

John 3A

- Now we enter into one of the most intriguing and unique section of John's Gospel
 - Beginning tonight in chapter 3, John chooses to relate a number of encounters between Jesus and various men and women
 - A Pharisee
 - A harlot
 - An blind man...among others
 - Each person John highlights become believers in the Messiah, having been touched by Jesus' words and miracles
 - They begin each encounter in ignorance
 - But they leave transformed by Christ
 - Therefore, each of these interactions serves to highlight a dimension of the salvation found in Christ
 - Between these encounters, John also records various miracles and dialog between Jesus and three different groups following Jesus
 - First, there is Jesus interaction with Jewish leaders and the crowds of ordinary Jews who followed Him
 - Secondly, John records numerous private conversations between Jesus and His disciples
 - Finally, John invites us into Jesus' private moments in prayer to the Father
 - John selects these moments to further illustrate the nature of saving faith
 - Those profiles of each unique character and how they came to faith will show us how an open heart responds to the Light of the Gospel
 - While the Jewish leaders and crowds typify the response of darkness to the message of salvation

- And then we have Jesus' disciples and their struggle to understand the nature of Christ's ministry and their own salvation
 - Reflecting how spiritual immaturity is common to all new believers
- Finally, Jesus' conversations with the Father show us the magnitude of the Father's love for those He saves
 - And the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice to deliver that salvation
- Stepping back, it's easy to see that John's focus in writing this Gospel was to explain the nature of so great a salvation
 - He's explaining it through the eyes of those who encountered Jesus
 - Both those who believed and those who didn't
 - And through the experience of Jesus Himself
 - John isn't simply retelling events; he's teaching us about the nature of the Gospel itself
 - So we begin this section in chapter 3, with an encounter that illustrates the manner of our salvation, that is how it arrives
 - And what better figure to feature in a discussion of how one is saved than a Pharisee, the self-appointed religious leader and teacher of Israel
 - This scene takes place in Jerusalem, sometime around the Passover celebration, before Jesus left the city for His home in Capernaum in the Galilee

John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;

- We were told at the end of the chapter 2 that Jesus was performing many miracles in the city during Passover week, and many believed in Him
 - Without a doubt, some of those who would observe Jesus' ministry during this week in Jerusalem were the religious leaders of Israel
 - The Pharisees, Sadducees and priests would have heard Jesus' teaching and seen His miracles firsthand

- And they would have also witnessed seen the crowds' positive response
 - And we can be sure many of these leaders went away scoffing and even angry by what they saw
- But not all of them reacted that way, as we discover from Nicodemus
 - First, we hear that Nicodemus is a Pharisee
 - A pharisees was a rabbi (or teacher) of the scriptures in Israel
- Secondly, we're told he is a ruler of the Jews
 - This indicates that Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council over Israel
 - In fact, we'll see in later chapters of John that Nicodemus uses his position on the council to come to Jesus' defense
- Knowing a little about Pharisaical teaching is helpful to understanding what takes place in this encounter
 - First, Pharisees taught that every Jew was assured a place in the coming Kingdom merely on the basis of their Jewishness
 - Simply by virtual of being an obedient child of Abraham, a Jew could be sure they would be included in the Kingdom
 - In fact, Pharisees taught that Abraham himself sits guarding the gates of Hell to intercept and save any Jew consigned to that place
 - We see this thinking reflected in numerous places of NT

[Matt. 3:7](#) But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

[Matt. 3:8](#) "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;

[Matt. 3:9](#) and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

[Rom. 2:28](#) For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.

