

## God's Plan and Humanity's Response May 17, 2009 - Skip MacMillan

Jesus and Nicodemus are having a conversation and/or confrontation. Jesus loves Nicodemus enough to get confrontational, challenging Nicodemus' expectations and knowledge of God.

### From John 3:1-2, Jesus goes on to explain the Heavenly Plan in John 3:13-21.

#### Who is Jesus? John 3:13

A man full of wisdom, a significant spiritual leader, an incredible insightful man who helped others understand spiritual truths?

**Jesus says: "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man."**

**Son of Man:** Jesus declares, I am the Son of Man, prophesied about in Daniel 7:14.

"He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

**From Heaven:** He is not a man trying to ascend into heaven – He is from Heaven itself.

Jesus is not claiming to have climbed the mountain of spiritual wisdom, but I Am. I am God who has come to live among men as a man; the Logos (Word) became flesh, John 1:14. I am THE Revealer of God, "the revelatory Son of Man" -Carson, p. 201.

**Authority:** no one else can speak authoritatively about heaven but Jesus.

I am the God who has descended from Heaven to speak with you.

I have not required you to ascend the mountain in the hope of experiencing me but I have descended to you.

I am the ultimate authority on heavenly things, life, creation and you!

Jesus says to Nicodemus, I am more than you think I am.

I am the God you serve, the one you pray to, the One who watches over you.

I am the distinct Son of Man, Son of God, Jesus Christ, Messiah.

***Church, because Jesus is the Son of Man, God incarnate, listen to Him, believe in Him, read His words, seek Him, commit your life to the only One who came from heaven.***

### The Heavenly Plan, "heavenly things" - John 3:14

*Peeking into the realm of heaven, Jesus is opening the door into the plans of God.*

***"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up."***

Jesus refers to an event in the OT (Numbers 21:4-9) as an example of the Heavenly Plan.

**He uses the events of Numbers 21 as a shadow of 3 major points He is making:**

**1. Humanity's attitude towards God:**

"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

**2. God provides a way of healing in spite of our rebellion.**

Moses lifted up the snake on a pole and "anyone who is bitten can look at it (bronze serpent) and live" (Numbers 21:8).

Jesus says I **MUST** be lifted up on a pole so that "everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life."

Jesus is greater than any bronze serpent:

Jesus has "life in Himself (5:26), he is himself the resurrection and the life (11:25), and those who believe have life in Him" -Carson, p. 202.

**Serpent became an idol**, 2 Kings 18:4 – believing it had "inherent magical power" so Hezekiah destroyed it (Carson, p. 202).

Don't place your faith in wood formed into a cross but in Christ's crucifixion. The cross means nothing if Jesus was never lifted up on it.

**Jesus is even greater than Moses.** Moses merely lifted up the instrument of salvation; Jesus is the instrument of salvation.

There is no one in all of history like your Savior, Jesus Christ.

**3. The people's responsibility was FAITH and God would give them life.**

a. Faith was what God required of them back then and requires of us today!

Jesus says, Nicodemus you must look to Me in faith and you will be saved.

Furthermore, it is "not mere faith in Christ in an abstract sense, nor faith despite the crucifixion, but faith in the crucified Jesus" -Keener, p. 563.

Your faith must be tied to and deeply embedded in Christ crucified.

He most likely did not understand until he saw Jesus on the cross.

b. Some did and some did not respond. Some died out in the desert and some lived.

**Jesus presses Nicodemus:**

1. Is this your view of God? Gracious, merciful, mighty, personal, powerful to save?

2. It is critical to understand who I am. I am not just a spiritual leader, but the one who came from heaven, will be lifted up and given to the world. I am the Son of Man, the one and only Son of God, Jesus Christ.

- Only He could bring life to humanity
- Only He can move a person from death to life
- Only He can redeem

There is no other way to accomplish the redemption of man. This is the way!

**The Purpose of the Heavenly Plan, John 3:15**

*"that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."*

1. **"Everyone"**: inclusive, "whoever," God is reaching out worldwide, every nation and tongue!

2. **"Believes"**

This is God's requirement, qualifier - to believe Him, to place your faith in His Son.

Turn your head towards Him, look at Jesus hanging up on the Cross, high and lifted up.

Continue looking to Him all your life, as your source of healing, strength and hope.

**That you may have "Eternal Life"**.

**This is the heavenly plan Jesus is talking about, God's purpose to redeem humanity.**

**WHY? What is driving God to do such a thing?**

***"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" (John 3:16).***

**"For God so loved"**

**"So"** – "In this way", "this/here is *how* God loved the world", "he gave His . . . Son".

**"Loved the world"**

***A very exclusive look into the heart of God.***

**Intense**, the original language stresses the intensity of the love -Carson, p. 204.

**Agape**, unconditional, unending, surpassing knowledge.

**Active**, God's love acts: "he **demonstrates** his love for humanity by self sacrifice (13:34; 14:31)" -Keener, p. 566-567; the crucifixion.

Not with words but in action and in truth does God demonstrate His love (1 John 3:18).

"Jesus' (real, active, self-sacrificing) death on the cross (is) the ultimate expression of divine love for humanity (cf. Romans 5:5-8)" -Keener, p. 566.

