

Title: Go to the Light

In honor of the life of Billy Graham, let us pray this prayer of his: Dear Lord Jesus, (we) know that (we) (are) a sinner(s) and (we) ask for your forgiveness. (We) believe you died for (our) sins and rose from the dead. (We) turn from (our) sins and invite you to come into (our) hearts and (lives). (We) want to trust and follow you as (our) Lord and Savior. In your name, Amen.

“There is an old story about a family consisting of mother, father, and small son who went into a restaurant. As they were seated at the table, the waitress sailed up, pad in efficient hand, looked, and waited. The parents ordered. Then the boy looked up and said plaintively, ‘I want a hot dog.’ ‘No hot dog!’ said the mother. ‘Bring him potatoes, beef, and a vegetable.’

The waitress paused for a moment, and then looked at the boy squarely and said, ‘Yes, sir. What do you want on your hot dog?’ ‘Ketchup - lots of ketchup - and a glass of milk.’ ‘One hot dog, coming up,’ said the waitress and sailed off toward the kitchen. The boy turned to his parents said, ‘Gee, Mom, she thinks I’m real!’

“Well, our children are real. Sometimes they are real headaches, but always a real responsibility, and always worth considering as real persons with real lives of their own. One reason that we are real is because God thinks we are real. God created all of us to be God’s children. We are made ‘in God’s image’ as Genesis puts it.

“However, over the centuries that image has become somewhat tarnished. Our original resemblance to God has become overlaid with all sorts of accretions across the centuries and that is why God saw fit to issue a new edition of what it means to be truly human.

“We call that new edition Jesus, the Christ. And Christ called upon us to become what we really and truly are: children of God. That process of becoming may be for us as radical as being born anew, as Jesus told Nicodemus, but it is precisely that for which we were created.

“After telling Nicodemus about his absolute dependence upon the Spirit of God who moves about where the Spirit wills, bringing new life out of old,

new light into darkness, Jesus says ‘those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.’” (John 3:21)

What Jesus says about coming to the light may have two meanings. The first is a metaphorical light where actions are seen by God and others and so tend to be moral. The second is another metaphor. In John’s prologue, John calls Jesus the light of the world. So, this could also mean that we are to live in Jesus’s light of forgiveness and eternal life.

It is those topics that conclude Jesus’ dialogue with Nicodemus. Jesus was trying to impress on Nicodemus that we need to be reborn in the Spirit. Being born of the Spirit is probably closer to what Jesus was saying than the phrase, “born again.” It took a bit to redirect Nicodemus from a physical rebirth. Jesus pushes Nicodemus to think spiritually rather than physically.

Then Jesus refers to the time when the Israelites were bitten by poisonous snakes in the wilderness. On top of all the woes the Israelites suffered in their trek across the Sinai, they were dying because of snakes. As Indiana Jones said, “It had to be snakes.”

Moses and the Israelites follow a recurring pattern in their trek from Egypt to the Promised Land. The people complain to Moses about how hard it is in the wilderness and that life was so much better as slaves in Egypt.

They grew very tired of Moses’ leading them out of Egypt and they wanted to go home. Their biggest complaint was a lack of food and water. Of course, after conferring with God, Moses told them that God would provide bread in the form of mana and meat in the form of birds.

As they were leaving Sinai and approaching the promised Land, they complained once again about a lack of food and water. They were tired and disgusted with the mana. God got fed up and sent venomous snakes to bite them. It occurred to the Israelites that there was something worse than lacking food and water. That was to die of snake bites.

So, they confess their sins and implore Moses to intercede on their behalf to God. Moses prays to God on their behalf and God tells Moses to make a serpent and put it on a pole and when the people who are bitten look at it,

they will live. God's solution was not to remove the snakes, it was for Moses to go to his workshop.

Moses makes a serpent out of bronze. Where he got the tin and copper, I don't know. Moses places the bronze serpent on a pole and whoever was bit looked at the bronze serpent and lived. That is why you see a snake on a pole at medical facilities.

Just as Moses lifted up the serpent, the Son of Man must be lifted up. When the Son of Man is lifted up, then will people be cured of eternal death and be given eternal life. The serpent of death will be defeated. Jesus combines the image of Moses and the snakes with the serpent in Eden. Death came to humanity in Eden but the Son of Man, raised on a cross, will bring eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16) As Son of God, Jesus cannot stay dead. As the divine human, Jesus's death breaks the hold that death has on us. As the divine human lives after death, so will humanity live after death.

It is very important to note what John says. Eternal life is guaranteed to anyone who believes in Jesus. Jesus makes no distinction between Jew and gentile. Jesus makes no distinction between light skin and dark skin. Jesus makes no distinction between gender. Jesus makes no distinction between sexual orientation. Eternal life is available to everyone.

God responded to Moses out of love. God provided a solution to the deaths of the Israelites. Of course, the remaining Israelites eventually did die, just not from the Sinai snakes. Yet the curse of death is still with humanity. And so, out of love for us, God sent an only son. Through the son, we are given eternal life.

This is the crisis the world is in: light came into the world and there were people who ran for the darkness. They went to the darkness because they loved evil more than they loved the light. In the darkness, where people have trouble seeing what is going on, they work their evil schemes. These people hate the light, because their evil deeds would be for anyone to see. They are addicted to denial and illusion and they fear exposure.

But people, who live by truth, will come to the light. It is there that everyone sees what God is doing through the people of light. Nicodemus is attracted to the light that is Christ Jesus. The Greek word for judgment is *krisis*. The coming of Jesus provokes a crisis forcing us into a decision. Will we live in the light or will we live in the darkness?

Jesus is answering a question of why some people are attracted to the light of the world and why some are not. When John talks about eternal life, John is talking about life after this one and an intimate relationship with God and Christ in this life. To reject God and Christ is what John calls condemnation. Condemnation is the absence of communion with God.

God is involved with us in leading moral lives. God draws the morally upright – not implying that even the upright don't make moral mistakes. But *wanting* to do the right thing draws us to God. Those who claim to want to do the right thing and reject God, fail to see the goodness of the world and fail to see the goodness of creation. Or they simply don't understand it.

They may consider themselves moral without the need of God as a crutch. But they are refusing the help that can lead them into a more productive life. They think that an individual can achieve anything. But they fail to understand that we cannot achieve anything of lasting value by ourselves. It is only with God, in community, that lasting value in society is achieved.

That is God's commission to every single Christian. It is our task we accept by being a member of the church through baptism. Belief and good works are bound together with God. God wants to save the entire world. We are responsible for the outcome and shining our lights in the world.

Text: **John 3:14–21** (NRSV)

<sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

<sup>17</sup> “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Those who believe in him are not

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<sup>i</sup> Some interpreters hold that the quotation concludes with verse 15#

condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”<sup>j1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#). (1989). (Jn 3:14–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.