

“Lent: Giving up Expectations”

The Reflection Series

Scripture:

John 3:1-17 (NIV)

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”³ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. ^[a]”⁴ “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit ^[b] gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You ^[c] must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”^[d]

⁹ “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.”^[e]

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ^[f] ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”^[g] ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Subject Question: What three Elements of God’s Saving Grace does Jesus explain in His conversation with Nicodemus and us?

Compliment answer: The Process of Salvation, The Perplexity of Salvation, and the Premise of Salvation.

Big Idea: The three Elements of God’s Saving Grace that Jesus explains in His conversation with Nicodemus and us are: The Process of Salvation, The Perplexity of Salvation, and the Premise of Salvation.

Homiletical Idea: “What is God up to?”

Purpose: I want the congregation to understand the how, who and why questions concerning the life changing and extremely extraordinary gift of Gods Saving Grace.

Introduction: As we enter the second Sunday of Lent, We explore the life mission that Jesus understood He had been given. In His conversation with the religious Nicodemus, we see glimpses of the fact that, His was the ultimate Heavenly rescue mission for all humanity. His was the ultimate Divine undertaking that myriads have experienced. His was the ultimate glimpse into the very heart of our Divine Creator's Soul. Strikingly as we shall see... Quite humbling, to say the least, when you sit down and think about it... It's always been about us and for us. Today we ease drop as Jesus shares eternal insights with Nicodemus concerning Salvation's Process, Perplexity and Premise—the how, who, and why of Grace itself.

(Not of you, but all for you)

Ground Work:

Matthew Henry Commentary

3:1-8 Nicodemus was afraid, or ashamed to be seen with Christ, therefore came in the night. When religion is out of fashion, there are many Nicodemites. But though he came by night, Jesus bid him welcome, and hereby taught us to encourage good beginnings, although weak. And though now he came by night, yet afterward he owned Christ publicly. He did not talk with Christ about state affairs, though he was a ruler, but about the concerns of his own soul and its salvation, and went at once to them. Our Savior spoke of the necessity and nature of regeneration or the new birth, and at once directed Nicodemus to the source of holiness of the heart. Birth is the beginning of life; to be born again, is to begin to live anew, as those who have lived much amiss, or to little purpose. We must have a new nature, new principles, new affections, new aims. By our first birth we were corrupt, shapen in sin; therefore we must be made new creatures. No stronger expression could have been chosen to signify a great and most remarkable change of state and character. We must be entirely different from what we were before, as that which begins to be at any time, is not, and cannot be the same with that which was before. This new birth is from heaven, ch. 1:13, and its tendency is to heaven. It is a great change made in the heart of a sinner, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It means that something is done in us, and for us, which we cannot do for ourselves. Something is wrong, whereby such a life begins as shall last for ever. We cannot otherwise expect any benefit by Christ; it is necessary to our happiness here and hereafter. What Christ speak, Nicodemus misunderstood, as if there had been no other way of regenerating and new-moulding an immortal soul, than by new-framing the body. But he acknowledged his ignorance, which shows a desire to be better informed. It is then further explained by the Lord Jesus. He shows the Author of this blessed change. It is not wrought by any wisdom or power of our own, but by the power of the blessed Spirit. We are shapen

in iniquity, which makes it necessary that our nature be changed. We are not to marvel at this; for, when we consider the holiness of God, the depravity of our nature, and the happiness set before us, we shall not think it strange that so much stress is laid upon this. The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is compared to water. It is also probable that Christ had reference to the ordinance of baptism. Not that all those, and those only, that are baptized, are saved; but without that new birth which is wrought by the Spirit, and signified by baptism, none shall be subjects of the kingdom of heaven. The same word signifies both the wind and the Spirit. The wind bloweth where it listeth for us; God directs it. The Spirit sends his influences where, and when, on whom, and in what measure and degree, he pleases. Though the causes are hidden, the effects are plain, when the soul is brought to mourn for sin, and to breathe after Christ. `

