

Authentic Christians: Deity of Christ the Savior

sermonaudio.com

Salvation

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: John 3:1-18

Preached on: Sunday, January 3, 2010

Master Ministries International, Inc.

3581 Knollview Ct SE, #305

Grand Rapids, MI 49546-5923

Website: www.masterministries.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/masterministries

Ok. I am going to read from John chapter three verses one and two as the setting for our study today.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.¹

On previous occasions we have looked at this passage of Scripture and the conversation between Nicodemus and the Lord Jesus and we have looked at, in particular, the doctrine of regeneration which Jesus brings to the forefront in his discussion with Nicodemus. It is the very foundation of the kingdom of God.

And Jesus presents to Nicodemus the fact that unless you have been born again or born from above—as a more literal translation of that phrase means—you can't understand the kingdom of God. It will not make any sense to you. You won't see its depth and its meaning and you won't understand the character of the Lord Jesus and the salvation that he provides and all of the various aspects of the kingdom of God. You won't understand it unless you have been born again.

And we have looked at that on previous occasions so we won't go over that particular issue again. However, another thing that also occurs in this conversation is the fallacies that Nicodemus displays towards the Lord Jesus. And it is important for us to examine and test these errors and it is important for a couple of reasons. First of all, the refer to that day. That gives us a glimpse into that day as to the setting of the Lord Jesus as he ministered and as he lived during those early centuries among the Jewish people. It also gives us a clue as to the people and their response to the Lord Jesus and how they viewed him.

And you will find an interesting fact. It is no different today than it was then. The exact same arguments and fallacies and accusations that Nicodemus and his associates, the scribes and the Pharisees brought against the Lord Jesus are exactly the same arguments

¹ John 3:1-2.

you hear today, exactly the same. They have not changed. They are the same rejections and denials that they voiced. And not only can we then get a reference point to that day, but because we have this similarity between then and now, we can use this setting of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus to help us diagnose our present day. And not just the present day around us, but we can diagnose our own selves as to our reaction, our response, our attitudes towards the Lord Jesus himself.

Not only can we then diagnose our present, but we can also then discern the truth about the Lord Jesus. For he responds to their accusations. He gives an answer to them. And he confirms the truth to them even though they repeatedly rejected it.

The rediscovery or—in some instances—the discovery of these truths will reform us when we adopt them, when we believe them, when we trust our very lives upon them and conform our lives to them. For they comprise the content of Christ's message. Christ's message was really very simple. He didn't try to pull the wool over their eyes, to use a common expression. He didn't try to be fancy with them. He was very simple in his explanation of who he was and what he came to accomplish.

So with Nicodemus as our foundation, so to speak, as our example, and his associates the scribes and the Pharisees as well because they all believed the same things, this study will identify and examine two false claims that he and his friends made against the Lord Jesus, his responses to them and the implications to us today because the same things occur in our day as occurred in that day and because all authentic Christ followers believe these two truths that the Lord Jesus used in refuting the accusations of Nicodemus.

Now, stated very simply, the accusations of Nicodemus and his friends against the Lord Jesus fall into two basic categories. One is the deity of Christ. Number two is his works. And by works I am meaning his work on the cross, what he accomplished on the cross, his purpose in coming, the fact that he came to be a Savior. And not just a savior, but the Savior, no other Savior but him. And we will see that as we progress through our study.

So the first thing I want us to examine is this concept, this truth about the deity of Christ.

Now you will notice in this particular section with Nicodemus as he is talking with the Lord Jesus you will notice his reference to the Lord Jesus and how he described him. And that tells us what he thought about him. He thought he was being very nice, very kind, very positive, very encouraging in his comments about the Lord Jesus.

But notice what he called him, because it gives us a clue as to how Nicodemus truly viewed the Lord Jesus. Notice what he said. He came to Nicodemus and he said unto him, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher and we know you are an unusual teacher because nobody can do the things you are doing unless God is with him."

Now did you notice the critical statements that he made? We need to look at them real closely because they give us the clue as to his view about the Lord's claim that he was, in fact, deity.

Notice he said, “You are a teacher.”

Now, Nicodemus himself was a teacher. He was called and designated as the master teacher of Israel. He was at the top of the list. He was the head teacher. And so in a sense what he was saying to him, putting his arm, “Oh, comrade. You are a teacher just like I am a teacher.”

