

A Matter For Life or Death

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 July 2012

Preacher: Bob Akroyd

[0 : 0 0] Turn back to that passage that we read and I'll read again from verse 36 the last verse of chapter 3 John 3 verse 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 Hidden masterpieces If you know the Bible if you know John's gospel John chapter 3 stands out for Jesus's encounter with Nicodemus John chapter 4 stands out for Jesus's encounter with the woman of Samaria the woman at the well and This passage in between can easily be overlooked you could read through it But it might not stick in your mind because you know John 3 16 very famous passage John chapter 4 again a very Significant passage this point was illustrated to me a good friend of mine many years ago Went to Paris and went to the various museums and the sites of Paris and came back and showed me his photographs This is the time when you actually had to get photos developed

And you had these packets for the young people here will find that interesting but anyway, so Jeff went to Paris and he went to got to the Pictures he said he went to the Louvre and I had been there and he was showing me these photos and here was a here was a painting I said oh it looks interesting But where's that and he said oh that's the painting next to the Mona Lisa I'd seen the Mona Lisa, but I'd never noticed his other painting then he showed me a sculpture the picture of a sculpture And so it's interesting, but where's that? He said oh, that's the sculpture next to the Venus de Milo I'd seen the Venus de Milo, but had never seen this other sculpture Why because I wasn't looking for it or I didn't notice it my attention was just diverted to something else and Sometimes when we're reading the Bible We can find our attention diverted or distracted that we read the whole of John 3 and we said oh yeah John 3 Nicodemus you must be born again. God's who love the world. Yes, that's true but we come to the end of John chapter 3 and there's some significant lessons for us and

You'll find as you as you grow older and maybe some of those of us who have reached the middle age that in life There's only really a few things that really matter things that are of complete first importance You're reminded of this if you take a holiday now when you're packing to go away on vacation Yeah, you want the suntan lotion if you're going somewhere hot you want a good book to read summer clothes But really you need your passport you need your wallet if you have the passport and wallet Whatever else you've forgotten you can cope with you need the tickets of course too But these are the priorities so many other things are important But not essential and this passage gives us several different examples of things that may be significant insignificant or Absolutely essential and with you this evening. I'd like to go through the passage from basically from John chapter 3 verse 22 to the end of The chapter because it's a really a question about what is essential? What is what are the priorities of your life?

What what is your focus if you're a Christian? What is the priority of your Christian life? And if you're not yet a Christian, what is God saying to you? What is absolutely essential for you to hear tonight? Well first, it's interesting. We begin with a matter of insignificance Think of the scene this great meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus This great statement you must be born again this great statement for God so loved the world We're told that in verse 22 after this Jesus and his disciples went into the countryside Spent some time with them and baptized Now we're also told that John was baptizing there as well and people were constantly coming Verse 25 says an argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing Now baptism then and now Was a sign a symbol it spoke of an outlet was an outward cleansing Yes, but it spoke of something inward a inward cleansing a spiritual cleansing And here someone comes along and begins an argument begins a debate about the subject of ceremonial washing Now in the context, this is really not all that important really not all that significant

[4 : 31] And many times Christians are good at arguing and debating About matters that are of secondary or not even secondary importance And we miss the main message we miss the reality of what's going on John's baptizing Jesus his disciples baptizing People are coming recognizing their sin repenting of their sin and turning to God in faith Wonderful and somebody comes along with this argument that is really of no significance and of no importance And as you get to understand and hopefully as you grow in your understanding of the Bible grow in your understanding of Christianity You'll realize that there are those matters that Christians can disagree about There are those matters that we really don't have the answer to there are questions that we might have That the Bible doesn't really answer and you can spend a lot of time and a lot of energy Trying to find out answers to questions that you'll never really this side of eternity be able to answer