Benson Commentary

John 3:9-10. *Nicodemus answered, How can these things be?* — Christ’s explication of the doctrine of regeneration, and its necessity, made it no clearer to him. The corruption of nature, which renders it necessary, and the operation of the Spirit, which renders it practicable, were as great mysteries to him as the thing itself. And though he had acknowledged Christ to be a divine teacher, he was unwilling to receive his doctrine when it did not agree with his preconceived notions. Thus the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man, and he is not only estranged from them, but prejudiced against them. *Jesus said, Art thou a master* — **Ο διδασκαλος**, *a teacher*, or rather, *the teacher, of Israel*, as Dr. Campbell renders the expression; observing, “The article here is remarkable; the more so, because there does not appear to be a single Greek copy which omits it. As a member of the Sanhedrim, Nicodemus had a superintendence in what concerned religious instruction, and might on that account have been called *a teacher of Israel*; but it is probably in order to intimate to us his distinguished fame for abilities in this respect, that he is styled by way of eminence, *the teacher*.” *And knowest thou not these things* — When so much is everywhere said in the Scriptures of God’s *circumcising men’s hearts, creating in them clean hearts, renewing in them right spirits*, and of the quickening and purifying operations of his Spirit on their souls? See Deuteronomy 30:6; Psalm 51:10; Jeremiah 4:4; and Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27. “Could it be proved.” says Dr. Doddridge, “that the Jewish rabbis, so early as Christ’s time, called a baptized person one *born again*, or *born of water*, that would strongly illustrate the passage before us.” But though several learned commentators give the words this turn, the fact, he thinks, is not proved. “However, it is strange to / me,” says he, “that any should doubt whether proselytes were admitted into the Jewish church by baptism, that is, by washing, when it is plain from express passages in the Jewish law that no Jew who had lived like a Gentile for one single day could be restored to the communion of their church without it. Compare Numbers 19:19-20; and many other precepts relating to ceremonial pollutions, by which the Jews were rendered incapable of appearing before God in the tabernacle or temple till they were washed, either by bathing or sprinkling.” It is probable, however, that the reproof conveyed in this verse does not so much relate to the aforementioned figures of speech, supposed to be in use among the rabbis, representing the baptism of proselytes as a *new birth*; as to Nicodemus’s being so entirely unacquainted with the doctrine of the Old Testament, respecting the necessity of a change of heart being experienced by all who

would be the true people and spiritual worshippers of God; and respecting that effusion of the Spirit which the prophets had so clearly foretold would take place under the Messiah.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

(16) The last verse has spoken of “every one who believeth.” The thought went beyond the limits that Rabbis set to the kingdom of God. Its only limit is humanity. This thought is now repeated and strengthened by the “might not perish,” and the love of God is made the foundation on which it rests. Perhaps no verse in the Bible has been so much explained as this; perhaps no verse can be so little explained. Most young preachers have sermons upon it; older men learn that its meaning must be felt and thought rather than spoken. Still less can it be written; and this Note may not attempt to do more than indicate some lines of thought which may help to lead to others.

God so loved the world.—Familiar as the words are to us, they were uttered to Nicodemus for the first time. They are the revelation of the nature of God, and the ground of our love to God and man. (Comp. Notes on 1John 4:7-11.)

His only begotten Son.—Here, once again, the Old Testament Scriptures suggest and explain the words used. Every Jew knew, and loved to think and tell of his forefather who was willing to sacrifice his own and only son in obedience to what he thought to be the will of God (Genesis 22). But Love gives, and does not require, sacrifice. God wills not that Abraham should give his son, but He gave His only begotten Son. The dread power that man has ever conceived—that is not God; the pursuing vengeance that sin has ever imagined—that is not God; the unsatisfied anger that sacrifice has ever suggested—that is not God. But all that human thought has ever gathered of tenderness, forgiveness, love, in the relation of father to only child—all this is, in the faintness of an earth-drawn picture, an approach to the true idea of God. Yes, the true idea is infinitely beyond all this; for the love for the world gives in sacrifice the love for the only begotten Son.

