

Transcript

The Jesus Story - Nicodemus: Part Two

The last time that we looked at John's gospel we looked closely at the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, and how Jesus had explained to Nicodemus the need to be born again.

Then in verse twelve where we finished it would seem that the conversation was over because, this is what we read in verse 12:

12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

But nothing could be further from the truth because Jesus then goes on to reveal to Nicodemus the whole plan of salvation. In verse 13 we have the source of the plan:

13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

In verse 14 Jesus describes just how this will happen:

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus then tells Nicodemus of God's gracious offer of salvation:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

When we come to verse 18, we arrive the make your mind up time:

18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

We need to take this one step at a time. In verse 13, we have the source of the plan:

13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

Jesus is the only one who is able to reveal these heavenly truths because he is the only one who has ever entered heaven's realms. Jesus is able to testify about Heavenly things because He has been there and seen them. No human teacher has ever had access to this kind of revelation.

Jesus is the only one who is equipped to describe the things that are beyond both human wisdom and imagination. Jesus descended with this knowledge making him the supreme teacher. Jesus by taking human flesh, descended as the Son of man to reveal the Father. He came to give the world a visual manifestation of who God is, and what He is like.

On one occasion in John 10v30 Jesus told the angry crowd;

30 "I and My Father are one."

This is what He had to say a little further on when talking to Philip in John 14:9:

9 Jesus said to him, He who has seen Me has seen the Father.

If anyone was in a position to describe just what was in the heart of God Jesus is the only one able to do this. Jesus did not ascend to Heaven, He descended from Heaven because He is the God of Heaven, come down to earth.

Then in verses 14 and 15, Jesus describes just how this will happen:

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

To describe to Nicodemus just how this plan of salvation will happen Jesus refers to a story from The Old Testament. This is briefly what happened. Israel murmured against God, who punished them by sending "fiery serpents" to attack the people, and many of them died.

As a result Israel repented and asked Moses to pray on their behalf, asking God to take the punishment away. God then instructed Moses to make a "fiery serpent" out of brass and place it on a pole. God told him that everyone who looked at the brazen serpent would live. Moses did this and as he lifted up the serpent the people who looked to it, and were healed of the wounds caused by the punishment.

Those who believed the word that Moses brought from God and looked to the serpent which Moses had lifted up and were healed.

Jesus says that in like manner the Son of man must be lifted up. Those who have faith in the word that Jesus brought from God, would be saved. Faithful obedience is the key here. Faith that obeys is the faith that saves. Faith in what Moses had told them to do saved the Israelites, and faith in what Jesus tells us to do will save us.

The children of Israel did not have to touch the serpent or worship the serpent. They did not even have to get near to the serpent. All that they had to do was to look at the serpent. The serpent was lifted up on a pole in the sight of everyone. The only effort needed was to look. No matter how far away they were, nor how sick they were, God had put the cure within the reach of all. The only ones not healed were those who refused to look.

With this illustration Jesus answered the question of Nicodemus. "This is how Nicodemus, just as the serpent was lifted up, so also must the Son of Man be lifted up."

And just as the children of Israel who believed the promise that God had made were saved, so also would all those who believed on the Son of Man be saved. It did not matter how many times the Israelites had been bitten, or how far their sickness had developed, just one look of faith, and they were completely healed.

On the cross Jesus was literally "lifted up between Heaven and earth", to be the intermediary and to atone for sin. Jesus did this to open a way for believers to

possess eternal life. Jesus is only mediator between God and Man

While discussions on new birth had Nicodemus totally stumped, this Pharisee certainly knew his Hebrew history. When Jesus makes reference to this incident from the Old Testament, Nicodemus knew the story, but he had never heard the story applied in the way that Jesus applied it.

In the same way Jesus said He must be “lifted up” in order to become the source of eternal life for all who believe. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

That word ‘whosoever’ demonstrates the scope of the Gospel. The vilest wretch on the face of the earth, the most despised and degraded the worst sinner in the world who truly believes in Jesus Christ will be saved by him, for all eternity.

It is not the sin; the Son of God has already dealt with that. It’s unbelief that bars the way to Salvation. The feeblest look by the children of Israel brought healing, and the weakest faith if true and sincere brings salvation to the sinner.

The expression that ‘whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life’, this is a very strong statement as the Israelites who looked at the brass serpent, not only did they not die, but they recovered completely from their wounds.

The sinner who looks to Jesus not only escapes the condemnation of hell but, they have the seeds of eternal life planted within them. They are saved for all eternity.

This salvation is not just being pardoned from sin, it is being counted as completely righteous and being made a citizen of heaven. It’s not just the escape from Hell, it’s the promise of an eternity in heaven, ‘That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, But have eternal life.’

“How can these things be” – that was the question that Nicodemus asked. Jesus had explained to him how. Jesus was now going to tell Nicodemus ‘Why’. It is because ‘God Loves You Nicodemus’, that is why.

In verse 16 we find God’s gracious offer of Salvation:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Just what does John 3:16 really mean? This is the core of Christianity; that God loved the world enough to come as Jesus to die for us, so that anyone who trusts in Him will be saved. This is certainly the most well-known verse in the Bible. It is probably the best-known and most-memorized part of any holy text in human history. The verse is a one-sentence summary of the gospel.

