

Gospels class 15-Nicodemus comes to see Jesus, Jesus tells him he must be born again
Scott Ashley Jan. 5, 2013

Good morning/afternoon,

We'll continue today with our study of the Gospels. Last time we began in John chapter 2 with Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine, and then His cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, about six months into His ministry. Today we pick up the story with something else that takes place at that Passover Feast, which is His discussion with Nicodemus. But before that, John makes a few more comments that set the stage.

John 2:23-3:21

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast [the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is generally and generically called "the Passover" or "the Passover Feast" in the Gospels], **many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.** And this word translated "signs" is often translated "miracles." It can mean either signs or miracles.

24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,

25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

This is really interesting. Earlier in the chapter John talked about the miracle of the wine at the wedding feast in Cana. Here John says that Jesus performed miracles at the Feast in Jerusalem, but he doesn't say what these miracles were—only that some people believed in Him when they saw the miracles.

So what's going on here? The real question John is addressing in these few sentences is, why didn't Jesus then and there openly declare that He was the Messiah? And the answer is, the time wasn't right yet. The circumstances weren't right yet. Among other things, He still had other disciples to call and prepare. But probably most important is what John points out here about those who saw the miracles—that John knew people were fickle and their interest would be short-lived. He knew that people would be attracted by the miracles, but He didn't want a large crowd following Him who knew he could perform miracles but didn't know what it meant to really be His disciple. He wanted a small and dedicated group that He could train to be the foundation of the Church and who were prepared to follow Him to the end.

Continuing with the story in John 3—

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

Who is this man Nicodemus, or *Nakdimon* as he would've been called in Hebrew? He's mentioned several times in the Gospel of John. It says here that he was a Pharisee. So as we'll see, not all Pharisees were as we typically view them to be, a group of self-righteous, legalistic, hypocritical men who were always opposing Jesus. There were differences among the Pharisees just as there are differences among any religious group. Some *were* self-righteous, legalistic and hypocritical, but not all. And as we learn later, some Pharisees were called by God to be a part of His Church, like the apostle Paul.

As we see here, John also tells us that Nicodemus was "**a ruler of the Jews.**" Apparently he is a member of the Sanhedrin, the 70-member chief legal body of the Jews at that time. They weren't rulers in the sense of the kings like Herod and his sons who were rulers, or the Roman administrators, but they were part of the primary legal body, something like our Supreme Court

is today. Let's notice the other places Nicodemus is mentioned in the Gospel of John:

John 7:47 This is at the last Feast of Tabernacles before Jesus is crucified six months later. The Pharisees send some men to arrest Jesus, but they come back saying "We've never seen anyone teach like this man!" And then we pick up the story here:

47 Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived?"

48 "Have any of the rulers (there's that word again, probably referring to the Sanhedrin) or the Pharisees believed in Him?"

49 "But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."

50 Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) (one of which "them?" One of the rulers, probably the Sanhedrin. And note that this is clearly the same Nicodemus, since John identifies him as "**he who came to Jesus by night**") **said to them,**

51 "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?"

That's a logical and reasonable answer as one would expect from a legal jurist. But notice the response:

52 They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee."

So they don't answer the legal point Nicodemus made; they raise an irrelevant argument to dismiss Nicodemus' point and to discredit him and the wise advice he had given.

We find a final mention of Nicodemus in **John 19:38-42**, right after Jesus has been crucified.

John 19:38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus.

39 And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

So here again we see the same Nicodemus "**who at first came to Jesus by night**" now helping entomb the body of Jesus and providing the spices for burial, which would help cover the smell of the decomposing body. Incidentally, this tells us that Nicodemus was quite a wealthy man to be able to afford this amount of spices.

40 Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.

41 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.

42 So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.

So we see that Nicodemus appears to be a secret supporter of Jesus Christ. He first comes to Jesus in secret at night; later he's bolder in stepping up to defend Jesus, though not necessarily openly but rather by arguing a point of legal procedure; and finally, after Jesus has been executed, he helps with Joseph of Arimathea in taking care of the body and putting it in Joseph's tomb. He seems to have lost his fear at this point and is open in his support of Jesus — although at this point it's too late to make a difference.

So with this background about Nicodemus, apparently a member of the Sanhedrin, let's return to John 3 where Nicodemus first comes to Jesus by night.

2 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."

Notice that Nicodemus says, "Rabbi [or "Teacher" or "Master" or "Great One" which is the meaning of "Rabbi"], we know that You are a teacher come from God." Who is the "we" he refers to here? Presumably it's some of the Pharisees or some of the Sanhedrin or both. He

doesn't specify. But as we see from the book of Acts later on, people from all walks and classes of society are called into the Church. Even a number of the priests are later called into the Church.

