

G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ◇ deo ◇ gloria

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

Jesus and Nicodemus

John 3:9-3:15

November 21, 2004

□ WHAT ARE YOU THANKFUL FOR?

- Your family?
- Your spouse?
- Your children?
- Your parents?
- Your friends?

□ What does the Bible indicate should be our greatest reason to be thankful?

Verse 9-10

- Nicodemus said to Jesus, "How can these things be?"
 - Unless one is born again [or *from above*] he cannot see the kingdom of God
 - Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God
- Nicodemus believed that, as a righteous teacher of the Law, a Pharisee, he would receive automatic acceptance into the kingdom of God
- Jesus answered Nicodemus, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"
 - Jesus uses the definite article *the* when referring to Nicodemus (literally, *the* teacher of Israel).

- This seems to indicate that Nicodemus was a well-recognized, well-respected teacher or religious authority

Verse 11

- From this point further in Chapter 3, the dialogue becomes a monologue, where Jesus is the sole speaker

Verse 12

- Jesus is telling Nicodemus that if he cannot grasp the most elementary [earthly] truth, that you must be born again [people are born again on earth, hence, earthly], how can he expect to understand the spiritual, heavenly, deeper truths of God?

Verse 13

- During first century Judaism, tradition said that Old Testament saints, such as Moses, had ascended into heaven to receive special insight from the LORD.
- Jesus is saying that only He has ascended into heaven and descended to earth - not the saints of Old.

Verses 14-15

- There are connections between this verse and the previous one:
 1. First, in the previous passages Jesus describes “new birth” in terms of “water” and “spirit” using Ezekiel 36 - 37; now Jesus will use the account of the bronze snake in the wilderness, in Numbers 21:4-9, to compare physical life to spiritual life.
 2. Second, Moses *lifted up* the snake in the wilderness, just as Jesus was *lifted up* on the cross.
- Verses 14-15 are direct references to **Numbers 21**
 - READ **Numbers 21:1-9**

- The Israelites, when bitten by the poisonous snakes, were forced to take their eyes off of **themselves and their problems**, and focus their eyes **up** on the snake.
- Just as the Israelites were given life by focusing on the bronze serpent, so we have life by looking to the crucified Savior, Jesus Christ.
- *Interesting Note:* King Hezekiah, in 2 Kings 18:4, had to destroy the bronze serpent because the people believed it had mystical healing powers. The LORD was the one healing the Israelites in the wilderness, not the bronze snake.
- Nicodemus came to Jesus as **the miracle worker** [because of his signs] (see John 3:2); yet, we are to come to Jesus as the **crucified Redeemer and Savior**.
- John uses four *lifted up* statements:
 - John 3:14-15
 - John 8:28
 - John 12:32
 - John 12:34
- “The Greek verb for ‘lifted up’ in its four occurrences in this Gospel always **combines the notions of being physically lifted upon the cross, with the notion of exaltation**. This is a theological adaptation of the literal (‘to lift up’) and the figurative (‘to enhance’) meanings of the verb.”

“If Jesus is the ‘one who came from heaven’, how shall he return? The Synoptists [Matthew, Mark, and Luke] think of the crucifixion and the exaltation as temporally discrete steps; John makes it clear that Jesus’ return to the glory he had with the Father before the world began is accomplished by being ‘lifted up’ on the cross. It is this exaltation that draws people to him.”

D.A. Carson

- Read John 12:32
- “[This] is surely another example of John’s use of words of set purpose to convey more than one meaning. The verb can refer to exaltation in majesty. It is used of Christ’s exaltation (Acts 2:33) and again in a compound (Philippians 2:9). **It is part of John’s aim to show that**

Jesus showed forth his glory not *in spite of* his earthly humiliations, but precisely *because of* those humiliations. Supremely is this the case with the cross. To the outward eye this was the uttermost in degradation, the death of a criminal. To the eye of faith it was, and is, the supreme glory."

Leon Morris

- Had Nicodemus known that Christ was referring to his own crucifixion, surely, he would have, as a teacher of the Law, thought of Deuteronomy 21:23, which states, "his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance."

- **WHAT DOES JESUS' SUFFERING ON THE CROSS REVEAL ABOUT OUR SUFFERING?**

- What does Jesus' crucifixion reveal about suffering in general?

- **If we are to be like Christ, we will suffer (2 Timothy 3:12), and we, like the Apostle Paul, should be thankful for the sufferings that identify us with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17-18; 2 Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 1:9; 3:8-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:3).**

- Dr. Larry Crabb, in his book, Finding God, writes (page 46):

In a culture so thoroughly devoted to life now, and in a church drenched with teaching on self-improvement and building happier lives, we can't easily develop a passion for something other than our immediate satisfaction. The historic church, in its role as embassy of a foreign kingdom, taught that the chief end of people is to glorify God and enjoy him forever; the modern church too often teaches that the chief end of God is to gratify people.

- What does the world say about suffering?

- 19th Century German Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, in a work published in 1895, wrote:

What is good?

Whatever increases (or augments) the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself, in man.

What is evil?

Whatever springs from weakness.

What is happiness?

The feeling that power increases...that resistance is overcome.

What is more harmful than any vice?

Practical sympathy for ... the weak...Christianity...

- How does Nietzsche's comments reflect the world's view of suffering?
- How does the world's view of suffering [and, to some degree, Nietzsche's] relate to the health, wealth, and prosperity Gospel?
- **READ 1 Corinthians 1:27**
- How is this one of the great paradoxes of Scripture?
- Why was God so supremely glorified through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ?
 - The crucifixion of Christ was the **SUPREME ACT OF OBEDIENCE**.
- **READ Hebrews 13:3**

- READ **Philippians 2:5-11**

- READ **Hebrews 2:9**

- “He who descended has now once more ascended up on high, but he has ascended by way of the cross; the cross on which he was lifted up became the ladder of his ascent to the Father’s presence.”
F.F. Bruce
 - Refer back to **John 1:51**, “And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”
 - This is a reference to Genesis 28:12 [“Jacob’s Ladder”]:
“He [Jacob] had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.”

- Again, **WHAT ARE YOU THANKFUL FOR?**
 - READ **Ephesians 1:3-14**

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

CHORUS:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*