

But, Not, Nor, Nor, But

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[0:00] John 1, verses 12 and 13.

But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? The Bible is the Word of God.

It's not a work of fiction. It's not a fantasy book. It's not some kind of spiritual self-help book with instructions on how to make your life, your everyday life, I should say, seem like it's a Friday. It isn't merely a collection of historical events or of poems and wise sayings. The Bible is a true story of the death struggle between two sworn enemies, God and Satan.

[1:35] Both of them want glory, but only one of them deserves it. Though the details of the origins of this conflict are shrouded in mystery, it seems that Satan sought at some point after he was created by God to seize God's place.

The creature wanted the place of his Creator. He coveted God's authority. He coveted God's glory for himself.

As a result, God cast him and the other angels who conspired with him out of heaven. He cast Satan forever out of his heavenly court. And so all of this sets the stage for the events that take place in Genesis chapter 3, where there's Satan, the anti-God, the counterfeit God, tempts Adam and Eve to emulate himself by disobeying God's command not to eat from the tree of knowledge. He tempts them to reject God's authority, to doubt God's love, to doubt God's provision, ultimately to doubt that God's word is true.

The first man and woman made a terrible choice. In fact, no decision in all of world history has ever had worse consequences than the one that they made.

[3:15] This choice resulted with what we in the church call the fall. Mankind fell from their original place, from their original standing with God.

And all of us and everything that God created fell under the curse of sin.

Everything and everyone in this world is totally affected by sin. Have you ever wondered or thought to yourself, why does the world seem to be so broken?

The simple and clear answer to that is sin. We wonder, why are people so messed up? Why do people hurt each other so badly?

We can even look introspectively and we think, why do I feel the ways that I do? Why do I think certain things that I do? Why do I say and do things that I know that I shouldn't? Why am I so messed up?

[4:22] And the answer to those questions is sin. Sin has broken our fellowship with God. Sin has broken our world. Sin has broken us.

Sin has broken us. And so it was we who sinned against God. And at that point, God could have been justified if He said, you know what? That's it. He could have been completely done with it. The human race which He created for eternal glory now deserved only His eternal judgment for the sins that they committed against Him.

But instead of wiping the slate clean, God instead lays out the next stage in the great war between Himself and Satan.

He makes a promise in Genesis 3, verse 15, that though Satan would bruise the heel of the woman's offspring, that ultimately He would crush Satan's head.

This promise set the rest of human history in motion. And the conflict between God and Satan was now fully framed.

[5:31] This is a conflict of glory. God is identified in Genesis 1 and 2 as the creator of all things.

By rights, He possesses lordship and sovereignty over everything and has power over everything and everyone.

While God creates, Satan counterfeits. He despises the glory of God. He wants it for himself.

So he has set up himself as a counterfeit to all that God is. God has angels. Satan has demons.

Satan is referred to in the Bible as the prince of the power of the air.

The prince, the kingdom of this world system. A counterfeit to the kingdom of God. Satan is called the father of lies.

[6:30] Lies are counterfeit of the truth. And as we continue in our study of John's gospel, we find more counterfeits as Jesus approaches the cross.

First, there's the counterfeit high priest who seeks to condemn Jesus. The real high priest. Second, there's a counterfeit judge who wrongly participates in the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus, who is the true judge.

Third, there's a counterfeit king who demands allegiance over Jesus, who is the true king. Working behind all of this, behind all this religious and legal and political evil, was Satan and his demonic forces.

Counterfeits have power in that they are able to deceive someone into wrongly believing that what they are seeing is real. That they have true value.

But in fact, they're fake, they're false, and they're worthless. This week, Jack came home with a \$1,000 bill.

[7:45] A \$1,000 bill. And so he shows it to me, and I'm, man, that looks like it could be real, except for, you know, I'm not that dumb, and I know that, you know, maybe there isn't a \$1,000 bill, but people don't have them out, right?

