

GOD'S INVITATION:

How to Become a Christian

“What it Takes to Get it Right”

The Fourth Movement – The Love of God – John 3:16-18

Nicodemus is a very successful, extremely wealthy and very religious individual. He's well thought of and respected in his community and yet he discovers that when Jesus Christ comes on the scene there's some things in his life that don't measure up.

Jesus Christ, being aware of the fact that he wanted an interview, provided time at night for Nicodemus to come. They sat down and began to talk together. After the trivialities of greeting were over, they probably got into this passage that we're looking at here.

This is the dialogue that went on in these 21 verses. There aren't any other sections of the Word of God that guarantees our eternal destiny. That's the reason we're beginning with this particular study. We'll conclude it next time and then do another little book study after this, but for today we're moving into the fourth movement of the symphony.

Now we've likened this passage of scripture to a symphony because a symphony sort of builds to a big finale and climax.

That's kind of the feel we get in this particular passage of scripture. The first thing that Nicodemus hears, when he and Jesus begin to talk, is three times in the first seven verses where we have the phrase, "you must be born again."

In other words," Nicodemus, it's not what you do, it's what God does that's going to prepare you for your eternal destiny."

Verse 3—"you must be born again."

Verse 5—"you must be born again."

Verse 7—the divine imperative—"you must be born again."

Then secondly we note together that as Nicodemus hears this new message the instrument that God uses in performing that New Birth is the Spirit of God and He's likened it to a "wind." And His function in our life is to blow as a wind and He blows in three areas:

1. He blows in the area of showing us our shortcomings or our SIN—as the Bible calls it.

And so the message of the Word of God says that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (ref. Romans 3:23) That shows us our NEED. That shows us that we have not measured up to God's standard of holiness.

2. Then the Spirit of God comes along to convince us of that fact and shows us the RIGHTEOUSNESS in the life of Jesus

Christ, or the righteousness which is in the Law.

Any of us can measure our life against the 10 Commandments, and of course we realize that we fall short. That there are areas where we're not living up to that. This is the standard of righteousness.

3. And then the Spirit of God also says there is JUDGMENT as a result of the consequence unless we respond to God's provision in Jesus Christ.

So the Spirit of God is functioning in this manner. Now in our last study we had a guy on our hands who was terribly frustrated. He was very confused and he asks in verse 9 almost the same question that he asks in verse 4. He says, "How are these things able to come to pass?"

And then Jesus knows that Nicodemus is not being honest. He's asking an intellectual question, wanting to know the process, but Jesus knows his heart. And He really levels him in verse 11. Notice what He says there in that verse:

John 3:11

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.

In other words Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, "Friend, you're not fooling Me, just by covering up this situation, by asking a

question as to how I really know your heart. Nicodemus, I'm telling you something and down in your mind and in your heart you're rejecting these things. You're refusing to believe what I have to say."

Now as we've moved along with this guy and we've seen him hear this message, we see the instrument that does it and the Spirit of God begins to blow upon his life. And then he goes through this period of doubt and unbelief. The best thing that we can do for a person like this is to love them.

When we see a couple who maybe the wife has become a Christian first or the husband has become a Christian first, they always want to know what their responsibility is in that home. What they ought to do, how they ought to relate. Some women of course, when they become Christians, get so excited they bug the tar out of their husbands and their husbands crawl back in the shell and think that their wives have flipped their lid.

But invariably if it's the man who has received Christ and his wife hasn't, they need to be the perfect husband in the sense of love, compassion, understanding—live the life. The same for the women because the Bible describes it that way in 1 Peter chapter 3. It's the responsibility to manifest love and by the quality of our life, to share Christ.

We often see kids with a lot of problems go through the very periods that we see Nicodemus going through.

Nicodemus just needs to realize that somebody loves him and cares enough to be involved in his life. As a result of a love relationship in a family or the love of a friend, somebody cared enough to invite someone to hear the Word. Somewhere they could hear the message in response to that kind of reaching out in compassion and love.

Jesus is using the very same method with Nicodemus, although in his heart he's still rejecting it. If there's one movement of the symphony where Nicodemus gets it, it's here. This is where his decision is made. This is where Nicodemus experiences the New Birth.

Now one more thing about God's love before we look at these three verses. Many times people get the wrong idea that God loves by degrees. That God loves a Billy Graham more than He does some guy who has never allowed God the privilege of entering his heart through the person of Jesus Christ. God's love is something we'll never understand, but He does not love by degrees.

We do not earn His love, we do not merit it. God's love is full and complete and it is not dependent upon our worthiness. If that were the case, He ceases to be a God of grace.

