

# GOD'S INVITATION:

## How to Become a Christian

### “What it Takes to Get it Right”

#### The Third Movement – The Period of Doubt or Unbelief – John 3:9-15

We're in the third movement of the symphony in John chapter 3. We're going to be looking at verses 9-15.

Let's just review for a minute in this passage of John 3:1-21. We have the HEART of the Bible. We have the whole message actually contained in 21 verses.

We've discovered that this is an encounter or a dialogue between a man who is very, very religious and extremely successful and he hears a strange message.

In the first movement of our little symphony we discovered that he learned the absolute necessity of the New Birth before a person could have a relationship with God. Verse 3, verse 5 and verse 7 drive home this fact in these first seven verses.

In our last study we looked at just one verse, and that was verse 8. In this particular movement of the symphony of Salvation we were looking at this verse as the instrument which God uses in performing this new birth in our lives.

And this instrument is the Spirit of God and He blows like a wind in the hearts of people. And although we cannot see Him, we cannot deny the results of the work which He performs in a human heart.

Now Nicodemus has heard all of this. And when the Spirit of God begins to do His work of conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment—we looked at this in John 16 as the function which the Spirit of God performs—immediately an individual will go through a feeling of wanting to get away from it. Wanting to run away, wanting to leave, wanting to deny the thoughts, wanting to get away from any serious reflection about themselves and their spiritual needs. This invariably happens. Nicodemus is going through this.

We noticed that as the Spirit of God convicts of sin, He's showing us what we have done. As He convicts of righteousness, He shows us what we should have done. And as He convicts of judgment, He shows us the consequences of our lives.

And we used the illustration of a traffic officer who apprehends us and he says, "You've been speeding." That's your sin. Righteousness—there's the speed sign. Judgment—here's the ticket.

And a holy God is saying, "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (ref. Romans 3:23) That's the analysis of God looking at the human race.

But, righteousness is what we should have been when we look at the life of Jesus Christ. Judgment—unless we respond to His gift for our judgment, Jesus Christ took it on the Cross of Calvary—we’ll never experience a relationship (the New Birth) or spend eternity with Him.

Now having looked this far, when someone faces this kind of feeling that they’re being convicted and that the Spirit of God is making very personal, invariably we’ll go through a period of doubt or unbelief.

Notice that Nicodemus could have one of several responses. Either he could run away, drown his desires in the pool of passion, try to get away from any thought of these things or serious reflection.

Like one businessman said, “You just don’t feel comfortable when you get in that kind of group. And you don’t want to get there because you just don’t want to think very seriously about it so you get away. You try to avoid any kind of serious thought or consideration about your spiritual destiny.” He was being real honest.

Or secondly, if we can’t run away, we want to deny it by drowning our thoughts in a pool of passion. Or to some it’s turning to the alcoholic beverage to maintain their happiness and to deny any serious thought or reflection about their inner life and their personal needs. So that they don’t see things as they really are.

There are a lot of medical doctors that say this is the real problem for them to really come to a place where they need help spiritually, because they've been taught all of their lives that no matter what the crisis might be they're supposed to be capable of handling the situation. So they're tough that way, their nature is bent in that direction. So we can handle it and we declare our independence of any plan which God would have for us to gain eternal life.

Now Nicodemus has several alternatives presented to him. But let's look at the encounter now beginning in verse 9.

**v. 9 Nicodemus answered and said to him, “How are these things able to come to pass?”**

“Nicodemus answered and said to him, ‘How are these things able to come to pass?’”

In the fourth verse we get his first question:

**John 3:4**

How is a man able to be born, being an old man?

And now it's not so much an old guy starting all over again as it is this New Birth that we're talking about. How can that become a reality? How can a person really come to know Jesus Christ? Or how can a person experience the New Birth? It all looks so impossible.

Nicodemus is very honest and yet there is a certain air of dishonesty as we're going to see in the next few verses. He's really endeavoring to find out the truth and he's in a period of doubt and unbelief—confusion. He's still searching for the answer. He's fully aware that he is unable to deny the results but he cannot understand the process. And so that's what he's searching for here in these questions.

Now verse 10, Jesus answers Nicodemus with a question of His own which is very interesting.

**v. 10 Jesus answered and said to him, “You are the teacher of Israel, and these things you are not knowing?”**

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘You are the teacher of Israel, and these things you are not knowing?’”

“You are a teacher in Israel.”

“You're an authority on religious matters and you don't understand the basics?” That's like talking to a great linguistics scholar and he doesn't know the A-B-C's.

And the truth comes across to Nicodemus, that he might have an awful lot of theological answers but if he hasn't started with the basics his eternal life is still in jeopardy. Perhaps his message of the New Birth sounds strangely foreign because we know an awful lot of Bible. We've heard an awful lot of

sermons. This is the basic point.

Here we a leader in religious activity and he doesn't know the basics. Nicodemus is facing the problem at this particular point—"What will happen if I declare myself openly with Jesus Christ? What will happen to my world? What will happen to all the people who look to me as their respected religious leader if I declare the fact that I've been leading them astray to this point? What will happen to my little kingdom?"

