

John Chapter 3 v 1 -17

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 May 2018

Preacher: Gareth Crossley

[0 : 0 0] Read John chapter 3, and then after this the children will go out to Sunday school and fresh. Not quite the full chapter, but verses 1 to 17.

This will link in with what's said later. Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

He came to Jesus at night and said, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.

Jesus replied, Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. How can someone be born when they are old? Nicodemus asked.

Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born. Jesus answered, Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

[1 : 0 6] Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases.

You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. How can this be? Nicodemus asked.

You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus, and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.

I have spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe. How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man.

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. 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.

[2 : 1 6] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. I suppose the vast majority of us will be familiar with John chapter 3, especially verse 16, how it speaks of God's great love, his amazing love in sending his Son.

Since I retired from pastoral ministry some years ago now, I've been in the privilege of listening to sermons more than preaching sermons.

And it's quite an education for someone who's spent years preaching to others to have to listen to what others say. And it's been interesting, too, to hear the number of sermons that have been preached on John 3, 16.

It's a central verse, and if you were to go anywhere in the world and meet Christians, this would be the verse that they would know best in their own language.

But it's very rare, in fact, so rare that I don't think I've ever heard a sermon which has dealt with this verse, John 3, 16, in its context, in the place that it appears in the teaching and life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 01] So let's just look at the context and think of the context and see how this wonderful, wonderful truth was revealed, the truth of John 3, 16.

This man Nicodemus came to him, it was by night, because he wanted a secret meeting with Jesus. He was a Pharisee, not only a Pharisee, but among the ruling group of 70, known as the Sanhedrin.

And there was such an antagonism against Jesus from the very earliest times when he began to preach and teach. There was such an antagonism by the Jewish leadership, by the Pharisees, the scribes, by the chief priests, and the family of the chief priests, such a hostility that it wouldn't be a popular thing for any member of the ruling party of the Pharisees engaged in the Sanhedrin to show even the slightest interest in Jesus of Nazareth.

So he comes by night. He comes in the dark. And spiritually, he's in the dark. So he's in the dark in two levels.

He comes to Jesus, and he says in great respect, and he addresses the Lord Jesus and saying, Rabbi, we know that you have come from God because nobody could work the miracles.

[5 : 48] The word sign is from the New Testament word semaya, and it means a miracle with a message, a miracle with a spiritual meaning associated with it.

No one could perform these miraculous signs that you do unless God was with him. So he started off on a good level.

He's been absolutely sincere. He's opening his heart to the Lord Jesus, and he's coming because he believes that God is working with this man, but he doesn't understand who he is and why he's come.

Jesus responds in a very strange way. He said, I say to you, unless you're born again, you won't see the kingdom of heaven. It seems a very strange thing to say.

It doesn't seem to be flowing, really, from what Nicodemus has said. It's almost as though some words have been missed out, and it's a break in the conversation. But no, let's take it as this is how Jesus responds to him.

[6 : 59] You won't see the kingdom of heaven. You must be born again. And Nicodemus is thrown. And as you heard in the reading from God's word, he thinks of it in an entirely physical sense, and just is absolutely bewildered at what Jesus means.

But you notice, Jesus doesn't tell him anywhere in that conversation, as we have it recorded, how to get born again.

Does he? In fact, there's nowhere in the Bible where you can find out how to be born again. In fact, you wouldn't want to say to anybody, be born again.

What the Lord Jesus is doing, he's addressing the teacher of Israel. This man, that definite article is used in the original, the teacher.

And that's usually used in language to emphasize one particular one. He's probably the professor of theology, training and teaching the Pharisees there in Judah.

[8 : 15] And Jesus says, are you the teacher? And you don't understand what I'm saying. See, Pharisees had the notion that it was what you did that mattered.

How you lived according to the law of God. How meticulous you were in obedience. And if your life matches up, you're going to be all right. God will approve of you.

They had no real understanding that no human being can achieve the standard suitable for God.

The Pharisees had no understanding of that. They just thought that if they obeyed the law of God, as far as they understood it, if they could obey the law of God, God would smile on them.

They're born from Israel. They are the people of God. They've got the history behind them. And so the Pharisees thought, it's all down to us. Consequently, anybody who was an open sinner, somebody who had done something publicly, that was criminal or immoral, they looked at those people as hopeless cases.

[9 : 38] Outside the pale. No hoppers. And you see this in the way in which Jesus draws alongside hopeless cases.

And how he corrects the false teaching of the Pharisees and reassures that anyone, whatever they've done, wherever they've been, can come to God and know his forgiveness and know his love and his presence and friendship forever.

So Jesus is talking to a Pharisee. A one who believes it's all down to self-help.

And he's saying, you must be born again. He doesn't understand. And Jesus says, you're the teacher of Israel. In other words, you're the man who stands up there and lectures to the Pharisees, training young Pharisees in Old Testament Scripture.

And you don't understand. Because it's taught, actually, in the Old Testament. It's there in the Old Testament. Not many places.

