



CAPITOL COMMISSION

The Perfect Christmas Gift (John 3:1-21)

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Brent Alderman / PO Box 2060, Annapolis, MD 21404 / www.capitolcom.org / brent.alderman@capitolcom.org

Most of us spend this time of year looking for that perfect gift for someone special. When we love someone, giving to them is natural and we want to have a gift that communicates that we think they're worth the time and money to pick out something just right.

Jesus talked one night with a man named Nicodemus and laid out as clearly as possible what God thinks about mankind. The Christmas gift from the Father was His own Son and the result of this perfect gift was the offer of salvation for anyone who believes in Him.

1) THE PERFECT GIFT SATISFIES OUR DEEPEST LONGING

John 3:1-12— Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader, probably didn't want to be seen talking to Jesus so he approached Him at night. The beginning of this conversation is interesting, though, because Nicodemus' statement is ignored by Jesus, who goes directly to the main need of man's heart – redemption.

This obviously caused some confusion for Nicodemus, who required teaching about the nature of humans. Jesus simply points to the contrast between the physical being and the spiritual. The

Bible speaks of these two realities separately. When we are born physically, our spirits are not yet alive.

Ephesians 2:4, 5 - But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Another birth is needed, a new spiritual birth. This happens when one trusts in Jesus by faith alone to save them by His grace. Completely understanding this is impossible for human brains, no more than we can explain and predict how the wind blows, yet our trustworthy God knows and reveals only what we should believe from Him.

BORN TWICE, DIE ONCE. BORN ONCE, DIE TWICE.

One other comforting thought here is the fact that Jesus even chooses to have this conversation with Nicodemus. Do you remember the crowds at the end of chapter two? They were enamored with the miracles of Christ, yet He knew their hearts – that they weren't really exercising true belief in Him. Nicodemus starts this discussion with his belief in Jesus' "signs", but this time, Jesus reveals Himself more to Nicodemus. Why?

Christ knew Nicodemus' heart – that he truly sought truth, unlike the fickle crowds in Jerusalem who just wanted to be entertained. God is not hiding from anyone who is truly seeking Him.

Jeremiah 29:13 - You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

John 6:37 - All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

2) THE PERFECT GIFT SHOWS GOD'S DELIVERING LOVE

John 3:13-18— "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His

BIBLE STUDY

LEGISLATIVE AIDES (DURING INTERIM): TUESDAYS @ 11:30AM, HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING (ROOM 218)

Maryland

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only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Not only did Jesus tell Nicodemus about the perfect Christmas gift, but how the Father would accomplish His purpose through the gift. Not all the details are given here, but the reference to the cross is evident. Nicodemus didn't know right then that the gift sent to give him spiritual life would be a bloody gift, beaten beyond recognition and lifted up on a cross, but he would eventually.

These are tender words from a patient teacher to a dull student, but they pack God's redemptive plan into just a few verses. How kind of Christ to show the love of God to this seeking Pharisee who had no idea what spiritual rebirth was all about. His purpose for being on earth was to make eternal life possible for totally depraved sinners who were incapable of saving themselves.

Notice the themes John has already started in his book that continue here: life, believe, Son of Man. For Jesus' teaching on salvation to be credible, He must be the Son of God. A sinful man dying for another sinful man might be a good moral act, but it could never pay a debt of sin for someone else. Only a perfect, sinless sacrifice could cover the sins of all people and right here, Jesus points to the love of the Father which motivated His plan to offer eternal life to imperfect people.

3) THE PERFECT GIFT SHINES GOD'S DIRECT LIGHT

John 3:19-21— “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

As wonderful as God's good news of forgiveness is, Jesus makes clear that some will not receive it. He again underscores the perfect gift of God's Son, here referred to as the Light sent to the

world. But the response of mankind will not always be to turn to God and away from sin.

This contrast of darkness and light is another major theme in the book of John. Some people will always seek to satisfy their desires through the world and its system. But Jesus offers a new way, a way of transparency and doing right as God defines it; a way of humility and submission, servanthood and obedience. What a life of peace when we don't have to conceal our works, but let them be seen by those around us for God's glory, not ours.

Much of modern man's problem with the gospel is anthropological. It arises from a faulty view of himself. Fallen man generally views human beings as neutral if not good. Therefore the fact that God sent Jesus and Jesus came to save sinners seems only interesting at best. If man is good and not in need of salvation, we can applaud God's love as admirable. If man is neutral, we can take salvation or leave it. If we leave it, God appears unfair for condemning us. However man is not good or neutral but bad. He already stands condemned and destined to experience God's wrath. Therefore faith in Jesus becomes a necessary way of escape from that dreadful destiny. The Incarnation is a manifestation of divine grace, not just divine love.¹

CONCLUSION

I don't think it's a coincidence that we arrived at this passage during the Christmas season. It's so easy to get caught up in the way the world celebrates this time of the year. Even though it may not be a bad celebration in itself; the sights, sounds, thoughts, culture and motives do not always point us to Jesus Christ, who is the reason for the significance of Christmas.

Christmas is about giving because that's what God did. And His was not just any gift – He was perfect. He came to earth, giving up heaven for a man's body. He had pain and hunger and laughter and loss and friends and enemies. And He died because that was the payment the Father demanded. We deserved that death, but the Gift died for us, the Righteous for the unrighteous, so we could be forgiven. What a plan. What a reason to celebrate. What a perfect gift.

¹Tom Constable. (2003; 2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Jn 3:21). Galaxie Software.