There's a verse in Titus One of the short letters written by Paul to Titus this young man was sent to Crete He had a challenging charge there and we're told at the very end of Titus chapter 3 at verse 9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law Because these are unprofitable and useless Warn a divisive person once then warn him a second time and after that have nothing to do with him You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful. He is self condemned So major on the majors Understand the gospel the message of Jesus understand the person of Jesus understand who he is and what he did Understand the Bible in terms of its message to us from God Telling us about God who God is telling us what God has done Telling us of how we in turn are to respond to God Focus on those areas that the Bible does address focus on those issues that the Bible does

Does describe focus on those issues that the Bible does Does describe focus on those answers that the Bible does give don't split hairs don't spend time or energy or effort like this man A matter of ceremonial washing. There was an argument that came up But this insignificant argument gave way to a another matter and this really was a matter of priorities And this is something we can certainly learn positively from Sometimes the Bible gives us examples to say this is what happened. Don't do it Other times the Bible says this is what happened and do it Because we're told in that context They the debaters they came to John and said to him rabbi That man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan the one you testified about well He is baptizing and everyone is going to him. So you see it wasn't just a quarrel But it was this idea of a rivalry We're right. They're wrong. We should be popular

But look he is getting more and more popular and you we are getting less and less popular So it's not just splitting theological hairs. It's not just talking about ceremonial washing But it's this sense of pride or this sense of importance and they come to John with their question Everybody's going to him. How's John going to reply? How's he going to deal with this issue?

Does he answer their question about ceremonial washing? Does he give a discourse on the various the various means of washing or the old testament law? No John understands what's happening and John wants us to understand This is a a pattern that we are to adopt for our own Christian life to this John replied A man can only receive what is given from heaven You yourselves can testify that I said I am not the Christ But I'm sent ahead of him the bride belongs to the bridegroom the friend who attends the bridegroom Waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice That joy is mine and is now complete. He Jesus must become greater. I must become less John's gotten in one he understood priority. He understood who was to be first and who wasn't Who was to have preeminence and who wasn't and he realized that it wasn't a matter of popularity

[9 : 09] How many people were with you and how many people were with him? But it was a matter of priority That here John recognized that his role His god-given mission was now coming to its conclusion. He had done what he was called to do He was faithful in that ministry. He spoke the truth He pointed to Christ and now the ministry of Christ was commencing So the ministry of John was going to diminish as the ministry of Jesus was going to advance And he uses this illustration of a wedding This is a relevant illustration for me in the last three weeks. I've been at five weddings So I've got the idea of how weddings work now And at weddings everybody's important, you know If you're getting married you want to make sure that all your family and all your friends are there It's a special event and each person that there is there is special a special guest But really there are only two key individuals at a wedding the bride and the bridegroom And you see John the baptist realizes that he's not one of the key individuals. He's an attendant

He's not the bridegroom. He's waiting for the bridegroom and the bridegroom Jesus has now come. He's arrived and the attention focuses on him. So you see I was a guest at five weddings. I was there doing sometimes doing certain things during the weddings. But the main people were the bride and the groom who made their vows and who got married. John recognizes that he now is a secondary figure. Jesus is primary. Do you understand that Jesus must be primary in your life? He must be first. His word, his truth. He has a call upon your hearts and your lives. He doesn't take second place. He won't allow it. You know if you have a movie if you have two big movie stars. They get double billing. It's not just one major star and a minor star, but you would give double billing to Stallone and Schwarzenegger or whoever it was big today, but uh here you have John recognizing that Jesus is the star. Jesus is the key. Jesus is the primary character now in the story and John's message and John's ministry is going to decline. So it's a question of priorities. And John understands that issue perfectly. Jesus must increase, John must decrease. Can you put your name in the place of John's?

