



“Saved By What?”

John 3:9-15

Sermon Date: November 11th, 2018

Reflections on Sunday’s Sermon

Prayer

As you begin your study this week, spend some time praising God for who He is and for His amazing grace displayed through the saving work of Jesus Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes afresh to the beauty and implications of John 3:15, “that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” As you pray, make the following words your own before the Lord (prayer taken from At the Throne of Grace: A Book of Prayers by John MacArthur).

*“Glorious Father in heaven,
we again recognize the humbling reality of the gospel,
that salvation is a gift You give by grace through faith alone.
No work of ours, no ritual we perform, no effort we expend
could ever add an ounce of merit to the finished work of Christ.
In our fallen state we were living under Your wrath, driven by sinful passions,
seeking only the gratification of our flesh, unable to convert ourselves –
unable even to prepare our hearts for Your saving work.
We were spiritually dead.
Our wills were in bondage to sin, so that we were spiritually insensible
and wholly incapable of doing anything to please You.
Even now, we can do no good toward our own salvation.
The only good deeds we do are works You sovereignly and graciously prepared for us
before we ever thought to do them.
And it is You alone who empowers us to walk in accord with Your holy plan.
What a blow that truth is to our religious and moral achievements!
Yet we affirm the testimony of the great apostle Paul regarding religious ceremony,
ethnic heritage, legal observances, personal achievement, human zeal,
and every other excuse for mortal human boasting.
All such traits are no assets at all in Your sight, and we count them as pure rubbish...
Like Paul...we count even the best attainments of our fleshly efforts as loss
in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord...
Father of glory, fill us with gratitude that befits the grace You have shown us.
Open our hearts and fill them with praise for You.
We thank You for granting us repentance that leads to life
and for reconciling us to Yourself through faith in Jesus Christ.
We desire, Lord that our prayers and lives would overflow with worship,
motivated by sincere love for You...in the name of Christ. Amen.”*

Scripture

John 3:9–15 – (English Standard Version)

9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Handling the Word

1. Our passage for study this week picks up where we left off last week—in the middle of a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Read through John 3:1-8 and summarize the first portion of their conversation. Based on what was said in those verses, what was Nicodemus referring to when he asked Jesus, “How can these things be?” in verse 9.

Understanding and Applying

1. As Jesus and Nicodemus continued their conversation, Nicodemus demonstrated that he was not understanding the things Jesus was saying. Hence, that was the reason he asked Jesus, “How can these things be?” (v. 9). Why was that the best question Nicodemus could have asked in this situation? What, if anything, prevents you from asking the same kinds of questions about matters of your own faith?
2. Nicodemus certainly had knowledge of the Old Testament and of spiritual things since he was a “teacher of Israel” (v. 10), but his knowledge did not necessarily translate to understanding. How would you describe the difference between knowledge and understanding? What are the dangers of growing in knowledge but lacking understanding?

3. It is also possible that Nicodemus struggled to understand (v. 9) and to receive the testimony of Jesus and the other disciples (verses 11-12), in part because what he was hearing contradicted all that he had thought to be true about salvation and his relationship with God. Perhaps Nicodemus was finding it difficult to believe because he could not give up the religious framework he held so dear and lived his entire life by. Are there things, maybe even good things, you have thought, been taught, or believed over the years that you have had a hard time giving up even though they are clearly contradicted by the truth of Scripture? If so, what are they and why were they so hard to give up?

4. Along with all the things Jesus was saying to Nicodemus about the spiritual new birth, Jesus noted that there was additional evidence of its reality in “what they had seen” (v. 11). In other words, Jesus was pointing out that Nicodemus had ample evidence to receive Jesus’ teaching, not just because of what He said, but also because of what could be seen (v. 12). The new birth Jesus was speaking of is something that takes place in people’s lives here on earth, and the effects of it having transpired can be tangibly seen. What in your life is tangible evidence that the Holy Spirit has brought forth new life in you? What role does this tangible evidence play in helping you to proclaim Christ to others?

5. In verse 13, Jesus reiterates something that is absolutely crucial to understand about Himself: when Jesus speaks, He does so not with an earthly authority that has been granted to Him, but with an authority He has always had in heaven (also refer to Matthew 7:28-29). Why was it important for Jesus to establish His authority to speak on these matters in His conversation with Nicodemus? Why is it important for us to remember Jesus’ authority as He speaks to us through His Word today?

6. Sensing that Nicodemus was still not understanding what He was saying, Jesus then used an incident that Nicodemus would have been familiar with (as a teacher of the Old Testament) to illustrate His point in verses 14 and 15. Look up the incident that Jesus refers to in Numbers 21:4-9, and describe what happened there. List out the ways that story serves as an excellent example of the plight of all mankind and the salvation found in Jesus Christ?

7. Throughout his entire discussion with Nicodemus, Jesus was showing him that there is only one remedy to sin and its consequences, and it wasn’t found in following a set of religious practices. As there was only one way to be cured from the deadly snake bite in Numbers 21, so too, there is only one way to be saved from the deadly infection of sin. What is the remedy Jesus reveals in verses 14-15 (also refer to 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Galatians 3:13)? Why is this remedy different and better than all other possible remedies people have come up with to deal with the problem of sin?

8. The fact that we are told in verse 14 that the Son of Man “must” be lifted up, implies that it was absolutely necessary for Jesus to be lifted up on the cross in order for any man to have eternal life. According to the passages below, why was it necessary for Jesus to be lifted up on the cross and what was the result of Him doing so?

Romans 6:20-23 –

Hebrews 9:22-28 –

1 John 4:9-10 –

9. In the case of the Israelites in Numbers 21, it didn’t matter how many times they had been bitten by the serpents nor how bad their condition was as a result; all they had to do was trust in the Lord and look upon His provided remedy to be saved. Similarly, we are told in verse 15 that “Whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” It does not matter how far one has plunged into sin, nor how destitute their condition is as a result; should they look upon Jesus on the cross in faith, they will be given new life here and for all of eternity (Isaiah 45:22, Hebrews 12:1-2). Why is this good news for the entire world? How should this reality impact the way we see and interact with lost people around us?

10. The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus came about because of Nicodemus’ uncertainty regarding Jesus and the spiritual matters of which He spoke. In what ways does Jesus confront Nicodemus’ uncertainty in this passage? Can it be said that Jesus is the absolute certainty that confronts all spiritual uncertainty in this life? Why or why not?

11. What glorious truth about Jesus or the gospel stands out to you the most from these verses? Why do you think this particular truth grabs your attention?

“What will be the good of all your knowledge if you do not know how to gain admission into the kingdom of heaven? It would be better for a man to be ignorant of all other things, and to know this one thing, than to have all possible human learning and yet to miss this knowledge which is the most essential of all.”

C.H. Spurgeon