

Back to the Gospel



Next week we are going to start a new series on Heaven. It won't be as long as our other teachings like [Hebrews](#), but there have been so many misconceptions and much lack of information (even though the Bible has provided so much) that it felt like the time to dig into what should be one of our favorite topics, in more depth.

- So before we get there, it also seemed right to go back to the basics of the gospel today, because this is another subject that seems to be getting convoluted by many. **And since the gospel means the good news, it too should be a favorite of us all.** Who doesn't like good news. Or for that matter, the best news ever!
- We are going to use the account of [John 3](#) as our primary text. So if you have your Bible and want to follow along, that would be great. Now let me set this up for you a little. Jesus is having a conversation with Nicodemus, who approached Him by night so he didn't have to worry about anything other than what Jesus had to say. And Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless he is *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God. It's from this conversation we get the terminology and understanding of what it means to be a born-again Christian. And folks, there is no such thing as a Christian who is not born again.
- This confuses Nicodemus, so Jesus tells him unless he is *born of water and the Spirit* he's not getting into the kingdom of heaven. Nicodemus is now more confused. And this is where we pick up. Which is a perfect jumping in point because the gospel is the good news of how we get right with God, granting us entry into heaven for eternity, escaping the just penalty of our sin. If that's not good news to you, I hope when we finish today you will have changed your mind.

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel (because Nicodemus was a Pharisee [3:1]), and do not know these things (it appears Jesus is making a point here because Nicodemus held a rather important position in his party. But without the Holy Spirit as his guide, even what he knew of the Old Testament was not helping him arrive at what the Messiah would make possible, and how)? ¹¹ Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

We need to start by asking who else is Jesus speaking about when He says, "*Our witness*"? It would appear from context He's speaking of the witness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are all saying the same thing, the sure and unchanging thing, and **when they are speaking (witnessing), we want to be listening.**

- Which brings up the next point, who is it Jesus saying is not listening (or not receiving their *witness*)? There are three possibilities, **1)** the religious leaders of Israel, **2)** the nation of Israel, or **3)** humanity in general.
- And in terms of who is not listening, since it's only a remnant of each of these groups who have listened and responded to the gospel, **I think we can apply it to all of them** (all of us).
- **But the real question is are you listening? God is speaking, but you must open your heart to Him to hear.**

If we do not pay attention to the Holy Spirit making things clear for us upon the earth (the natural realm), with the things we can see here, how will we understand *heaven*? The answer is we won't.

- It's another reason I caution against the adoption of theories such as theistic evolution. God plainly tells us the reality of creation. And I think it would be a big mistake to trust your own human understanding over what He has said. After all, who sees more clearly, God or mankind?
- Our understanding is far more limited than our egos want to admit. What we understood a century, a decade, or even a year ago in what we deem as the natural world, has changed. And is still changing. Because there is simply so much we do not truly understand.
- And do catch that He is saying He wants us to understand *heavenly things*. But apart from the Holy Spirit opening our eyes, there is blindness to realities even of the natural world.

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

Now we come to the One who knows it all—truly. His point here is twofold. Let's start by **first** asking a question. Who can speak about heavenly things other than one who is from heaven (even the prophets were receiving their information from one speaking from heaven)? And Jesus descended from heaven to come and testify to humanity of our need for a savior, and how God had established a rescue plan for us before the foundations of the earth ever existed in time ([Rev. 13:8](#)).

- But there's more. Not only did Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life ([John 14:6](#)) (speaking both of being the source of our being able to be born again and that leading to eternal reconciliation and life with God) **descend** to bring us this truth and execute the plan of our salvation (through His substitutionary atonement of Him dying in our place on the cross). Afterward **2** He **ascended** back into heaven to advocate for us and prepare a place for us to come home to ([John 14:3](#)) (next week we will begin the journey of looking into that reality more). But this is so important because it means He is not giving us yesterday's, or even just today's news when He reveals truth. But rather eternal truth.
- Which, by the way, also reveals these verses and this title *Son of Man* provide a direct claim to Jesus' deity ([Mark 2:10](#), [2:28](#), [Matt. 26:64](#)). And at the same time a direct claim to His humanity ([Matt. 8:20](#), [11:19](#), [Mark 8:31](#)). He is 100% God and 100% man ([John 1:1](#) & [14](#), [Col. 2:9](#)). Which is required and therefore essential to the fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation (we will come back to this later in [verse 16](#)).