Can you recognize that Jesus must increase in your life in your heart that what he says? That's your now your marching orders that his priorities become your priorities that he now has the authority to command you to do certain things and he has authority to command you to avoid certain things. And that you were to give him Allegiance, faith, obedience because of who he is. You can imagine the scene. Large crowds gathering to be baptized by John the Baptist. They are coming to this character this strangely dressed figure reminiscent of the old testament. They are hearing his sermons. Repent the axes at the root of the trees. They come to John. And now there's no somebody else on the scene and he's also preaching. He's healing. He's proclaiming the kingdom of God. And those who once were following John, those who once were flocking to this Strangely dressed prophet in the wilderness are now finding their attention distracted to this new preacher, to this new teacher and to this new healer.

And they find that their affection and their faith and their obedience their allegiance is now shifting to Jesus. So there is a question for each of us to answer here in your heart. To whom do you owe your allegiance to? Who do you trust and who do you believe in?

[13:11] Who has that primary place in your life? Is it yourself? Is it the person that you love most? Is it your wife or your husband? Is it if you're a younger person? Is it your parents or your friends?

Or do you find that Jesus can occupy the same place that your parents and your friends are? In a place that John has here that Jesus must have the greater and that we must have the lesser. That this goes against our human nature. Our human nature is to take the prime place. Especially if we are experiencing this type of popularity you can imagine. The popularity that John had people streaming to him. Eager to hear what he had to say, eager to take part in this baptism that he was performing. And then all of a sudden the tables begin to turn. Now human nature such as it is there would be jealousy, there could be bitterness, there could be anger. There could be a sense of disappointment, but not with John. John knew exactly what was happening. He says I am not the Christ. He knew who he was and he knew who Jesus was and he knew the connection between the two. So we need to understand who we are. Yes, we're made in God's image.

We are special and important in God's sight. We are given unique talents and unique abilities that we are expected to use. But Jesus is supreme. He's supreme in power. He's supreme in authority. He's supreme in glory and he must be supreme in our hearts, in our minds, in our affections, in our emotions. So it's a question of priorities and John has got that completely right. Some of his followers don't get it. They think it's a popularity contest and they are worried that Jesus's popularity is increasing and John's popularity is decreasing. John knows that's part of God's plan and purpose. It's interesting today. We live in an age where Jesus isn't that popular where it doesn't appear that many people are swarming to Jesus to hear him or to find out what he has to say. But nonetheless his command and his demand is still the same. He wants your affection. He wants your heart. He wants your life. He wants you to dedicate yourself to him.

But this brings us to the final matter of the passage and this is really the matter of life and death. That the choices that we make here in time will determine how we spend eternity. Now here's an interesting fact. We are told or I remember hearing this on BBC breakfast news. So it must be true. That in a disaster the people who tend to survive a disaster are those who for example in an airplane those who read the card that's in that seat pocket that tells you about what to do in a disaster. Those people who listen to the attendance as they give you that talk. You know the talk that

you've heard every time on a plane and you don't really pay attention But statistics say experts say that Most people who survive are those people who are clued up who actually do pay attention to the talk And who actually do read the card in the pocket Now ever since I heard that report I've been listening to the talk and ever since I've heard that report. I've kind of been reading the card You know just to make sure that okay if the plane goes into the water Where's the exit? What do I do?

[16 : 46] Because if that makes a difference between life and death And I guess the way they find this out is the they can only talk to the survivors And they ask the survivors well, what is it you did? What makes you different from maybe the other people?

So when it's a matter of life and death You begin to pay attention when it's a matter of critical importance You get You find that your focus now is sharpened We're told in verse 31. This is again, uh, john speaking the one who comes from heaven is above all That's why jesus must become greater because he's he is greater. He is from a greater place The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks as one from the earth The one who comes from heaven is above all He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony You see jesus's testimony does not depend on your acceptance Doesn't depend upon a majority vote His testimony is true whether you believe it or not His testimony is true whether anyone believes it or not because that's all he can do is simply speak the truth The man who has accepted it has certified that god is truthful

