

## THE VERDICT

John 3:14-21 Text vs. 19 *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”*

On Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup> of this year, *CBS News* reported that *“An Anchorage, Alaska jury returned a unanimous verdict against serial killer Brian Steven Smith. The trial lasted two weeks. And after deliberating for less than two hours the jury delivered a verdict.”* Verdict! A verdict is the finding, or decision made by a jury, or a judge, at the end of a trial after considering all the facts presented during the legal proceedings. The verdict is the conclusion that is reached. Verdicts determine whether someone is guilty, or not, in a criminal case. In a civil case, it establishes liability. So, a verdict is an official judgment given based on the evidence and arguments presented in a court of law. Juries must return a unanimous guilty verdict.

Now, our lesson today is about a verdict that was part of a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus as Jesus explained the concept of salvation and the role of faith. The first verse of John 3 puts it all into context. Nicodemus was a seeker of Truth. A Pharisee. His mysterious encounter with Jesus at night and the conversation raises some questions. Who Was Nicodemus? Well, he was a ruler among the Jews. A Pharisee. Pharisees believed in life after death and the resurrection of the body. They emphasized the importance of keeping rituals. And adhering to the Ten Commandments. They taught the way to God was through obedience to the law. Commandment-keeping.

So, Nicodemus went to Jesus at night and said, *“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher sent by God, for no one performs these signs without divine presence.”* Jesus answered, *“Unless one is born again, born of water and the Spirit, they cannot see the kingdom of God.”* Puzzled, Nicodemus questioned *“How can someone be born when they are old?”* Now, what to Nicodemus represented the idea of being *“born again.”* It was being born by a woman! And Jesus answered Nicodemus gently saying, *“Are you not the teacher of Israel? Yet you grapple with earthly things. Listen: No one ascends to heaven except the Son of Man, who must be lifted up, just as Moses raised the serpent in the wilderness. Believe, and eternal life shall be yours.”* That stirred something within Nicodemus. Especially after Jesus had said the words of John 3:16. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoso ever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* *“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”* *“Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already. Because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”*

Down through the ages those words have encouraged seekers to embrace God’s Spirit. Nicodemus stood at the crossroads where his caution melted into curiosity. He might have wanted to know if Jesus was Messiah. But later, he dared to question the authorities about their decision to arrest Jesus. Justice and fairness had taken root in his heart. And at night, after the crucifixion of Jesus, Nicodemus went with Joseph of Arimathea to take *“a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds worth”* to prepare the crucified body of Jesus for burial. *“Taking Jesus’ body (to a borrowed tomb) the two of them wrapped it with the spices, in strips of linen in accordance with Jewish burial customs.”* (John 19:39-40).

So, in the records of faith, Nicodemus will forever be seen as seeking after Jesus who told him, *“I have spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe. How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”* *“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.”* And *here’s the verse!* John 3:19! (NIV) *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world. But people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”*

Now, think about that. That deep Truth revealed by Jesus Himself in Verse 19 made a definite contrast between light and darkness. Does it apply to your life today? When Jesus declared, *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world”* He was speaking of none other than Himself! Jesus, the Son of God had stepped down from His heavenly Glory to bring spiritual light to our broken world. His teachings. His miracles. His sacrificial love. All spread like a powerful beacon from a lighthouse cutting through the darkness of sin and despair. But Jesus said the human condition had a love for darkness. He accepted that painful Truth when He said, *“People loved darkness instead of light.”* Why? Because their actions were evil. Sin can blind you. Sin can twist how you identify between good and bad. But many have become comfortable in the shadows. They hide guilt. They cover their shame. And they don’t want anybody to know about it! They prefer the darkness. Because it hides their brokenness.

Today, we as a nation are broken. We’re standing at a crossroad making a choice between light and darkness. Your vote in the coming election will play a crucial role in shaping our future as a nation. According to Thomas Williams, *Breitbart* News Bureau Chief, and author of *The Coming Christian Persecution*, says *“over the past five years the United States has experienced a significant rise in attacks on Christian churches. Last year there were 436 attacks on Christian churches. Vandalism, arson, gun related incidents and bomb threats. He states the rise in crimes against churches average over one a day! And that suggests a shift in American society which is becoming increasingly hostile toward Christianity. A collapse in reverence. The loss of respect for churches. And even Christianity itself! Church buildings are being targeted because they symbolize fundamental Christian beliefs. And the perpetrators are motivated by anger toward the church. All 50 states*

are included, including the District of Columbia.” And Jesus invites our nation to step into His light. Embrace His grace. Accept His forgiveness. Be transformed by the power of His light. And Jesus invites *you* to step into His light and embrace His grace. Because the pull of darkness remains strong. Clinging to sinful habits. Having secret sins and pride may remain and cause you to fear exposure, because you’re afraid His light will reveal your imperfections.

Yet, the Light of Christ is not merely a spotlight on flaws. It’s healing. A life-giving force. Just as LED light therapy, known as phototherapy, a non-invasive treatment using light-emitting diodes to treat various skin conditions rejuvenates the skin and supports overall health, when you choose the Light of Christ, your overall spiritual health is made whole when your sins are forgiven. Your brokenness is made whole. Your heart is filled with hope. Your purpose in life becomes clear. When you’re walking in the Light you’re living a life of righteousness. Speaking the Truth. Following God’s guidance. And striving to be pure and holy in all your actions. That’s in contrast to walking in darkness. Darkness represents sin. It’s deception. It’s confusion.

To walk in the light, you must live a life directed by God’s Word. And guided by the Holy Spirit. It’s about remaining in Christ. It’s about obeying His Word. When you walk in the light, you have joy and peace. Not anxiety and fear of darkness. The light is God’s Word. Psalm 119:105 says it’s a lamp to your feet. A light to your path. Walking in the light means you have brought your life around to be in alignment with God’s Word. His life is *your* life. And His light shows you the Truth.

So, you have a choice. Love the light. And choose God’s Word as a weapon against sin, accepting the Truth and hating sin. Because choosing darkness requires nothing of you. But walking in the light demands acceptance of God’s Truth. Obedience to His ways. It’s an on-going process. You’re continually being transformed into the image of Jesus. It’s called Discipleship. Walking in the light is being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It’s not merely having knowledge of who Jesus is. It’s about living out that knowledge in your daily life. And how do you do that? How do you respond to the verdict that *“Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”*

How do you choose the light? Well, first, you recognize your need for salvation. Confess your sins. Invite Jesus to shine His light directly into every hidden corner of your heart. Embrace the Savior. Jesus *is* the Light of the world. Accept Him as your Savior. Believe that His sacrifice on the cross redeemed you. Live clearly. Be completely open with God and with others. His Truth helps you when you are making your decisions. Let Him help you with your relationships. And constantly be on guard with your actions. And here’s the conclusion. God’s verdict stands! God is both judge and jury! Light *has* come into the world. And *people loved darkness instead of light*.

The choice is yours. You can remain in the darkness still clinging to your sinful ways. Or you can let go, and step into the transforming light of Jesus Christ! Choose the Light. Choose the One who chases away darkness, forgives sins, and offers eternal life. And as you leave this sanctuary, this safe place, remember Jesus’ words: *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12, NIV). Amen.