The Bible says God is love and no matter what kind of conduct we're in, or condition we're in today, that love is just the same. It's an attribute of His character that He never changes. And a companion truth to the fact that He never changes is the fact that His love never changes either.

It doesn't matter where we are on our spiritual pilgrimage, we can count on one thing. God loves us as a person. And that means a lot frankly when we're out there in that old cold business world and we think we're all alone. We have somebody who really loves us although we can't see Him in the flesh.

Now when we turn to the Word of God and we see the word "love," we find that it has three different meanings.

First of all, there is the word for physical attraction. This is the word "lust" in our language. The woman at the well in the next chapter—John chapter 4—is a victim of this. As Jesus confronts her with her life, she says, "I don't have a husband." He says, "You're right. You've had five and the guy you're with now is not your husband."

This kind of love is the love that's common today. So many people are defining love as that. "She's not very bright, she doesn't have much upstairs, but man what a staircase." That's the philosophy of that type of love.

Then the Bible describes another kind of love in Genesis 29:20. It's human love like it's supposed to be.

We can tell the difference between lust and human love by the fact that one takes and the other gives. The sheer thrill of giving of oneself to the one loved is human love like it's supposed to be.

Genesis 29:20 says: “And Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed unto him but a few days for the love that he had for her.”

The other kind of love is God’s kind of love. And this kind of love is greater than anything we can experience. The marvel of it all is that there’s never been a person in the world who sunk beyond the capacity of God’s love to change him as a man and make him in the image of God.

Let’s look together at verse 16. Here’s the message that Nicodemus hears now in this fourth movement of the symphony of salvation.

v. 16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, in order that everyone who is believing in Him may not perish, but may be having life eternal.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, in order that everyone who is believing in Him may not perish, but may be having life eternal.”

The extent of God’s love, according to this verse, is the world. And yet the marvel of His love is that He loves us as an individual.

It was Saint Augustine who said:

“God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love.”
(source unknown)

Someone put it this way:

“For God (the greatest lover) so loved (to the greatest degree) the world (the greatest company) that He gave (the greatest act) His only begotten Son (the greatest gift), and whosoever (the greatest mutation) believed (the greatest simplicity) in Him (the greatest attraction) should not perish (the greatest promise) but (the greatest difference) have (the greatest certainty) eternal life (the greatest possession)”
(source unknown)

We should each try putting our name in this verse. As a result, it makes it very personal.

“God so loved [Don Anderson], that He gave His only begotten Son, that if [Don Anderson] would be one who believes in Him, he would not perish, but may be having life eternal.”

God, as a God of love, wants a relationship. Through all of this problem of sin in the world, God is not changed in His love.

We can look at God as a God of love. And in creation He created the world. And when He created the world it was inanimate. And after He created the world, He says “I’m still lonely. I need to have someone to have fellowship with so I’ll create a man.”

And He brings man into the picture. Man says, “I’m lonely!” So God says, “I’ll create a woman for your companionship.” Man and woman decided together one day that they were going to be disobedient. They were going to forge their own course and live their own life. Because as the serpent had come into the garden, made suggestions that God was unjust in prohibiting certain things in their lives, they made the choice to do their own thing.

Now God did not change at that encounter. He’s still a God of love and He’s lonely! Because the thing which He created left Him and went his own way and forged his own course.

So Solomon can say, “There’s a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” (ref. Proverbs 14:12) We see that all about us as people lost, because they’ve never found a relationship to Jesus Christ, are doomed for eternity when they come to that moment of physical death.

And out here God says, “The only way that I can restore a relationship with My creation is if I satisfy the justice and holiness of My requirements and that is by becoming a substitute and paying the price for his disobedience and for his sin.”

“So God so loved the world”—each of us, as individuals—“that He gave.”

How much do we love? We say we prove our love by giving. That’s true. And some of us are saying, “Well, I have proven

my love for God by giving of my money.” Alright, that’s good. And God is pleased. In fact that’s one of the sacrifices of the Christian in the book of Philippians.

“I have shown my love for God by giving of my time. Just the very fact that I’m here manifests that.” And that’s good.

“I have shown God that I love Him by giving of myself in service. I teach a Sunday school class. I serve as an elder. I serve as a deacon.” Very good.

Have we gotten to the place where the love of God has motivated us? To the place where we’re giving ourselves? The most precious commodity we have. The Bible describes that is New Testament compassion, when we can give ourselves to others so that they too will come to know Christ.

We can give our money, our time and our service and we’ll never touch another person. But God gave the most precious thing of Himself, His Son.

