

Jesus Presents the Plan of Salvation

The Passover had just ended. Christ was in Jerusalem in the first year of His ministry. He had just cleansed the Temple for the first time. He was going to repeat this in three years, during the last week of His life on earth. He made the first promise of His death and resurrection as recorded in John 2:19-21: "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But He spake of the temple of his body." The unconverted Pharisees and religious rulers never grasped or got over this claim (Matthew 26:59-61; 27:40). During this Passover our Lord performed many miracles and as a result many believed on Him (John 2:23).

On that night following the Passover with all the symbolism, one ruling member of the Sanhedrin was deeply troubled and came to see Jesus by night. Nicodemus was catching a glimpse of the One for whom the Passover prophesied. There was something greater than the Passover feast, yea, Someone greater than the Passover itself! Nicodemus and all honest inquirers since are seeing Someone greater than the Temple (Matthew 12:6)! Someone greater than Solomon (Luke 11:31)! Someone greater than Jonah (Luke 11:32)! Someone greater than Jacob (John 4:1)! Someone greater than Abraham (John 8:53)!

I. THE SEEKING SAVIOR

John 3:1-8

Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The Lord throws out the offer of a changed life; He calls it being born again. The nature of man is so defiled that a new life must be exchanged for the old life. I Corinthians 15:22, 23: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the Last Adam was made a quickening spirit." Our fall came through the first Adam; we will live again through a second birth by the imparting of a new nature by the Second Adam. In the fall of the first Adam God came looking for him: "And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9). And now in John 3, we see the Second Adam looking for His fallen sinner.

II. THE SYMBOLIC SERPENT

John 3:9-15

The Lord Jesus makes a direct reference to Numbers 21:5-9. The children of Israel were rebelling against God, therefore the Lord sent fiery (poisonous) serpents that bit the people and many were dead and dying. God's remedy was to place a serpent of brass upon a pole and whoever looked would live!

- A. They were not commanded to make their own medicine. This would have been as fruitless as the woman who lost all she had in searching for a cure for twelve years (Mark 5:25, 26).

- B. They were not commanded to minister to other poor poisoned souls in order to get relief for themselves. Philanthropy seems more logical than looking at a pole and asking others to do the same. What good would it do for a man to jump into deep water to save a drowning man, when he cannot swim a stroke himself? Our works of charity cannot counteract the deadly effect of sin in others or ourselves.
- C. They were not commanded to fight the serpents. Had they been able to kill a thousand or even a million, the poison would still be in their bodies. We should stand against all the evils of our day, but man's hope is in regeneration, not reformation!
- D. God was not asking for any remuneration or payment for their healing. They were not commanded to make an offering to the serpent on the pole. Romans 11:6: "And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." II Timothy 1:9: "Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."
- E. They were not commanded to look to Moses. John 1:17: "For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Romans 3:20: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin."

Nicodemus, being very familiar with the Scriptures, not only knew well of the story quoted by Jesus from Numbers 21. He was also quite familiar with the great revival under King Hezekiah, when the children of Judah had begun to worship the 774-year-old brass serpent that Moses had made. II Kings 18:4 tells us, "He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan." In stern rebuke, Hezekiah called it, "Nehushtan" which means "a brazen thing."

Our Lord is giving a magnificent message to Nicodemus. He was, in essence, saying, "I am going to be lifted up on a tree and take your curse, so that if you look, you can live!" Our Lord was saying, "I am not the symbol; I am the One you need to look to. Look past all the substance of the Temple and the Feasts; look to Me, Nicodemus! All else is Nuhushatan!" The first Adam and his wife Eve fell through a look at what the serpent promised. The Second Adam says, "Look at Me and be saved!"

III. THE SAVING SON

John 3:16-18

Jeremiah 31:3: "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

- A. The wideness of God's love: "For God so loved the world..." He loved the world (not loves the world) proving that He loved us before we were saved.
- B. The sacrifice of God's love: "...that He gave His only begotten Son..."
- C. The permanence of God's love: "...that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."
- D. The mercy of God's love: "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

An orphan boy on a cold night in New York City was given instructions by a kind police officer on how to get to a Christian orphanage. The officer told him what to say upon arriving; he was told, "Just say, John 3:16." He did what the officer told him. The workers brought him inside, gave him a bath, which he desperately needed, and gave him new clothes to replace his rags. They fed him and gave him a comfortable bed to sleep in (which was quite welcome after many a lonely night in cardboard boxes).

The next day the boy put on his new warm coat and found the policeman. The policeman spotted him and said, "Hello, young man! It looks like you found the place!" The youngster replied, "Yes, sir, I did!" He then continued, "Mister, I don't know what John 3:16 means, but it sure can make a dirty boy clean! And I don't know what John 3:16 means, but it sure can make a hungry boy full. And I don't know what John 3:16 means but it sure can give a tired boy some rest. And Mister, I don't know what John 3:16 means but it sure can make a cold boy warm."

I am so glad that my godly father and mother explained John 3:16 to me in such a way, that I, too, found that Jesus' blood would and did cleanse me from all my sins! And Christ's righteousness could replace my rags. I found the Bread my Savior offered has filled me with satisfaction. He also gave me rest--something this old world would have never given me. And thank God, our Lord's warmth of unconditional love and eternal security in Him has insulated me from the cold, harsh life found on this lost and wayward planet. How can we not love our Lord and Savior!

-Pastor Pope-