John 3:16 also reflects another important aspect of the gospel. Although the surface story is very clear there are layers of meaning and knowledge inside this text.

The life offered to those who believe in Christ is “eternal”. This comes from a Greek word meaning “never ending”. The alternative to life in Christ is destruction: to “perish”.

Verses 16 and 17 explain that the purpose for sending Jesus 'Was the salvation of all mankind'. We shall see a little latter verse 18 those who don't believe are condemned and there is no question at all about that.

The Bible very clearly demonstrates that people can only be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. This passage sets the theological framework for the teaching of the whole Gospel by stating the elements of salvation as simply and directly as they can be found anywhere.

God gave His only begotten Son; this describes both the expression and the gift of God's love. God's love did not just feel for the plight of a fallen world, God did something about it. He gave the most precious thing He could give: His only begotten Son. The motive for God's gift was love; and the purpose of God's gift was Salvation. When we break this verse down it becomes even more wonderful.

1. For God, the greatest Being that man could ever fathom.
2. So loved the world, the greatest action that man could ever receive.
3. That He gave His only begotten Son, the greatest gift that's ever been given.
4. That whosoever believes in Him, the greatest invitation that's ever been offered.
5. Should not perish but have everlasting life, the greatest promise that's ever been made.

These are the "heavenly things" Jesus was referring to when talking to Nicodemus in verse 12. The position of all believers, is revealed in this one paragraph.

If there is one sentence more than another which sums up the message of John's gospel, this is it.

The love of God is limitless; it embraces all mankind.

John 3:16 itself is so simple that even a little child can understand its basic meaning and accept its teaching as their own. Yet, there is a depth here for the profoundest of thinkers. "Whosoever" the invitation is as inclusive and open-ended as possible. Salvation is not restricted to any race, colour, or class, but is the birthright of all who will truly believe.

Jesus dispels any false conceptions that men may have of God.

Nicodemus! Do you know why this plan of salvation was formed? Do you know why it is that you have the opportunity to be born again? It's because God loves you, that's why.

There are a great number of descriptions in the bible concerning the actions of God. We can read of the Sovereignty of God, the Justice of God, the Holiness of God, the Righteousness of God, the long-suffering of God. The list is endless but every action of God is prompted by the nature of who He is.

So, how could we describe God? Well He is omniscient, He is omnipotent, He is omnipresent. He is the all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present God. There is nothing that God cannot do. He is all-powerful. He is ever-present, and he knows all things.

And all this awesome power is controlled by the very nature of who God really is.

The power of God can be seen in the use of His mighty attributes. He can create a world out of nothing. He can breathe into a piece of clay and it becomes a living soul. He can open a way in the sea, so that men can cross on dry land. He can close the heavens so that there is no rain. His power is limitless.

And yet every decision and action of God is controlled by love. God does not just Love. God is Love. We are all capable of loving at some time or another but God is Love. It's His very nature and he can't do anything that is contrary to His nature.

God is love in name, and God is love by His very nature and the very character of God's love is seen in the lengths that it goes to.

FOR GOD SO LOVED.

That little word 'so', how much the word 'so', implies it would be very difficult to define. It can only really be understood when we see the lengths that it is prepared to go to. It goes far beyond anything that our finite minds could ever comprehend. It goes far beyond anything that we could ever measure. God does not love us because Christ died for us; Christ died for us because God loved us, and the object of that love is the world.

It was not just a nation that God loved, or the good people. It was not just the people that loved Him, it was the world, the unlovable and the unlovely, those that no one else would love. It's the man, who loves God and the man who never thinks of God. It's the man, who rests in the love of God and the man who spurns the love of God. It's to the saved and it's to the unsaved.

There is not a man, woman or child on the face of the earth that God does not love, and there is not a man, woman or child on the face of the earth that God loves any less than He loves all of us.

Not only was the Lord Jesus Christ prepared to come and die, but His Father for no other reason than His love for mankind was prepared to send Him. Now, this really blows my mind. All the awful events of the cross and the things that led up to it: the mocking, the spitting, the scourging, and that awful death on the cross; not only did Jesus have to suffer, but his Father had to stand and witness it all.

This is what we read in Mathew's Gospel 27:

45 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

But further on in verse 50 we read:

50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,

Is it any wonder that John tells us in his first epistle, 1 John 3:1:

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God:

Finally, what was the purpose of that love? That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The purpose of the Love of God is that lost mankind may have everlasting life.

This is what we read in 2 Peter 3:9:

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to-ward us

Now listen to this:

Not willing that any should perish, But that all should come to repentance.

The love of God for fallen man cost Him all that was precious to Him. It robbed heaven for a time of its greatest treasure but, God could do no other because of His very nature

GOD IS LOVE

To try to describe the love of God is to try to do the impossible because the Love of God is beyond description. There was a song George Beverly Shea sang years ago:

- Could we with ink the ocean fill,
and were the sky of parchment made.
Were every stalk on earth a quill
and every man a scribe by trade?**
- To write the Love of God on high
would drain the ocean dry
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.**
- The love of God is greater far,
than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It reaches from the highest heaven,
and reaches to the lowest hell.**

Something else that we find in this verse. Jesus says “he that believeth on Him...” The word “believeth” is written in the present-active tense. It indicates a continuous action on the part of the believer.

