

Mystery And Security

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[0:00] I'd like us to turn together to the passage that they'll read for us in John chapter 3. I'm going to read again the wonderful words of verse 16 and 17.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

And in so many ways, on a day like today, there's not much we can say and hard to know what to say.

And yet, at the same time, it's really helpful for us to just come back to the gospel and just to be reminded about all that God promises to us.

Because I think it's important to recognize that and to remember circumstances like this.

Sometimes people will use a really difficult event as a reason not to believe the gospel.

[1:04] And so sometimes when something really hard and difficult happens, like what we've experienced as a community, that's what makes people reject the gospel and to think, you know, it's not for me because something awful has happened.

And it's so important to remember, this is the whole reason why we have the gospel. This is the whole reason why we believe it. Because the gospel is not, and it's never about having a life where everything goes the way we want it to go.

The gospel is about giving us hope in a world that is broken, and in a world that brings things that we never want to happen, and in a world where we face the sorrow and pain of death.

And we've all seen and experienced that so powerfully this week. That is not a reason to reject the gospel. That's the whole reason why we have the gospel. It's the whole reason why we believe what we believe, why we do what we do, why we proclaim what we proclaim.

And this is why Jesus came, and this is why we have the gospel, so that we can have hope. And today we come, you know, just with such a mix of a huge sense of sadness and loss.

[2:25] Mixed into that is the happiest of memories of somebody who we all adored. And I don't think that's an exaggeration. I think we all adored Douglas, because he was unique.

And so we have many, many precious memories, and he always gave us so many reasons to smile. And so we're just meeting today in the middle of a tough day.

I have no idea how long this sermon will last. Maybe only a few minutes, but we'll just see. I want to think about these words under the heading, mystery and security, because that's really what you see in this chapter.

I'm not going to go into the early parts of the chapter in great detail, but you have this famous incident where Nicodemus, one of the leaders of the Jews, in many ways somebody who was an expert in everything, expert in the Old Testament, expert in religion.

He was the one who would answer people's questions. And yet he was struggling to understand what was going on. He comes to Jesus, and he's asking him questions, and in many ways wants to know what Jesus is all about.

[3:40] And Jesus replies with these famous words, that unless one's born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus responds with a question, how does that work? And he's thinking just in terms of entering your mother's room a second time.

And Jesus explains more and more, but as Jesus explains things to Nicodemus, instead of giving Nicodemus crystal clear answers, what Jesus actually explains to Nicodemus is that there's so much that's mysterious, and there's many things that we don't have the answers to.

And for Nicodemus, he's asking questions about faith, and he's wanting to know how things work, about Jesus' identity and purpose and everything.

But that whole category of mystery applies to our theology, our understanding of God, but it also applies to our understanding of life. Sometimes there are things that happen that are just impossible to understand or explain.

And I think in many ways, Nicodemus' question in verse 9 is their question. Nicodemus is responding to what Jesus is teaching.

[4:59] Nicodemus says, how can these things be? I think that for all of us this week, there's part of us asking, how can these things be? Why has this happened? And it's all highlighting the fact that that mystery like this leaves us feeling vulnerable.

That was the interesting thing about Nicodemus. You could see that actually, the fact that he couldn't explain everything and couldn't understand everything did leave him feeling exposed and vulnerable and uncertain.

And it's fascinating to read that as you go on in John's Gospel, there seems to be very clear indications that Nicodemus came to faith in Jesus and became a follower of Jesus. But at this moment, he's struggling to understand.

And mystery leaves us feeling vulnerable. And circumstances like what we're facing just now as a community definitely leave us feeling vulnerable and exposed and uncertain.

And sometimes in those situations, we are faced with a choice as to where we go in terms of our thinking and how we respond to things.

[6:08] And sometimes we want to kind of try and go deeper into the mystery and to unravel things. And you can see that Nicodemus is trying to do that in this chapter where Jesus tells him something and he's like, well, how does that work?

How does that work? How does that work? What's going on? And he's trying to go deeper and deeper into the mystery, but actually he ends up just struggling more and not really understanding everything that's being said to him.

And sometimes we can do the same thing, that when we face circumstances that are really difficult in life, we want to try and explain it. We want to try and figure it out. And what's happened, thinking through different details of what's caused it, what led up to it, all that stuff.

We want to try and explain why things have happened. And we sort of look for answers. And it's very natural for our minds to go in that direction, to try and unravel mysteries.

Whenever we face a hard and difficult circumstance, you kind of want to explain it. But ultimately, these things don't have, they're not going to be fully explained to us.

[7:15] And we're not going to fully understand why this has happened. And we're not going to fully understand why all the sad and difficult things that we experience happen to us.

We stand at a crossroads, and we want to sometimes go and try and figure out the path of mystery, but we're never going to fully unravel that path.

Instead, there's a different direction that we can go. We can go down the path of where we can find security. And that's what I think is really fascinating in John 3.

You've got this first part of the chapter, verses 1 to 9 of the conversation with Nicodemus. You go into verses 10 to 15. Jesus explains more. And in many ways, what Jesus is trying to just say to Nicodemus is that a lot of what Jesus is talking about here is just echoing the Old Testament, echoing the stuff that Nicodemus should have really known and understood.

