

Born Again I John 3:9-12

Introduction

This last week – our nation was reminded of the darker side of human nature – when gun violence broke out at a parade in KC – celebrating the Chiefs Super Bowl victory

In the aftermath – a 43-year-old mother of two lost her life – and some 22 others were injured including an 8-year-old girl

The two individuals in custody are teenagers

We say – ‘What is wrong with these people – that you would take an assault rifle to a parade and start firing at someone you don’t like?’

It’s a much larger issue than mental health
The problem is, in fact, spiritual in nature

In the United States some 24-26,000 people will die by homicide this year

Why do we see such things in our world?

Murder is a result of man turning from God – **Romans 1:28-29**

Romans 1:28-29 - 'And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice . . .'

Such things flow from our fallen nature – man is walking in darkness / he is out of fellowship with God / He is a child of the devil

The only remedy is to embrace Christ

Budi Mulyadi grew up in Southeast Asia - - - when he was thirteen, he got into a violent argument with his father and ran away from home. He was soon placed in an Islamic boarding school – but the rules were very strict and Budi ran away again.

That’s when he met an Islamic extremist who promised him a new life. The man took Budi to a large training compound where, with about twenty other boys, he slept in tents at night and trained with knives and guns during the day. The boys were taught to hate and kill Christians in particular.

Budi later said: ‘We were taught that Christians were infidels – that if we would kill Christians – that would be a free ticket to heaven for us.’

The more Budi trained – the more he felt the surge of hatred well up within him. He fired at targets while his trainers yelled slurs against Christians and non-Muslims. But – when it came time for Budi to search for a Christian and kill them – he just couldn't do it. He and four other boys left the training camp.

Budi returned home – but his father's anger drove him away again. He found a job – and at night began reading the Quran – which is where he first saw the name of Jesus. Intrigued – he picked up a Bible and began to read. Alone at night – while reading his Bible – he thought he heard a voice say: 'I will send a Helper unto you.' He had no idea what that meant until he later came across John 14:16

John 14:16 - 'I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever.'

Budi put his faith in Christ – and later became a pastor

He referred to the change Christ brought – “My whole demeanor has changed – and God has filled my heart with love. I'm not an angry person anymore. My temper is gone. I don't get mad at people like I did before. Because God loves me I am able to love others.’

This morning – John gives us another test of our faith / identifying mark of a Christian

I John 3:11, 12 - 'For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous.'

Christians are to be identified not by hatred / malice / strife - - - but by love

To illustrate this – John reaches back to Genesis 4 – and recounts the history of Cain and Abel

I. *Genuine Article - vv. 9, 10*

Here John makes a statement about the nature of genuine Christians

He tells us the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious

If someone lives in habitual darkness / wickedness - - - they are a child of the devil

If someone practices righteousness – they give evidence of having been born again / of knowing Christ

Being born again – is simply another term for being a Christian

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

John 3:3 - "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Being born again – always involves God's Word / faith in God's gospel / trusting in Jesus

I Peter 1:23 - 'For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is through the living and abiding word of God.'

Rom. 10:9,10 - 'That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes resulting in righteousness and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation.'

When God's truth is met with faith – salvation occurs / one is born again

The Christian life is the outworking of this new life - - - the Christian's moral behavior now flows from the indwelling Holy Spirit - - - as the Christian yields himself to God's Holy Word as His moral guide for life and godliness

The old nature – we got from Adam – [nobody needs instruction on how to sin]

Apart from Christ - - - the new birth - - - everyone on this planet exhibits the old Adamic nature

This nature is selfish / hostile to God / hostile to fellow human beings / deceitful / vain / violent / etc.

When Jim Elliot and several other missionaries wanted to reach out with the gospel to the Auca Indians in Ecuador - - - they knew they were attempting something dangerous [they left their wives and children at home]

The Auca – did not interact with modern society in any way but with hostility

In fact – a couple of Shell oil representatives were killed by the Auca several years earlier – as Shell had considered setting up a drilling operation in the area – but after the murders – they left the area

But – Jim and the 4 other men were intrigued by the prospect of communicating the gospel to a people that had never heard the gospel before

They began doing gift drops – different food items / tools – trying to communicate a desire to meet them

The day came – something went wrong - - The Auca murdered the 5 men with spears / machetes - - - the story went around the world - - - Life magazine sent a photographer down to cover the story

We were reminded once again – of the old nature

But later – the Auca’s hearts were changed by the gospel

Adam and Eve welcomed sin into the world thru their disobedience - - - but it was in the lives of Cain and Abel - - - where they began to see the full horror of what they had unleashed in the world

Old nature we get thru Adam
The new nature we get from Christ

One of the things the new nature does is that it helps us to see the ugliness of sin / the selfishness of it / the vanity of it / the horror of it / etc.