Believeth in.—Better, *believeth upon*. The preposition is not the same as in the last verse. (Comp. John 1:12.) There the thought was of the Son of Man lifted up, in whom everyone who believes and can interpret spiritual truth, ever has eternal life. Here the thought is of the Son of God given for the world, and every one who believes upon, casts his whole being upon Him, and, like Abraham, in will rests all upon God, finds that God has provided Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering instead of human sacrifice or death.

Everlasting life.—Better, as the same Greek word is rendered in the previous verse, *eternal life*. For the meaning of this word see Note on Matthew 25:46. It is of frequent use in this Gospel (seventeen times), and always used in reference to life.

Expositor's Greek Testament

John 3:17. οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ... δι' αὐτοῦ. For whatever the result of Christ's coming has been, in revealing a love of sin and bringing heavier judgment on men, this was not God's purpose in sending His Son. The Jewish idea was that the Messiah would come “to judge,” *i.e.*, to condemn the world.—κρίνω and κατακρίνω, though originally distinct, are in the N.T. sometimes identical in meaning, the result of judgment so commonly being Condemnation; *cf.* *crime*. But although the result is judgment, the bringing to fight a distinction among men and the resulting condemnation of many, yet the object was ἵνα σωθῆ ὁ κόσμος. John repeats his favorite word κόσμος three times in this verse that there may be no possibility of missing his point, that so far as God's purpose was concerned, it was

one of unmixed love, that all men might be saved. The emphasis was probably due to the ordinary Messianic expectation which limited and misrepresented the love of God. Westcott remarks on this verse: "The sad realities of present experience cannot change the truth thus made known, however little we may be able to understand in what way it will be accomplished". It might on similar grounds be argued that because God wills that all men be holy in this life, all men are holy.

(Not of you, but all for you)

- A. The Process of Salvation. (Vs.1-8) *Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."³ Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. ^[a]"⁴ "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^[b] gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, "You^[c] must be born again.'⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."^[d]*
- B. As we make our way along the long path to the cross, Jesus stops and in his conversation with Nicodemus, reveals His life mission, his life purpose and in a way the very heart of One that He called His heavenly Father. The question raised is "How..." How can a person enter heaven? How can one assure themselves that at life's end, when our eyes close in death, can we somehow have an assurance that heaven is real, that there is life after death, that there really is a place where I can come face to face with that mysterious figure, the Divine... that I've always longed for and could only imagine.
- C. And I think that is THE question of questions, the longing of every human heart... how do we make sense of life and death and aging and struggle and justice and beauty and love and loss. Nicodemus, like you and I, wanted to know basically, "what can I do..? what does it take?...can I live now knowing that someday everything will be OK?" Surprisingly, Jesus doesn't answer with a laundry list of do's and don'ts... He says it doesn't begin or end with a diatribe concerning conduct, but rather points in the opposite direction... it's not about you "doing," as it is about having something done in you and for you. *no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again* ... Not conduct but conversion; a transformation if you

will, of the mind and more, the heart. As Jesus whispered, a second, “spiritual” birth ... *Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^[b] gives birth to spirit*

D. Basically Jesus kind of threw Olé’ goodhearted and curious Nick for a loop. And thus, throws every one of us, goodhearted and curious ones as well. What was Jesus saying? What was the inference? First, It’s **not** about getting into heaven and being changed into the kind of person who we should have been all along. No, just the opposite: it is being changed person now and then getting into heaven as the person who you have already started to become while on earth. Second, It’s not you getting ready for heaven and it is heaven getting you ready. More, it’s not yourself getting you ready to meet God as much as it is God getting you ready to meet Him. As much as that hurts our pride, renders all our efforts useless in our being able to somehow do something along the way to earn such status, makes us question and cry out: unfair, unfair that none of **my** striving, **my** goodness, **and my** righteousness... counts... Jesus would simply state: its heavens way, its heaven’s idea, its heaven’s process, it heaven’s heart, its heaven’s answer to the “How” question. I think Jesus was looking at Nicodemus and in way at you and me and conjecturing... Don’t ask, if you don’t want to hear the answer... Don’t inquire if you can’t handle the truth.