He called him rabbi, which is a term that you kind of use to recognize someone who has a position of authority, someone who is kind of a master teacher. So he was giving him a high title. But, you notice, in calling him just a mere teacher, he was leaving out the claim that the Lord Jesus himself actually made about himself.

He was only a teacher in the eyes of Nicodemus. “You are just like our long list of teachers. We have had a long list of teachers. We have had a number of prophet who have come. We have had a number of highly skilled teacher who have come. Now you are admittedly kind of at the top of the list because you have done some fantastic miracles, but then, so did Elijah, so did Elijah, so did Moses, so did a number of the Old Testament prophet who did some miraculous things.”

They weren’t God. Neither did any of them claim to be God. They accepted who they were. They were just messengers of God. At no time did Nicodemus ever recognize to Jesus that he was God, never did. He denied it. He rejected it because the Lord Jesus had frequently in his messages stated that he was, in fact, God.

Now, in this passage the Lord Jesus again responds to the accusation and declares who he is and makes reference to the fact that he is, in fact, deity in the flesh. And I want you to notice how he does it with him.

Well, the first thing he does with Nicodemus is he explains to him the necessity of regeneration. And that takes several verses as we outlined in the passage where Jesus explains in some explanation using some examples of the wind and of the Spirit of God coming and giving new life, giving new birth and he explains that to Nicodemus and Nicodemus doesn’t quite grasp it. He doesn’t quite fully understand. And then we come down to verse number 10 and Jesus says to him, “Are you a master of Israel and you don’t know this?”

No, we are very popular in our day using the phrase, “What would Jesus do?” And we have a totally wrong concept of Jesus. Do you think Jesus in his comment to Nicodemus was being real nice? No.

You can accuse me of being wrong and that is fine. I can accept that. But, you see, Nicodemus, when he came to Jesus and called him merely a teacher, that was a slap in the face. That was a slap in the face of Jesus. He was the Son of God in flesh and he called him merely a teacher just like he was a teacher. And Jesus comes back to him, “Listen, young man. Do you have any notion who you are talking to?”

That is my version. Admittedly, it is my version.

But he is very strong and he says to Nicodemus, “Are you a master and you don’t know these things that I have just explained to you? Because they are all in the Old Testament. They are all there.”

And he starts with some of the Old Testament and brings it up to date pointing out who he is and he starts in this fashion, verse number 11. He says:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?²

If you don’t understand the bare necessities of things that are earthly, how on earth can I explain to you spiritual things and have you grasp them, again pointing out the necessity of this new birth, this birth from above, this birth that comes upon you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And then he says this. “No man has ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven.”

Well, what is he talking about here? He is talking about himself and he is saying, “Nicodemus, I want you to understand something. There is nobody that has been in the presence of God except him who has come down. Well, who is the one who has come down? Me,” Jesus is saying. Not me, me, but Jesus, me. Jesus is saying, “I am the one who was with the Father. I have presence with him. I have come down.”

My friends, that is not just mere humanity, nor is that the form of an angel.

Now, Jesus goes on from there and then he brings to the mind of Nicodemus the example of the brazen serpent lifted up in the wilderness. You remember the story, I am sure of the occasion in the wilderness as Moses led the children of Israel toward the Promised Land, that a plague of vipers came out and afflicted the people, bit them and people were dying. And God provided relief for them by giving instruction to Moses to make the form of one of these serpents in brass, put it on a post in the center of the camp and stick it up high so that people could see it and everyone who looked to the brazen serpent was healed of the bite of the viper. A very miraculous salvation provided by God for a recalcitrant people.

And Jesus says to Nicodemus, “Just like Moses lifted up that serpent of brass in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”

² John 3:11-12.

Who is the Son of Man? Jesus. That is the phrase that he used to describe himself. He called himself repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly the Son of Man, the Son of Man, the Son of Man, not only identifying his humanity, but also his deity.

He then goes on from this passage and then goes to the next verse, verse number 16, and it starts with the word, “For,” which links it to the verses immediately preceding it.

Well, in the verses immediately preceding it he calls himself the Son of Man who is going to be lifted up. Then he says, “Because the only begotten Son of God has come to be the Savior.”