[Rom. 2:29](#) But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

- Secondly, Pharisees were the conservative, law-abiding party, politically speaking
 - Their chief rivals for power were the Sadducees, which was the liberal political party of Israel
 - As it happened, the Sadducees were the political party in power at this time, holding a majority of the seats on the Sanhedrin
 - As a result of their majority, the Sadducees were responsible for the Temple and the operations of the temple mount
 - So the temple was the source of the Sadducees power, influence and wealth in Jewish society
- The Pharisees, on the other hand, had no ruling or financial interest in the temple, so they had to rely on a different base for their political power
 - They obtain power over the people through their theology and teaching
 - Their power over the people came from teaching a strict adherence to the Law as a means of maintaining citizenship in Israel
 - They were renown experts in the Law
 - And their teaching from the Law stressed that in order for a Jew to enter the Kingdom, they had to be in good standing with the Law
 - If a Jew didn't keep the works of the Law according to the Pharisees' teaching and standards, the people were at risk of forfeiting their Jewish identity
 - In other words, when they approached the gates of Hell, Abraham wouldn't save them because they had lost their right to be called a Jew
 - It was a works-based theology, and it ensured that Jews eager to enter Heaven would give heed to the Pharisees' teaching
 - To solidify their authority over the people, Pharisees made a point of modeling a scrupulous obedience to the Law in a very public way
 - They went to ridiculous lengths to abide by the Law or display their piety to the world

- As Jesus commented elsewhere, referring to the Pharisees' tendency to make a public show of even their prayers

[Matt. 6:5](#) "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

[Matt. 6:6](#) "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

- The purpose in such displays was to creating an impression among the people that satisfying God's demands was nearly impossible for the average Jew
- That the effort required to secure the Kingdom was enormous and few beyond the Pharisees were capable of making the grade
- But of course, these men were self-deceived in thinking themselves righteous, for they weren't even close to meeting the standard God requires, as Jesus said

[Matt. 5:20](#) "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

- And that's how a Pharisee's gained power over the people: they portrayed themselves as ones held the keys to Heaven for the ordinary, hapless, sinful Jew
 - When the average Jew saw the difficulty of following in the Pharisees' footsteps, they would seek some other solution
 - They would come to their rabbi, the Pharisee, seeking a solution for how to be assured entrance into the Kingdom
 - And the Pharisee would offer new burdens, rules or requirements for the Jew to adopt in return for increased potential to be judged worthy for the Kingdom
 - Naturally, the appreciative Jew was expected to reward the Pharisee for their advice and spiritual wisdom
 - This is a scam as old as religion itself, and the Pharisee played the game as well as anyone ever has
 - By exhibiting themselves as guardians to the gates of Heaven, the Pharisees gained both the praises and wealth of men

- Consider some of Jesus' comments concerning the Pharisees:

[Luke 16:14](#) Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.

[Luke 16:15](#) And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.

[Matt. 23:1](#) Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,

[Matt. 23:2](#) saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;

[Matt. 23:3](#) therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.

[Matt. 23:4](#) "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

[Matt. 23:5](#) "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

[Matt. 23:6](#) "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,

[Matt. 23:7](#) and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.

- So with that background, let's look at the conversation between this Pharisee and Jesus

[John 3:2](#) 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."

[John 3:3](#) Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

- The name Nicodemus literally means "a victory over people" or "victory for the people"
 - It's ironically prophetic when you consider that Jesus delivered a victory for the common man over the tyranny of Pharisees
 - He decides to come to Jesus by night, which tells us he was hoping for a private moment outside the watchful eyes of his fellow Pharisees
 - His desire for secrecy is our first indication that Nicodemus isn't your ordinary Pharisee

- His interest in Jesus is very personal and sincere
- Also, coming to visit Jesus in darkness also reminds us of John's metaphor for spiritual blindness
- As he speaks, Nicodemus gives Jesus respect and consideration from the start
 - He calls Jesus rabbi and confesses that "we know You have come from God" because of the signs Jesus has done
 - Teacher was a respectful term, but it falls short of acknowledging Jesus as Messiah
- And the use of "we" would refer to the rest of the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin
 - Apparently, the Sanhedrin had concluded that Jesus was doing miracles by the power of God
 - The irony of course is that though the religious leaders could see the power of God at work in Jesus, they rejected His claims
- As we said last week, this is one of the central themes in John's Gospel: explaining the response of unbeliever to the Gospel
 - The acceptance of the Gospel is a matter of supernatural faith and it isn't dependent on miracles or signs
 - Hearts in darkness will reject the Light of the Gospel even when it's accompanied by self-evidently evidence of God
 - John revisits this point later in this chapter
- In response to Nicodemus' polite opening statement, Jesus abruptly jumps into the heart of what's on Nicodemus' mind: a conversation on entering the Kingdom
 - Jesus knew that this man, who claimed to hold answer to entering Heaven
 - He knew Nicodemus wanted to hear God's answer to the question, "How does one enter the Kingdom of God?"
 - But before he could even ask the question, Jesus gives the answer