Now the Spirit of God is blowing upon his heart and doing His convicting work, and yet he is hesitating because of his own concern about himself and the world which he's erected.

Bishop Ryle, as he preaches on this passage of scripture, says:

"Many would rather in eternity be put to shame before God, the angels and the elect than to blush for a moment before a few people in this world."

(source unknown)

Now look at verse 11 because there's the secret verse to these verses in the dialogue. Jesus continues in the conversation here after He's raised that question.

"You mean you are a Ph.D. in theology and you don't know the basics?"

**v. 11 Most assuredly, I am saying to you, that which we are knowing we are speaking, and that which we have seen, we are bearing witness: and our witness you are not receiving.**

“Most assuredly, I am saying to you, that which we are knowing we are speaking, and that which we have seen, we are bearing witness: and our witness you are not receiving.”

That last phrase—“our witness you are not receiving.”

Jesus is saying, “Nicodemus, it’s not a question of you having all these answers. And really it’s not a question really about you understanding the process. The big question comes right down to this, you’re not believing and receiving the witness that I’m giving to you right now.”

“You see I’m speaking about things which I know. I’m speaking about things which I have seen and you are not receiving the witness that I’m giving to you.”

In other words, “Nicodemus, the things that I’m talking about are a reality. I’m talking about spiritual things which you can’t see with a physical eye, but that does not deny the reality of these matters.”

Nicodemus, filled with doubt and unbelief, and the Lord confronts him with the honest attitude of his heart.

We may already be Christians. We may have experienced a

New Birth and we are walking with Jesus Christ in a very lonely, uncommitted business world. It's is to maintain a Christian ethic and to live like a Christian should live in a pretty lonely place.

Here's a challenge. Don't be so hard on Nicodemus because he is filled with doubt and unbelief. We know one of the hardest thing we have as a Christian right now is the same problem of doubt and unbelief in our Christian life.

For instance, we have a doubt as to whether God can really handle the next 24 hours. We have a question in our mind whether God is really interested in the details of our business of our profession, of our family. And frankly, oftentimes our lives when we're honest, have to be filled with unbelief that God is really going to move in time and provide an adequate answer. So it's going to be necessary for us to adopt the old theology that God helps those who help themselves.

Now as a Christian we miss some of the greatest blessings that we could ever experience because our lives are filled with doubt and unbelief at this point. The greatest blessing in our life is when everything which comes to us comes from the hand of someone who's been touched by the Spirit of God to provide for our needs.

God sometimes takes everything away from us—physical, financial—so that we are at the end of the road. And then He says, "Alright now can you trust Me?" There's a tremendous difference in our life in knowing that God is capable of



touching people and supplying needs.

He's always there to meet every need that we have.

There are Christian businessmen and women all over the place who feel terribly lonely because they never experienced the blessing God has for them because they're filled with doubt and unbelief with regard to their daily life and experience.

“God I trust You with my next thought! I trust You with eternal life! But I'm afraid You'll blow the next 24 hours so therefore I've got to handle it.”

That's the whole attitude. This is exactly what happened to the children of Israel. Here they come tromping up and God says, “I'm going to give you the Promised Land.” They come tromping up across the desert under Moses' leadership, they see miraculous deliverance through the Red Sea, they get to the shores of the Promised Land and what happens? They send twelve guys in to check the scene out, ten come back and say, “Friend, we'll get smashed if we go in there.” The other two guys say, “Look, if God be for us, who can be against us? God promised that to us and He's going to give it to us. He just waits for us to trust Him in faith to give that land to us.”

Well the creepy types in those days took the majority plank and decided to stay in the desert. And God says, “Because of your unbelief, the rest of your experience is going to be wilderness and desert. And when a new generation comes on

that can trust Me and believe in Me, then I'm going to give them the Promised Land!"

So there they are—evidence of divine disqualification, corpses strewn all over the desert for 40 years. So many times our Christian lives are filled with dust and ashes and desert simply because our hearts are filled with doubt and unbelief in our daily life.

The writer to the book of Hebrews says, "Take heed brethren, lest here be in any of you"—writing to Christians—"an evil heart of unbelief." (ref. Hebrews 3:12) Failing to take God at His word and to apply it to our business practice, to our relationships to people.

Many, many times we fail to see what God can do because we fail to trust God and move ahead so we stay in the desert and we never experience the abundant life that He planned for us.

**v. 12 If I told you earthly things, and you are not believing, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?**

"If I told you earthly things, and you are not believing, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"

Now here the Lord Jesus asks the question, "How?"

"If I tell you about earthly things"—like physical birth and all of these things and I tell you about this matter—"and you are

not believing it”—like verse 11. You’re not receiving my witness—“how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things that you can’t see?”

**v. 13 And no one has ascended into heaven except He who came down from heaven, the Son of Man.**

“And no one has ascended into heaven except He who came down from heaven, the Son of Man.”