Our eyes have been opened – and we don’t want to walk in that manner any more

The Spirit at work in our lives – moves us in the positive direction towards holiness

Chuck Swindoll: 'Sanctification is God removing, little by little, the poison of sin that contaminates us, freeing us to become who He created us to be.'

When you contemplate a sin / or are tempted - - - if you are a Christian – something inside you will say: ‘no – that’s not wise’ - - - ‘don’t go there’ – don’t do that / don’t say that / don’t look at that / etc. - - - it’s the Holy Spirit

Sometimes it is a gentle nudge / sometimes it is a megaphone shouting in your ear!

We are part of God’s family now – He is refashioning us into the image of His Son

Author Craig Barnes gives an analogy from adoption

Craig Barnes: 'When I was a child, my minister father brought home a 12-year-old boy named Roger, whose parents had died from a drug overdose. There was no one to care for Roger, so my folks decided they'd just raise him as if he were one of their own sons. At first it was quite difficult for Roger to adjust to his new home - - - an environment free of heroin-addicted adults! Every day, several times a day, I heard my parents saying to Roger: "No, no. That's not how we behave in this family."

"No, no. You don't have to scream or fight or hurt other people to get what you want."

"No, no, Roger, we expect you to show respect in this family."

And in time Roger began to change.

Now, did Roger have to make all those changes in order to become a part of the family? No. He was made a part of the family simply by the grace of my father. But did he then have to do a lot of hard work because he was in the family? You bet he did. It was tough for him to change, and he had to work at it. But he was motivated by gratitude for the incredible love he had received.

Craig Barnes: 'Do you have a lot of hard work to do now that the Spirit has adopted you into God's family? Certainly. But not in order to become a son or a daughter of the heavenly Father. No, you make those changes because you are a son or daughter. And every time you start to revert back to the old addictions to sin, the Holy Spirit will say to you, "No, no. That's not how we act in this family."

We sometimes talk about the perseverance of the saints – true believers continue in the faith

The reason we continue in the faith – is because God continues with us

He is relentless in His love – and in His objective of sanctifying the believer into the image of Christ

We are part of this family – The Father comes along at times and says, 'no – that's not how we act in this family'

We don't behave that way – we don't act that way

C.S. Lewis: 'But the great thing to remember is that, though our feelings come and go, His love for us does not . . . it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins, at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to Him.'

Sin is incompatible with the work of God's Holy Spirit

In the new nature – we are learning to love what is good and hate what is evil

If a person can live in sin and feel no desire to repent or turn from it – that indicates something about their faith is deeply askew

We can't be a friend of sin and a friend of Jesus at the same time

I John 1:6 - 'If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.'

II. Not as Cain - vv. 11, 12

Here John switches to a particular trait of Christian character – that of love

In contrast – he draws us back to the OT account of Cain and Abel

In a perfect world – there would be no such thing as murder or hatred - - - only love and goodwill

What is wrong with our world?

We live in a wicked world – that is in rebellion against God - - - the evidence of such wickedness are things like murder / violent crime / robberies / selfishness

There is a short story – titled – ‘The Little Loaf’ – that used to be used to convey Christian ethics to children in the olden days

‘Many years ago, there was a great famine in Germany, and the poor people suffered from hunger. A rich man who loved children sent for twenty of them and said to them: “In this basket there is a loaf of bread for each of you. Take it and come back again every day till the famine is over. I will give you a loaf each day.

The children were very hungry. They seized the basket and struggled to get at the largest loaf. They even forgot to thank the man who had been kind to them. After a few minutes of quarreling and snatching for bread, everyone ran away with his loaf except one little girl named Gretchen. She stood there alone at a little distance from the gentleman. Then, smiling, she took up the last loaf, the smallest of all, and thanked him with all her heart.