And so it was clearly not the real thing. But not only had he had one, but he made sure to make, he went to his buddy's house, and they made copies of these \$1,000 bills.

And I think, you know, hey, if I was seven years old, that'd sound like a pretty good plan to me, you know? But it's clear to see, if you've studied the real thing, that it's a counterfeit.

And if you know the Lord, and if you know the Word of God, then you know how much of a counterfeit the devil is. This matters for us because from birth, we do not follow the true King, the true Lord, the true God.

We follow the anti-King, because we've inherited Adam and Eve's sin. And that's true for every single one of us.

[8:53] And you might think that that's a bold claim. Well, what evidence do you have to support such a claim? Well, my evidence is the world. Watch it. Go home and watch the news.

Pick up a newspaper and read it. Go on Facebook and social media and see the things that people post about, the things that they care about. We see that man kills man.

We see that there is a problem, that the world is not the place that it should be. In fact, have children. And I love my kids.

Volunteer next Sunday in the nursery, I always tell people. And you'll experience that kids do not act the way that we want them to. In fact, we spend a lot of time.

We spend a lot of effort. We spend a lot of energy and even money at times trying to get them to not act so bad. I remember when Jack was a much younger boy and he was walking and he was able to more fully understand what we were wanting him to do.

[10:04] And so I remember this one time we had curtains in our house and he was over there playing and he's just kind of like tugging on the curtains, you know. And Danny and I see what could happen.

You know, the whole thing could come crashing down on his head and really hurt him badly. And so, of course, we see this and we correct him. No, no, no, no, no. You know, you don't want to do that. Don't mess with those.

Don't pull on the curtains. And so he goes and he plays. But do you know what he did not too much long after that? Goes back over and he grabs the curtains and he looks at us.

And he makes eye contacts and then he smiles. And he starts to pull. Think, what's wrong with you? Why would you want to do that? Can't you see how bad that is for you? Kids are not as good at hiding their sin nature as we are.

But it's there and I think we all know it. All these things and other things like them come naturally to us. And these things that we naturally do, I think, speak to a deeper reality about the fallen condition

that we are all in.

[11:11] We do these things because like Satan, our heart seeks for its own glory. We don't want the glory to go to God. We don't seek to serve God, but to seek a God that serves us, that sounds so much more appealing to us.

In fact, many churches and pastors have built their ministry on this thought that God exists to serve you and that you don't exist to serve God.

That God is all about you and not so much about Himself. But if we read the Bible, we see that that's not at all what it says.

Look at John the Baptist. In John 3, His disciples come to Him. John the Baptist. And they're upset. They say to Him, Hey, you know, we've noticed that Jesus across the river, He's baptizing more people than we've been baptizing. Right?

[12:18] In a way, they're saying, their church is growing and ours isn't. We should be concerned about this. What are we going to do? Do you remember what John's response was to them?

He said of Jesus that He must increase. And He said of Himself, but I must decrease. You see, this is the opposite of what sinners desire.

We want it to be the reverse. I must increase. All others must decrease, including God Himself. We see this attitude all throughout Scripture.

In the Old Testament, they construct the Tower of Babel to bring glory to themselves. David conducts a sentence to bring glory to himself. Nebuchadnezzar's self-glory results in him losing his mind for a time.

And there are so many other examples of this in the Bible. But the most tragic examples, I think, come from the New Testament. When King Herod was visited by the Magi and given notice that the Messiah, the long-awaited Messiah, had been born.

[13:24] Instead of seeking to go to Him, instead of seeking to worship Him, He seeks to kill Him. And so He exterminates an entire generation of little boys to keep the glory for Himself.

The religious leaders, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the leaders of Jesus' day, they do not respond well to His arrival. Here He is, God incarnate. He has come, but they don't fall down on their faces and worship Him or obey anything that they have to say.

In fact, they oppose Him. They blasphemously say things about Him. Ultimately, they send Him to His death. They didn't want to share the glory.

over and over again, the story of the Bible is that human pride strives and connives to obscure the glory of God.