- Jesus tells this man that the true way a man enters the Kingdom of God, or we could say being saved, is to be born again
 - The term born again long ago became part of the Christian lexicon, such that most true believers know and understand it
 - It describes the moment when we receive a new living spirit, at the moment of faith in Christ
 - Made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit
- We might assume that this phrase would be completely unknown to a Jew living at this time and that Jesus' choice of words would have been entirely confusing
 - And to an extent that's true, as evidenced by Nicodemus' response
 - But it's not because Nicodemus had never previously heard the term "born again"
 - It's because Pharisees had contrived their own understanding of that term as part of their twisted theology
- Look at Nicodemus' response:

[John 3:4](#) 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?"

[John 3:5](#) 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.

[John 3:6](#) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

[John 3:7](#) "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

[John 3:8](#) "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 asks how can someone be born when he is old?
 - He doesn't ask how can someone be born again, but rather how can someone be born again when they are now grown old
 - This question reflects the Pharisaical teaching on being born again
- Pharisees taught there were six ways that a man could experience a rebirth in life

- Much like the Catholic teaching on sacraments, the Pharisees taught these six moments were important moments of spiritual transformation during our life
 - Not all men could experience all six moments, but progressing through them was a journey of spiritual advancement
 - For example, when a Jewish boy had his bar mitzvah, or when he got married or when he became a rabbi, in each instance he was said to be born again
 - As in his life began again in a new and better way
 - Like sacraments, it suggested a work that moved the person closer to God
- Nicodemus hears Jesus telling him he still lacks a necessary step of rebirth before he can be assured of salvation
 - But to a Pharisee, this statement makes no sense
 - If there was every someone who could be said to meet the requirements of being born again, it would be a Pharisee
 - A Pharisee would have met most every “rebirth” tollgate
 - But now Jesus is saying there’s more required
 - Nicodemus can’t believe what’s he’s hearing, so he responds in a somewhat mocking tone asking Jesus how it’s possible to re-enter a mother’s womb
 - Since Nicodemus has met every type of rebirth taught by the Pharisees, he can’t imagine any other rebirth possible except to take Jesus’ literally
 - And of course there is no possible way to be born again physically
- So that’s the thought that Jesus seizes upon to respond to Nicodemus
 - Jesus says one must be born of both water and spirit if they are to enter the Kingdom of God
 - To be born by water is a Jewish expression that means to be born physically
 - It’s a reference to the amniotic fluid breaking at birth

- Obviously, no one is going to enter Heaven unless they've first been born into existence
 - But Jesus includes this obvious prerequisite as a response to Nicodemus' mocking about climbing into a womb
- He says there is a birth that is physical (or flesh) and one that is spiritual and both are necessary to enter the Kingdom
 - In the way Jesus phrases His response, we can clearly see that these two births do not happen in the same moment
 - If every physical birth included a spiritual birth, then there would be no reason to call them out separately
 - Jesus is emphasizing that a second kind of birth, one that comes after our physical birth, must happen to us
- Jesus' choice of birth as a metaphor is telling, because it teaches us about the manner of our salvation: being born again is similar to being born physically
 - Consider the process of physical birth
 - Our physical birth is an event that happened to us because of a decision made by our parents - we don't chose to be born
 - And when the time came for our birth, we were oblivious to everything - it just happened to us
 - We took our first breath and may have cried
 - But those were our responses to being birthed
 - And in the first weeks and months after our birth, we lacked the maturity to appreciate what life was about
 - But then our awareness began to grow and over time we got to know our parents and came to understand the significance of life
 - This is the model Jesus chose to explain spiritual renewal: we were born again spiritually
 - That birth came to us by the will and power of God
 - When it happened, we were oblivious to God, our Father