Next day the children came again, and they behaved as badly as ever. Gretchen, who would not push with the rest, received only a tiny loaf scarcely half the size of the others. But when she came home and her mother began to cut the loaf, out dropped six shiny silver coins.

“Oh Gretchen!” – exclaimed her mother, “this must be a mistake. The money does not belong to us. Run as quick as you can and take it back to the gentleman.”

So Gretchen carried it back, but when she gave the gentleman her mother’s message, he said: “No, no, it was not a mistake. I had the silver coins baked into the smallest loaf in order to reward you. Remember that the person who is contented to have a small loaf rather than quarrel for a larger one will find blessings that are better than money baked in bread.”

We note: the story depicts our natural selfishness / look out for # 1 / leads to quarrels / conflicts

But – then it points to a different way to live - - - the humble way of love / character / gratitude – the way that is pleasing to God

The first 2 children in the world were named Cain and Abel

And they reflect the two different natures / two different ways of living / one is that of faith / the other is that of rebellion against God

Genesis 4:1-10

Both Cain and Abel make offerings to God – but something is wrong with Cain’s worship / Cain’s heart

Why did God reject Cain’s offering?

Did Cain bring the wrong offering / or come with the wrong heart?

It seems clear – Cain’s problem was not knowledge of what to do – but his problem was his heart and that he would not submit himself to God

When given the opportunity to change course - - - he does not do so – instead he chooses the path of pride / hatred

MacArthur: 'God is not arbitrary or whimsical . . . He was not playing a game with Cain and Abel. He did not hold them accountable for what they could not have known or could not have done. Abel's sacrifice was accepted because he knew what God wanted and obeyed. Cain was rejected because he knew what God wanted, yet disobeyed.'

C.S. Lewis: 'There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done."'

Cain festers in his pride and anger – and he turns his anger on the only person he can actually do anything against – Abel his brother

Abel is something of an innocent bystander in this drama

Cain – reflecting the old nature – refuses to heed reproof from God

That is what the old nature does - - - it resists God / pushes Him to the side / deems Him irrelevant [I don’t need the Bible / church / Jesus]

Cain says, ‘thanks for the advice – but I know what I’m doing’ – that is always the nature of sin

Prov. 13:1 - 'A scoffer does not listen to rebuke.'

Cain did not want to do things God’s way – so he struck down the one who was

William Barclay: 'In life an evil man will always instinctively hate a good man . . . the good man is a walking rebuke to the evil man, even if he never speaks a word to him.'

While Cain overpowered Abel – sin had overpowered Cain

We are to look at the account of Cain and Abel – and recognize the lesson - - - don't be like Cain

Instead - John says we are to love our brother

I John 4:7, 8 - 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.'

If we have an authentic faith – our lives should be characterized by a gentle – forbearing, love for our brothers and sisters in Christ

Will we stumble? Will we fail to love at times?

Yes – we deal with a lack of love like we deal with any other sin

We confess it and forsake it – we recognize that we must walk by the Spirit to see the fruit of love in our lives

If we know Christ and are indwelt with the Holy Spirit – we won't be content or comfortable in a loveless or hateful state towards others

John 13:34, 35 - 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.'

Conclusion

Jesus told us – we must be born again

John 3:3 - "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

No one waltzes into heaven carrying the baggage of sin and wickedness

Sin must be dealt with – God provides the means

MacArthur: 'In Abel's sacrifice, the way of the cross was first prefigured. The first sacrifice was Abel's lamb - one lamb for one person. Later came the Passover - with one lamb for one family. Then came the Day of Atonement - with one lamb for the nation. Finally came Good Friday - one lamb for the whole world.

There is an interesting incident in the life of George Whitefield – as he preached during the age of the Great Awakening – he got to know some other great figures in history such as the Wesley brothers, Jonathan Edwards, Ben Franklin, David Hume the Scottish philosopher and skeptic

Whitefield once wrote a letter to Ben Franklin

In the letter he wrote:

George Whitefield: 'I find that you grow more and more famous in the learned world. As you have made such progress in investigating the mysteries of electricity, I now humbly urge you to give diligent heed to the mystery of the new birth. It is a most important and interesting study and, when mastered, will richly repay you for your pains.'

i.e. – 'Ben Franklin – you need to be born again'
Jesus speaks to us today – 'You must be born again'

Believe in the Savior