But he didn't. Nicodemus didn't understand it. And it's all emphasising the fact that for Nicodemus, for everybody, we need God to help us to see, God to open our eyes, God's spirit to bring us to life.

[8:27] And that's in many ways one of the big points that Jesus is trying to reveal there. But again, it's all quite complicated. You can see that Nicodemus is struggling to take it all in.

And sometimes you can read verses 1 to 15 of John 3, and there are some things in those verses that I can't fully explain myself. And Jesus himself, that's part of what he's saying, that the wind blows where it wants, and we don't quite know where it comes from or where it's going.

There's always going to be mystery. What's fascinating in John 3, chapter 3, though, is then when you come to verses 16 and 17, you come to just the clearest and most beautiful statements of the gospel in the whole Bible.

And I guess what I want us to do, and I think part of what John 3 is getting us to do, is to say, look, we can leave the mysteries of 1 to 15 as mysteries, because that's part of what it is.

And we can leave the mysteries of what's happened to us this week as mysteries that we're never going to fully explain. But we can go to John 3, 16, and there we find amazing security.

[9:44] And this is one of the things that I think is what's so important. And we've been saying this in different ways over the past few weeks in our services, that there's parts of our theology that we're never going to fully take in. There's parts of what happens in life that we're never going to fully understand.

We should actually expect that, and we leave that in the Lord's hands. But there are certain things in the Bible that God makes crystal clear to us. And these are the things that give us security. And I want to just go through verse 16 in a wee bit more detail for a few minutes. When you come to a verse in the Bible like this, sometimes, often ministers like me will go to books and commentaries that can be really helpful in explaining verses like John 3, 16.

So as many of you will know, the New Testament was written originally in Greek, so you can go to books, and that'll help explain to you what the Greek words mean, etc., etc., etc. So often, you know, you come to the Bible, and then you go to kind of your bookshelf, and the books help you understand what the verse means.

Sometimes, though, sometimes what happens in life can actually explain to you more about what these words mean.

[11:04] And I think that that's the situation that we find ourselves in today. That we can come to John 3, 16, and you could go to loads of books that would help explain these words.

But I think that what's happened this week is actually going to teach us even more about what this verse is saying. And so I'm just going to go through some of the key words in this verse, and I hope that's going to help us just to see more of the wonder of the gospel and the hope that we have through our Lord Jesus Christ.

John 3, 16 starts by saying, For God so loved the world. I want to think about that word, loved.

That's a word that we're very familiar with, and we'll often talk about it, but I think it's a word that we can underestimate a lot.

So, this time last week, everybody in this room would have said that they loved Douglas. It's this week that you realize just how much.

And it's the events of this week that show just what our love for somebody is. And that's part of what's made this week so hard because it's somebody who we love so much.

[12:33] But it's definitely kind of... It definitely just raises the bar of what love means.

And that's something that can be exposed in these really difficult circumstances. You just realize just how much you love somebody.

And so, what this week has done is that it's maybe... It's maybe given us all a higher understanding of love.

And if your understanding of love is pushed higher, then it means you're getting closer to understanding what God's love is like.

Because your highest level of love, my highest level of love, is still not as high as his.

[13:34] And so, when it says that God so loved the world, that's not just saying that God's nice. It's saying that God's devotion and commitment to you is at the highest level.

Higher than anything we've ever experienced. higher than anything that we could ever express. That's the level that God loves at.

And so, we're learning more about what it means to love and what it means for God to love us.

It says that God so loved the world. The word world is a very important word in John's Gospel because it gets used frequently. And many of you may know this, but the important thing to recognize is that when John uses the word world, he actually uses it to describe something negative, not something positive.

Often we'll talk about the world as though it's a great thing and really good, but actually, when John uses it, he uses it frequently to express the world in all its brokenness, in all its sadness, in all its sin, in all the things that's wrong.

[14:57] And so, when you just see the world, if you could block out all the other rest of the words there and just look at the word world, you would know, you would, and the rest of John's Gospel would help to show you that that's something that's broken.

And that is definitely what this week has taught us. The world is so far from what we want it to be.

And I think that that's something that we have recognized that's just hit us all so hard this week, the reminder that the world is so far from what we want it to be.

And that, I think, just heightens the wonder of what John 3.16 is saying. Because it's that world that God loves.

It's that world that God loves to the highest level. And that's, again, something that's so, so important for us to remember, that the Gospel is never, ever a kind of, a sort of, you know, elite club where the best of the best are welcome and where the weak and the struggling and those who feel like failures aren't included.

It's never, ever, ever like that. It's the absolute opposite, the fact that God's love is poured out to those who never deserve it but who desperately need it.

[16:26] And so the world in its brokenness is the world that God has loved and that is why one of the great things that the Gospel is telling us is that the world is not forgotten and that we are not forgotten and even in the midst of our sorrow He's always with us.