And so I think we need to understand that this is personal. This battle for glory is not far from each one of us here. It takes place every moment of our lives.

[14:32] every born-again believer struggles against the nature and their desire for self-glory. It's not easy to decrease and it's tempting to want to take some of God's glory for yourself.

And so I tell you that because I confess to you that I am the chief of sinners. I struggle with this. We have our annual meetings for the association.

And when we have those meetings, we receive a packet of information. And one of those packets of information or in that, I should say, packet of reports that we have is a report that lists all the churches in our association.

Willard knows. And next to all of the churches is average attendance, number of baptisms, giving. And it's hard.

I know why we have those reports just so people have an idea of sort of what's going on. But man, it's hard to not look at those numbers and start comparing.

[15:42] Start comparing. Oh, well, they're bigger because of this reason and it's sinful and they're really not. And different things like that and whatnot. And so it's tempting to me because we're going to go back this year and our numbers are going to be better than they were last year.

And there's a temptation for me to want to share in God's glory for that.

Because I confess to you that ministers of the gospel often determine their success by numbers. Things that can be counted.

And so often we look to those numbers for self-justification and for self-glory instead of looking to God for our justification and seeking to give Him all the glory.

And again, it's not that I don't want God to receive the glory for it, but there's this internal battle. It's almost like I want God to be the focal point of the picture, but I just like to photobomb it a little bit.

[16:52] You know, just peek out and wave like God's getting the glory, but I'm here too. Don't forget about me. And I think that we all at times struggle with that.

In fact, in his writings, Martin Luther said that there are theologians of glory and then there are theologians of the cross. The distinction being that the theologian of glory seeks greatness and glory apart from the cross and they seek it for themselves.

While theologians of the cross seek to bring the glory to God no matter what the personal cost might be to them. The primary concern that they have is for the glory of God and so the phrase *solī deo gloria* has been forever linked to the reformers, though none of them ever uttered that phrase that we know of.

It did, however, characterize their ministry and their mission for they were all about the glory of God and for God alone. This phrase first was introduced by two composers, Johann Sebastian Bach and George Friedrich Hendel.

Both used to write that abbreviation SDG, *solī deo gloria*, at the end of their compositions. Why would they do that?

[18:16] Because they understood that the reason they composed was for God, for the glory of God, that their music was intended to bring Him glory, not for themselves.

And so, in a similar way, on my phone, the screen saver is that very picture that you see right there on the slide, to remind myself that I don't live my life for me and that the glory isn't for me but it's for God alone.

So, imagine if that was the primary concern of all of us in the church. Imagine if we would gather together and the number one concern that every single one of us had is what can I do to bring God glory here?

Imagine if that was your primary concern where you work in your home. What can I do here to bring God glory? You know, our vision for our church, the four E's, engaging, enlightening, encouraging, and equipping, they would quickly become a reality if that was the way that we all truly felt.

When you're concerned primarily for God's glory, you aren't concerned for your own. And let me tell you that that attitude will have an impact. People with an attitude like that will be used mightily and powerfully by our Lord.

[19:51] In his book, *Desiring God*, John Piper made a statement that will forever be linked to him. And it's a statement that has stuck with me and it's stuck with so many others who have heard it.

It's this statement. He says, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

If you are most satisfied in something else, then God will not be very much glorified by you. And so I think that these verses provide us with the answer in this passage.

How can we have this mindset? How can we live for the glory of God alone? And so here's the main idea for this morning's message.

A person's heritage, personal efforts, and obedience to man-made systems of religion are incapable of saving them. Salvation is all of God and it's all of grace.

[20:55] Therefore, God receives all the glory. When we review where we've been in verses 10 and 11, those spoke to the rejection of Christ.

The world that He created, the world that He made, wanted nothing to do with Him. Even more shocking than this, the very people whom God had called, whom God had given the Scriptures, whom God had prepared for the coming of His Son, even they rejected Him.