Why did Nicodemus come by night? We have traditionally assumed that he didn't want to be publicly seen with Jesus because he was afraid of what that would do to his reputation. That may be true, but culturally speaking, there's another explanation. Some rabbis taught that nighttime was the best time to study the Scriptures because there wouldn't be as many interruptions, and maybe that was his custom.

Also, what do we see throughout Jesus' ministry? He's often surrounded by crowds following Him during the daytime, especially after He's performed some miracles or people are hoping to see Him perform miracles. So perhaps this was a practical matter of nighttime being the best time to see Jesus and spend some private, one-on-one time with Him without the interruptions that would occur during the daylight hours. So we don't know for sure.

Continuing in verse 3, after Nicodemus mentions the miracles Jesus had performed, Jesus responds:

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

This is a rather strange transition here. Nicodemus compliments Jesus, and then Jesus gives him this strange statement seemingly out of nowhere. But is it? As we've seen and will see, it was fairly common for Jesus and other rabbis to make challenging statements to challenge their audience to think. And that's clearly what's going on here. But what's the connection between the statement from Nicodemus and the response from Jesus?

Nicodemus notes that Jesus must be a messenger from God, or He couldn't be doing these miracles. And Jesus essentially says tells him that it's not the miracles He was that were important, but that a *far greater* miracle was what was really important—a complete and miraculous total transformation in the life of a human being.

So what does Jesus mean by this statement about being "born again"? I'd like to preface this with a comment as we started going into this series on the Gospels and I began to see how long it would take, I began feeling guilty that I'm not giving sermons on various Church doctrines as normally would be done at Sabbath services. But then we got a little further and I realized that before we get through the Gospels, we will likely cover pretty much every doctrine of the Church as we come across them in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and we'll probably cover lots more.

We've already talked about the nature of God, the identity of Jesus Christ, the accuracy of Bible prophecy, Satan the devil, baptism, the history of Israel, God's plan of salvation, God's calling, and probably several other things that I've forgotten. And today we'll talk about "born again" and our destiny, among other things. So I hope you don't feel shorted that you're missing out on specific sermons on specific topics. You're getting the doctrines covered, just in a different way. So let's continue and talk about the subject of being born again.

We see that Nicodemus is surprised by Jesus' statement.

4 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?" And Jesus responds again with another rather

shocking statement.

5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

The Jews of that day actually had a concept of being born again. They said that a proselyte to Judaism was “like a newborn child”—someone starting a new life. But what the rabbis meant about being born again and what Jesus meant about being born again are very different things. And we see that in how Jesus defines and explains what He means.

He says here that we must be “**born of water and the Spirit**”—two different things. Some get confused over this statement, so let’s dissect it. There are three main interpretations of what it means to be “born of water.” One is that it’s talking about water as a general form of cleansing. In other words, we have to be cleaned up to enter the Kingdom of God. While that’s true that we need to be cleaned up, that explanation leaves a lot unanswered.

Another explanation is that it’s talking about a physical human birth, with the water from the womb that accompanies the birth process. But that doesn’t make sense in context, because *every* human being is born in this way and there’s nothing out of the ordinary about that.

But there is one other way that we can be figuratively reborn by water, and that’s through baptism. Let’s notice a few scriptures that show this, beginning with **Romans 6:3-4—**

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

So Paul is saying that when we are buried with Jesus Christ in baptism, we come up out of those waters to a new life. Another very similar passage is **Colossians 2:12-13—**

12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him . . .

Here again we see the metaphor of a new life or new birth. And one other one in **Mark 16:16—**

16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

To enter the Kingdom of God *is* salvation, and we must be baptized to be saved, so this seems to be the most likely meaning of the water being referred to in **John 3:5—**that it’s the water of baptism where we receive God’s Spirit, leading to the second part of that verse, which is being born “of spirit.”

5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

So how are we “born of the Spirit”? Jesus goes on to explain what He means.

6 “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

He’s contrasting two very different things—a fleshly physical birth and a spirit birth. One is to physical human life and the other is to spirit life.

Let’s look at how Paul expressed this over in **1 Corinthians 15:50-54**, the resurrection chapter.

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For *this corruptible* [this physical flesh] *must put on incorruption* [glorified spirit], *and this mortal* [physical flesh, which will die] *must put on immortality* [eternal spirit, no longer subject to death].

