

Reborn . . . The Decision

Part II

John 3:16-19

Introduction

It was sometime, under cover of darkness, that a man, named Nicodemus, slipped into the home where Jesus was staying. He was deeply troubled by the radical teaching and approach of this young man, who obviously claimed to be the Messiah.

The Interview

Their conversation would become the most important conversation recorded in scripture, for in it we discover the secret of salvation.

Two Implications

Now, in the process, Jesus had to shatter a couple of myths. Let's review them together.

It is possible to be sincere, and yet be . . .

1. It is possible to be sincere, and yet be sincerely wrong.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. The Pharisee was the sincerest person in the Lord's day. He kept thousands of regulations, prayed and fasted regularly, and lived a life that was beyond moral question. Sincere . . . yet sincerely wrong!

It is possible to be religious, moral, and upright, and yet be . . .

2. It is possible to be religious, moral, and upright, and yet be on your way to hell.

People like to hear about heaven; we like to hear about the God of love, yet Jesus looked Nicodemus in the eye and said, "You must be born again!"

Jesus had to tell this man, an individual easily voted in as, "The man most likely to get into heaven," that he is not going there!

Three Illustrations

Then the Savior illustrated that new birth in three ways.

Physical birth

1. The first illustration is, just as you have been born physically, so you must be born spiritually.

In fact, your physical birth and nature signals the problem. Before you were even born, you had inherited something from your father – Adam's nature. The proof of that is, like Adam, you sin. And the proof that your children inherited the same nature that you did is that they also will sin.

You will never have to teach your child to lie or to want their own way. You will never hear a toddler crying, "But I want to share, I want to share."

This is Adam's nature and it is transmitted from father to child. When any of my children act up, my wife can look at me and legitimately say, "They got that from you."

Spiritual birth

2. The second illustration of new birth is that the wind is invisible, yet you can see the effects of it; so also, the spiritual birth is invisible, yet you can see the results in the life of the person.

The Savior on the cross

3. The last illustration is that, just as the Israelites had to look at the brass serpent, raised up, in order to live; so also, must you look to the Savior, lifted up on the cross. This is not a man made cure, but a God inspired, God provided cure.

And this is the cure for Nicodemus and us. This is the plan of salvation!

The Invitation

Look at the invitation in John, chapter 3, verse 16.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Now, I want to break this verse into six sections. In some sections I will simply illustrate the truth of it, while in others, I will expound on a word or truth.

For God . . .

1. "For God . . ." – the genuine source.

Notice that this verse begins with its reference point in God. It takes you back in thought to Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

That is, God was the source and creator of physical life. So also, God is the source and creator of spiritual life or re-birth.

This was certainly not a new concept in Judaism. In fact, the idea of re-birth was not a foreign idea. They taught that a Gentile who wanted to leave his pagan faith and convert to Judaism had to go through a series of prayers, sacrifices, and baptism. After doing so, he was considered "reborn". The rabbis taught,

A proselyte who embraces Judaism, is like a newborn child.

Additionally, they were actually embroiled in a theoretical argument that such a man should be able to marry his own mother or sister. This was because he was now a completely new man and all of the old connections and relations were broken; were done away with!

The Jews were not the only ones with a "new birth" concept. One of the chief aims of Satan is to counterfeit the truth of God. He has even counterfeited the idea of re-birth to a secular world.

The Greeks, even before the time of Christ, had developed the Mystery religions. These religions were all founded on the story of some suffering, dying, and resurrecting god. Now where did they get that idea from?!

The person who desired to become a part of these religions had to go through a series of initiations whereby they identified with the sufferings and triumph of some god. When the identification rites were completed, the initiate was, in the language of the Mysteries, a "twice-born".

A Greek, by the name of Apuleius, who went through the initiation and later wrote about it, said that he underwent a,

. . . voluntary death, and that thereby he attained his spiritual birthday and was reborn.

In the Phrygian Mystery religions, the initiate, after his initiation, was given milk to drink. This was a symbol of the fact that he was a newborn babe.

The most incredible Mystery ceremony, a ceremony that came close to the truth and yet, was so far from it, was the ceremony called "taurobolium". In this, the candidate was put into a pit. On the top of the pit, there was placed a lattice-work cover. On top of the cover, a bull was slain by having its throat cut. The bull was then laid on top of the cover and the blood dripped down into the pit. The initiate literally bathed in the blood as it fell through the lattice-work. When he came out of the pit, he was "reborn for all eternity."

