

John 3: 17 & 18
Message #3 (8:30 am) in the series "Whose Verse is it Anyway?"

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Good morning. For those of you who are joining us for the first time, whether here in person or online, my name is Dominic Tuttle. I'm the director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries here at St Paul's Church and I have the joy and privilege of sharing God's word with you today. We will now review this verse that has been presented, John, chapter 3 versus 17 and 18:

"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. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God."

Pray with me now for a moment. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. Lord, I am so excited to see your word proclaimed and that I get to be a part of it and share my perspective and what you would speak to me. I pray that you would communicate now to all in the church as a family, we thank you. We praise your name. Amen.

Back when I was in college working on my associates degree, I decided I wanted to take one class, one credit class that involved some physical education every semester. I am not always the most athletically inclined. If it were up to me, I would spend most of my time with a book or on a computer and I would be happy. But I knew I needed to, you know, increase my physical activity. So, I took a self-defense class and that was fun and exciting. And I tried to take a weight training class, but I think they just expected everyone to already know how to use all of the equipment in a gym. So, no one told me how to use any of the equipment in the gym. So, I dropped that class after a week because I had no idea what was going on. My favorite class of those physical educations was a rock-climbing class, and it wasn't just, Oh, we're going to go in and scramble around. It was all of the proper technique and terminology and the proper way to climb safely. And that involved learning about all the harnesses, all of the equipment, the different carabiners, the different figure eight harness the ropes. How to tell a good rope from a bad rope. Who knew there were bad ropes, right? It started easy enough, you sit in the class, you have a conversation. Our teacher was really laid back, just a super chilled out kind of guy. And then at the college, they had a rock-climbing wall, and we started practicing. You'd go through and you figure out. All right, this is how I make sure I've got my harness on properly. This is how I thread the rope. Make sure the rope is connected properly. You check with the person who's belaying your safety. If you fall, all they got to do is drop their hand with the rope and you cannot fall because they're anchored to the ground, and you're now suspended by a rope. It doesn't matter how high up you are or how far you fall, the person belaying you, who's feeding the rope and taking up the tension, the slack, all they've got to do is drop their hand and friction in their harness completely stops the rope. It cannot go any further. And trust me, I got to put that to the test a couple of times because once again, I am not the most proficient in the physical activities, and climbing takes both strength and dexterity, which I'll admit I hadn't put too much time into developing. And so, the first time you fall on a rope is terrifying. It's like getting up and talking in front of people without preparing anything. Well, you fall and the amazing thing with the rope- the term is belaying. Whoever is belaying for you, they're the one below. They've got your rope and they're anchored. Whoever has your line they never take their eyes off of you. Their eyes are locked on you the entire time, they're watching you. And as you go up, they're taking in the slack and pulling it out and dropping it behind them. And they never let go the rope. And the moment they see you struggle; they drop their hand and you don't go anywhere. You need a break? All they've got to do is drop their hand. The friction of the equipment stops the rope, and you can literally just sit back and hang out, have lunch up there if you want. They probably don't want you to, you know, packing on extra weight

while you're up there, but it's fine. You're okay. The equipment is doing its job and you're safe. And when you fall, there's a surprising amount of give in the rope. A good climbing rope has an ability to stretch. And so, the first time I fell, I was expecting to get whiplash up and down my spine. Instead, I sunk for a moment and bobbed to a stop as the rope extended and the person below did what they were supposed to do, and I was safe. And when you're coming back down after your climb, they feed the rope through so that you can descend, and they let you out. And the moment you're losing, and you feel like you're going too fast, the belayer drops their hand and you're safe.

Now we're here in this story in John Chapter 3. And I love John Chapter 3. One of the first Bible verses that I learned as a child, I don't know about you, was John 3:16. Didn't really ever get around to learning about John 17, much less 18 until quite some time later. But reading through the Gospels, I really resonate with John Chapter 3. And I'll tell you why. I think based on my personality; I would be a Pharisee. I'll leave you with that bombshell. The Pharisees loved the Word of God. They loved Scripture. And they spent all day, every day since the age of three years old, studying and memorizing the Word of God, discussing how different teachers from the past had interpreted the Word of God. Determining what does the law say? What does the law tell us to do? And how can we best fulfill the law of God to honor God? I mean, that sounds good to me, sitting all day, talking with people, studying the Bible. That sounds awesome. Sadly, church does involve a certain amount of administration, not just studying scriptures. So, while that's great, you know, you have to balance, right? So that means I can't just sit around all day studying the Bible. I have to send a few emails from time to time, plan a few games particularly.