And so John uses these verses to speak to just how sinful we are. That we've rejected our Creator, even God's own people who were best prepared to receive Him and wanted nothing to do with Him at all.

Then in verse 12, we see that, however, though that's true, there are some who have received Him. There are some who have believed in His name. To those ones, the Bible says, He has given the right to become children of God who were born, John says, referring to the new birth, this radical transformation.

Verse 12 speaks to the effect of our salvation. It says there, we've become children of God. So then we wonder, how have we become that way?

[22:18] How have we been born again? And verse 13 gives us the answer. It tells us the cause, which is the new birth. The Bible says that salvation is not by blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.

Look again, verse 13. He says there, they were born, they had become children of God, they were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.

So I was thinking about this, I was thinking of Luke chapter 18, and Jesus' encounter with the rich, young ruler.

This man was in possession of all the things that most Americans want. He was young, had a lot of life ahead of him, he was rich, had a treasure trove of all the possessions that people in this life would want, but there was one thing that he was uncertain of.

One thing that he wanted was eternal life. So let's begin to read that encounter that Jesus has with this man. In verse 18, and the ruler asked him, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? [23:45] And Jesus said to him, why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and your mother.

So here the rich young ruler has so much that the world craves, but he was looking for one thing. That one elusive good work.

That one more thing that he could do that would make him feel like he got pushed over the edge to obtaining eternal life for himself. And so it's almost like he's asking the Lord, just what can I do? Lead me in a prayer. Lead me in a prayer. Have me walk down an aisle. Whatever it is, just give me one more thing that I can do so I feel like I'm in possession of this eternal life.

He had thought like the Pharisees that if he kept the law that he would be saved. So what Jesus does for this man is he takes that law and he holds it up to his face like a mirror to see just how well he was measuring up.

[24:53] So Jesus began, as we saw, by listing the commands that deal with our responsibilities towards our fellow man, the so-called second tablet of the law. So he presents these laws to him, right?

Brings them face to face with it. And how does the man respond? Well, we see in verse 21 that the man says, well, all these things I have kept from my youth. He looked calmly in the mirror of the law that Jesus had brought to his face and he saw no imperfections in himself.

Now imagine that someone came to our church today matching a similar description of this rich young man. Let's say that they drive up in a Porsche.

And I got to peek out in the parking lot this morning. I didn't see anybody driving a Porsche. So no, I'm not talking about you. But say he drives up in a Porsche. He gets out of the car. He walks in. He's wearing a three-piece Armani suit. Tucked under his arm is a Bible with a cover made of really fine, soft, genuine goatskin leather.

[26:08] Now imagine that he goes to your Sunday school class. And in your Sunday school class, you're talking about sin. You're talking about your personal struggles with sin.

You're talking about the Bible and it says clearly about our own sinful fallen human condition. And imagine that this man in his three-piece Armani suit, right? Looking nice, looking dapper, looking like a great addition to our church.

You know, what can we say or do to get this guy coming here? And say he's got this puzzled look on his face as you're talking about sin and he pipes up and he says, you know, I'm confused about what you guys are talking about here.

You seem to have a problem with sin. Well, I don't. In fact, I haven't sinned since I was a little boy. I would want to wring that man's neck.

Wouldn't you? Are you kidding me? You haven't kept all of God's commands for ten minutes, let alone for most of your life.

[27:09] So I admire Jesus' patience and his more subtle approach here with this man. And he was definitely more effective than I would have been with him.

In verse 22, Jesus says, when he hears this, he says to him, one thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come and follow me. me. And I think here, if ever Jesus spoke in tongue in cheek, it was at this point. If we took Jesus' words literally, then it would seem as if right now we are witnessing the conversation between the most righteous person who's ever been and the second most righteous person who's ever been, right?

I just have one more thing that you don't have. But we know that that's not the case. that Jesus is being gentle with this man.

So he puts him to the test. And he points out that this man who thought that his life had been lived righteously, in fact, had a severe problem.