- Even after our new birth, we lacked the maturity to understand it properly
- But over time, we gained in spiritual maturity as we are taught by God's word,
- Until we develop the capacity to appreciate our new life
- That's the point Jesus is making to Nicodemus
 - In contrast to the Pharisaical teaching that said men could effect their own rebirth through certain works, Jesus says it only happens by the work of God by His Spirit
 - Nicodemus is hearing Jesus' words, and he understands what Jesus is saying at some level, but yet he's amazed
 - Who has ever experienced such a thing? When has such a thing ever happened to a man?
 - In v.7 Jesus tells the man not to be amazed by this concept

John 3:8 "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 was amazed at the prospect of the Spirit of God moving among men granting rebirth yet undetected by Israel's religious leaders
 - In Pharisaical thinking, rebirth was a process of works, like the sacraments of the Catholic theology
 - It was something tangible
 - Something that men could see, understand and achieve
- But Jesus was speaking of a spiritual rebirth accomplished by the Spirit of God Himself
 - If such rebirth was the only way to enter Kingdom, then surely it would be happening all around Israel
 - Certainly, Nicodemus and other religious leaders would have seen it if not experienced it themselves
 - But no one had seen a spiritual rebirth, or so Nicodemus must have thought

- So Jesus offers a short parable to explain how something so critical to eternal life could be so invisible to a religious leader like Nicodemus
 - Jesus compares the Spirit's regenerative work to the wind blowing
 - The wind blows as it will under God's direction, but we cannot see it at work
 - Wind is invisible
 - We only sense it by the force it exerts or the sound it makes
 - So it is for everyone born of the Spirit
 - We can't see the moment of a spiritual rebirth, since it's an invisible process
 - And we don't know where the Spirit is going next in His mission to bring men to faith, since those He chooses to regenerate are not announced in advance
 - But that doesn't mean we can't detect the Spirit at work
- Just as the wind makes sound as it passes by, so we can recognize the Spirit's spiritual regeneration taking place in the hearts of men and women
 - We can see men and women brought to repentance
 - We can hear the resulting confessions of faith and see water baptisms
 - We witness lives, lifestyles & priorities changing as sin is set aside
 - We see the spiritual fruit of the Spirit working in believer's lives
 - In all these ways, we recognize a spiritual rebirth
 - At this point, Nicodemus is starting to get the point, so he asks the question that every person should ask:

John 3:9 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?"

John 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"

John 3:11 "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.

John 3:12 "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

- Nicodemus asks how can these things be, meaning how do these things happen?
 - Nicodemus wants to know how a person can be born again by the Spirit?
 - What set of circumstances lead to this wonderful outcome?
 - What are the steps required to enter the Kingdom
- This is the right and proper question for him to ask
 - In fact, this is question *every* person should ask
 - Every human being should be literally obsessed with finding that answer in every day they spend on earth
 - For there can be no higher purpose in our earthly lives than to answer the question what comes after death
 - As Christians, we often lament the fact that so many people latch onto the wrong answer to that question, falling victim to false religions
 - But we should lament all the more the fact that so few people even think to ask the question at all!
- Nicodemus asked it, and because he did, now it's Jesus' turn to be amazed
 - Jesus asks how can a man who is a teacher of Israel not know how someone enters the Kingdom of Heaven?
 - Is there no more basic question than this in all religion?
 - Yet here's a man who supposedly leads others into finding Heaven asking Jesus how a man can enter the Kingdom
 - You need no further evidence of how far Israel was from understanding their own scriptures than this man's testimony
 - But we shouldn't be surprised to discover that teachers will sometimes be as ignorant as their students
 - They claim to know how to find God when they themselves are far from God
 - The Pharisees were just one group in a long line of wolves in sheep's clothing

- And these men still operate in the church today
- Don't ever assume because someone is a pastor or elder or Bible teacher that they will have the right answers to central questions of faith
 - In fact, don't be too quick to assume they even know the Lord themselves
 - Instead, look for evidence of the Spirit in their lives
 - As Jesus says:

Matt. 7:15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Matt. 7:16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?"