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

That’s pretty plain. You have physical flesh, and you have eternal spirit. They are very different. And the physical human flesh cannot inherit eternal spiritual life in the Kingdom of God. Paul and Jesus Christ are saying the exact same thing. Let’s read some more from Paul to make this perfectly clear. This is **1 Corinthians 15:35-49 (NIV)—**

35 But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”

...

39 All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.

He’s simply saying that human beings are different from other mammals are different from birds are different from fish. They all have different kinds of bodies.

40 There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another.

41 The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour.

The sun is a burning ball of fire, the moon is a cold gray ball, and there are different kinds of stars—small and large stars, yellow stars, blue stars and red stars. They’re as different as human beings are from animals. And just as these are very different, Paul explains—

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable [it’s made out of flesh and will die], it is raised imperishable;

43 it is sown in dishonor [again, made out of flesh], it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness [again, made out of flesh], it is raised in power;

44 it is sown a natural body [made out of flesh], it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

45 So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam [Jesus Christ], a life-giving spirit.

46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.

47 The first man [Adam] was of the dust of the earth, the second man [Jesus Christ] from heaven.

48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.

49 And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, [Adam] so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven [Jesus Christ].

This is almost a commentary on what Jesus Christ tells Nicodemus in John 3. With that background let’s go back there to **John 3:6—**

6 “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

This is exactly what Paul says in much greater detail—again, contrasting two very different things, a fleshly physical birth and a spirit birth. One is to physical human life and the other is to spirit life.

7 “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

And then Jesus describes what this spirit-born life is like, giving Nicodemus an illustration from nature that he can identify with:

8 “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Spirit is invisible to the human eye. The human eye cannot see the spirit world just as we cannot see wind. But the wind is obviously there, and in the same way the spirit world is obviously there.

9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

Jesus has just blown Nicodemus’s mind, telling him he has to be born again not as a human being, but as a spirit being. This is totally out of his experience and understanding.

10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”

Notice what Jesus calls him— “*The teacher of Israel.*” Not *a* teacher of Israel, but *the* teacher of Israel. Apparently Nicodemus must be a man of great wisdom and knowledge and reputation.

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.

Who is the “we” here?— “**We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.**”

It’s possible that it’s Him and God the Father, although it sounds unusual to have the Father saying these things. Some think it’s the disciples, but they’re not doing much at this stage. I think the most logical answer, since Jesus just called Nicodemus “The teacher of Israel,” is that Jesus is referring to Himself along with all of the earlier prophets like Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel who prophesied of these things, but Nicodemus and the other Jewish sages and rabbis didn’t understand those prophecies any more than they understood Jesus’ teachings.

Thus Jesus says they “**do not receive Our witness**”—they didn’t believe or understand what they were saying. So Jesus is saying essentially that He is a prophet like the earlier prophets who wrote much of the Hebrew Bible, and Nicodemus as a great teacher should’ve understood what they prophesied about such things. But he didn’t. And this makes sense with what Jesus says next, which is—

12 “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

In other words, “I’m telling you basic things that you should know. But if you don’t understand these basic things, how will you understand the really deep spiritual things?”

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

The latter part of this sentence is a parenthetical phrase added later by John as explanation, since Jesus wouldn’t have said that He was in heaven at the time He spoke this. So a better way to punctuate this—since there is no punctuation in the original Greek—would be like this:

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

John is writing about 60 years later, and Jesus is in heaven then—though He obviously wasn’t when He said this in A.D. 28. But why does Jesus even mention this here? The answer is in where He says He “**came down from heaven.**” He’s referring to His pre-existence in heaven with the Father, and because He was in heaven with the Father before He was born as a human being, He knows what He’s talking about when it comes to heavenly things. He came down from heaven, so He

knows about heavenly things. That's why He also said right before this, **“We speak what We know and testify what We have seen.”** He knew what He was talking about because He had come from heaven to live on earth.

Questions?

And of course, this is a very helpful memory scripture to show that we don't go to heaven when we die. Another pair of scriptures you might want to write down here is **Acts 2:29, 34—**
29 This is Peter speaking to the crowds on Pentecost, and he says: **Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. . .**

34 *For David did not ascend into the heavens . . .*

David, the greatest of Israel's kings and author of much of the book of Psalms, clearly did not go to heaven as people commonly believe. And what kind of man was David? Notice what Paul says about David, paraphrasing from the Hebrew Scriptures:

Acts 13:22—

22 **And when He [God] had removed him [Saul], He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.”**

So if David, whom the Bible describes as a man after God's own heart, did not go to heaven, who would? No one. The fact is that no one has ascended to heaven—not David, not Moses, not Enoch, not Elijah, not Daniel, not Isaiah, not Jeremiah, not anyone other than Jesus the Messiah. So you can forget all the ideas about people going to heaven. That idea actually came out of Greek mythology, not out of the Bible, and got pawned off on a compromised Christianity considerably later.