For the one whom god has sent speaks the word of god the words of god for god gives the spirit without limit The father loves the son has placed everything in his hands This is why jesus is supreme That jesus has that ultimate love of the father and jesus therefore has that ultimate authority over absolutely everything and absolutely everyone That the father has given charge to jesus of this world and everyone who is in it That he will one day judge the living and the dead But right now he is presented to us as savior as one who will accept us as one who will forgive us as one who will receive us But be sure that one day you and i will meet him at that great throne of judgment And we will either be acquitted because our faith has been Resting in him that we've accepted what he's done on our behalf Or there will be those on that day who will find themselves outside of the kingdom Outside of the presence of god outside of the goodness of god because They have not responded to the sun And that's why verse 36 is so critical Whoever believes in the sun has eternal life But whoever rejects the sun will not see life For god's wrath remains on him Whoever On both sides of the equation whoever Where did we hear that word before we heard in john chapter 3 and verse 16 for god's soul of the world that he gave his only begotten sun That whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life the gospel is good news by its very definition It's good news. It's good news for you and it's good news for me. It's good news for whoever This great word whoever means exactly what it says There are no stipulations about age There's no stipulation about class or education. There's no stipulation or qualification about education or attainments So it's whoever whoever hears the gospel and responds Whoever finds out about jesus somehow some way and places their hope and faith in him So there's whoever believes And notice this belief is focused. It's not just a general belief Again a long long time ago. There was a great baseball team called the Mets. They're still in existence But there was a miraculous season 1969 And the catchphrase of the 69 Mets was you've got to believe Now in that context it was you've got to believe in this baseball team But many people have this general idea that faith is you just have to believe It doesn't matter necessarily what you believe. It doesn't matter how you've come to believe it It doesn't matter if you really understand what you believe, but you just have to have faith. You just got to believe But not so Because the belief that's described here is a personal belief. It's your belief But it's a personal belief in a personal Jesus whoever believes in the sun there must be a focus to that faith

[21 : 11] It's not general faith in a generic god, but it's personal specific faith in a personal savior whoever believes in the sun But notice too that there's a whoever rejects. There's two choices here. Believe or reject And this rejection is also personal If you're not yet a Christian, then you are personally rejecting just like if you're a Christian night, you're personally accepting Nobody can make this choice on your behalf I can't accept on your behalf nor could I reject on your behalf Whoever rejects the sun Will not see life. So it's a rejection not of church. It's not a rejection of the bible. It's not a rejection of morality It's not a rejection of organized religion or organized institutions But it's a personal rejection of Jesus And I'd like you to just to be clear that if you're not yet a

Christian tonight, you might have many significant points to make against organized religion
Christianity

The bureaucracy that you've observed whatever it might be, but at the end of the day if you're not a Christian It's because you've rejected Jesus. It's a personal rejection of a personal savior So there's two choices here whoever believes and whoever rejects and each of those decisions has a consequence Whoever believes in the sun has eternal life And whoever rejects the sun will not see life Yes, we are all living and breathing here tonight. We are all respiring We have brain activity our hearts are pumping blood is circulating through our bodies. So we are each alive But spiritually speaking tonight only those who have faith in Jesus are spiritually alive That's why Jesus said in John the early part of John chapter 3. You must be born again Something needs to happen within us To give us spiritual life because we do not have spiritual life naturally It's not something we inherently possess It's only by the work of the Holy Spirit and notice that it's

It's God who sends the spirit without limit that God is able to do this great work of regeneration in your heart And if you are a Christian, he has renewed your heart. He has transformed your life He has given you this hope and he promises you eternal life So for the Christian tonight, no matter what your Christian experience might currently be No matter whether you feel that you are half empty half full or almost on the very edge of Turning away from Christianity whatever it might be whatever you might assess your Christian life to be a complete success A complete and utter failure Whoever believes in the sun has eternal life as a promise. It's a commitment It's a commitment that God is making to you and remember that God only speaks the truth He never lies. He never shades the truth. He only says what he means and he always means what he says but Whoever rejects the sun there are consequences for unbelief Consequences for rejecting Jesus. They will not see life for God's wrath

