

Practicing

John 3:14-21 (March 14, 2021)

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¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Historical Context

This text really begins back in Verse 3:1 with the visit of Nicodemus in the middle of the night. Nicodemus represented opposing Jewish communities led by Pharisees. By the time John's gospel first appeared in a complete form (100-115 A.D.), Christians not only professed a new Messiah; they proclaimed a new spirituality. God created a new, spiritual relationship with all people (not just Jews). And this new relationship bypassed the Jewish Law. The Pharisees were religious conservatives who rejected everything but the books of Moses as canon, thus rejecting out of hand any talk of a Messiah,

Theme: Practicing

In this passage, we find some difficult tensions. On the one hand, we find a wonderful affirmation of the unconditional love of God—for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that we might experience the wholeness that is called eternal life (Jn. 3:16). But there is also a lot of talk about those who don't believe being condemned that sounds pretty exclusive.

While the text clearly affirms God's unconditional love for the whole world, it also tells us something about the kind of response that love calls forth in us. In John's Gospel, it's called “doing the truth.” Our faith, our truth, our convictions are meant to be put into practice in our lives. But that's not something you learn to do like riding a bike; once you learn it you've got it. It's more like learning a musical instrument. If you're really committed to it, you're always learning how to practice faith in real life.

Practicing faith means continually learning what it means to love God and love others. Continually learning how to get beyond our own selfishness so that we can truly love the people around us and relate to them with compassion, understanding, kindness, and mercy.

In a very real sense, we're on a continual journey when it comes to loving God and loving others. We're engaged in something that takes constant and consistent attention. Becoming a person who is open to God's loving presence and who allows that love to flow through us to others is something we must constantly practice.