Matt. 7:17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

Matt. 7:18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit."

- In vs.11-12, Jesus explains why Nicodemus has found himself in his predicament of ignorance
 - Jesus says we have spoken of what we know and what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony
 - Who is "we?"
 - It could be a reference to the Trinity, that is Jesus and the Spirit have been testifying to this truth
 - But I think Jesus is referring to Himself and Moses, because of what comes next in the narrative
 - Jesus is referencing the teaching of Moses, the author of the Torah, which the Pharisees memorized and studied to no end
 - Moses taught the way of salvation and foretold of a coming Messiah Who would bring men into the Kingdom
 - Moses testified of what he saw and Jesus is now fulfilling what Moses wrote
 - Yet the Pharisees have not believed what was given them in God's word
 - Of course, the words of Moses were given by Jesus Himself, since He is the word of God

- So Jesus asks if the Nicodemus wasn't willing to accept the words and signs given already, why would he accept even greater revelation?
- Nicodemus was looking past the word of God, which had been given to Israel so they could recognize their Messiah
 - He was asking for special, divine revelation concerning entering Heaven
 - Which is why Jesus asks Nicodemus how he expects to receive greater, heavenly knowledge if he hasn't accepted the earthly knowledge already made available to him
- So it is with men everywhere
 - They want something special and unique revealed to them, when all they need has already been given through the scriptures
 - As Paul says, Jews seek for a sign and Greeks seek for wisdom
 - But God has hidden the message of salvation in a foolish message
 - It's foolish to the natural ear
 - It sounds crazy when we hear that the way into Heaven is by placing your trust in a convicted criminal Who was executed 2,000 years ago
 - Nicodemus is stumbling in the same way that men stumble today
 - He is overlooking what has been provided while seeking something greater
 - And so Jesus asks him how he expected to gain anything from Heavenly revelation when he hadn't made use of what God already provided in Earthly revelation
- In compassion, Jesus gives Nicodemus an answer to his question, the answer to how a person may be born again
 - And what follows in chapter 3 includes what is easily the best known verse of the New Testament, John 3:16
 - As eloquent as it is at expressing the essence of the Gospel, let's consider the whole of Jesus' answer and avoid focusing on just one verse

[John 3:13](#) “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.

[John 3:14](#) “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

[John 3:15](#) so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

[John 3:16](#) “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

[John 3:17](#) “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

[John 3:18](#) “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.

[John 3:19](#) “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.

[John 3:20](#) “For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

[John 3:21](#) “But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

- In answer to Nicodemus’ question, Jesus says there are two parts to reaching Heaven, and both are ultimately the product of God’s work
 - The first is step is the Son of Man descending from Heaven
 - Christ’s descent from Heaven was a fulfillment of what Moses demonstrated in Numbers 21
 - When Israel demonstrated unbelief in God’s word, the Lord brought a judgment of snakes or serpents to kill the people
 - The image of a serpent is a reminder that all sin traces back to the serpent in the Garden
 - The Israelites had sinned in unbelief, and now they were dying at the hands of the serpent
 - But then Moses placed a bronze serpent on a pole and held it up high
 - And he instructed the people that if they looked upon the bronze serpent in faith that God would heal them, they would not die
 - And those in the camp who looked upon the pole with faith in God’s promise were saved from the snakes