[11 : 03] But it is there. The teaching that you've got to be born again. It's there in Psalm 87. It's there in Ezekiel 36, verses 26 and 27.

It's there in that remarkable prophecy of the Valley of the Dry Bones. In Ezekiel 37, which Jesus is evidently referring to when he says, the wind blows where it will and you don't know where it's come from.

You hear the sound of it. You don't know where it's come from. You don't know where it's going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. Now, he didn't tell Nicodemus how to be born again.

But he did tell him that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. That whoever believes in him, that's really trusting him, entrust themselves, give themselves over to God and trust his word and trust his person and work, will be saved.

will be forgiven. Will have the approval and blessing of God in their lives. But that isn't the whole of the Gospel, is it? There's more to it.

[12 : 20] And Jesus dealt with it in a very beautiful way. In verses 14 and 15 of John chapter 3, we have the recorded words of Jesus where he said, as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so will the Son of Man be lifted up.

That whoever believes in him would not perish but would have everlasting life. He preached the Gospel to him through the Old Testament.

He was relying on Nicodemus knowing the history of Israel and knowing very definitely and clearly and understanding something of Numbers chapter 21, which is the occasion in the wilderness when the people were grumbling against God and against Moses.

It happened time and time and time again over the 40 years that they were traveling from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan.

You can read in the Old Testament scriptures in that history of Exodus and Numbers how they grumbled. So often grumbled and complained.

[13 : 46] They were a dissatisfied people. And in Numbers 21 we have a record of an occasion where they were grumbling and complaining again.

Even with the years that they'd already had 38 years in the wilderness. And they're grumbling again. They haven't learned any lessons. They haven't learned lessons from their parents.

They're still making the same error. Grumbling against God complaining against Moses. And God sends snakes vipers into their camps.

Now in the Arabian desert vipers are found frequently.

But not in the numbers that they experienced on that occasion. A vast number of these vicious snakes came into the camps and started biting the people.

[14 : 57] And if you read it you will see people were grumbling and God sent punishment. Please don't emphasize in your own mind and heart God is love to the detriment of the same Bible truth which says God is light meaning God is holy.

There is such a thing as the wrath of God the anger of God. God is angry with the wicked every day. That says that is said in the scriptures and it's as true today as the day it was first recorded.

there is an anger a righteous anger in God towards all sinfulness. They sinned and God sent punishment and the punishment were these vipers that were going around and biting the people and they were biting the people and people were being poisoned and were dying in consequence.

and then something grand and wonderful happened. The people began to come to their senses one by one it would seem or maybe a whole bunch of them coming to their senses and realising why it had happened why these snakes had come in such a multitude why the people were being bit.

We've sinned they said they go to Moses they go to Moses and they say to Moses we've sinned against God and we've spoken against you pray for us that God would deal with this for us and send us healing and so Moses prayed and God gave him a strange instruction God said I want you to make a snake a metal snake maybe a bronze something of that nature make a metal snake a big one and wrap it round a pole and stick it in the middle of the camp erect it in the middle of the camp and then tell the people that anyone who's bitten by the snake can look at this pole and look at this snake this bronze snake on the pole and they'll be healed it sounds ridiculous doesn't it can you imagine what would happen just let's try and cast our minds back to the tents there dwellings of the

[18 : 11] Israelites there in the wilderness a man comes struggling in to his family I've been bitten I've been bitten by one of the snakes I'm going to die and his wife turns to him and says well you know what to do about it Moses has given us instructions there's a pole there's a brass snake a metal snake on a pole in the middle of the camp go to the camp go into the middle of the camp go look at that brass snake because Moses says this is a word from God and God says if you look at it you'll be healed I'm not looking at any silly snake what good is that it's nonsense absolute nonsense and he takes himself to his bed and he gets worse and worse and his children come dad dad go look at the snake dad go look at the snake go into the centre of the camp dad we don't want you to die dad I'm not looking at any snake I don't believe it and they bury him but there were those who believed it those who said this is a word from God that punishment those snakes have been brought to us as punishment from the living God himself and as he sent the punishment so he sent the cure and told us that if we trust him and believe what he says and do what he instructs we'll be healed and many were healed because they looked at the snake you see how powerfully the gospel is there in the old testament scriptures and you see how

Jesus is dealing with this man he doesn't say to anyone be born again because you can't do it you can't you have no power on being reborn any more than you had power to be born in the first place it just happened you had no say nobody asked you whether you wanted to be born nobody asked you whether you wanted the parents that you got nobody asked them they might have said no thank you so the Lord Jesus doesn't do that but he reminds Nicodemus of what the gospel is all about this is what you can do you can believe on the Lord Jesus and you can believe on what he's done at Calvary and you can entrust yourself to him let's see it as it relates to us right now today we are all sinners like it or not people get their backs up over this

