



Sunday, November 2, 2025

John 3:1-21

‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.’

For many Christians, this is our hallmark verse. This is the one that defines us. If you only know one Bible verse by memory, it’s highly likely that this is it. However - do you know the context of this verse and what makes it so powerful? This verse is actually inserted into the middle of the story of Jesus and Nicodemus - who was likely one of the conniving Pharisees that we talked about last week. But this week, Jesus uses this verse and a few others to literally change the trajectory of this one Pharisee named Nicodemus from death to life.

John 3:1-21

‘There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 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.”

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.”

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?”

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. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 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.”

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

10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?
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. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly 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. 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. 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.

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. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

I’m not sure if you noticed this or not, but over the past three weeks as we’ve been walking through the early chapters of John, we’ve walked through three distinct stories. First, it was Jesus turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Next, it was Jesus in Jerusalem, turning over the money-changers tables in the temple. And now today, it’s the story of a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who becomes saved. Interestingly, though, if you read these stories in any of the other gospel accounts, you’ll come to see that John has these stories in completely the wrong order.

At first, I thought this was odd, but the more I have come to understand John’s gospel, the more I see his intentions here. For John it’s far more important to showcase the sovereignty of Jesus as Messiah instead of following the chronological order of events. And so what he’s doing with these three stories is setting up a kind of progression of the Lordship of Jesus. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus doesn’t say anything about who He is - He just quietly turns water into wine, and through that, people start to believe. Then, in the temple, He not only acts but speaks - He calls it His Father’s house, which is a huge statement about His identity. And now, in John 3, with Nicodemus, Jesus takes it one step further by making it crystal clear: salvation is found in Him and Him alone. So, in the first story He’s hinting at it, in the second He starts to declare it, and in the third He’s making it crystal clear.

And we know that the message is progressively getting more and more clear because now we see

a member of the Pharisees, likely one of the ones that could have even been at the temple when Jesus was turning over the tables, now coming to Jesus in secret and acknowledging that He is one that was sent from God. Notice the language that we see being used though. 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God.' So, Nicodemus is acknowledging that there is something supernatural and divine about Jesus - that He is sent by God.

This is massive. However, it's important to know that this acknowledgment is not enough though. Notice how he calls Him Rabbi and Teacher but not Messiah or Lord? Jesus picks up on this immediately and responds accordingly. In essence, He's saying: 'Nicodemus, even the prophets of old were sent, and empowered by God. But I'm not just another prophet, teacher or Rabbi. I'm the Messiah. I'm the Saviour. And until you recognize me as your Messiah and Lord, just acknowledging that I am from God won't save you.'

Jesus goes on to say in verse 3: 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'

And this is the problem even to this day with our culture and society. Many would acknowledge that Jesus is from God or that He was divine in nature. They may say that He is good and that He walked the Earth and did amazing things and they may even go as far as to say that there is clear evidence that He is the Saviour of the world. But until He's your Saviour - until He's your Lord - the power and effectiveness of His life won't change yours.

So now Jesus looks at Nicodemus and tells him plainly: you must be born again. Naturally, Nicodemus is confused. He asks, 'How in the world is that even possible? Surely you don't mean I can enter my mother's womb a second time?' And Jesus responds, 'Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'

In other words, Nicodemus, this isn't about physical birth - that's already happened - it's about a spiritual birth.

And from this point forward, Jesus begins to unpack what it means to be born again - to show with clarity what this concept of spiritual rebirth actually means - not just for Nicodemus and his generation, but for you and me, right here in ours.

And He starts off by saying that just, 'as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up...'

Which is a really interesting example for Jesus to use here. Remember, Nicodemus was a Pharisee - he would have been deeply familiar with Old Testament theology and would've known the story of Moses in the wilderness by heart.

The story comes from Numbers 21 where the Israelites are still midway through their 40 years wandering of the desert. They are not happy, and start to grumble and complain to Moses saying that they were better off in Egypt. But this wasn't the first time they had complained like this. They had a history of complaining like this, and quite frankly God was getting tired of their attitude and lack of trust even though He had come through for them time and time again.

So God responded to their complaints by sending poisonous snakes among them. God had corrected and disciplined the Israelites many times before, but never like this. And I imagine that, in that moment, the people suddenly realized what was happening - that this was just like what God had done to Egypt through the plagues. Only now, in their rebellion, they had become the very thing God once rescued them from.

But thankfully, it only took one 'plague' for them to wake up. They repented quickly and begged Moses to pray that God would take the serpents away.

Moses prayed, and God gave him a surprising instruction: make a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten could look up at that serpent and be healed.

Now the details of this instruction are not specifically shared here, but they are worth mentioning because it shows a deeper level of what God is doing here. Noticed that the serpent was made out of bronze. Not silver...not gold.

Bronze was the same metal used for the altar of sacrifice in the temple and the wash basin where the priests would clean themselves before entering the holy place. It was known as the metal of purification and judgment. So the bronze serpent represented the sin of the Israelites being judged and dealt with - but also the mercy of God being extended upon their repentance. So, when the people looked up, they were looking at a symbol of God's grace and mercy - where God's judgment was now met with His compassion.

Notice a few things: the serpent on the pole wasn't preventative. It was for those who had already been bitten. The poison was already in them. Without divine intervention, they were going to die. All they had to do to be saved from almost certain death was to look at God's provision for them - lifted

up on a pole.

And that day, hundreds upon hundreds of Israelites looked upon the bronze snake on that pole and were miraculously healed.