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.

Now for some I know this is confusing to some degree because they rightly might ask, "Isn't the serpent associated with sin and even Satan? And if so, how does this compare to Jesus being lifted up on the cross?" Think about those words we sing in the Chris Tomlin song "Jesus Messiah"; "He became sin who knew no sin, that we might become His righteousness. He humbled Himself and He carried the cross. Love so amazing, love so amazing. Jesus Messiah..." This is from [2 Cor. 5:21](#) (and I love worship songs that directly quote scripture like this).

- But let me backtrack just a bit so you get the full picture here. This incident where Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness is not a reference to snake handling 😊. It's found in Num. 21. After God had delivered the Canaanites into the hands of Israel, He sent Israel backtracking on a long walk to bring them to Edom. And it says to us, "*and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.' So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died* (the question is often asked why the God of the Old and New Covenants is so different. Might I say He is not. God was justified in giving the people what they deserved in order to keep them from completely perishing like the generation before them had in the wilderness. He is the same righteous God. What's different in the New Covenant is exactly what we are focusing on today—stay tuned). *Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned (the conclusion they needed to come to), for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us.'* So Moses prayed for the people. Then the Lord said to Moses, "*Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.*" So Moses made a bronze serpent (bronze being the metal of judgment), 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 ([Num. 21:4-9](#)).

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- Now we have learned the Old Testament was continuously painting the New Testament realities centered on the gospel (good news) in advance of Jesus coming. And it's no different here. And knowing the serpent is often a representation of the work of Satan and evil itself (Gen. 3), and bronze is the metal of judgment, it's clear John is now telling us what this foreshadowing event was pointing to. From his perspective in time, this hadn't happened yet. But we now know Jesus would become sin (or take all our sin upon Himself) when He went to the cross, being accursed for us, taking our judgment upon Himself. But why?

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him (being Jesus) 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. 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

We have seen verse 16 printed on signs, shirts, hats...you name it. It's arguably the most known verse of the Bible. And yet it has become so easy for so many to just read over it and keep right on going without ever letting it speak to their heads and hearts. As you can imagine, we're not going to do that 😊. Because the gospel is so clearly presented here and in the surrounding verses.

- Let's start by clearing up what it means that Jesus is *the only begotten Son* of God. Because we don't typically use this kind of vocabulary. *Begotten* comes from two words meaning "only kind" or "only class". And what it's conveying to us is Jesus' absolute uniqueness, and the singleness of the gift of Him. There is no one else like Him. **Meaning there is only one way to salvation.**
- And someone might say, "What makes Him so unusual?" Well, I mentioned we would come back to this when we were in verse 13, and that is that *Jesus is 100% God and 100% man at the same time*. There have been, and are, religious figures from all over who claim they can lead you into enlightenment or their version of the afterlife. But seriously, how do they intend to get themselves or others there? Is it wishful thinking, positive confession, reincarnation, amassing secret spiritual knowledge, through becoming a martyr, separating yourself from the rest of the world and living in a remote location while growing veggies, spinning carved items, ringing bells, taking a vow of silence, LSD...? How exactly does this deal with the issue of sin against a completely righteous God?
- The truth is self-evident, unless something changes in every single one of us, and something beyond our own capabilities, wherever we might go after this life would soon be infected by the same free will that caused the fallen state here. Just one person's "first" sin in that new place would release a chain reaction. **1)** For those who have studied trauma, think even about how one "natural" death could begin such a series of actions by those who suffered primary and secondary losses from such an event. That too is self-evident. **2)** And we cannot arrive at the age of enlightenment that some believe we can "evolve" to, because even that concept is shrouded in *pride* based on the necessary belief in our superiority over others who have not arrived, to build this premise. This *pride is a certain killer of inner peace, peace with others, and peace with God*. **3)** And all of this does not take into account the very existence of God and who He is? Because if there is a God (and there is—because nothing comes from nothing) all sin or rebellion would be against Him because He created it all. So how will any of these pursuits reconcile you with Him?