I've had a flat nose a couple of times it's been broken once with a boot when I was 14 from a lad who took exception to me I don't know why I'm such a likeable character really but bam he was swinging on a tree and he just brought his foot straight up into my face broke my nose and I had it broken on another occasion but I'll not go into that it only upset my wife because she didn't mind me playing rugby but the number of times I've nearly had it broken with a door slammed in my face when I've been going around wanting to talk to people at the gospel it could have been broken a whole lot of more times people reacting and they react if you mention anything about sin they think it's a word that preachers have invented to keep themselves in business it's a short word sin what is it well it isn't related to crime or being a criminal as far as the world is concerned because that varies all over the world in different cultures basically it couldn't be put better than the Scottish

Catechism sin is doing what God doesn't want you to do and it's not doing what God does want you to do so basically it's got to be about God and our standing before God and if we're not doing what God wants us to do we're sinning and if we're doing what God doesn't want us to do we're sinning and every one of us is in that position you can read many passages in the Bible will explain how sin works itself out disobedience to parents I wonder whether that would catch any of the children out young people out today disobedient to parents disobedient to government people who like to cheat on their tax and think it's all one big game

Christians should pay their tax cheerfully I bet there aren't many Christians who pay their tax cheerfully but we are to honour those who roll over us there's adultery oh dear people aren't getting married so much now so maybe adultery is not in the picture they're not married so they're not going off with somebody else's wife or husband but the Lord Jesus Christ makes it abundantly clear abundantly clear that if you have wrong thoughts towards another human being desire for someone who you have no right to you sin against God and if you think of it in your heart and mind you sin against

[24 : 56] God there are certain aspects of our nature and certain characteristics of our makeup where God permits in his grace and mercy two husband and wife to experience something together in a holy way outside of that it's unholy whether in mind or in deed stealing if we were to check ourselves how many of us have ever stolen anything a few hours from your employer exaggerations on your expenses forms there's all kinds of ways of stealing and it's sin whatever it is there are so many things that are sinful when your heart is going its own way and following the course of this world we're all sinners and God punishes sometimes even in this life but he certainly will punish in the life that's to come if we don't take notice of what he says like

Moses lifted up that serpent that snake in the wilderness and whoever looked at that snake was healed so that is representing to us the most momentous event that has ever occurred in this world or likely to occur in this world momentous event when one who was God like the Father became a human being like us except he was pure and holy in every area of his life from the moment of birth to the return to heaven he's always been holy he always will be holy without sin and that one was treated in a horrific manner he was going around doing good he was healing people he wasn't putting people under the possession of the devil he was releasing them from the possession of the devil he wasn't bringing illness and sickness to people he was releasing them from illness and sickness he was healing minds as well as bodies and spirits he was going around doing good and yet they still hated him because he was teaching something that contradicted their teaching it didn't fit with human pride and human arrogance

I'll do it my way that's one of the popular funeral hymns and songs in our own day I did it my way and that's what people are thinking so many I'll do it my way in arrogance against God and it's sin it's obnoxious to God our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of the living God was crucified he was crucified by Romans doing what the Jewish leadership wanted to be done destroying Jesus they thought and yet in a marvellous and amazingly wise manner God was achieving something through it all sinners human beings did what they wanted to do when they crucified him but at the same time

God wanted it to happen for he had a greater purpose a greater plan that as that one suffered there at Calvary he would take upon himself responsibility for the guilt of his people for the guilt of sinners millions of us and he would pay the penalty in full he would experience the horrors of hell on that cross experience the horrors of hell under the judgment and penalty for sin on behalf of his people so that his people may go free and never face that penalty ever but how do we know when we're people of God or not how do we know that we're his people for whom he died well he died knowingly for everyone who had already repented said sorry to God and apologized to God for all those who repented and believed in God and God's way he died for all those that he knew were going to repent and believe right until his return so he died knowingly for people that he could have actually named on that cross is your name on his heart was your name in his mind on that cross are you part of the people of God do you belong all who repent repentance is a change of mind a change of thinking you see yourself as you are from

God's perspective and it's not a pretty sight and you apologize to God you confess it to God and you tell him how sorry you are and then you entrust yourself over to the Lord Jesus that one who was figured in that serpent on the pole fancy Jesus being identified with a serpent because serpent throughout the snakes and serpent throughout the Bible are always the baddies that old serpent the devil from the very beginning why why would God why would the son of God choose to display himself and his gospel and the glory of his gospel in the likeness of a snake that which is a symbol of everything that's bad and horrible and evil need to go to 2

[33 : 01] Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 21 for an interpretation and an explanation for God made him to be sin who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him what a transaction every believer knows the blessing of that transaction my sins gone and I have a righteousness as a free gift from the Lord I love the only saviour Jesus the Christ Christ let's take up we are amazed Lord truly amazed at this great love that you have for us and we respond dear God with heartfelt thanks and gratitude we praise you we worship you we adore you for your great love and mercy and we praise him who sits at your right hand that one that we know as our saviour and the lamb of

God oh what a blessing to those of this congregation dear God to us here who know and love you and how we long Lord that many more many many more will come to love you too in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen