

# PM John 3:1-21

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[ 0 : 00 ] John chapter 3 for our scripture reading this evening. John chapter 3 and we'll read the first 21 verses. As I said the last time I was here when we dealt with the first part of this reading, this is a very important chapter because of the teaching, the doctrine that it contains.

We were looking the last time at the new birth and this evening we'll be looking at the love of God and the giving of his son Jesus Christ that he might be given over to death in order that all who believe in him may have the pardon of their sins, not perish and have everlasting life.

We couldn't really be concentrating or focusing our minds on anything of more vital importance. So let's read carefully this passage.

It may be familiar, very familiar to us, but let us read it as if it was for the first time with hungry hearts, with thirsty souls, longing for the Lord to reveal himself in his truth to us.

John chapter 3. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.

[ 1 : 41 ] Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus said to him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?

Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear it sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

[ 2 : 44 ] Nicodemus said to him, How can these things be? Jesus answered him, Are you the teacher of Israel?

And yet, you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one, or except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

[ 4 : 00 ] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

Amen. May God bless the public reading of his word to us all. Please turn in your Bibles to this passage that we've read together. I want us to focus on verses 9 to the end of verse 21.

And in this passage we're going to look at five lessons from what is a very familiar passage of John's Gospel. The five lessons are made up of two cautions and three saving truths that we must never lose sight of.

[ 5 : 39 ] The cautions are like bookends. They come at the beginning and they come at the end. And they're very salutary. They are cautions that we really need to keep in mind.

We live in a world that is full of danger. And perhaps the greatest danger is found in church. You might think well that's a crazy thing to say.

But I don't think you'll think it's so crazy when we consider that the person that the Lord Jesus Christ was talking to was a religious man.

In fact he was a ruler of the Jews as we're told in verse 1. And then if we look at the words of Jesus in verse 10 he was in the Lord's description the not a but the teacher of Israel.

He was a man perhaps we would say today with a university training. He occupied the highest rank in his ecclesiastical establishment.

[ 7 : 02 ] He was a ruler of the church of his day and yet he was a man full of ignorance and darkness when it came to vital spiritual truth.

Are you the teacher of Israel Jesus says to him and yet you do not understand these things? And the Lord Jesus gathering together as it were all his authority as the Lord's anointed says to him truly truly I say to you we speak I think he's using the royal we there in order to communicate his teaching authority we speak of what we know and we bear witness to what we have seen but you do not receive our testimony if I have told you earthly things and you do not believe how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven the son of man the Lord Jesus is speaking truth and he knows he is speaking the truth and he's trying to communicate this certainty of knowledge to Nicodemus and Nicodemus is someone who just does not understand but worse than that he doesn't believe he doesn't receive the testimony and I think we live in a world where that example of Nicodemus can be repeated and seen in so many different places and in so many different churches and religious institutions there are many leaders in the Christian church and outside the Christian church who occupy teaching and ruling positions and they do not understand they do not receive the word of God the truth of scripture and they do not believe that truth and woe to us if we put ourselves under such teachers because if the guide is blind he's going to lead his blind followers into the ditch we need to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and we need to test the messages that we hear in the light of Christ's own teaching the apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to prove all things using scripture as the touchstone prove all things bring that teaching that you hear and bring it to scripture and see if that teaching is true if it is not true reject it if it is true hold fast to it if we follow that which is not true if we reject the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ if we refuse to believe it then there is no hope for us the gospel what it teaches us is that important and we must distinguish between that which is true and that which is false reject the false don't follow false teachers place yourself under the sound of the word of

[ 11 : 46 ] God go to a church stay in a church where the word of God is opened and where it's absolutely clear and transparent that what's being said from the pulpit is from an open Bible and that the minister's only concern is that his people understand what is written to the word and to the testimony thankfully in the case of Nicodemus this isn't the end of the story but this was one of the steps that the Lord used to draw him to faith in himself and by the end of the gospel we see him with the courage of faith identifying with the crucified saviour taking his body down from the cross and with

