

God Gave Us His Only Son
John 3:1-17
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(Read John 3:1-8) Nicodemus came to Jesus in the middle of night; perhaps it was because he didn't want other Pharisees to see a member of the Sanhedrin talking with a hick from the sticks... a "Nazarene nobody." But, Nicodemus had realized that what Jesus was doing and what he was saying was like a light shining in the darkness- truly unique- and he was looking for something beyond the ordinary. "Rabbi, I know you are a teacher come from God, and you couldn't do the things you do without God's help."

Then comes the first *double entendre* in verse 3: "I tell you the truth" Jesus replies, "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is.... what?" Nicodemus understood the word "*genaethae anothēn*" as "born again"; appropriate, but it can also mean "born from above." Then comes a second *double entendre* in verse 5: "No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of the water... physical birth... or is it baptism... and the Spirit." Then a third *double entendre* in verse 8: the word- "pneuma"- can be translated either "wind", or "spirit": "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going." What's going on here? There seem to be verbal trap doors all over the place!

In each case, the meanings- all of them- are consistent with Jesus' teachings about God and God's work in the world. What these opening verses of John 3 suggest to us is that we shouldn't brush by them too quickly; there's gold in those verses. Consider the first one: "born again"... a fresh start, a new beginning, a do-over in life- a blessed gift

from God to those of us who wish we could have done life differently. “Born from above... God’s work, not on our own; grace, not works... Nicodemus, Frank, Jean, Henry, Susan, Alan... do you get it?” Consider water, consider the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, consider what it means that the light of this insight emerges in the midst of confusion of our own day. (switch to John 3:9-15)

Let’s press on: (read John 3:9-15) Jesus seems to be chiding Nicodemus, and suggesting that he accept the evidence of his own eyes... the God-sightings he alluded to as he began to speak with Jesus back in verse 2. Jesus had spoken of earthly things; some of the early church goers- called Gnostics- felt that fleshly, worldly things were evil...yet Jesus is suggesting to Nicodemus that he look around. You too; look around and don’t take for granted your privileged lifestyle. Count your blessings; thank God for what good health you’ve got; food enough to eat well; a place to live; family and friends to appreciate. If you can’t see the hand of God in blessings such as those- how can you find heavenly blessings that you can’t see?

Then, in verse 14 Jesus says something- based on ancient history- that begins to focus the bulls-eye of faith for Nicodemus, and also for us. He reminds Nicodemus of Moses lifting up the snake in the desert; so also must the Son of Man be lifted up. The term “Son of Man” is a messianic figure mentioned several places in the Old Testament, and a term well-known to Nicodemus; what was unique was how Jesus linked that term with that little snippet about Moses. Of course, it won’t come as a surprise to any of you that Jesus used the term “Son of Man” more than any other as his favorite way of speaking about himself. His eventual death on the cross, and as verse 15 suggests... the importance of belief in him is the doorway to eternal life... to the richness of God’s

goodness made available to us. Then comes JOHN 3:16.... (close John 3:9-15, and put some slide up- not scripture yet- see below, pg 5)

Let me tell you a story I picked up along the way about a wealthy man and his son who loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art. When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified, and grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands. He said, 'Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you, and your love for art.' The young man held out his package. 'I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this.'

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears... he thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. 'Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift.' The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

The man died a few years later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection. First up on the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. 'We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?'

There was silence. Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, 'We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one.' But the auctioneer persisted. 'Will somebody bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?' Another voice angrily spoke out, 'We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Gogh's, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real bids!' But still the auctioneer continued. 'The son! The son! Who'll take the son?'

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. 'I'll give \$10 for the painting.' Being a poor man, it was all he could afford. 'We have \$10, who will bid \$20?'

'Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters.' The crowd was becoming restless... they didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel... 'Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!'

A man sitting on the second row shouted, 'Now, let's get on with the collection!' The auctioneer laid down his gavel. 'I'm sorry, but the auction is over.' There was an immediate murmur in the room. 'What about the paintings?'

I'm sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only

the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including all the other paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!’ (put John 3:16-17 on screen) “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him- *takes the son*- shall not perish, but have everlasting life”... gets everything!

“*For God so loved the world...*” all of it, including you and me. Can you put your name there? Try putting your name in this verse: “*For God so loved _____ that he gave his one and only son...*” Know this- that if you and I were the only sinners on this earth- God would still give us his son 2,000 years ago to be lifted up like a snake on a stick- that’s how much God loves us, and he sent Jesus to tell Nicodemus and the rest of us all about it. Talk about a light in darkness, indeed!

“... *that whoever*- you, or me- *believes*- present tense, not past tense- *in him might not perish, but have eternal life.*” Much like the auctioneer, his message today is: ‘The son, the son, who’ll take the son?’ Whoever takes the Son gets everything. Do you believe that? Think of all that life has to offer, and know that God focuses it all on Jesus; whoever takes the son, gets the richness of eternity.

Some have a hard time accepting that; they know they don’t deserve it. The Gnostics thought the world too dirty, too corrupt, too filthy for God. Someone once remarked that from a hundred miles up, even a garbage dump like Rumpke Mountain looks beautiful. The incredible thing verse 17 tells us that God sent his son to walk and live on a Rumpke Mountain world, allowed him to be crucified between two thieves; God saw the dirty us up close, and loved us anyway. (close John 3:16-17)

Now Nicodemus- what do you think about all that? After concluding his nighttime conversation with Nicodemus, the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus went out to the Judean countryside. Shortly afterwards, there is an extended monologue from John the Baptist- who was the Billy Graham of his day. He knew, and said of Jesus that he must become greater and that he, John the Baptist must become less. If you take the son, and hang his portrait over the mantle in your heart, what role is Jesus going to play in your life... a greater role, or are you going to try to play that part for yourself as you make your life all about you. Or are you will to accept a lesser role than that of the Son of God in your life?

And you, Rabbi Nicodemus- wealthy, proud scholar and ruling member of the Sanhedrin- how about you? What role will Jesus play in your life....?

(Charge at end of message- cf John 19:38 – 40)