Ladies and gentlemen, when Jesus Christ stepped on the scene and declared the idea of re-birth, it was a concept that had long been argued and even counterfeited. In fact, the world was looking for the genuine spiritual experience. So it still looks today, with our New Age gurus and our paranormal pursuits.

Mystery religions are alive and well . . . and they are close to the truth!

There is a spiritual world! And you must be re-born to enter it and relate to it. Jesus says, however, the true spiritual world that leads to freedom and, ultimately, heaven, begins with the creator God of the Bible. Any other source, any other truth will be deceiving and lead not to heaven, but to hell.

That is why Jesus declared, in John, chapter 14, verse 6,

. . . I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

In the original, this statement is constructed with a double positive, which is an exclusive construction. Jesus was saying, “I am the way, the only way, I am the truth, the only truth, I am the life, the only life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me, and only Me!”

That makes Christianity exclusively the truth.

I read that someone complained about the three crosses hanging in the chapel on the campus of the University of Central Arkansas. The president of the university was quick to answer and, stating separation of church and state concerns, ordered curtains to be installed to cover the crosses. He said,

This way the chapel will be accessible to persons of all faiths.

I have got news for you – heaven is not even accessible to persons of all faiths – only of one faith.

Let us go on in verse 16.

So loved the world . . .

2. “. . . so loved the world . . .” – we will call this “the immeasurable degree”.

F. B. Meyer wrote of his son saying, “Daddy, I love you like a hundred pounds . . . a hundred miles . . . a hundred dollars . . . Daddy, I just love you so much!”

It seems that the vocabulary of humanity is at a loss to find a word that adequately describes the immeasurable nature of God’s love.

Now, the interesting thing about biblical “agape,” the word chosen in this verse for God’s love, is that it is not a feeling, it is an action.

So what was the action whereby God revealed his agape? Let us look at the next section of the verse.

That He gave His only begotten Son . . .

3. “. . . that He gave His only begotten Son . . .” – the greatest gift.

The Greek word for “begotten,” in this verse, is “monogenes,” which means, “unique; one of a kind.”

I read of a minister who was talking to a married couple who were having marital difficulties. There was much hardness and bitterness, coupled with a lack of understanding. At one point, the husband spoke, in obvious exasperation, to his wife, “I’ve given you everything. I’ve given you a beautiful home. I’ve given you a new car. I’ve given you a closet full of designer clothing. I’ve given . . .” and the list went on and on.

When he finally ended his speech, his wife said quietly, “That is true. You’ve given me everything, but yourself.”

What action did God take to reveal His eternal love? He gave you his Son!

Who could imagine it?! Who can explain it?!

When the young preacher, Henry Morehouse, came to America, D. L. Moody invited him to preach in his church in Chicago. That night Morehouse chose as his text, John, chapter 3, verse 16. He preached with such passion and power that Moody invited him to speak again the next night. He spoke for a number of nights and on the last night of his series, Henry Morehouse said to the packed audience,

I have been trying to tell you how much God loves you. Suppose I could borrow Jacob’s ladder. Suppose I could ascend that shining stairway until my feet stood on the sapphire pavements of the city of God. Suppose I could find Gabriel, the herald angel who stands in the presence of God. Suppose I could say, “Tell me, Gabriel, how much does God love the world?”

I know what he would say. He would say, “Henry Morehouse, ‘. . . God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ That’s how much God loves the world.”

Let us continue on in the verse.

That whoever believes in Him . . .

4. “. . . that whoever believes in Him . . .” – the simplest invitation.

What does it mean to believe?

John Paton first went out as a pioneer missionary to the New Hebrides Islands. He found that the natives, among whom he began to work, had no way of writing their language. He began to learn it and, in time, began to work on a translation of the Bible for them. Soon he discovered that they had no word for “faith”. This was serious, of course, for a person can hardly translate the Bible without it.

One day he went on a hunt with one of the natives. They shot a large deer, in the course of the hunt, and, tying its legs together and supporting it on a pole, laboriously trekked back down the mountain path to Paton’s home near the seashore. As they reached the house, both men threw the deer down. The native immediately flopped into one of the deck chairs on the porch, and exclaimed, “My, it is good to stretch yourself out here and rest.”

Paton immediately jumped to his feet and recorded the phrase. In his final translation of the New Testament, this was the phrase he used to convey the idea of saving faith, trust, or belief,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever stretches himself out on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Now, that is easier said than done. Why? Because there is no such thing as a free lunch! Everything about our pride and flesh would rather help God save us than to simply throw ourselves on His mercy. That is too demeaning!

I have heard people say, “Well God’s just going to have to accept me the way I am. I’m not that bad.”