And Paul said, “If my life is poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you.” (ref. Philippians 2:17)

As a Christian today, if we’ve insulated ourselves from human suffering and need, to the point where we’re comfortable, it’s not because we’re spiritual. It’s because our love hasn’t gotten to the point of giving to some people who really need us as an individual.

This is God's kind of love, manifested in creation, manifested on the Cross. And men I'm going to be honest with you, although I'm not trying to scare you, He's going to come again and that love is going to be finally culminated in the fact that we who know Him are described in the Bible like a bride. And you just don't keep love separated very long.

God loves us. He loved us so much that He gave His Son and it pleases Him when we respond to His Son. And although we're foreigners in a land here as pilgrims looking for a city whose builder and maker is God, we anticipate the fact that He's going to come real soon to take us to be with Himself.

1 John 4:10 says: "Herein His love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the satisfaction for our sins."

Notice verses 17 and 18 in conclusion.

v. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world in order that He might be judging the world; but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

"For God did not send His Son into the world in order that He might be judging the world; but in order that the world might be saved through Him."

v. 18 He who is believing in Him is not being judged; He who is not believing has been judged already,

because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

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God says, “I didn’t send My Son into the world to condemn the world, to judge it. I’m still a God of love. I sent Him into the world so I could pour my judgment upon sin on Him, not you! I still love you and He came to take your place. And when He dies upon the Cross I won’t judge the world if they know Jesus Christ, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

Peter catches the thought in 2 Peter 3:9 and he says: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, as some men count slackness; He’s longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the point of repentance.”

“Verily, verily, I say unto you,”—Jesus said in John 5:24—“He that hears My word and believes on Him that sent Me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death into life.”

Now notice verse 18 is the promise to Nicodemus.

“He who is believing in Him is not being judged; He who is not believing has been judged already,”

In the eyes of God our unwillingness to respond to Him is something that doesn't catch Him by surprise. He already knows how we're going to respond today because He has the big picture. He's an infinite God and He sees the beginning and the end and He knows how we're responding right now to the message of Jesus Christ. And He knows whether we're going to find a convenient time before we breathe our last to respond to Jesus Christ.

And He says the person "who is not believing" in Him is already judged as far as God is concerned. There's one unpardonable sin and it's the refusal of an individual to believe in Jesus Christ.

And that brings us quickly to this fact. You say, "That doesn't bother me. I'll believe in Jesus Christ. Intellectually I believe He's a good man. I believe that He went to the cross, I believe that He died. I believe that He lived. I believe what the Bible's got to say. So what?"

There are a lot of people running around with an intellectual belief in Jesus Christ but they'll never spend eternity with God and with Jesus Christ.

In Matthew chapter 7 Jesus says, "Many will say unto Me, 'Lord, Lord, haven't we done many wonderful things in all of this?' And I'll say, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you.'" (ref. Matthew 7:22)

There's a difference in a belief that affects our heart. Intellectually we can stand all day on the ledge of a burning building and see some ants down below holding a 50 cent piece and say we believe that net will hold us and that's the only source of our rescue and never jump into it because we're afraid. We're threatened. We're fearful.

And the problem comes with a lot of people who name the name of Christ, as intellectually in their head they know Christ died for them and they're living their lives the best way they can right now—glaring inconsistency. And they come to that point where they've never really, by an act of their will, committed themselves to Jesus Christ. In other words, they've never come to the dead end of their own self-effort and they've never come to the place where they are willing to realize that strength lies in dependence at this particular point. They've never come to the place.

They can look all day at the chair and say “it'll hold me,” but they've never by an act of their will sit down in it and say, “This is for me. This is my time to respond to Jesus Christ. From here on in it's His baby. I'm playing the ballgame His way.”

Hopefully at this particular point when Nicodemus responded to his substitute Jesus Christ, that we will too. And that God's Spirit will begin to really bear witness with our spirit, that by an act of faith we'll receive Christ as our Savior.

There are a lot of Christians that are willing to be of help to

others but they're not going to force themselves on them because God never forces His love upon anybody. They have to come to the moment of need and the realization of the fact that Christ died for us on the Cross and they must make that intelligent decision of allowing Christ to come into their life.

Our heavenly Father, thank You for these great verses that are verses that all of us know. And yet how few of us seem to apply the principals involved to our personal lives. And we pray in a special way today that You'll minister to these individuals. You'll speak to their lives and You'll cause them to make the decision real—even share it with somebody else—so that the quality of the Savior can break through in their lives and they'll go away with a smile, a certainty in their lives that Jesus Christ lives within. And as a result, they're ready to meet You face-to-face when that time should come. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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