaven. There is a Jewish path. There is a Muslim path. There is a Christian path. There is a Buddhist and Hindu path. There are as many different paths as there are people. The journey looks different to everyone but the summit looks the same, heaven! They believe not a single world religion has the complete answer to salvation. They believe every world religion has only part of the truth. If they are right then you could spend eternity standing between a Muslim and a Hindu. Do you believe there are many paths to heaven? Or do you believe Jesus is your only hope of salvation?

Some people believe you can earn your way to heaven. That is a common theme in our world. They believe all religions can be distilled down to ethics and morals. The only thing that matters is what you do. Though the years, I have been part of countless funerals. Loved ones have been called upon to remember the deceased. They recalled countless good deeds. Each one paid a small portion of their entrance fee into heaven. They took the trash out for a senior neighbor. She cooked a meal for a friend after a surgery. He shoveled the snow of a neighborhood without compensation. They served on every church committee, twice. They love everyone and everyone loved them. Someone once told me the deceased braked for a kitten that was standing in the middle of the road. The list of good works is more than impressive. That list of good works proves they were good enough to get into heaven. Some people believe you can earn your way into heaven. Do you believe you can earn your way into heaven? Or do you believe Jesus is your only hope of salvation?

Some people try to ignore eternal life. It is all about the here and the now. Like the family goldfish, they will simply stop existing. If the truth be told, Nicodemus is in that category. The Orthodox Jewish faith has no well developed concept of the afterlife. They stressed the law not to earn salvation. They stressed the law to earn God's blessings. If you followed the law then God would bless you with more income, children and happiness. They believed the miserable deserve their agony because of their

lawless lives. Do you believe some deserve to be miserable? Do you believe Jesus is your only hope of salvation? Do I have to go on? Do I really have to go on? Nicodemus went to Jesus on that dark night with the question of the ages. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus answers the question clearly in verses fourteen and fifteen. No, God does not grade on a curve. The Master said, *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."* There is only one correct answer to the question of the ages. The Christian world believes your only hope of salvation is Jesus. The question everyone must answer is, "Do you believe in Jesus?" I hope your answer is, "Yes!" If you believe your only hope of salvation is Jesus then say, **"Amen!"** Today, I want to talk about God's plan of salvation for the world. You are going to get a dose of basic Christian theology. That is why I want to look at John 3:16 in detail. It was first uttered by Jesus on the night Nicodemus came for a little chat. You know the verse, *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. That whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."* If you only want to memorize one Bible in your life then memorize John 3:16. It has been called the perfect summary of the entire Bible. That single verse tells us about God's love, Jesus' mission and your response. It is a Bible verse for anyone who wants to live for eternity. Satan wants you to believe God grades on a curve. The truth is your only hope of salvation is Jesus! So if you are ready to continue say, **"Amen!"**

### **God's Love**

Between July 27 and August 12, 2012 the world was focused on London, England. How many of you watched the Summer Olympic Games? Did you know 10,500 athletes completed from 204 different countries? Did you know 26 different sports were demonstrated? The media made sure we saw every detail of some, like gymnastics and swimming. I am a little upset they didn't show any of my favorite sport, taekwondo. There were a lot of the Olympics I missed but there is one part I had to see, the parade of nations. I like it because it tests my geography. Did you know the location of each of the 204 competing nations? Some were easy; some were hard. I knew where the United States, Canada and Mexico are located on a world map. I can find England, France and Spain. I am right on with Italy and Greece. However, I have a little trouble with other nations. Can someone tell me where Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania or Zambia are located? I can not locate all those countries but God can. John 3:16 begins, "God so loved the world." The world is a big place. God loves it all. While we are busy loving everyone, who is just like us. God loves everyone; God loves the world. We are preoccupied with human differences but God is blind to human differences. We see black skin and white skin. We see rich or poor. We see educated and uneducated. We see Republican or Democrat. We see Americans and non-Americans. God doesn't see any of those things. The only thing God sees is human suffering and need. God doesn't care about human classifications. God loves the whole world! How would your world change if you loved everyone? And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"** First, God loves everyone. Second, Jesus came to be the perfect sacrifice.

## Jesus' Mission

D.M. Stearns was preaching in Philadelphia. At the close of the service a stranger came up to him and said, "I don't like the way you spoke about the cross. I think that instead of emphasizing the death of Christ, it would be far better to preach Jesus, the teacher and example." Stearns replied, "If I presented Christ in that way, would you be willing to follow Him?" "I certainly would," said the stranger without hesitation. "All right then," said the preacher, "let's take the first step. He did no sin. Can you claim that for yourself?" The man looked confused and somewhat surprised. "Why, no," he said. "I acknowledge that I do sin." Stearns replied, "Then your greatest need is to have a Savior, not an example!" Jesus came for one reason. He came to die for your sins! John 3:16 continues, *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son."* That verse means nothing until you admit you are a sinner. I am convinced most of us here today think we are good people and why not. The world is filled with some ugly stories. The news gives us a steady stream of bad news. We have almost grown numb to violence. However, those stories do not change the fact that we are sinners. Consider these two verses with me. Romans 3:23 says, *"All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God."* Romans 5:8 says, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* If you believe Jesus came to save sinners like us say, **"Amen!"** First, God loves everyone. Second, Jesus came to be the perfect sacrifice. Third, you must accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

## Your Response

One of the great stories in the Bible comes from eighth chapter of Mark. You know the story. Jesus is traveling with the disciples. Along the way Jesus asks them a question, *"Who do people say I am?"* They answer with an impressive list. Some say John the Baptist. Some say Elijah. Still others say one of the other prophets. Then Jesus asks a more personal question, *"Who do you say I am?"* Peter answers with those life changing words, *"You are the Messiah."* Jesus' correct identification is short lived. Jesus tells them about his suffering, death and resurrection. He then warns the disciples. If you are going to follow Jesus then you must be prepared to suffer. That is not just a statement about the original twelve. It is a statement for us. If we are going to follow Jesus then we must be willing to suffer and sacrifice. Have you ever wondered if Peter regretted his answer? Romans 10:9 says, *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Who do you say Jesus is? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

There is an old story about a church who hired a new preacher. Everyone was excited to meet him. Everyone was excited to hear him. On that first Sunday he stood in the pulpit and delivered a powerful message about Jesus. Everyone was impressed. The next week he stood in the pulpit and delivered another powerful message about Jesus. The next week he did the same. Every week for the weeks to come he stood in the pulpit and talked about Jesus. Everyone loved hearing about Jesus but one man. He grew tired of this Jesus talk. He wanted to hear about something else. One Sunday, after another Jesus message, he decided to talk to the preacher. He went to the preacher and said some were concerned about his Jesus sermons. (Have you ever noticed how people express their complaints in the third person?) He said to the

preacher, "I can't tell you who said this but some people are concerned you are talking about Jesus too much! Our world is filled with inspirational stories and broken lives. There are people who are starving and people who are in prison. There are wars. Our church needs money and our building needs repair. Why don't we here about those things? Why do we always have to hear about Jesus? Doesn't anything else matter?" And the preacher looked at him and said, "No!" Once everyone knows Jesus then those other problems will disappear. " It isn't just true in the story. It is true in life. The only thing that matters is Jesus!

It is a bold face lie. God does not grade on a curve. Your only hope of salvation is Jesus. God loves the whole world so much He sent Jesus, the perfect sacrifice for our sins. That leads us to one final question. Do you believe in Jesus? Jesus said it best in John 14:6, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the father but by me.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"