But here we've got Nicodemus, a Pharisee, an expert in religious law, a teacher. People look up to him for guidance and he has questions. He's not sure that everything that he and his fellow Pharisees have determined is the way it's going to be. He's not sure if it is the way it's going to be. And all of a sudden, he hears about this fellow Jesus who is doing miracles. Miracles that would only be attributed to the old prophets. So, who could this be? Is this the scriptures foretelling of Elijah returning to make way to prepare the way of the Lord? Nicodemus doesn't know. And every other time in Scripture you see Pharisees coming up to Jesus and asking questions, they're usually not too nice about it because they have a stance to defend. So instead, at the beginning of John chapter 3, it says, now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This is a man of authority. This man came to Jesus by night. Did he come up to Jesus when he was in a synagogue teaching or walking around healing people? No. He waited until it was night. Everyone's in bed. No one's going around. In fact, probably the only people moving around at this time are shepherds who have to watch over their sheep by night. Perhaps some of the laborers who worked in the nighttime because the rest of the place was too busy during the daytime, servants cleaning. There was lots of work going on. But someone of this caliber would be at home getting ready for bed. But he takes advantage of the cover of dark so that no one sees them to go and visit Jesus and start asking questions. Nicodemus doesn't show up to Jesus and start making demands of - who do you think you are and how dare you interpret and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. He comes to Jesus and says, What's going on here? Who are you? How are you doing this? Nicodemus really wants to know who Jesus is. He doesn't make up his mind ahead of time. He's asking questions. And then there's some great theological conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus of Jesus explaining about salvation, and Nicodemus really doing some broad surface interpretation of what Jesus is saying. And by interpretation, He's taking everything Jesus says at face value. And Jesus has to walk him through it a few times. And you get up to this point where Jesus starts explaining salvation. John 3:16 *"for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whosoever believes in him, the Son of God, will not perish but have eternal life."* He's now laying out this map. Then we hit verse 17 *"for God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 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."*

So, what we have here is a man of the old law, wondering what God is doing. The Old Testament law was very clear. Do this, do this, do this, don't do that. Don't do that. Don't do that. You're good with God. You have good standing. You are made righteous before the Lord. If you do all of these things and don't do all of these things, that is what Nicodemus was an expert in. Nicodemus likely would have had the entirety of the first five books of our Bible memorized in addition to if not perfect word for word memorization of the histories, the wisdom literature, and the prophets, which is the entirety of our Old Testament. Nicodemus likely would have had the entirety of it down cold, which, okay, maybe I wouldn't make it as a Pharisee. I don't know if I'm that dedicated to memorization, something I can work on. It's a personal challenge. Nicodemus knew the law and Jesus is now saying, you are not condemned by the law. Okay. So, Nicodemus gets to throw out everything that he studied and learn for years and years that it's a challenge. You can understand why Nicodemus is having this mental friction as his theology is being challenged. See, the key thing that so many people were expecting of the Messiah is that he would return and set them free from captivity, that the Messiah would come in judgment. And for years they thought maybe it was the Babylonian Empire, maybe it was the Assyrian empire, maybe it was the Persian Empire. Maybe it was the Greek Empire. Okay, we get to Jesus' time. Maybe it's the Roman Empire. At some point God is going to send the Messiah, and the Messiah is going to set us free, and the Messiah will be the true judge. They were expecting a righteous warrior king judge person. And here's Jesus, a lowly carpenter from questionable background, depending on who you talk to wandering around just taking care of people. But he's doing miracles. So that's new. There's got to be something to this. Verse 17, Jesus is turning all of the expectation on its head. God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved, we have this amazing moment. Where instead of coming in to condemn, Jesus is coming in to save. Now who here is without sin and worthy to cast the first stone? I'll put my hand down. Yep. Nope, nope. I think we're all on the same page there. We can all agree. Romans Chapter 3 versus 23 through 25. We definitely are on board with that, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. *"They are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as an expiation by His blood, to be received by faith."*

