Preaching Series: **Christmas through the Eyes of Others**
Sermon Title: Christmas through the Eyes of the Father

Text: **John 3:9-21 -- Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 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. 18 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. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God."**

Introduction: **The Friday after Thanksgiving** is *known as "**Black Friday**" because it is the day that department stores finally begin to turn a profit for the year, so that they are now "**in the black**."* It also **marks the launch of the Christmas season for many Americans**. I suspect the majority of us have already done ***much of our shopping*** in an effort to get a good buy and stretch our financial resources as far as possible. And why not? It's just plain good stewardship to stretch our dollars as far as we can. Perhaps one of the blessings of having a limited amount of discretionary money available to us is that we consumers begin to reassess our priorities and value how much effort goes into earning the income to support and care for our families. **If only our children could come to appreciate the same thing! A while back, I read the story of a teenager who lost his contact lens while playing basketball in the driveway**. He started to look for it, but after only a few minutes gave up and went to tell his mother what had happened. Now, as we all know, contact lenses are very difficult to find, but incredibly, the mom found the one belonging to her son in only two minutes. When the boy asked his mother how she found it so easily, she said, "***It's simple, son. We weren't looking for the same thing. You were searching for a piece of plastic. I, on the other hand, was looking for $150.00***."

This is the second message in our **Advent Preaching Series,** which I've entitled "**Christmas through the Eyes of Others**." **As we all know, perspective is crucial when it comes to the important matters in life**. **The American Heritage Dictionary** defines the word **PERSPECTIVE** as "***the relationship of aspects of a subject to each other and to the whole***." **As we consider the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, ONE WAY TO MORE FULLY GRASP THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INCARNATION** (*the word means '**in flesh**' and refers to the son of God becoming a human being*—**John 1:14 -- And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth**) **IS TO CONSIDER IT FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF MANY OF THE KEY FIGURES INVOLVED IN THE STORY**. Last week, we looked at how Isaiah saw the coming of the Messiah – the Lord Jesus Christ. HE LOOKED FORWARD TO HIS COMING AS HE WOULD BE OUR **WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER AND PRINCE OF PEACE**! Today, we'll attempt to view Christ's advent THROUGH THE EYES OF GOD THE FATHER WHO SENT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD. I invite you, now, to open your Bibles and **fast forward a bit in time with me from the birth of our Lord to a discussion in the early part of Jesus' earthly ministry** in **John 3. This is** where we can learn more about **WHAT GOD THE FATHER SAW AND HIS SON TAUGHT** about the spiritual state of affairs of Israel and the world more than 2,000 years ago. Let's start with this …

DURING CHRIST'S FIRST ADVENT INTO THE WORLD, GOD SAW PEOPLE LIVING IN DENIAL OF CHRIST. This passage is part of a conversation that Jesus had with a man named **Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council**. In the first few verses of **John 3**, our Lord explained that a person needed to be "***born of water and the Spirit***" to enter the kingdom of God (**this is a reference to spiritual cleansing and renewal that only God can bring to His people by the power of His Spirit** — **Ezekiel 36:25-27 -- I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you)**. Though he likely had a pretty good working knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures as a Pharisee, Nicodemus didn't grasp what Jesus was saying. That's why he asked, "**How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born**?" Our Lord responded by asking a question of His own, "**You are Israel's teacher and (yet) you do not know these things**?" **Clearly, Jesus was implying that Nicodemus should have known better, but did not because he and his fellow Jews were LIVING IN DENIAL THE MESSIAH HAD COME.** We pick up their conversation in verse nine.