**Whom did He love?**

**"World"** includes: liars, those who cuss, divorced, simple, complex, people with baggage, issues, and those with regrets, the ashamed; from every continent.

Nicodemus and other Jews of Jesus' day didn't think the world was included.

God has always been after people who place their faith in Him, not a genetic pool.

Israel was always to be a "blessing" and "light to the Nations" (Gen. 12, Isaiah 42:6).

**God loved in this way, "He gave His one and only Son".**

**God "gave"** – action, demonstrated, selfless, gave without being given to.

God's self sacrifice is a "distinctly Christian concept" -Keener, p. 568.

"This early Christian emphasis on God actively seeking to restore to himself, at great cost to himself, those alienated from him by their rebellion was a distinctive position in Mediterranean antiquity of this period (so it may be to you)" -Keener, p. 571.

**BEST**, "The Father gave his best, his unique and beloved Son" -Carson, p. 204.

**"that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life".**

"Whoever believes in him experiences new birth (3:3, 5), has eternal life (3:15, 16), is saved (3:17); the alternative is to perish (10:28), to lose one's life (12:25), to be doomed to destruction (17:12). There is no third option" -Carson, p. 206.

Jesus is Savior of the World (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14).  
God wants you to have LIFE, ETERNAL LIFE! His Plan, His Purpose.

***Simple Heavenly Plan: one perfect Man, one cross, one day, one death; and a call for you to believe.***

God's love for humanity is so intense that He actively demonstrated it by sacrificially giving His very best to you, His Son Jesus Christ!

### **Explanation for Nicodemus and Us**

***"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17).***

- Focus is on what Jesus has accomplished
- I have not come to condemn
- God desires that no one should perish

"Do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" (Ez. 18:23) -Carson, p. 205.

"God desires that none should perish" (1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

**God desires to bring new life to you, real and tangible!**

**Jesus brings with Him no condemnation but salvation from condemnation.**

**This is the Triune God's Heavenly Plan.**

Jesus tells Nicodemus (you), listen to what I'm saying even if it doesn't fit your understanding of God. I am here, Nicodemus; I am the final solution.

**Concept / words** associated with God: life, heaven, eternal, self-sacrificing, action, giving, loving.

### **Clarification**

***Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).***

- The focus is on us!
- Whoever believes in Christ is not condemned.  
Whoever does not believe stands condemned already.
- **Who condemns you?**

1. Our own freely chosen sin condemns us, our own actions.  
We are snake bit, suffering, feeling the consequence for our sins. We have willingly brought it on ourselves.  
Take responsibility for your life and actions!  
We tend to gloss over our weaknesses and failures.
2. Compounded by our disbelief, the rejecting of God's sacrificial love, His Son on a pole.

**Down Side:**

If left to stand before God on my own, I stand snake bit, condemned, drowning in my own chosen sins.

Harsh reality of our position before God without Christ.

**Upside:**

Jesus comes to you in your condemnation to set you free from the condemnation you have brought on yourself.

"He did not come into a neutral world in order to save some and condemn others; he came into a lost world (condemned already). . . in order to save some" -Carson, p. 207.

"There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23).

This is the great mercy, grace and love of God.

**The Verdict:**

***<sup>19</sup>This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."***

**Jesus** – the light has come into the world; Jesus has entered the world, God has come to man.

**The World's Response**

**Some people do not believe:**

Why? Because their deeds are evil and they fear exposure.

1. Does God know everything anyways?
2. Did Jesus come to die for the evil done in darkness?
3. So, if He knows everything we do, and He came to pay for our sin, through being lifted up on a pole, why not come to Him NOW!

**Some people believe:**

Some live by the truth and come into the light, believe God, acting in faith towards God.

These people bring their lives, actions, words into the light.

WHY? Because what we have done has been God working in and through us.

This new birth, "born again", manifests itself in transparency, humility, good works with no secrets.

Furthermore, believers understand that it is God in us who is working and moving:

"it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose." (Phil. 2:13).

The Hope for us: those who seek truth, who are willing to be honest, transparent, who seek God, these are being drawn into the light, Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion:**

1. Who is Jesus? Son of Man, Only Son of God, given over to the Cross for you.
2. What is your view of God? Not condemning but Life-giving; love manifested in sacrificial giving, generous, giving the best!
3. What is your response to God's heavenly plan, His self-sacrificing love demonstrated on the cross for you?

God is calling you to look, to place your faith in His Son who was lifted up on a pole.

Will you look up to Him for your salvation as you sit in your condemnation or will you stubbornly refuse to look, to believe in God's means of salvation for your soul!

In Christ we are healed, in Christ we find the forgiveness of our sin, in Christ we find eternal life.

Understand the reality of your situation: without Christ you stand condemned by your own actions.

Christ has come to free you from your self-imposed condemnation; come into the light.

4. What you believe in this life will without doubt determine your eternal future.

Deny Christ in this life and you stand condemned by your own actions and thoughts.

Believe Christ in this life and you have eternal life with the Father in Heaven.

Urgency is found in the Numbers 21; some were physically dying. The time to look is now!