By faith. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So, there's no amount of law abiding that you can do to be saved. We can all grab that. Nicodemus wasn't there yet. He had no idea. Jesus instead says you're not condemned by failing to live up to the law. You're condemned by not believing in the Son of God. Whoever believes in him is not condemned. I mean, that's a bit of a relief. But whoever does not believe is condemned already because he is not believed in the name of the only son of God, you see, it's so much easier to have a checklist of laws to say that we're good or not than to just believe. It's so much easier to say, all right, I did this, I did this, I did this. And safe. Then it is to say. Just got to trust your God. I just got to believe. Now, when I'm with the youth, I like to hit them with this all the time. There's a difference between belief and faith, and I know the scripture here is using the word believe. But I think what we're really looking at here is the active nature of faith. And we've got to be careful with the passive nature of the word 'believe'. See, when I'm rock climbing. I can believe that the person who's got the rope, the belayer has got the rope, and that they have to set up their equipment properly. I can believe all of that. And never touch the rock. Never start climbing. Never leave the safety of the ground below me. If I want to start climbing, then I can't just believe my belayer has the rope. I have to put my faith in the belayer to hold the rope and start climbing.

Jesus is asking Nicodemus to step out of his comfort zone, to step out of what he knows in his head and trust something that he can't prove. Jesus is asking all of us to step out of our comfort zones. To believe in something that we can't prove, scientifically. The world wants answers. Unfortunately, the answers that Jesus gives us, the answers that we have to give aren't scientific, but they're real. I know that I know, that I know, that I know in my heart beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God is good and he loved me and He sent his one and only son to die in my place. And when I believe in that and I don't just believe and do nothing but begin to live in that, to step out of my comfort zone in faith, my life starts to change. And I have seen

that evidence in my own life. If I had time, I would love to tell you all of the amazing things that I have witnessed because I stepped out in faith. Trusting in something that I couldn't prove scientifically. I still can't explain some of these things, but I've seen them. I've seen students who couldn't walk heeled, get up and run, whew, I was not expecting to feel that emotion so strong again! I've seen teenagers struggling with depression set free and live a life of joy. I've seen too much to not believe.

Back in Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, the Israelites are wandering around the wilderness. And they're struggling to believe. They're struggling to trust. I mean, they've got a giant pillar of cloud during the day and a giant pillar of fire by night. That's pretty good evidence to me. Nonetheless, they were struggling to believe because they're wandering around and they're running out of food and their complaining and the running out of water. And they're complaining and they're they don't like this food anymore. Man, it sounds like having kids. Seriously. I try and give this example to my seven-year-old and she just doesn't really grasp the relevance to her situation. Moses is leading the Israelites around and they continue to whine and complain and moan and they're getting mad at Moses and they're mad at God and they're convinced God just wanted them to die. And so, God tells them, guys, if you keep complaining, you're going to walk out from my protection. Trust me. And they don't. They're like, no, Moses just doesn't know what he's doing. And what do they do? They turn and they walk right into a field full of venomous snakes. And people are getting bit. And they're getting sick and they're dying. And they come to Moses saying, 'Save us', and Moses turns to God and says, okay, God, what do I do? And God says, 'we're going to set up a test of faith'. So, he has Moses construct a serpent made of gold or bronze. Believe it's bronze. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to track that specific verse down, so it's out of metal. And he hangs it up on a stick. And he sets it up in the middle of the camp. And he says to the Israelites, anyone who comes and looks at this will be healed. Now imagine- I'll relate it to my kids. They fall down and bump their knee. End of the world. They're going to die. Their knee hurts. I mean, literally, the world is ending for them, especially my four-year-old, she has very little frame of reference. For her this is the worst day of her life, and the worst thing that has ever happened to her is falling down and bumping her knee. But she believes that if she runs to mommy or daddy and we kiss her knee, she will be healed. She doesn't look at it logistically like my seven-year-old and go like, yuck! (kiss) like that it still hurts like I can see the blood, there's a problem here. Maybe we should look at get some real medical help. I mean, absolutely, we should do that if you're bleeding. I mean, of course. But the four-year-old still believes, and half the time most of her injuries are in her mind. Her knee isn't hurt that bad, but the fact that she's fallen, and she hit her knee means she's hurt. Whether or not there's pain, that's irrelevant. She's hurt and she believes that a kiss on the knee will heal her knee. She's like, okay, and off she goes and she's fine. And then she hits it again, pops herself up and for whatever reason is distracted and keeps going, despite the fact that now she's bleeding. Don't ask me to explain a four-year-old. It's been a while since I was four.