- **The Jews rejected Christ's testimony** (**John 3:9-11 -- Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not RECEIVE our testimony**). **EVEN THOUGH JESUS CLEARLY KNEW WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT, THE JEWS AS A WHOLE WANTED NO PART OF HIM. THAT'S WHY THEY DID NOT WELCOME JESUS AS THEIR MESSIAH** (**John 1:11 -- He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him**). **THE DENIAL OF CHRIST'S WITNESS LED TO FURTHER UNBELIEF**.
- **The Jews rejected Christ's teaching** (**John 3:12-15 -- If I have told you earthly things and you do not BELIEVE, how can you BELIEVE if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life**). **In these verses, JESUS EXPLAINS THAT HE UNDERSTANDS WHAT THE JEWS HAD NOT (I.E., what it means to be born again and how it takes place) FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT HE HAS COME FROM HEAVEN**. He is the "***Son of Man***" mentioned in **Daniel 7:13-14** (*a passage that speaks of the Messiah*). He knows what heaven is like because He has descended from there. **Jesus is the only One qualified to teach about the kingdom of God**. Yet, they do not recognize Him as such. This is evidenced by the title "**Rabbi**" given to Jesus by Nicodemus in **John 3:2**. **At this point, Jesus was only seen as another itinerant teacher of the Jews**. So, it is no surprise, then, that when He appeals to a story from the Old Testament of Moses and the fiery serpent in **Numbers 21:5-9, Nicodemus still doesn't CONNECT THE DOTS**. **Just as the Israelites were rescued from death caused by their own sin and rebellion by looking to the fiery serpent in simple faith, so those who have been bitten by sin today will live forever as they look to the crucified Christ by faith**. UNFORTUNATELY, THE JEWS WERE A PEOPLE THAT DENIED GOD'S PLAN TO REDEEM THE WORLD THROUGH CHRIST BECAUSE IT DIDN'T FIT WITH THEIR INTERPRETATION OF HOW EVERYTHING WAS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN. **THEY DIDN'T RECEIVE JESUS TESTIMONY BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE HIM WHEN HE SPOKE OF HEAVENLY THINGS**.

Sometimes people seem to be too smart for their own good. One of my former youth ministry students is now a research professor at Vanderbilt University. He is the most intelligent person I've ever met. He graduated with a PHD in Chemistry from the University of Wisconsin in his early twenties, something that is unheard of. He is also deeply ingrained in the scientific community. **A while ago, I asked him if scientists are guilty of stating things as facts that are, at best, assumptions that appear to be true given what we currently know**. For example, for centuries, the best scientific minds in the world claimed that the Earth was flat. Then, when new information came along that changed the opinion of many scientists, they began to teach that the Earth was round. **When I ask that of Ben, he just smiled and said, "Yes." I asked, "Why do they do it?" He said, "Most people in the sciences never want to appear to be wrong about anything."**

This is not only true when it comes to what we believe in the scientific world, but it's also true when it comes to our beliefs about God. **For centuries, leading Jews taught as fact that the Messiah would come as a military ruler. Then Jesus came along and didn't seem to fit that mold, so what did they do? They didn't change their beliefs. They just denied Him**. **This is what God saw in His people when Christ came into the world** – THEY WERE LIVING IN DENIAL. THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE HIS TESTIMONY EVEN THOUGH HE HAD COME FROM THE FATHER!

DURING CHRIST'S FIRST ADVENT INTO THE WORLD, GOD SAW PEOPLE DIVIDED IN THEIR RESPONSE TO CHRIST (**John 3:16-18 -- "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 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. 18 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**). Though the Jews denied Him, Jesus wanted to be clear that their response would not keep His Father from meeting the spiritual need of those who exercise faith in Christ by redeeming them. Why not? **Because God was both motivated to redeem them and had the means to do so**.

- **God's MOTIVE in rescuing the world: His LOVE**. "**For God so loved the world.**" Love is self-sacrifice for the good of another. Here, our Lord makes it clear that God wants this very thing for everyone ('**the world**' here refers to the people living in the world—**See Matthew 5:14**). Of course, elsewhere, the Bible confirms the same thing … that God's plan to redeem mankind flows from His love FOR US (**Romans 5:8 – But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**).
- **God's MEANS for rescuing the world: His SON**. Through faith in Christ, we can have life eternal. This life begins the moment we enter into a relationship with Jesus (**See 1 John 5:11-13**). Here are two further thoughts to consider concerning the Gospel message:
  - **The good news is BROAD enough to INCLUDE the worst sinner** ('**whoever believes in Him is not condemned**'). Despite the fact that in Adam all have sinned and inherited death as a result (**Romans 5:12 -- Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned**), so in Christ, even the worst of humanity can have life. ***The Apostle Paul referred to himself as the worst of sinners*** (**See 1 Timothy 1:16**) ***and yet God in His grace saved Him from the wages of sin***.
  - **The good news is NARROW enough to EXCLUDE any who reject Jesus** ("**whoever does not believe stands condemned (or judged) already**"). Christ must be the object of our belief. To reject Him is to reject salvation. ***He alone is the unique Son of God*** (*that's what the word "only" means*) **who is capable of delivering us from death to life**. There is only one answer for our sin, and that is Christ. Those who believe they are good enough to warrant salvation on their own merit are self-deceived (**Romans 3:10-11 -- … it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God**).