[28 : 34] that problem that he worshipped another God. Not the true God of the Bible. And so, in verses 23 and 26, Jesus tells him, we see, go and sell all that you have.

And when this man heard these things, he became very sad for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, how difficult is it for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.

For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. And those who heard it asked, asked, then who can be saved?

The point of this exchange was not to lay down a law that requires Christians to sell all of their property, but for us to understand what true obedience and goodness requires.

Sinless perfection. And seeing the rich ruler unwilling to put his faith and trust in Christ, he was unwilling to give up the things that he had in his life because these things brought him glory.

[29 : 52] The disciples watched him walk away and they were perplexed by what they saw. This man had everything. And at this point in time, in this culture, to be rich and to be wealthy, they thought, was a sign of God's favor.

And so they thought he has the heritage. He's a Jew like us. He has the wealth. And we believe that that means that he's been blessed from God to have it.

That he must be saved. Why else would he be in such a position? And then they see that Jesus, he goes away sad because he realizes that he's unwilling to give up his true God and that he's not saved.

And so then they hear Jesus' words and they think to themselves, well, if he can't be saved, then who of us can be saved. In John 18, 27, Jesus responds, what is impossible with man is possible with God.

Every religion that has ever existed except for Christianity has been based on the necessity of human achievement for salvation. Basically, if your good deeds exceed your bad deeds, they say, you'll be saved.

[31 : 13] You'll have eternal life, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Mormonism, you name them. All of them at the root is an assumption that salvation is based upon your human achievement, your heritage, your good works.

That's enough to do it. But the Bible says that that is not at all the case. Jesus repeatedly pointed out two things.

There's really only two religions in this world, a system of salvation based on works or a system of salvation based all upon what God has done for you. And so Jesus was constantly pointing this out by referring to two things.

The necessity of choosing whether to follow God or not and the fact that the choices are two and only two. He said, there are two gates. There are two ways, a narrow way and a broad way.

There are two destinations. One that ends in life, one that ends in destruction. That there are two groups. There's the few and there's the many. That there are two kinds of trees, the good and the bad, which produce two kinds of fruit.

[32 : 15] Good fruit and bad fruit. Two kinds of people who profess faith in Jesus Christ and some who do also but are not sincere in their profession of Him. There's two kinds of builders.

There's a wise builder. There's a foolish builder. There's two different kinds of foundations. The rock and the sand. There's two houses. One that is secure. The other that is insecure.

The standard that God demands is absolute perfection through obedience to His law. Salvation is not of blood.

We don't become Christians because our parents were Christians and it passed on to us in the bloodstream. And salvation isn't by the will of the flesh. If our own efforts and good works aren't sufficient for our salvation, right?

And it's also not of the will of man. It isn't by the choice of myself by my own free will. That's what that verse clearly says. If it's not by any of these things then what can it be by?

[33 : 19] And John says it's only by one thing. The Bible says that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It's not by the blood.

It's not by the will of the flesh nor by the will of the man. It is of God. Verse 13 It is but of God. That's it. And there are so many verses that would speak to this but I think one of the most clearly the one

that most clearly speaks to this or one of them is Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 and 10. Please just listen to the word of God and what it says. Speaking to those Ephesian Christians. speaking of them in the past tense at first and you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

You were following the course of this world. Following the prince of the power of the air who we identified as Satan. The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all even referring to himself once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and we were by nature children of wrath just like the rest of mankind.

But again thank the Lord for these two words. But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses he made us alive together with Christ.