The Israelites are being asked to just believe that all they have to do is go and look at this metal snake on a stick. It's all you got to do. Believe. I can imagine that was a struggle until someone did. And then they get to tell others it worked. I'm healed. I'm saved. I'm not going to die. Please come with me. I will drag you to look at the metal snake. You've been bitten by a real one and eventually people are healed, and they begin to trust. This one is a great first reference here because if we go back to just before this in John, chapter 3, verse 14. '*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the son of man be lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*' It's about putting your faith somewhere. You know the saying; we will put your money where your mouth is. All right. You talk about it. Well, go ahead and invest in it. We need to put our faith where our mouth is. And I know for many of us, we've been believers for a long time. I've been a believer since I was a child. So, for me to say, am I putting my faith in God, I really have to suddenly stop and take stock of what's going on in my heart, what's going on in my head. Do I really believe it? Because if I really believed it, I'd start climbing that rock. I'd put my faith in the person with the rope. If you really believe it, then you've got to start doing something. Over and over and over to the Gospels when

someone asks, Jesus, are you who you say you are? Are you the Messiah? Who are you? How are you doing this? Over and over. Jesus said, Come and see. Follow me. Come watch. Because when we see what God is doing, how can we not believe? And then that changes the way we walk. Walking in faith. Not just belief.

There are so many ways that you could imagine it. You want to cross the street? You're going to put your faith in that crosswalk and that the drivers are going to respect that. And I don't know about you, there have been times where I don't believe them. And it's not until they have come to a full and complete stop that I step out into the road. There are times where you get just get that feeling, that little twinkling of suspicion that that car's definitely going to run this red light and I should just hang on a second before I start crossing the street.

You hang up your hammock, you're putting your faith in that tree to hold you up in the rope, in the material. Every time you put yourself into a situation that you cannot control, you're putting your faith in something or someone. Get on an airplane. You're putting your faith in the airplane and the pilot and the crew and everyone. We do it all the time. But we're terrified. And I say we because I'm pretty certain all of us, in one way or another, are afraid of stepping out of our comfort zone. We're afraid to believe in the name of Jesus and step out and live like we mean it. What is God challenging you to get out of your comfort zone to do? Is it going up to a neighbor and striking up a conversation? Is it seeing someone who looks like they're having a breakdown in the store or somewhere around and just crying and sobbing? Maybe God is wanting you to go up and sit down next to them? Maybe that person who's standing on the side of the road with a cardboard sign and everything we're told is, don't give them money, maybe in that moment, God is asking you to step out of your comfort zone and give them something. Maybe go buy them lunch. A little bit of a different option. We can't live like the world and claim we follow Jesus to follow Jesus you got to follow Him. This week, dig into the Gospels. Read the Gospel of John. Get those first five chapters in. And try and follow Jesus. Let him challenge you out of your comfort zone. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. You are not condemned for any failure. Whoever believes in him is not condemned. But we have this challenge. Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only son. The only condemnation that you or I can face is turning our backs on Jesus. And say, you know what? No, thanks. I'd rather go do my own thing. According to Jesus here, the very words of God himself, our condemnation is turning our backs on him. Not failing to do something successfully. Failure does not mean we are condemned. It's only when we turn away that we're condemned. So, I want to close with that challenge for you. For me, for everyone online, for everyone here, take time to meditate on the Word of God and listen and see what God is challenging you to do to step out of your comfort zone. To believe in him. And then live like you believe.

Father, we thank you for your word and how you speak to us, how you affect change in our lives, that we are not conformed to this world, but we are transformed through the renewing of our minds. May your word come home to live and rest in our hearts. And change the way we eat. Change the way we drive; change the way we talk and communicate. That we may follow in your footsteps. We thank you and we praise you, Lord, in your name. Amen.