Joseph of Arimathea laying it in the tomb he had become a follower of Jesus but sadly that doesn't always happen with men who do not understand who do not accept the testimony and who do not believe the word of God may God open the eyes of many religious leaders and bring them back to the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ because we're concerned aren't we for the salvation and the spiritual well-being of the people of our land and what a tragedy it is that where the truth should be proclaimed it is not proclaimed and is replaced instead with the wisdom of men rather than the wisdom of God ministers can do good but only if they're true servants of the Lord Jesus Christ ministers can do terrible harm if they are ignorant of the gospel and if they refuse to accept and to believe the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Jesus said to his disciples that they were to call no man master they had one master one teacher even the Christ and so we must test everything by the teaching of Christ by the word of his apostles by the scriptures which he by his

spirit has caused to be written and in his providence has preserved for our instruction so this passage begins with a caution here was a religious well educated ruler of the Jews and he did not understand he was full of darkness he needed to be enlightened the second lesson that we have in this passage has to do with the source of the salvation that comes to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ and that source is traced right up to the fountain head and to the love of God we see that particularly clearly don't we in verse 16 of John chapter 3 for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life where does our salvation ultimately stem from where does it come from what is its source this is a glorious truth it comes from the very love of God one of William Tyndale's great concerns was to communicate to the people of early 16th century England William Tyndale by the way was the man God used to translate the scriptures into the common English language even before the reformation took place in the early 16th century and he paid for that with his life burnt at the stake in Vilvoorde in modern day Belgium in 1536 with the prayer on his lips Lord open the king of England's eyes but William Tyndale was really at heart an evangelist and he wanted to preach the gospel and to teach the gospel to the common people his great desire was that the boy following the plow would know scripture and be able to sing scripture as he plowed with his horse up and down the fields but his great concern was that the people should know that God and this was his phrase is friendly minded towards sinners sinners many of the expressions that we use in our everyday [17:14] English language stem from William Tyndale who had this great ability of coining phrases that have become part and parcel of our common English language heritage deep deep deep distrust of God if truth be told and yet this passage of scripture teaches us something about God he loved the world and the world there hasn't anything really to do with you know the extent or the number of people that

God loved it is really there as a symbol of the blackness the sinfulness the depravity of the object of God's love the world in a state of rebellion against its maker God was concerned about it God loved it with a love of deep pity and compassion because of its plight and condition this is the source of our salvation the love of God when I was thinking about this passage in this point in particular I thought of the sources of some rivers you know the way you can trace a river from where it flows out into the sea you can trace it all the way back up to its source and I remember not far from here one day driving up the road from Moffat back towards Edinburgh and you've probably stopped at the same lay-by I think there's a sign there an information board you get out of the car you want to see what it's all about and you discover that oh this is the source of the river Tweed this great river that forms part of the border between England and Scotland you get out you read the signposts and then you turn around and you look for the source and it's it's so unimpressive isn't it it's a real disappointment but the source of our salvation is far from being a disappointment it is so so glorious for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life this verse is called by Martin

Luther the Bible in miniature it contains really everything essential to know for our salvation and the love that it speaks about here is this almighty pity pity and compassion with which God regards the whole of his creation his race of men and women its object is the whole world this world of sinful men and women and there's a deep sense in which God loves that world that he has made but which has fallen and is in a state of rebellion against him their sins of course God cannot love but he loves their souls you think of Psalm 145 verse 9 the Lord is good to all and his mercy is over all that he has made and when you think of what the Lord is saying here to Nicodemus in John chapter 3 verse 16 he himself standing before

Nicodemus is evidence to this blind and ignorant and unbelieving man of the love of God towards him and his fellow men and women there's an old gospel hymn that I was brought up singing back in Rosemary Park Baptist Church in Bangor and I think it summarizes this text so well and whenever I read John 3 16 it immediately springs into my mind and goes like this won't sing it I'll just repeat it God loved the world of sinners lost and ruined by the fall salvation full at highest cost he offers free to all oh t'was love t'was wondrous love the love of God to me it brought my saviour from above to die on Calvary my friend

[22:54] I want to ask you this evening are you clear in your understanding about the love of God as I said so many people in this world have a slavish fear of God and that really doesn't surprise me one little bit when I think of the alienation that exists in the hearts of men and women who have

rebelled against God and who believe the devil's lie about God but we cannot begin to grasp the good news of the gospel the coming of Jesus Christ into the world his death upon the cross the free offer of pardon and peace and everlasting life without seeing all of this as springing forth from the love of God from God in Tyndale's words being friendly minded towards sinners God loved that's what the text tells us he loved the world what an object and unlovely world is loved by this