(Not of you, but all for you)

- A. The Perplexity of Salvation. (Vs.9-13) ⁹ *“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.^[e]*
- B. Basically, Jesus even goes further... now states, that if you have a hard time accepting the fact that it’s not about your striving and earning as it is about God’s transforming... then try this on for size... I, Jesus said, am God... or as He put it in a more palatable way, the Son of Man ¹³ *No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.^[e]* O come on. Many people can and will accept the fact that Jesus was certainly Enlightened; the he pointed people to God, and in a way, like the rest of us, a child of God himself. He was a great teacher who changed the world with his message of love and caring for one another. But, this

was a pretty serious claim. As thus we too are left slack jawed and speechless in light of such a statement.

- C. I kind of think Jesus said this tongue in cheek... he know Nicodemus wouldn't immediately buy into that argument. And neither can you or I or anyone else unless and until... you experience the first part of the conversation: the transforming, being born again... It's **only** a life changing touch, a being born from above, from and by Him that allows you and I to accept that in some way, in some form, the very Creator of the Universe whose vastness we cannot even begin to comprehend, somehow did come to this earth, that He really entered our world in a specific way, at a specific time, in a specific personality and person... called Jesus of Nazareth. The problem with many good people and even more, lots of good church going people is the reality that they have never really had the courage or the conviction to doubt and to admit what they do doubt—that Jesus is God. They want to believe because of their upbringing... they're afraid not to. They don't give themselves permission to think about it and the boldness of the claim that Jesus made! But you must. The only way to live a life with any assurance that you will someday go to God is knowing for sure that God, first, came to you, and touched you, and changed you and called you, and loved you.
- D. To the question of the perplexity of such a dilemma, Jesus would once again state: its heavens way, its heaven's idea, its heaven's process, its heavens heart, its heaven's answer now, not to the how question but the "who" question. Let's take this a little deeper. Listen to the words of Jesus in Johns Gospel... *The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all³⁰; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.*" The Great perplexity of Salvation is not really that Jesus is God..., No, the real perplexity is the fact that for some unknown reason, the "who," the sheep... those who hear His voice and follow Him... is you. And you know it. You my precious Nicodemus... Jesus was saying, then... you my beloved brother or Sister Jesus is saying now. Even this morning you perceive his still small voice beckoning you to come to Him, your hands are probably a little wet with perspiration... you hear him calling you to

follow him, to open your heart to Him...its time, not later...but now. He knows you and now, wants you to know Him. You've heard his whisper all through your life, and this morning he wants you to come home. Salvation is...

(Not of you, but all for you)

A. The Premise of Salvation. (Vs.14-17) ¹⁴ *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,* ^[f] ¹⁵ *that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.* ^[g] ¹⁶ *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* ¹⁷ *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

B. This of course was Jesus pointing out to Nicodemus the “why” of Heavens heart and Jesus’ life. I came, Jesus states, not to do what I could which was to judge people for their sins, unbelief, rebellion, and apathy. Not to condemn, but to give people a real second chance, an opportunity to find not only the meaning of life, but life itself.

C. Let’s try using this text in the way that it was truly meant: I want you to say your name every time I stop...

¹⁴ *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,* ^[f] ¹⁵ *that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.* ^[g] ¹⁶ *For God so loved ----*
_____ *that he gave his one and only Son, that if _____ believes in*
him, _____ shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ *For God did not send his*
Son into the world to condemn _____ but to save _____ through
him.

D. Why did Jesus come? What is the Premise... the reason for salvation? Why the offer of a process, introduce a perplexity? One more time state your name _____. On this second d Sunday of Lent, in Jesus conversation with Nicodemus, he not only has laid out His reason for being, but explained the how, the who and the why of a life that we are following as we journey together toward Easter morning. The main character however us not him, but... .