[34 : 50] By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

And if you didn't hear it the first time again for by grace you have been saved through faith and if you still don't understand and this is not your own doing it is a gift of God not a result of your works so that no one may boast no one may seek the glory for themselves for we are his workmanship we've been created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we might walk in them and I don't know how more clear it could be I don't last week I had a good friend come and visit our church I hadn't seen this man in over 10 years and he just was there second row in the pew when I walked in totally surprised had no idea that he was going to come in fact I thought he was somebody else at first and I told you that we were college teammates we were good buddies he was the catcher who knew how to calm me down when I was getting frustrated and though he could calm me down on the field he knew how to bring another side out of me off the baseball field of all of my friends and you've heard my testimony you know about some of you what I was doing in college

I was not living my life at all for the Lord I was very much a party animal and of all my friends he was the one that Danny was most concerned about me hanging out with or I say yeah me I'm going to go hang out with my friends and so who's going with you well you know John and Joey and Adam and some other guys and she would she would get really upset because she knew that me and him together had the ability to bring out the worst in one another and I won't share the stories because honestly I'm ashamed of a lot of the stories and so all of this to say that I was shocked to see my friend and now he knows what I've been doing in life and so obviously or else he wouldn't have gotten here and so it was just neat to see him here and so we went out to eat afterwards and I could just tell right off the bat this friend of mine who was very opinionated who was very boisterous was not afraid to let people know how he felt even if it hurt their feelings really badly was acting completely different soft spoken very humble and we went out to eat and I could tell that his life was just different but this wasn't the same friend that I knew in college and so we started talking about Christ the church about faith and he told me that soon after he was married that he and his wife began going to church my friend and this is this is sad too

I didn't even know his upbringing at all in college I didn't care about any of that I didn't care about sharing the gospel with him and so he told me you know I grew up Catholic and so what that would have meant is that he would have been christened as a baby that in their tradition that that meant that he would have been cleansed of original sin and then later on he was confirmed which means that now he was that now he was considered a member of the church they considered him to be a member of the body of Christ he was able to participate in communion and what not all those other man made sacraments then we went to college and we went to a Christian university you had to go to church you had to go to chapel twice a week they would scan you in and out and they were very serious about making sure all of their students went to chapel and so he was in chapel twice a week hearing people get up and preach to him in that Christian university you were required to take Bible courses you took a Old Testament class you took a New Testament class you took a theology class you took a Christian ethics class you took a marriage and family class that was all based upon what the Bible had to say about those things and you know what he told me he said Mike I got a 4.0 in all of those classes but I had no idea what the Word of God said and it was in that Bible study as they were teaching him the Word of God he said I realized that I was wasting my life the things that I thought were important the things that I that I was pursuing it is all changed and me and Danny

were just flabbergasted!

[40:20] afterwards I mean it was almost like we didn't know really what to say we just couldn't believe it and I told him I said you know Adam if people knew us back then hanging from the rafters of houses and buildings right and doing really stupid stupid things if they knew us then and if they were at this table hearing us talk now they wouldn't believe it and so I share that with you to tell you that all the things that could have saved my friend were totally incapable of saving him wasn't of the blood wasn't of any man-made system it wasn't of himself it was the word of God and God's spirit speaking to him that radically transformed his life that excites me because to me it's like that takes the pressure off all I got to do is share the word of

God with people all I got to do is share the gospel with people and the results are up to the Holy Spirit that excites me and I hope it excites you and it also excites me because I realize just how unworthy I am of the salvation that I've received I realize just how unworthy I am of the person who was blessed in so many ways to grow up in a Christian home who was called a young age yet ran away hard and fast from all of those things in college and lived my life for my own glory and yet God was merciful to me to forgive me and to show me a better way and I'm thankful that he did that for my friend that my good buddy is now my brother in Christ and I don't give anybody else the glory for that besides God alone and so for you I hope that you know that it's not about some kind of a system that man has established yeah we do an altar call but you know what that's a totally a traditional thing it is

I don't care if you walk down the altar what I do care is that if you are hearing if you are seeing your sin and your need for Jesus Christ I want you to tell me so that me and this church can continue to serve you and equip you to be a disciple of Christ who makes disciples for Christ and excites me to think of the opportunity that we have for engaged when people will be here and my hope is that they will see in us people who have truly been transformed and that we will share with them the good news of Jesus Christ that he's the one and the only one who has done this thing for us is that they are you