Back to John 3:14—

14 **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,**

This is a very striking *remez* by Jesus Christ Himself here. He's referring to an incident in the 40 years of wandering after they left Egypt. Let's take a look at it back in **Numbers 21:4-9.**

4 **Then they [the Israelites] journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way.**

5 **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.”**

Be careful what you say about God, because as we see here, it may come back to bite you—literally.

6 **So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.**

7 **Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, 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.**

8 **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.”**

9 **So Moses made a bronze serpent, 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.**

You might say that the bronze serpent on a pole was a *zemer* (that's *remez* backwards, meaning something that points forward instead of backward), and this pointed forward to Jesus Christ's crucifixion. **And Jesus makes the point,** without saying it explicitly, that as the Israelites were

saved from death by looking to the bronze serpent on the pole, we are saved from death by looking to Jesus Christ on a pole—Him being crucified on a wooden beam to take on Himself the death penalty that we deserved for our sins. He says that He, the Son of Man, must be lifted up—as indeed He was when He was crucified so that we might have life.

Continuing back in **John 3:14**—

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.

The Israelites had to believe that looking on the bronze serpent would save them, and we must believe and accept and look to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to receive God’s gift of salvation as well. There is no other way to be saved other than through faith in that sacrifice.

And then we come to one of the Bible’s best-known verses, also one of its most profound:

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

There’s so much to say about this. First of all, who does it say God loves? To the Jews of that day, they thought that God only loved them. He was *their* God and no one else’s. So this was blasphemy to them. It also doesn’t say that God loves only one nation. Or that He loves only good people. Or that He loves only those who love Him. No, it says God loves *everyone*—the whole world. And because of that, He gave His only begotten Son.

This part where it says, “**whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life**” is where some people get the idea that all a person has to do is believe in Jesus Christ and he or she will be saved. It ties in with the erroneous ideas about born again and that once you are born again, you are saved from that point forward—in other words, once saved, always saved. I won’t spend a lot of time on this, but here are several scriptures that show there’s much more to salvation than just believing in and accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior. Yes, we have to do these, but there’s considerably more to it when you look at all the scriptures. Here are several very clear passages:

As the apostle James points out, belief is pointless unless it is backed up by action and obedience. Notice **James 2:19-24**—

19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! He goes on to explain that faith—belief and trust in God—and obedience go hand in hand:

20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God.

24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

So James explains that works of obedience as a result of our faith maintain our relationship with God and lead to *greater* faith and obedience, as God requires for salvation.

Another clear scripture is found in **Matthew 7:21**—

21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

Jesus made it clear that just acknowledging Him as Lord and Master—saying “Lord, Lord”—doesn’t cut it. To inherit the Kingdom, we must *do something*. We must *do the will of the Father*, as He clearly stated.

We read in **Matthew 19:16-17** that at one point a wealthy young man asked Jesus how he could receive eternal life.

16 Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”

Christ’s reply, in verse 17, might shock those who think obedience to God’s law is unnecessary. Jesus responded—

17 So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

Jesus didn’t answer that nothing is required other than believing in God or in Him. He told the young man that he must *obey the commandments of God* to receive the gift of eternal life.

Jesus gave another condition for God’s gift of eternal life in **Mark 16:16—**

16 “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

Water baptism—by full immersion—is a symbolic act representing the death of our old self and the beginning of a new life of serving God. Baptism is also followed by the laying on of hands, which allows us to receive God’s Holy Spirit and truly belong to Him. Unless we surrender our lives to God through baptism and the laying on of hands to receive His Spirit as instructed, we fail to meet His requirements for receiving His gift of salvation.

We find yet another condition to receive God’s gift of salvation in **Matthew 10:22—**
22 He who endures to the end will be saved.

So this shows that it’s not a matter of just believing in Jesus Christ and accepting Him as Savior. Again, we have to do that, but that’s just the beginning. Accepting that sacrifice of His life on our behalf means we have to change our lives completely.

Questions?

Now back to **John 3:16—**

16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him 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.

And of course, what does the name Jesus or Yashua mean? It means in Hebrew *Yah Shuah*, or “God saves.” That is the whole purpose of His coming to earth—first to become a sacrifice for all sin for all time, and coming again to open the way to salvation not to just a few, but to the entirety of humankind.

Let’s analyze this concept of “God so loved the world” for a few minutes in the light of the four **key questions** we talked about a session or two ago.

What does this teach us about the nature and character of God?