Remains on him There's an anger of God towards sin and there's a settled anger of God towards those who reject His solution to sin So it's adding if you think of it this way if sin is an insult Or sin is an injury. We are injuring God. We are doing something that he doesn't like. We're doing something that he Finds painful. That's an in that's an injury But when God sends his son into the world to save us from sin if you say no to God's solution You are adding insult to injury. You're making it personal You're saying not only God do I not acknowledge your law or your word not only am I not willing to live by your truth But I am not willing to accept your son whom you are sending As a solution to my sin problem. So you're adding insult to injury You're heaping one sin on top of another and God takes his son quite personally He went to quite an effort to save this world from its sin to save you and me from our sin And even though God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save

There is coming a time where there will be judgment and there will be the saved and there will be the lost There will be the redeemed and there will be the punished And God will determine the saving and the lost by this relationship with Jesus Christ So as I said earlier There are very few things in life that are absolutely essential But if you understand the gospel and if you understand Jesus you realize that he is absolutely essential to eternal life There is no substitute. Nothing you can put in his place Nothing that you can have that makes this difference between eternal life on one hand And the wrath of God remaining on you with the other In John's first letter As you read John's gospel and John's gospel As you read John's gospel and John one John you'll find this constant similarity with the way in which John phrases things In verse 10 of John first John chapter 5 page 1 2 2 8

[26 : 27] Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar Because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his son And this is the testimony God has given us eternal life and this life is in his son. That's the gift. That's the offer That's the term those are the terms and conditions He who has the son his life And he who does not have the son of God does not have life So it is a question of life or death It matters eternally this evening your response to the gospel and your personal response to Jesus So as a follower of the Lord Jesus You are safe in his hands. He won't let you go. He won't let you down His promise tonight is as true as was spoken 2000 years ago And he is able to keep you protect you preserve you. So don't worry You can't be with him one day and against him the next

This relationship is a permanent and a persistent relationship But please note if you're not yet following Jesus There is a day coming when you'll meet him and you can meet him on his terms

Well, you're going to meet him on his terms Tonight you can meet him tonight on his terms as savior or you can meet him then on his terms as judge And the only way you can stand before God is judge as if you have an advocate one who will speak And if you read through 1st John chapter 1 and 2 We're told that there is one who's willing to speak One who's willing to defend us one who's willing to stand alongside of us and his name is Jesus Are you ready to meet God? Are you prepared for that day where time gives way to eternity?

You might be young and you might think I've got plenty of years One thing I've learned in my 45 plus years is Life is uncertain. We don't know what today holds. We don't know what tomorrow holds But we know who holds today and tomorrow in his hands and who holds us in his hands So if it's a matter of life and death, I'd like to place my life in Jesus's hands I'd like to leave my death to him that whenever that happens whatever the circumstances that I can be confident That he will take me to be with him forever Next time you're on the plane by all means read that card Listen to that presentation, but make sure tonight that your faith and trust is rooted in the Savior Because we do not know what time holds But we're told here what eternity holds and the difference between eternal life And eternal wrath or separation is found in Jesus Reject him at your peril And embrace him for that gift of life that will never end

Let's pray Father, it's our prayer that you would strengthen the faith of each person here who trusts in Jesus We can find ourselves tired. We can find ourselves discouraged. We can find ourselves disheartened We can look at our own lives and see so much that is lacking We can find ourselves so often hanging on by a spiritual thread But we ask lord that you would strengthen that faith that we do have and rekindle that love for the lord Jesus And for any here tonight who may not yet follow who may not yet trust May they hear that were those words of Jesus speaking powerfully and clearly Remind us of john the baptist Remind us of his willingness to become less and his desire for Jesus to become more May Jesus grow in our hearts May Jesus grow in our lives and may the cause of Jesus grow in this city and in this land And may we be willing to be humble humble servants eager to see him advance Even if that means that we

May Jesus grow in our lives and may the cause of Jesus grow in this city and in this land May Jesus grow in our lives and may the cause of Jesus grow in this city and in this land