It's not enough simply to “have” believed, we must continue to believe. Faith has to be a daily part of life for anyone who has been born again.

The love of God is limitless; it embraces all mankind. It was not just for one nation or group that he was given. He was given so that all, without distinction or exception, who rest their faith on him might be rescued from destruction and blessed with the life that is life indeed.

God loves, and because of this, God gives.

We believe, and because of this, we do not perish. We have eternal life.

What begins in the heart of God overflows into new life for the repentant sinner. By grace you are invited to believe. By faith you can.

What a fantastic thing to look forward too – everlasting life. Not just a never-ending existence, but an everlasting abundant LIFE. Life with a capital 'L'. We really need to understand this: the founder of the Christian religion, Jesus Christ Himself, said that He came to this earth for a purpose.

“I have come,” said Jesus, “that they may have LIFE, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Jesus Christ came to bring us that ‘ABUNDANT LIFE.’

Do you know what that is? It’s an incredible privilege to understand the full impact of that verse. John 3:16 should give us all a reason for getting out of bed every morning, knowing each day we are one day closer to witnessing what God; who cannot lie; has promised for all redeemed mankind: ‘ABUNDANT LIFE’.

There is a vast difference between the condition of the believer and that of the unbeliever. There are two sides to the offer of eternal life: salvation or judgment. There are only two options in this life: eternal life or eternal damnation.

The choice is ours, and whether we realise it or not, we are choosing one or the other. Either we embrace Christ and His ways, or we reject Him, thereby choosing eternal damnation.

It is not God’s will that any should perish, as Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:4:

4 God who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The sad fact is that the vast majority of mankind reject the Lord and His salvation.

We cannot move on to verse 18 without emphasising the very clear statement that we find in verse 17.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but, that the world through Him might be saved.

In verses 18 to 21 we arrive the make your mind up time. The judgment side is developed in verse 18. The unbeliever, ‘has already been judged’ the moment he or she rejected God’s ‘One and only Son’, but we must never forget what happens to the man who rejects Christ. He will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him. He stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

We as Christian’s should always talk to people about the Love of God, but we must never neglect to talk about God’s wrath. Man must either believe and be saved, or not believe and be condemned.

Man must choose one of these two; there is no other choice. On the positive side, for a true believer there comes the truth that spiritually they will never perish but ut continue to have eternal life.

But, There is no middle ground: believing in the Son: resulting in eternal life; or refusing to believe: resulting in destruction. These are the only options.

Since 'perish' is contrasted with 'eternal life' it stands to reason that perishing will be eternal as well. The word 'eternal' used by John refers not only to the ages to come but also to a quality of life even now that flows from it.

There is a very clear instruction found in James 2:26:

26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Faithful obedience is required. A person must trust (believe), repent (change), and be baptized (obey) because he believes Jesus will save him. If a person does not believe That Jesus will save him, he will not obey and he will remain condemned. This is what we read in Mark 16:16:

16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

The sad fact is that the vast majority of mankind reject the Lord and His salvation. Heaven's door has one key, and Jesus holds it. No other verse in the Bible so succinctly summarizes God's relationship with humanity and the way of salvation. Thousands are going to eternity under condemnation for rejecting God's mercy, and despising the gospel of his Son.

As you study the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially His teachings in the other Gospels, you will find that Jesus spoke far more concerning hell than He did of heaven, for there are two advents of Jesus Christ.

Now Advent simply means a coming or an arrival; the arrival of something important or something people are waiting for. There is one Advent that has already taken place: when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. This was the fulfilment of all the prophecies in the Old Testament, the promised the coming of God's Messiah. That was the first Advent, when Jesus was born.

The reason for this we find in verse 17

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

The second advent will be very different. We read of this in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 25 verse 31:

31 When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

The very frightening reason for this division we find in the book of Revelation 20v11, and we need to read this:

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face

the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire.

This is the second death. And, this is the frightening part

15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

God forces salvation on no man. It is ready, it is free, it is within the reach of all; but it must be sought after. Jesus Christ is our reconciliation, not in type and shadow, but in very truth. He, as a mediator, stands in the place of God to man, and in the place of man to God.

Jesus Christ is our ransom. Jesus Christ paid our heavy debt. If in repentance and true faith we turn to Him, the debt is cancelled, and we are free.

This is what we read in Hebrews 9:

14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, Christ, by the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God.

In Romans 8:31-32:

31 We can see the abundant love of God; What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

There is a Heaven to be gained and a Hell to be shunned. There is not a more important decision for anyone to make. The stakes are so very high. We are living in the day of grace, this is the only time we have to make the decision that will determine where we will spend eternity. Will it be Eternal Life or Eternal Death.

There is a word often found in the Psalms: Selah. It means to pause and calmly think on these things. I would ask you today to pause and calmly think on these things. You need to ask yourself the question: 'Where shall I be spending eternity?'