In other words, nobody’s gone up to heaven and has been back to tell us about it. Only Jesus Christ! And Jesus Christ is saying in this experience, “I’m talking to you about something which I have experienced. And so by faith you’re going to have to trust Me in what I have to say.”

But too often we’re like Thomas. Remember the encounter of Thomas? He skipped the evening church service and Jesus chose to come on that particular evening and the rest of the guys were there.

And in John chapter 20, after the Resurrection, we read:

**John 20:24-29**

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said unto them, “Except I see him, see in his hands the print of he nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into

his side, I will not believe.” And after eight days again his disciples were within and Thomas with them. Jesus comes, the door being shut, and stood in the midst and said, “Peace be unto you.” Then said he to Thomas, “Reach hither your finger and see my hands; and reach hither your hand, and put it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. Thomas answered and said unto him, “My Lord and my God.” Jesus saith unto him, “Because you’ve seen me, you have believed; but blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

**v. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the snake (serpent) in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”**

“And just as Moses lifted up the snake (or the serpent) in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”

Back in the book of Numbers, chapter 21, as the children of Israel were doubting God, questioning Him and involved in sin in their lives, God sends a plague upon the people of poisonous snakes. The thing gets so serious that people make a plea to Moses that he do something about it because a lot of people were dying. Moses goes before the Lord and the Lord says, “Put a bronze serpent on a pole and everybody that looks to that serpent on that pole will live.”

Now imagine as Moses calls his cabinet together, representing the probably one and half million people involved in this set of circumstances, he says, “Gentlemen I’ve got some instructions from the Lord today. My instructions are you’re going to be

delivered from the poisonous bites of these snakes and people are going to live if they'll look to that bronze serpent on a pole over there."

One guy says, "Man that is ridiculous. That is the dumbest thing I've ever heard."

That's too easy. Wouldn't we expect the Lord to send a snake bite kit or something so that we could work this deal out and take care of as many people as possible? This is just ridiculous. We look to a pole and we live.

But the interesting thing is that everybody that looked to the pole lived and discovered that God was faithful through His instructions in His word. And this is just what Jesus is saying. In John chapter 12 He says, "If I be lifted up, will draw all men to me." (ref. John 12:32)

Jesus Christ is going to be put on another pole and He's going to represent the judgment of God against sin. And when men and women, boys and girls looked to that pole as the only basis for their salvation they're going to live.

"And so Nicodemus, it's not what you're going to do. It's what I'm going to do on another pole. I'm going to become your substitute. I'm going to take the sting of God's wrath for your sin."

Here's a piece of poetry that speaks so well of this substitutionary death of Jesus Christ:

On Him almighty judgment fell,  
that would have sunk a world to hell,  
He bore it for a chosen race,  
and thus becomes my hiding place.  
(source unknown)

God poured out the judgment upon sin upon Jesus Christ.

Isaiah the prophet predicted it hundreds of years before Christ ever came. It's one of the most significant thoughts for a Jewish mind to comprehend that their Messiah was going to be a suffering Messiah.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him, stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” (ref. Isaiah 53:4, 5)

“So Nicodemus, catch the truth. Realize that if you're going to live eternally it's going to be because you looked to Jesus Christ. He's the one.”

**v. 15 In order that everyone who is believing in Him may be having life eternal.”**

“In order that everyone who is believing in Him may be having eternal life.”

Maybe we've not experienced this New Birth. The Spirit of God is blowing in our heart with a message.

Listen to the voice that is speaking and allow the Spirit of God to perform the New Birth as we reach out in faith. It doesn't matter what prominent position we have or how successful we are in this life. The ground is level at the Cross of Jesus Christ. Each of us must come to a personal confrontation with a crucified, risen Savior that waits to provide eternal life that each of us need.

Jesus, I will trust Thee,  
Trust Thee with my soul,  
Weary, worn and helpless,  
Thou can't make me whole.

There is none in heaven,  
or on earth like Thee,  
You have died for sinners,  
Therefore, Lord, for me.  
(source unknown)

If we died today and we went to heaven, what one reason would we give to God that we should share eternity with Him? Or are we in such a spiritual state right now, if we checked out in the next minute, we have complete confidence that we are gone here but we checked in up there?

If our answer to those questions are "I don't know" and anything other than Jesus Christ, we won't make it. That's

not someone telling us that. It's what the Word of God speaks very, very clearly.

Father, we're living in a time when we're battling for men's minds. We're living in a time when we're spending so much time arguing over the rules we forget to play the game. And God somehow we pray that we'll get busy and get in the ballgame. And we'll get into the ballgame according to Your plan and respond to our Savior Jesus Christ and watch Him become a fabulous coach in the sense that He's never coached a loser. And as we play by His plan in faith and belief and trust in confidence, we'll see such great things in our lives we'd never dreamed were possible. And now Father we pray that as a result of being confronted with Jesus Christ and the desire to enter into the Christian experience—experiencing the New Birth—that this same dedication and fiery desire to be all that You want us to be, might likewise permeate our very being so we'll be those who'll mark our communities for the glory of God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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