What does this teach us about the way God interacts with His people and mankind?

What does this mean for your relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ?

What does this teach us about Satan, the adversary of God and mankind?

Again, we'll skip the last one about Satan since he is not discussed at all here. So let's go to the other three and discuss them together.

We have long taught that there are *two basic ways of life*—the way of *give, or love*, and the way of *get, or selfishness*. It really does boil down to those two basic motivations. One reflects God the Father and Jesus Christ; the other reflects Satan and mankind under his influence.

Let me ask you a question: What do you value more than anything? What is the most valuable thing you know of or own or possess or desire to possess? And a second question is, what are you willing to give or pay for it? What's it worth to you? Maybe it's your house, or your car, or your children, or your spouse.

But let's ask the question, what was or is the most valuable thing to God the Father? The answer is right here in what we read. **“For God so loved the world...”** So what's the most valuable thing to God? It's the world, or to be a little more specific, it's what's in the world, meaning *us*. We are what's most valuable and most precious to God. Because you know what's most valuable to someone by the price they're willing to pay for it. What price did God the Father pay for us? **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”** God loved us so much that He gave up *the one thing that was most precious and valuable to Him*, which was His divine companion and Son Jesus Christ. That's what we're being told here.

That is why He is a God of love. God *is* love, as **1 John 4:8 and 16** tells us.

8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

16 God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

God is a God of love. Not only did He give Jesus the Christ for us, but what does He promise us? That's a whole sermon in itself, but I'll focus on just a few things. **Revelation 21:7—**

7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

What does “all things” mean? Let's notice **Hebrews 2:6-8 (quoting from Psalm 8:4-6)—**

6 But one testified in a certain place, saying: “What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him?”

7 You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands.

8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

So **“all things” means there is nothing** that in time will not be given to us as sons and daughters of God. And this means not just the earth, but the entire universe. Notice **Deuteronomy 4:19—**
19 . . . the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven . . . which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.

So God the Father not only gave *for* us the thing that was most precious and valuable to Him, His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, but He also plans to give *to* us **His entire creation** as an inheritance as His sons and daughters. He is *giving us everything*—and giving us eternal life and glorified spirit bodies so that we'll be able to enjoy and use that inheritance to its fullest! And if we're going to **inherit things like this**, what does that say about what kind of spirit bodies God is going to give us? If we're going to inherit **stars that burn at temperatures of millions of degrees**, what will we be like at that time to oversee and assume ownership of such things? It boggles the

mind.

Another question for us: What was or is the most valuable thing to Jesus Christ the Son? The answer is the same—it's *us*. What did He give up that was valuable to Him for us? Let's look at

Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)—

**5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,
6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**

This tells us that Jesus gave up not only His divinity and glory and majesty and power as God, and His existence with God the Father, but He became a physical human being subject to death, and then gave up even that life for us because of His love for us and His desire to see many children brought to glory in God's family. So both the Father and the Son gave up what was most precious and valuable to them because of their love for us. You can't give anything more than what they have already given, and will yet give in the future, to us. *It can't be done.*

So this is the nature of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. This is how they interact with us as their people and with humankind. And this is the kind of people *they want us to become* in how we deal with others. We could go on and on with lessons and applications and implications of all this, but we need to conclude this section today. But I hope this helps give us a few things to think about when we read:

16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him 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.

They are beings of infinite love greater than we can fully imagine or understand. Don't ever take that lightly!

Continuing in verse 18, however, we see something else about the nature and character of God, which is that He is a God not just of love, but a God of *judgment*. As it tells us here:

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.

As I've mentioned before, light vs. dark is one of the repeating themes of the Gospel of John. The word “light” appears 16 times in John's Gospel, and spiritual “dark” or “darkness” five times. And this is a sad commentary on the human condition, that men love darkness more than they love light. And they do that because their deeds are evil.

20 “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

Light reveals the truth. It reveals what is wrong and sinful and contrary to God, and because of that, some people don't want to come anywhere near the light because it will expose what they are. It will show the people *themselves* what they are, and it will show *others* what they are. So they have to stay in darkness. This is the attitude of Satan the devil and his way, of staying in the darkness rather than seeking the light.

21 “But he who does [or practices or lives] the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

So if you know the truth and live the truth, you're living in light, the light of God. His light has been revealed to you, and you live in that light God has revealed. You don't need to live in and hide in darkness any longer. We are called to be children of light, not of darkness. Maybe we can have a sermon on that theme of light vs. darkness sometime.

So we'll wrap it up there.

Any questions? I know that's a lot to absorb. This is heavy-duty material.

We'll end there and pick it up again next time.