You then come to the kind of middle bit of the verse which in so many ways is like the center point of the verse speaking that God gave His only Son. I don't want to say too much about this but there is, there is just something to recognize here that, that, that, that, that, this week has just reminded us of the agony of separation and, and that, that's a glimpse of what God was willing to do for us in that it's His only Son, His beloved Son, His precious Son and, and, you know, we can never fully grasp the, the depth of, of bond of love between God the Father and God the Son and yet, for our salvation, that Son was handed over, He was given so that we might be saved.

And, then you see this sort of, one of the most stunning contrasts in the whole Bible in this verse that, in order for our salvation to happen, God, God does something and He asks something of us. What God does is He gives His only Son, which is, is the, the, the greatest sacrifice that can ever be given, that, that deepest of bond that's broken, that precious eternal Son is handed over.

And so, what God has asked us to do is, what God is required to do, what God needs to do, what God commits to do, what He's willing to do, is massive. And yet, what we are asked to do is so beautifully simple.

[18:35] We're asked to believe. And it's so important to see that contrast between what God does and what we do. And even that believing is only done with His help.

The key point is just to say that He's doing everything. He's doing everything. He's bearing all the cost. And so, all He's asking for us is, is, is to believe.

And again, this week helps us to see a little bit more about what that means because the gospel is asking us to believe. That's so important for us all to remember. That's what the gospel is asking us to do, to believe in the Lord Jesus.

What's really important to recognize is what we're being asked to do there is to believe good news. We've been asked to believe good news. This week has shown us that believing bad news is just unbelievably difficult.

And I think that for all of us this week, there's still a huge sense of disbelief. We don't want to believe it. and it's like, it's sort of impossible to try and untangle everything and figure everything out and to sort of accept and believe what's happened.

[19:48] Believing bad news just doesn't, it's sort of, there's something kind of impossible, so complex, so difficult in all of that. In contrast, believing good news is so easy.

If we'd heard good news this week, that wouldn't have been complicated to believe. You'd have just, you'd have just, we'd have all just fallen into the arms of that good news and rested there. That's what believing in Jesus involves. It doesn't involve figuring everything out. And it doesn't involve reconciling things that don't make sense.

And it doesn't involve unraveling all the mysteries that life brings. Believing in Jesus just, ah, it just means falling into his arms. And knowing that he'll take care of it all.

And that's what he's asking us to do today. And that's something that, you know, for those of us, maybe we're doing that again as a new week begins, as we continue to follow him. But maybe for some of you, it's for the first time to just, to just do that.

[21:03] You know, and I think that that's, that's the, that's just the amazing promise of the gospel. That's, that's what Douglas modeled so beautifully in his, in his life.

Just a, a joyful faith in his savior. And, and that's just a, that's just such a wonderful example for us to follow.

The gospel's asking you to believe good news. It's not asking you to try and untangle bad news. It's just asking you to believe good news. And that's helping us to see that, that's what John 3, 16 is

asking us to do.

And the great result of it all is so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. And that is, that's really the culmination of the security that the gospel gives us.

That's, that's everything that God wants to give us. That, that it means that death doesn't win.

[22:07] And that, that even though it brings agony for us just now, that agony is only temporary.

And that even though just now things feel so confusing, it's not pointless.

but ultimately everything is moving, moving towards the day when, when all the pain and sorrow that we feel just now is in the past.

And, and that all that lies ahead in the future is joy and peace and security with Jesus. that is what Jesus came and died to give us.

That's what the gospel is all about. That is what church is all about. That hope of eternal life. And, and that means that for all of us, you know, just now, what we're going through right now is really hard.

But if we're trusting in Jesus, it's full of hope. it's really hard, but it's full of hope. And that's what the gospel gives us, that the sorrow and pain we feel just now is, is just for a season.

[23:33] And the future that, that, that Jesus promises to all his people is a future where there will be no more tears, no more crying, no more pain, for all these things will pass away.

There's always going to be times in life when right now it's not okay. And, and right now it's not easy at all. And that's definitely what we face just now as a congregation and a community.

But, but eternal life, that's just another way of saying it's going to be okay forever. It's going to be okay forever. because if we trust in Jesus he'll take us to be with him.

We'll be reunited with those we desperately miss and whom we love so much. And, and never again will death have the final word over, over any of the Lord's people.

And in that we find security. security. And as we come here today for church, I cannot explain the mystery.

[24:39] I can't. None of us can. I can't explain why this week has gone the way it's gone. But, but I can offer you security.

Because that's what Jesus offers us. eternal security in his arms. And, and, that's where we can find comfort, where we can find strength, where we can find hope.

And, and I think it's just so important for us to say that, you know, when Jesus calls us to come to him, he's just calling us to come as we are. And following Jesus isn't, you know, about becoming an expert or anything like that.

You just, this is something I think Douglas modeled so well. He just, was just himself, and he followed Jesus. He was just himself, and he followed Jesus.

He wasn't perfect, none of us are perfect. God but that's what Jesus wants you to do. Just follow him, trust him. You'll carry on being you. He'll help us leave some things behind that we're better off without.

[26:03] He'll help us learn new things that we would love to have. But ultimately, following Jesus gives us security because God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Now we are devastated because we miss Douglas so much, but I am pretty sure he would say to us, well, I'm just waiting for you.

Come and join me. Follow Jesus like I did. Amen.