So in his explanation to Nicodemus Jesus points out again to his guest that he, Jesus, the Son of Man, was, in fact, the Son of God laying claim to his deity and is described here with that phrase, “the only begotten Son of God.”

One translator puts it in this fashion. He calls it, “The only one of a kind.”

Another one puts it in this fashion, “An only born from a Father.”

Another literal translation puts it this way, “The Son, the only begotten Son of God.”

They all are basically pointing out the same truth that Jesus is laying claim to the fact that he is the only one of a kind living, begotten Son of God, not made, not created, begotten. Having, then, the same nature as his Father God.

Now, Jesus answered this question for Nicodemus as we have seen the passage here. There were numerous other times recorded in the gospels when the Lord Jesus answered his accusers of this same fault, accusing him of his laying claim that he was God and not being God. I will simply mention a couple of them to show you the same kind of evidence that the Lord Jesus presents in laying claim and confirming the fact that he is deity in the flesh.

For example, John chapter five, just over a couple of chapters. This particular chapter talks about the Lord Jesus healing the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, the man who could not get up to get into the pool of water in time when the angel came down to disturb the waters and whoever got in first was the one that was healed and this man could never get there. Every time he was on his way, someone would beat him into the waters and, thus, he had been there for many years.

Jesus came directly to that man, that specific man and asked him if he wanted to be healed and the man said yes. And he healed him. And it just so happened it was on the sabbath when Jesus healed him.

This really irked the scribes and the Pharisees because they felt they had sole authority over the sabbath and what people could or could not do on the sabbath. And so when the Lord Jesus did this—and this wasn’t the only occasion when he performed a miracle on

the sabbath—but on this particular occasion the Lord Jesus healed the man on the day of sabbath, on a sabbath day. And I want you to notice on the end of this setting what transpired.

John chapter five and we will read verses 17 and 18.

Well, let me back up just a couple of more.

The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.³

That was bad enough that he healed him on the sabbath in their eyes. That was enough accusation for them to bring against Jesus. He broke the sabbath.

“But Jesus answered them,” in verse number 17, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.”⁴

They got the message. They knew exactly what Jesus claimed. They knew. They understood. They will not stand before the judge on that day and say, “We did not understand.”

Oh, yes they did understand. They understood fully what Jesus was claiming. He was not saying that God is my Father like you and I might be friends as some people try to translate this particular kind of a passage. “Oh, Jesus was just talking about his being... he is kind of like a father figure to him.”

Oh, no, no, no. The scribes and the Pharisees knew exactly what he was claiming. He was claiming to be God and for that they wanted to crucify him because no man could be God.

Now in the rest of the passage Jesus goes on and he refutes their false claims and errors against him by substantiating and confirming that he is, in fact, the Son of God. And he gives several witnesses to the fact.

First of all, his Father and the works that his Father did and was doing through him. John the Baptist. His works. Scripture spoke of him. This is the passage where it says, “You read the Scriptures and you think in them you have eternal life. Well, they are the ones who speak about me. They talk about me.”

And then he went on also to say, “And if you say that you really are a follower of Moses, no you aren’t, because Moses spoke of me.”

³ John 5:15-16.

⁴ John 5:17-18/

And so the Lord Jesus presented here at least five different testimonies to the fact that he was, in fact, the Son of God.

Well, there is one other passage and I will just cover briefly because I don't want to take a great deal more time in confirming this fact, but in John chapter 10 there is another confrontation between the scribes and the Pharisees and the Lord Jesus over this same specific issue, the deity of Christ. And, once again, the scribes and the Pharisees present in their statements that they know exactly what the Lord Jesus is claiming that he is, in fact, God.

Jesus in verse number 31 of John chapter 10 it says:

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy.⁵

Well, why blasphemy?

“Because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.”⁶

They knew exactly what Jesus was saying. The gospels give us abundant evidence and confirmation that the Lord Jesus was who he claimed to be, not just the Son of Man, but the Son of God, God in the flesh, deity, humanity in one person, God in the flesh.

Jesus, on every occasion refuted the accusations and the fallacies of not only Nicodemus, but of his other associates, the Scribes and the Pharisees and their accusations and their claims against him that he was not the Son of God. And he gave constant confirming evidence that he was, in fact, the Son of God.