Oh, no. You must say, “O Lord, I want you to accept me, even though there’s nothing about me that’s acceptable.”

Does that bother you?

You might remember when the rich young ruler came to Jesus and Jesus told him that, if he wanted to be saved, he must give all of his money away. Why? Do you have to be poor to be saved? No. The point was that riches were the biggest obstacle between him and God.

In the case of Nicodemus, it was not mere wealth that was his obstacle. Jesus simply told Nicodemus to believe; to place his faith in a person. Why? Because

that was Nicodemus’ greatest obstacle – he had to trust in his works; keeping the regulations of the law. He was a Pharisee – that was his salvation. In effect, Jesus told him to give it all up . . . and stretch himself upon the work of the Son of God. You must simply believe.

The question is, “Why the urgency to believe; to get it right?”

Continue in verse 16 for the answer.

Should not perish . . .

5. “. . . should not perish . . .” – the everlasting escape.

And why are people in need of escape? This verse assumes that, unless you do something, you are automatically going to perish. Not annihilation, but eternal separation from God in the torment of hell.

Now look at verse 17.

For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.

Now people say, “See, it says right here that Jesus didn’t come into the world to judge the world.”

The word “send,” is the Greek word “apostello,” which is the word from which we get our word “apostle”. It simply refers to sending someone forth as a messenger on a mission. His message was not a message of judgement. Why?

Look on to the first part of verse 18.

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already . . .

Jesus did not bring a message of judgment, because the world was already under judgement. In other words, why condemn an already condemned world?!

No! When Jesus came to planet earth, His purpose for coming was clearly spelled out by the angels. They said to the shepherds, as recorded in Luke, chapter 2, verse 11a,

for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior . . .

Not a judge, not a teacher, not a healer, not a philosopher . . . a SAVIOR!

Luke’s gospel also recorded, in chapter 19, verse 10,

[He] has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

If the world had needed:

- information – an educator,
- technology – an engineer,
- money – a financial expert,
- pleasure – an entertainer.

But, the world is perishing, and every human being is on his way to an appointment with death. We need a Savior!

There are so many people without Christ. As I drive around town; as I watch people in a mall or walk up a sidewalk into an office building; as I visit in people's homes and drive through the neighborhood, I think, "Oh Lord, how will we ever reach these people?"

Nearly every week I meet with people and, many times, I hear them pray to receive Christ. If they do, usually, the next morning, I share with my family what happened. I want my children, although they are in the second grade and kindergarten, to understand the necessity and excitement of being saved.

One of my sons had to write a paper and shared the gospel story in a few sentences. He then concluded by writing, "If you want to be saved, call my Dad."

Imagine being a teacher and getting a paper with some kid saying, "You need to be saved."

So, to those who will admit their need of Him and place their faith in Him alone for salvation, Jesus states . . .

But have eternal life.

6. ". . . but have eternal life." – the most wonderful certainty.

Can you know for sure that you have eternal life in heaven?

Go back to the primary motivation for the inspired record of John's gospel – turn to John, chapter 20, verses 30 and 31.

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

I frankly get the strong impression that John, the apostle, had a burning desire to see that you and I know for sure that we are on our way to heaven.

John wrote in his smaller letter, called I John, in chapter 5, verse 13,

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

There is nothing more important than that you KNOW!!

I was driving behind a car, recently, with a license plate that read, "I INSURE U".

How important? One hundred reasons why? What about eighty billion years!

I remember, as a boy, visiting the home of an elderly couple. The man was confined to his chair, was in his eighties, and was near death's door. I remember sitting in the living room with my father, mother, and three brothers. We were in Wisconsin, I believe, traveling through on our way to Minnesota. Although this elderly man's children supported my missionary parents, he was not a Christian. I remember hearing my father share with this man the plan of salvation and then, asking him, "Would you like to receive Christ as your own Savior? Would you like to ask him into your life?"

The man said, "I don't believe I will."

Something pressed upon my father to risk offense, because he simply backed up and started over. I remember him pulling his chair right up to the recliner, where this old man was wrapped in a comforter. I remember the urgency. Here was a man who had lived a good life, raised decent children, attended church, and had accomplished a lot of good things. Here was my father telling him that he was not good enough!

Finally, my father asked him again, "Would you now place your faith in Christ and simply receive Him as your personal Savior?"

I remember holding my breath. Then, that old man said, "I believe I will."

I remember tears running down my cheeks. None of us knew it at the time, but, within a few months, that man would die.

How about you my friend? Have you received Christ? Although salvation is free, you must still ask for it. Have you asked?

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/28/1993 by Stephen Davey.

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