God but he didn't just love the world he so greatly loved the world that he gave he loved it so much that he gave but what did he give was it something small that he gave or was it everything that he gave he gave according to Christ in this verse his only son that in the next verse the world through him might be saved oh the love of God is it any wonder John the apostle of love could write in his first epistle in this is love not that we loved God this love of God was not some kind of quid pro quo he'll love us if we love him no in this is love not that we loved

God but that he loved us and because of that love he sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins so the salvation of men and women in this ungodly fallen rebellious world has only one source and we trace it all the way back to the love of God for the world the third lesson to learn from this passage is that God's giving of his son to the death of the cross is the only way the only way in which God in his love provides salvation for sinners in other words without the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross there is and can be no salvation notice our

Lord's words to Nicodemus in verse 15 and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must you catch that so must the son of man be lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life we came across this word must earlier in the chapter you must be born again and last time I was here I was showing you the divine necessity of the new birth we need to be born again that which is born of the flesh is flesh but to be born of the spirit and to enter into the kingdom of God we need a new birth a birth from above it is absolutely essential we cannot get to heaven we cannot even see heaven without this new birth you must be born again and here again later in the chapter

Jesus speaking about his death comparing his being lifted up with the way Moses in the book of Numbers was it Numbers chapter 21 lifted up the serpent of brass when the Israelites were punished for the rebellion against the Lord in the wilderness and the Lord sent these fiery serpents in amongst them and many were bitten and many were perishing and they cried out to the Lord and the Lord told Moses to make a serpent of brass and to put it up on a pole so that everyone who looked to the serpent of brass might be healed and saved from the certain death of the snake bite and here Jesus says he must be lifted up without his being lifted up there can be no looking to him for salvation there can be no salvation without his being lifted up and by being lifted up our [ 28 : 34 ] Lord Jesus meant nothing less than his own death upon the cross that death was a divine necessity it was part and parcel it was central to the plan that God's love drew up for the salvation of fallen men and women it was appointed by God so that the giving of Christ's flesh was for the life of the world as he says in John 6 verse 51 so it was ordained from all eternity to be the great propitiation and satisfaction for man's sin the death of Christ in the room instead of sinners this alone could pacify God this alone could remove sin this alone could cover the sins of all who believe in him Jesus

Christ is the great substitute Jesus Christ is the one who bore that enormous load and weight of our debt of our sin of our guilt before God and when Christ died upon the cross our many sins were laid upon him the Bible tells us that he was made sin for us he was made a curse for us and by his death he purchased pardon and complete redemption for sinners think of that little hymn I quoted earlier salvation full nothing is left undone that needs to be done salvation full at highest cost he offers free to all yes the bronze serpent of numbers chapter 21 was lifted up in the camp of Israel when people looked to that that brought a healing cure and that healing cure was within the reach of all all they had to do was look away from themselves to the serpent of brass hung up on the pole and that healing cure would come to them and in the same way all who look to Jesus Christ and him crucified will be healed will be forgiven will be pardoned will be cured of sin and of all its consequences my friends make no mistake about it what we read about here in John chapter 3 lies at the very heart the very foundation of the whole of the Christian faith Christ's death is the Christian's life Christ's cross is the Christian's key to heaven

Christ lifted up and put to shame on Calvary is the way by which Christians enter into the most holy place and eventually are brought to glory it is true that we are sinners but Christ it is true has suffered for us it is true that we deserve death but it is also true that Christ has died for us it is true

that we are guilty debtors but Christ has paid our debts with his own precious blood this my friend is the real gospel and this is what should be preached from every pulpit in the land this is good news on this good news we must rest our souls if our souls are to live everlastingly to this let us cling when we come to die

Christ has been lifted up on the cross and he has thrown open the gates of heaven to all who look to him and believe on him and that brings us to the fourth lesson in this passage and we mustn't miss the vital truth about how these saving benefits that Christ has won for us become ours they only become ours through faith in him Spurgeon used to say to his congregation his vast congregation there is nothing in the love of God there is nothing in the death of Christ there is nothing in the work of the Holy Spirit if you do not believe all these benefits come to us through faith and faith is the same thing as believing did you notice that three times our Lord repeats this glorious truth to Nicodemus in verse 15 he says that whoever believes in him may have eternal life and in verse 16 that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life and verse 18 whoever believes in him is not condemned so I want to repeat the truth as our Lord repeated the truth into the ears of Nicodemus it's vitally important that he hears it it's vitally important that we hear it faith in the Lord