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Folks, you can believe in anything you want, but reality is you need the *only begotten Son* of God for your salvation. He is unique. There is absolutely no one like Him, being 100% God and 100% man simultaneously and eternally (*hypostatic union*). He has the power to save, and the knowledge of what it's like to be tempted as we are tempted. Yet, unlike us, without ever sinning. But rather, because of *love*, coming to die in our place that we might be born again into a new life in and with Him.

And who does He love? *The world*. Now let's break that down just a bit because on top of meaning every single person He ever created, it also means all living creatures. In [Gen. 1:26-28](#) it tells us God created man in His image and gave dominion over every living creature to man. And in that time, there was no death or enmity between man and animal. *Then man put his imperfect will above the perfect will of God and brought catastrophe*. And don't tell me that's unrealistic because you see that happening everyday where people put their will above the will of God. And the results speak for themselves.

- Then when you get to [Gen. 6:7](#) and [9:1-17](#) you come to understand that because of our fallen state, the animals also live in a fallen state. So much so that God declares that any animal that kills a man will be judged by Him ([Gen. 9:5](#)). *And who is at fault for this?* Mankind, whom God gave dominion to, under His direction and leadership. And who in turn decided we knew better and asserted our own will over His? It's been a dumpster fire ever since. And if this evokes great sorrow (and it should), know that because of Jesus, this is not the end of the story ([Rom. 8:19](#)).
- And what He is telling us here is Jesus didn't come to condemn the world, because the world is already condemned due to mankind's rebellion, which in turn brought about the fall. This is not God's condemnation story as some would like to make it be. It's His rescue story. We were already condemned. And that of our own doing.
- Some people ask the question, "If God is love, how can He send people to hell?" But what we understand here is that God is *love* and He did *so love the world*. **The problem is we didn't love Him back**. The Bible tells us that if we love Him, we will obey his Commandments ([1 John 2:3-4](#)). And in [Matt. 22:34-40](#) when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He answered, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*"³⁸ *This is the first and great commandment.*³⁹ *And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*⁴⁰ *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*" That's exactly what we didn't do. And if we're honest, what many struggle with to this very day. Don't ever be mistaken, *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*. The question is will you love Him in return ([1 John 4:19](#))?

Here is where a major distinction now comes in. God so loved the world (that's everyone), but the "whosoever" leaves every one of us with a choice. And if today you want to make that choice to accept and return His love, *it must begin in belief* ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)). But that's not just believing that He exists (for even demons have done that [[James 2:19](#)]. Yet they certainly do not love God). *But believing and receiving what He has done for you by sending His only begotten Son*.

- It's so simple and yet so deep. Go back to the serpent on the pole. Why wouldn't every single person who was perishing from their rebellion against God just look upon it and be saved? Was it so simple that some wouldn't believe it was able to save them from what seemed so complex? Honestly, I hear people tell me of what a mess someone else or even they have made of their lives. And how God couldn't rescue them.
- But because God so loved the world, what He took upon Himself was not simple at all. And in doing so, He has made it so simple to come to Him that even a child could understand. Yet the complexity is beyond the greatest human mind.
- And I suppose today you could try to reason away His rescue plan and even His very existence (which is simply illogical). Or you could finally just fall into His arms and find what you have been searching for all your life. Entering into new and eternal life. Are you the "*whosoever*" that will come to Him? What are you waiting for?

CROSS REFERENCES

Jhn 3:1 NKJV – There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

Rev 13:8 NKJV – All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Jhn 14:6 NKJV – Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Jhn 14:3 NKJV – "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Mar 2:10 NKJV – "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"--He said to the paralytic,

Mar 2:28 NKJV – "Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

Mat 26:64 NKJV – Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Mat 8:20 NKJV – And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

Mat 11:19 NKJV – "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

Mar 8:31 NKJV – And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Jhn 1:1 NKJV – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jhn 1:14 NKJV – And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Col 2:9 NKJV – For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

Gen 1:26–28 NKJV – Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Gen 6:7 NKJV – So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

Gen 9:5 NKJV – "Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

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Rom 8:19 NKJV – For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

1Jo 2:3–4 NKJV – Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1Jo 4:19 NKJV – We love Him because He first loved us.

Eph 2:8–9 NKJV – For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Jas 2:19 NKJV – You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!