    A while back, a study conducted by **Canadian psychologists** found "**that people who purchase environmentally friendly items feel 'a moral glow' that makes them more likely to cheat and act selfishly in their private lives**." In the study, which was administered through the use of a computer game, "***subjects were to reward themselves with money based on results***. What they discovered was that '**Green**' consumers were more likely to lie about test results so that they could take more money. **The green subjects were also six times more likely to just steal money from the envelope.**" The explanation for this is that '***acting virtuously seems to make people feel they now have a 'license' to act unethically and selfishly in other parts of their lives***." The point is that we're simply not SO GOOD THAT WE SHOULD TRUST in ourselves. People really do need Jesus. (**Review: DURING CHRIST'S FIRST ADVENT INTO THE WORLD, GOD SAW PEOPLE LIVING IN DENIAL OF CHRIST, AND DIVIDED IN THEIR RESPONSE TO CHRIST.)**

DURING CHRIST'S FIRST ADVENT INTO THE WORLD, GOD SAW PEOPLE WHO LOVED DARKNESS MORE THAN CHRIST. (**John 3:19-21 -- And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God"**). Christ concluded his discussion with Nicodemus by explaining the difference between those who remain under God's judgment and those who have, through faith, been born again.

- **Everyone who does what is evil hates the light**. Light and darkness are mutually exclusive. Those who do what is evil and cling to darkness do so willingly and face God's judgment as a result (**John 5:28-29 -- Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment**).
- **Everyone who does what is good has come to the light**. In coming to the Light (*Christ*—**John 8:12 – I am the light of the world**), those who trust in Jesus are willing to see their sin exposed so that it might be forgiven and forgotten (**See Hebrews 10:17**). Once they've been saved, they practice doing what is right.

Review: DURING CHRIST'S FIRST ADVENT INTO THE WORLD, GOD LOOKED DOWN AND SAW PEOPLE LIVING IN DENIAL OF CHRIST, AND PEOPLE DIVIDED IN THEIR RESPONSE TO CHRIST AND PEOPLE WHO LOVED DARKNESS MORE THAN CHRIST.

Conclusion: The son of a farmer who had moved far away from home wanted to send his mom and dad a Christmas gift that they would never forget. He searched and searched but couldn't come up with a thing. ***Then, one day, a little man with a rather large goose wrapped in his arms knocked on the young man's door.*** He explained that this was no ordinary goose, but it was unique in that it could sing several Christmas carols as well as any tenor. Skeptically, the son of the farmer asked for a demonstration, and sure enough, the goose broke into a moving rendition of "***Silent Night***." Knowing that this was the gift he should give to his parents, he asked about its price. "***It is ten thousand dollars***," the little man said. Though the cost was steep, the goose was so remarkable that the young fellow purchased it. Working quickly, he built a special crate for the animal that would assure its arrival in good condition. He included a note saying, "***May this very special goose add great blessing to both of you this Christmas,***" and then sent it off to his mom and dad. He waited until after dinner on Christmas Day, then called to see if they had received his present. "***We sure did***," the old man answered. "***And what did you think of it***?" his son asked, beaming with pride. "**Well, I have to tell you that was the nicest gift you've ever sent your mom and me**." With a smile stretching from ear to ear, the son said, "***I'm so glad the two of you are able to enjoy it***." "**Oh, not just us**," said the father. "**That thing was so big we were able to feed half the neighborhood**!"

What a shame that the man and his wife never really understood what the gift given by their son was truly capable of. **Unfortunately, the same thing seems to take place in the hearts of people around the world every year as they contemplate the gift of God in the person of His Son**. They fail to see in Him anything more than a heart-warming story meant to satisfy their appetite for good feelings as the year draws to a close. To their misfortune, many never truly understand that Jesus is the visible representation of the love of God and the answer for a world that is ***LIVING IN DENIAL OF CHRIST, DIVIDED IN THEIR RESPONSE TO CHRIST AND IN LOVE WITH DARKNESS MORE THAN CHRIST***. May God keep any of us from being so short-sighted this Christmas.