There is a second thing here that I mentioned just briefly a few moment ago of the fallacies that Nicodemus presents that were common in that day and common in our day as well. And that is that they dismissed Jesus as the Savior. They denied and rejected his works as the Savior, the one whom God had sent to be the Redeemer for sinners.

Again, let's go back and take a look at what Nicodemus called him. Nicodemus called him rabbi, teacher. We find other occasions in Scripture where the rich young ruler, for example, came up to him as recorded in Mark chapter 10 and called him, “Good master.”

It is almost like the kind of thing you say as a welcome to someone to try and be nice to them and to be kind to them and say, “Oh, good master, kind person,” that kind of a phrase.

Again, just good master, not Savior.

⁵ John 10:31-33.

⁶ John 10:33.

And then we find in Luke 10 another reference to him when a lawyer came to try and trick him and to catch him in some minute error in his application or understanding of the law and he called him master, not Savior. They did not call him Savior. They did not call him Redeemer. They did not call him their Substitute. And yet the Scriptures describe the Lord Jesus as that of his purpose. He came to be a Savior. He came to be a Substitute. He came to give his life a ransom for many.

Now, just a few references, again, looking at our example of Nicodemus and then a couple of other examples of the Scriptures give us of how the Lord Jesus presented himself as the Savior, not a Savior, the Savior.

Now, with Nicodemus, again, we go back to the steps that the Lord Jesus took with him to prove his deity. He started out with the fact that he had been with his Father. He was the Son of Man who would be lifted up like the serpent of brass was lifted up because God loved the world and he gave his only begotten Son to be the Savior of sinners, all who believe upon him. And Jesus points out to Nicodemus, “Not only am I the Son of God, but I am the Savior. Those who believe in me will have eternal life. Those who believe upon me will have eternal life.”

Not found any other fashion, not found any other way, only through faith in Christ. And we find that very clearly stated by Jesus to Nicodemus in John chapter three. I will just point out a couple of verses and then we will look at a couple of other references where the Lord Jesus refers to his coming as the Savior, to confirm in our minds that the Scriptures teach that, that that is the truth of Scripture.

John chapter three, following verse number 16 which many of us know.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.⁷

Jesus makes absolutely, unequivocally clear to Nicodemus that he is the only Savior. There is no other. He came to fulfill that work on behalf of sinners. And all who believe and trust him will obtain eternal life. There is no other answer given.

Now, this isn't the only place where the Lord Jesus makes this truth known and where he confirms this and where he states this. For example, we also read in Matthew chapter 18. He says, “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.”

And then he follows it with the parable of the lost sheep. The 90 and nine are safe in the fold. There is one sheep missing. The good shepherd goes out and looks for the lost

⁷ John 3:16-18.

sheep, finds it and brings it home. And Jesus at the outset of that parable, that story mentions the truth that, “I came to seek and to save that which was lost.”

We read further on in Matthew chapter 20. He makes the statement that the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto. He didn't come to have people serve him. He came to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

Then the Lord Jesus, as we see it recorded in the gospel of John what we call the seven I am's where the Lord Jesus says, “I am...”

“I am the door.”⁸

He says, “I am the good shepherd.”⁹

“I am the bread of life.”¹⁰

And there are a number of others totaling seven called the “I am's” where the Lord Jesus presents himself and he doesn't say, “I do.” He says, “I am.”

And they all have to do with his serving as and giving pictures of the fact he is the Savior.

The last one, that is the most convincing one is in John chapter 14 verse number six. He says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”¹¹

Jesus couldn't make it any more clear than the examples that we have just shown and examined briefly that Jesus proclaimed that he was the Savior, not a Savior, not an example of saviors as many today try to make it. Every religion has its Jesus.

No, no. There is only one Jesus. And we find him revealed to us in the gospels and throughout all of Scripture as the Son of God. He is the one and only Savior, the gift of God the Father on behalf of people like you and me, sinners like you and me. He paid the penalty on behalf of people like you and me, that by faith and trust in him we might obtain eternal life.

And Jesus makes the promise that all who come to him he will accept.

Now, a few implications and then we will close. How can the Spirit of God use these two very profound, foundational truths as we see them presented in this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus?

⁸ John 10:7, 9.

⁹ John 10:11,14.

¹⁰ John 6:35.

