

8. Jesus Explained the Love of God for the World

We saw in our last topic that Nicodemus could not understand spiritual truth because he lacked spiritual life. Like many other religious leaders in Israel, he was like a blind person who was trying to lead other blind people. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus went on to tell Nicodemus how he could have the spiritual life that would give him spiritual understanding so that he could effectively lead others.

Nicodemus was a religious leader but he lacked spiritual life. As a result, Jesus explained to Nicodemus what God was doing to provide eternal life and how to receive that eternal life. John 3:14-17 says, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” Jesus gave Nicodemus an Old Testament illustration.

During the forty years that Israel wandered in the wilderness, the people often complained and spoke against God and against Moses. One day the Lord sent fiery snakes among the people. Anyone who was bitten by the fiery snakes died. Finally, the people came to Moses and said that they had sinned. God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. God said that anyone that were bitten would live if they looked at the bronze snake on the pole. Numbers 21:9 says, “So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.” Those who had faith in the promise of God and looked lived. Those who did not have faith and did not look at the bronze snake died.

This is the first recorded statement that Jesus made about the fact that He would die on a cross. Jesus told Nicodemus that He would be lifted up on a pole in the same way. He said that those who would believe on the Son of Man would not experience eternal death. Instead, all who would come to the Son of Man in faith would receive eternal life. Then, Jesus told Nicodemus what has become the best-known statement in the New Testament. John 3:16 says, “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.” Although this is probably the most quoted verse in the Bible, it may be the least understood. The love of God is also described in Romans 8:38-39, where we read, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Here, we see that no created thing can separate us from the love of God because of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

We also see the cost of that gift to both the Father and the Son. Matthew 27:46 says, “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?’” We often talk about the suffering that Jesus went through to pay the penalty for our sin. However, we seldom talk about the fact that it was equally as hard for the Father to have to turn His back on His only Son. Both the Father and the Son made

that choice so that they could freely give spiritual life to all who believe, just as the people of Israel who were bitten by the fiery snakes received physical life if they would look to the bronze serpent in faith.

The next verse speaks again about the love of both the Father and the Son for the people of the world. In this verse, we are reminded that the Father did not send the Son to condemn the world. Instead, the Father sent Jesus so that He could save all who would come to Him in repentance and faith. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” The Father loved us so much that He sent Christ to be sin for us so that the Father could place the righteousness of Christ on us at the moment that we believe.

We are also reminded that it is not the plan of God to condemn any person. Instead, that is the choice of each individual. John 3:18-21 says, ““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. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”” The word translated “believes in the name” means *to believe so that a person places their trust in and commits their life to Christ as Lord.*

In contrast, James 2:19 says, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” Here, we see that the demons also believe but it brings fear to their lives because they do not believe “in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” In John 14:6, Jesus made it very clear that He is the only way to come to the Father when that verse says, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” That is due to the fact that Hebrews 9:14 says, “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?” Christ could offer His blood for our sin because He is the One without spot.

Jesus is also the One who brought Light into the world. John 8:12 says, “Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’” Jesus is the One who is Light and can give spiritual light. No person has to walk in spiritual darkness. Jesus will give light to all who will come to Him. However, Jesus told Nicodemus why people love darkness rather than light. People love darkness rather than light because of the fact that their actions are evil. The word translated “evil” speaks of that which is bad in its nature or condition.

Satan is called the evil one or the wicked one twice in 1 John 2:13-14 where we read, “I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him *who is* from the

beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.” In these verses, we see that as Christians mature and become spiritual young men or women they have learned to trust the Lord to give them victory over Satan. That does not mean that they become perfect but rather that their lives are experiencing consistent victory over Satan and his temptations and sin less.

However, for all those who have not come to true faith in Christ, even if they are very religious as Nicodemus was, they still love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Jesus illustrated this very clearly in the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector who went to the temple to pray. Luke 18:11-12 says, “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”” Here, we see that the evil heart of this Pharisee was shown by his pride. 1 John 2:16 says, “For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.” This verse makes it clear that the pride of life is just as evil as the lust of the flesh or the lust of the eyes.

We also see the response of those who are practicing evil to the light. Jesus told Nicodemus that everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light because such a person knows that his deeds will be exposed. The word translated “exposed” means *that the light will convict a person of evil*. Such exposure will often cause shame to the person who is guilty. John 8:9 says, “Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.” These men had just brought the woman caught in the act of adultery to Jesus. Jesus had said, “...He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” (vs 7) Jesus is the Light and exposed the darkness of the hearts of those men and they were all convicted and left the Light.

In contrast, Jesus told Nicodemus what would happen if He came to the Light in faith. Jesus said that those who do the truth come to the light. They are not afraid to have their deeds exposed by the light. Instead, their lives will show that their works are through the spiritual light given by Jesus. Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” John tells us that Nicodemus later did come to the Light. After Jesus died on the cross, John 19:39-40 says, “And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.” Here, we see that Nicodemus helped Joseph of Arimathea prepare the body of Jesus for burial and bury it. His life had been transformed as he thought about what Jesus had said that night and he boldly participated in the burial of Jesus.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain these verses very clearly so that they can be used by the Lord to draw others to the true Light. As they learn to share these verses clearly, Christ will work in the lives of others. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to explain the Gospel clearly.