

For God So Loved The World

John 3 v 1-18

Context:

Did you know that the Bible is the world's best selling book of all time, with an approximate 5 billion copies sold so far. The Bible is a library of 66 books containing 1,189 chapters with 31,102 verses made up of 783,137 words, and of all those words these are probably the most loved and best known: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" Those 66 books were written by a variety of authors over hundreds of years, and yet they combine to tell one big story from Genesis to Revelation which can be perfectly summed up in the words quoted above from John 3 v 16. We find those life changing words at the heart of today's study as we explore the encounter between Nicodemus, a prominent Jewish religious teacher, and Jesus, narrated for us in John 3 v 1-18. So, let's listen in to their conversation.

Observation:

1. How is Nicodemus described in v 1?
2. When did he come to Jesus according to v 2?
3. What did he say to Jesus in v 2?
4. How did Jesus reply in v 3?
5. What was Nicodemus' puzzled response in v 4?
6. What is Jesus' reply in v 5-8?
7. What question does Nicodemus ask in v 9?
8. What question does Jesus reply with in v 10?
9. How does Jesus continue his reply in v 11-12?
10. What bold statement does Jesus make in v 13?
11. What comparison does Jesus make in v 14-15?
12. What famous words do we read in v 16?
13. What good news is contained in v 17?
14. What encouragement and what challenge are contained in v 18?

Meaning:

1. John tells us that Nicodemus was a very significant religious figure in his day. He was a member of the strict scribal sect called the Pharisees and he sat on the ruling religious council called the Sanhedrin. Jesus calls him 'Israel's teacher' in v 10. So, why do you think he chose to visit Jesus **at night** (v 2)?
2. Do you think Nicodemus' opening gambit in v 2 is a compliment to Jesus and an expression of faith? Why/Why not?
3. What do you think Jesus means by his reply in v 3 and how do his words show us that believing that Jesus is a teacher and miracle worker is not enough to save us?

4. Nicodemus takes Jesus' words about being born again literally and is puzzled (v 4). So, what do you think Jesus means in v 5-6 as he seeks to explain the concept of being born again?
5. In v 7 and 10 Jesus makes it clear that, as Israel's teacher, Nicodemus *ought* to have understood what Jesus was speaking about. In other words, Jesus is saying that the idea of being born again by water and the Spirit (v3 & 5) is part of the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures (what *we* call the Old Testament) and therefore Nicodemus, knowing the Scriptures back to front, should have been familiar with the idea. So, we need to look back into the OT to find a clue to what Jesus means by being born again of water and the Spirit and biblical scholars suggest that the best place to look is **Ezekiel 36 v 22-27**. So, read those verses and discuss the light they shed on what Jesus means by being born again in John 3 v 3 & 5. Note also that the very next chapter in Ezekiel, 37, describes a valley of dry bones which miraculously come back to life and are filled with breath/Spirit. How does this image in 37 v 1-6 further explain and illustrate what Jesus means by the concept of being born again?
6. What do you think Jesus means by his words in v 8?
7. Who is Jesus referring to in v 13 and why does he say this? Read Daniel 7 v 9-14 and discuss what light this sheds on the meaning of the title 'Son of Man' when used by Jesus in v 13.
8. Read Numbers 21 v 4-9 and discuss how this passage helps to explain what Jesus means in v 14-15. What event is Jesus referring to when he speaks about being 'lifted up' in v 14?
9. Why is v 16 often used as a summary of the Gospel? How does it relate to v 14-15? The words '*perish*' and '*eternal life*' are opposites - what does Jesus mean by them?
10. How do v 17-18 amplify and further explain v 16?

Application:

1. When I became a Christian back in 1979 and told my very conservative church-going Grandmother about my new-found faith, she said: '*I hope you are not one of those born-again Christians!*' What do you think she meant and how would today's passage in John 3 answer her question?
2. To what extent does this passage balance both *good news* and *bad news* and how can the church ensure it holds that same balance when it communicates the Gospel today?

Pray:

- Thank God for his sovereign, loving and free gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus.
- Thank God for the cross on which Jesus was lifted up to save us.
- Pray for someone you know who isn't yet born again and ask God to save them.