Now fast forward to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. When we look at this through the lens of the gospel, we see that the bronze serpent lifted up on the pole wasn't just about a moment of healing for the Israelites - it was foreshadowing the kind of salvation God would one day bring, not just for the Israelites, but for the whole entire world.

And the parallels between these two are striking. Just like the Israelites of old, we too have been infected by the venom of a serpent. In our case, the serpent is the devil, and the venom is sin. Without divine intervention, we all are destined for death.

But just as Moses lifted the bronze serpent up on the pole, God would mirror that moment - only this time, it wouldn't be an image made of bronze, but His own flesh and blood - His Son, Jesus Christ. Perfect in every way, He would be lifted up on a criminal's cross, taking upon Himself the very judgment that was meant for us. Now everyone who looks upon Him in faith will be saved.

And now, because of Jesus, that same mercy is made complete. God's wrath against sin is still real - but instead of being poured out upon us, it's poured out upon His Son. And so, the cross becomes the ultimate meeting place where judgment meets mercy - but not in the way that perhaps one might think. You see, at the cross, the judgment falls upon Jesus but mercy now falls upon us.

And this is where things get even more powerful. God didn't do this out of obligation or duty. The driving force behind the cross was the strength of His great love for you and for me.

John 3:16

'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 was no motive greater than love that could have moved the heart of God to give up His Son. His great love for you and me was - and still is - the reason.

And so, in this moment, Jesus continues to describe the nature of His great love by comparing and contrasting it with the judgement that should have been on our heads, but was now being placed on

His. He goes on to say in verses 17-18 that:

John 3:17-18

‘For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 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.

Again, this clearly echoes the picture of the serpent on the pole in the wilderness. We are those people. The venom of sin runs through every one of us, and it will destroy us unless the antidote is received. Jesus is that antidote. And what John is reminding us is simple - whoever looks upon Him in faith and trust is no longer condemned but saved.

It’s a gift.

It’s not something that was earned through the law because that was ultimately impossible to follow. It was a gift that was given by God himself because of His great love for us.

So when Jesus shows up on the earth, even though the world and everyone in it deserved condemnation and judgment, He didn’t come to give us what we deserve - He came to give us what we could never earn.

Grace. Mercy. Life eternal.

As Paul said in his letter to the Romans:

Romans 8:3a

‘For what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His Son.’

But here’s where Nicodemus would have likely struggled - because he, like the rest of the Pharisees was still operating under the law, not love or grace. The Law was a system of commands, sacrifices, and regulations that told you what to do and what not to do in order to be in right standing with God.

You see, for Nicodemus - and for the Pharisees as a whole - salvation was all about works. He knew that there were 613 laws (and hundreds of sub-laws) that had to be strictly followed in order to be considered righteous. And he knew just how weak the flesh was in trying to meet that impossible

standard. For Nicodemus, everything about salvation, was effort - striving and performing, yet never reaching perfection.

So when Jesus reminds him of the bronze snake being lifted up on the pole, He's now lovingly placing himself on that pole instead. And that message of grace - not human effort - would have absolutely blown his mind.

You see, grace isn't something you achieve. It's not something you buy or perform your way into. Grace is God giving us what we could never earn on our best day - and this He gives freely, not out of obligation, but because of His great love.

And for those who truly embrace and receive that grace, He now calls them to step into the light - to live as children of light.

Look at what Jesus does next. He shows Nicodemus that Grace doesn't just save us - it transforms us. It pulls us out of the darkness and into His glorious light. And that light isn't just about salvation for eternity after we die - no, it's about a transformation that begins here and now.

One of the beautiful signs of someone who has truly embraced the grace of Jesus Christ is the transformation that begins in their heart and is expressed through how they live their lives.

That's why we continually hear and read stories of people encountering Jesus - saved in one breath, and in the next, their whole lives begin to change. They stop cursing. They stop abusing substances. They stop looking at pornography. They stop judging, hating, or harbouring bitterness, unforgiveness, and hurt. Almost immediately, as God brings them into the light, everything about their way of life begins to transform.

But for others, that transformation can take time. It's a process of grace - a daily choice to lay aside the nature of the flesh and to willingly step into the light and let God keep working.

Maybe, like Nicodemus, you've been trying to earn what can only be received. Maybe you've been working hard to be 'good enough' - following all the right steps, showing up on Sundays, joining a small group, giving of your resources, saying all the right things - but still feeling like something's missing.

The truth is, salvation has never been about what you can do for God. It's always been about what

He's already done for you. You don't have to earn His love. He loves you. He really, really does.

Grace isn't earned - it's embraced. And the moment you stop striving and simply look to Jesus - the One lifted up for you - you find life.

So today, the invitation still stands: step into the light. Let God expose what's broken - not to condemn you, but to heal you. Because that's what grace does - it saves, it transforms, and it makes us fully alive.

If you've already received His grace but are struggling with the transformation part, then maybe, as we come to communion today, your prayer needs to be this: 'God, what am I holding onto that you actually want to transform in my life?'

(Expand on this a little bit)

Invite servers to come and start handing out communion while band plays softly in the background.

Communion

Read 1 Corinthians 11.

Invite some to take time to reflect, repent and/or accept salvation.

Blessing

May the Lord Bless you and Keep you

May He cause His face to Shine upon you

May He be gracious towards you

Lift up His countenance upon you

And may He give you peace

In Jesus name, Amen.

Josh Hageman

Lead Pastor

Kingsview Community Church

www.kingsviewchurch.com