¹¹ John 14:6.

First of all, he can enlighten our minds. He can open our eyes to see the truth. Jesus is the Son of God. He is deity, not just a good man, not just an example, not a political martyr, God in the flesh.

We read in Hebrews, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.”¹²

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, begotten, not made.

A second truth, just in summary, is the fact that Jesus is the Savior. He came to be a Savior. That was the covenant he made with the Father in eternity past when the Father designed the plan of salvation that he would send the Son and the Son in obedience would come. He would take upon human flesh. He would sacrifice himself on behalf of a people that God would give to him as a promise to Jesus for his obedience and that all who come to him will obtain eternal life. And that life, the Scriptures tell us, is in his Son.

“He that hath the Son hath life.”¹³

These two doctrinal truths regarding the Lord Jesus are foundational truths of all authentic Christ followers. All who have come to saving faith in Jesus Christ believe these two doctrines. He is the Son of God and he is the Savior.

A second thing the Spirit of God can do with these truths is examine us. Where has the Spirit of God opened your eyes to your failure to believe the truth regarding the Lord Jesus as we see it presented in Scripture? Do you trust him and him alone? Salvation, the Scriptures tell us is by faith in Christ alone, no works, no church, nothing that you provide. It is solely, exclusively by faith in Christ alone.

I urge you to regard the reproof of the Spirit of God where he has identified your unbelief. Maybe it isn't total unbelief. Maybe it is just small faith. Maybe it is questioning faith. Is that really true? Is he really the Son of God? Is he really the only Savior? Or is he just an example to us of what a Savior is like?

Well, the Spirit of God can take these truths and examine us and point out those areas in our lives where we have failed to believe and trust the truth and bring us to repentance, where we turn from our unbelief, we turn from our doubts and our questions to believe unequivocally in the deity of Christ and the fact of his being the Savior.

For those of us that may come in our examination by the Spirit of God to reaffirm in our minds and our hearts that which we have believed in sometime past, but perhaps we have not focused our attention upon it in recent days.

Let me encourage you to remember that Jesus is the Son of God, not just a good man, not

¹² Hebrews 1:1-2.

¹³ 1 John 5:12.

just an example. As someone has put it, he was either a liar or a lunatic or he was telling the truth. And the Scriptures give us substantial evidence to believe he was who he said he was, the Son of God, the Savior of sinners.

A third thing the Spirit of God can do with these truths is encourage us. For those of us who have not come to Christ it gives us hope. There is a way. There is a means by which I can be reconciled to God the Father in spite of my weakness. In spite of my inability to reconcile myself back to God, there is a way by which I can be reconciled back to God. That is through Jesus.

So that can provide for us great comfort and hope that there is a way for reconciliation back to the Father. And for those of us who have come to faith in Christ it is comforting to be reminded of the truth, truths that we have believed and upon which we stake our very salvation and that can comfort us, encourage us, confirm in our minds and hearts the truth, edify us, strengthen us to be reminded of what Scripture really teaches and to trust.

The last question I have—and with this I will close—how will you respond? How will you respond to the truths that the Spirit of God has made available to you to believe and to trust? Jesus said it very simply.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”¹⁴

Come. Come. If you are doubting, questioning, wondering, fearful, come. Come. That is what Jesus said. “Come. Come to me. Believe me. Trust me.”

So if there are those doubts, those questions in your mind and your heart, come. Trust him.

And those of us who have taken up his offer to come and we have trusted him, may the Spirit of God use these truths to reaffirm and confirm in our minds and hearts the truths concerning Jesus our Lord and Savior.

Let's close with a Word of prayer.

Thank you, heavenly Father, for your wondrous provision of salvation through Jesus Christ your only begotten Son whom you gave to be a Substitute, a Savior, begotten of you, Son of God in the flesh, who obtained for us eternal life through his life, death, resurrection and ascension to your right hand. I pray for those who have yet to trust you, that today might be that day when they would come to Jesus and take his offer and trust him to the saving of their souls. And for those of us who have come to Christ already may these truths confirm in our minds and hearts and stir up within us great joy and rejoicing to be reminded of the truth of the Lord Jesus and what he has done on our behalf. And we will give to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, honor, glory and praise for what you accomplish with the truth of your Word.

¹⁴ Matthew 11:28.