[ 34 : 34 ] Jesus Christ is your key to heaven if you have got this key then you have got life but if you do not have this key then you don't have life and nothing whatever besides this faith is necessary to complete our full and final justification nothing whatever apart from this faith will give us a share in the benefits that Christ has won for us don't look anywhere else you don't need anything else everything you need is found in Jesus Christ and by trusting him by looking to him by believing on him you receive everything it's possible to feel something of the conviction of sin and as a result to say to yourself

I must do something in order to win God's favour I know what I'll do I'll begin to fast I'll deny myself whether it be in Lent or every Friday or whatever it's possible to feel like that and to do many things that in and of themselves may be good and right and helpful you may decide I'm going to turn over a new leaf and I'm going to seriously attend church every Lord's Day I'll even join the church I'll even partake of the church's sacraments maybe I should do more maybe I should think about what I have and what other people don't have and maybe give away all that I have in order to help others and to feed the poor my friends you can do all of these things and yet remain unpardoned and unforgiven because these things while some of them may be very good in and of themselves are not sufficient to take away the least of our sins our sins can only be taken away through the death and blood shedding of Jesus

Christ and it is by faith in him faith in him connects us locks us into Christ so that the benefits that he has won for sinners on the cross flow to that sinner and become that sinner's possession so without faith there is no salvation but through faith in Jesus Christ here's the glorious truth the most vile the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives think of the most hateful person in this world if that person turned in repentance and in faith to Jesus Christ and called upon his name no matter how great that person sins no matter how many that person sins all would be washed away and atone for because of the precious blood of the son of God who died for sinners the fifth lesson is our last lesson and I said at the beginning this passage is bookended by cautions caution about the dangers of religious leaders who do not know the truth and the last lesson is another note of caution this passage tells us that there is only one reason why anyone is lost this cautionary note is sounded at the end of the passage our Lord says to Nicodemus in verse 19 this is the judgment the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than light because their works were evil here is a warning about the cause of our own damnation if we are not saved and could it be put more clearly could it be put more simply even the children here

I'm sure could understand and grasp this that although our salvation is entirely of God springing from his love purchased for us by Jesus Christ's death upon the cross and received by faith alone yet if we are lost if anyone is lost it will be entirely his or her own fault the blame can be put fully and squarely at their own door we reap the harvest that we sow this passage shows us clearly that God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world through him might be saved verse 17 may

[ 40 : 58 ] I put it like this there is no unwillingness on God's part to receive any sinner no matter how great and many his sins may be he will receive all who come to him by Jesus Christ God has

sent forth his light and his truth God has sent his light into the world and if anyone will not come to the light the fault is not in God the fault is in ourselves as I say the blame will be placed at his own door if he loses heaven his eternal misery will be the result of his own willful choice this is the judgment light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil for everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed but whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in

God will you come to Jesus Christ will you receive life from his nail pierced hands or do you love the darkness and hate the light and therefore refuse to come to the light the light of the world I am the light of the world he who follows me will not walk in darkness but you say no and perhaps like the Jews of whom Nicodemus in this chapter was a representative you refuse to accept the testimony of Jesus Christ sometimes we think if only

Jesus was here you hear people say if only Jesus was here I would have so many questions to ask him and I would hear his answers and I would follow him but Jesus was here and people came to him with answers with their questions and he answered them and yet many refused to accept his testimony and refused to believe in him for salvation do you believe these are weighty and solemn truths life and death is in the balance our response to the word of God has eternal ramifications if we accept the truth and call upon the

Lord's name and trust in his son we are saved if we do not do that or if we delay in doing that it does have consequences it may even harden our hearts and make it even more difficult for us to reverse the decisions that we made earlier in our lives so I ask you again have you embraced the gospel's message by faith and have you made it your own I would say to you do not rest give yourselves no rest until you know that Jesus Christ is your savior look to him if you have never looked to him before and do so without delay and on the strength of the word of God's testament again what was this thing was no thing to to

Thank you.

[ 46 : 40 ] Thank you.

Thank you.