- Now Jesus explains that this moment in Numbers 21 was a carefully constructed picture of Jesus Christ dying on the cross for the sins of men
 - The metal bronze always represents judgment in the scriptures
 - And the serpent represents the power of the enemy to bring death to men
 - And the raising up of the serpent of bronze symbolized Jesus taking the judgment for men, the judgment required by sin
 - And He takes that judgment while being raising up on a wooden pole or cross
- This is the first step of being born again and entering the Kingdom
 - Until and unless the Lord descended and took this penalty upon Himself, there was no solution possible
 - Faith in this sacrifice is a requirement for salvation, and so the first step of being born again is in knowing who to look upon
 - At this point, Christ has only just begin His ministry
 - And yet He's already describing the need to be lifted up on a pole, which is a clear reference to His crucifixion
 - Salvation depended on Jesus dying in our place
 - Secondly, a person must believe in Jesus' death on that pole
 - Just as the people in Israel had to look upon the pole with the serpent, so much we look upon Jesus' death with confidence that it satisfies the wrath of God
 - Jesus says that whosoever believes in the Messiah will have eternal life
 - Belief means belief that His death saves us from judgment
 - Just as the people in the desert had to look upon the serpent to express their belief in God's promise to spare them
- Jesus then summarizes these two parts to the plan of salvation in v.16, and then amplifies each parts in more detail in vs.17-18
 - In v.16, Jesus says the plan of salvation begins with the love of God

- The word for love is *agape*, which means self-sacrificial love
 - Giving a life for another
- There is no greater evidence of love than that a person lay down His life for His friends
- Which is what God voluntarily did in the Person of Christ
- Don't forget that Jesus didn't participate in this plan against His will
 - The Son and the Father determined together to accomplish this plan from the foundation of the Earth

[Eph. 1:3](#) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

[Eph. 1:4](#) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love

[Eph. 1:5](#) He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

[Eph. 1:6](#) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

- Since Jesus was the Creator, we can say that Jesus created the world knowing He would then have to die to save it
 - And He still went through with it
- This is the purest definition of Love
- God's love is for the *world*, which is the word *kosmos* in Greek, which refers to the created universe, to all Creation
 - It is not a specific reference to the population of the earth, although it includes humanity of course
 - The full sense is that God so loved His Creation that He was willing to send His Son to die to redeem it from sin
 - You can see this truth reflected in Paul's teaching on Christ as our redeemer of Creation

[Col. 1:19](#) For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

[Col. 1:20](#) and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

- Jesus redeems all Creation for the Father, including those men and women who believe
 - His payment on the cross redeemed the Creation from Satan, sin and the curse
- It's important to understand that John is not saying that God loved all mankind and sent the Son to die for all mankind
 - Self-evidently, not all mankind are saved, so not all mankind will be redeemed or loved by God
 - This fact alone means that we cannot interpret the word "world" to mean all people
 - We must understand it according to it's literal meaning, which is as a reference to Creation generally
 - Including those who place their faith in Christ
- But then for that sacrifice of love to be effective in the life of a particular person, he or she must believe in Jesus as their Savior
 - At the moment of belief in the Messiah, Christ's sacrifice becomes effective in a person's life
 - They believe and receive eternal life
 - This is the second part of the answer to Nicodemus' question
 - What must happen for a man to be born again?
 - The Redeemer must be lifted up on a cross to take the penalty for our sins
 - And a person must believe in that sacrifice so they can be covered by God's provision
- In vs.17-18, Jesus comments on each of these steps in more detail
 - In v.17 He says that the Son's arrival on earth was not to bring judgment against sin
 - He came expressly for the purpose to die for the sins of the world
 - And through that death the world might be saved through Him
 - Jesus words remind us that God could have had a different plan in response to the sin of mankind

- Instead of sending Jesus to die for our sins, the Father could have sent His Son to judge the world the first time
- His judgment would have been justified and warranted
- Sin demands judgment, and there was nothing requiring the Lord to spare us that judgment
- Instead, the Father sent Jesus on a mission to take that penalty on our behalf
 - So His arrival was for a mission of mercy and grace
 - But the Bible also records that Jesus returns a second time in the near future
 - When that day comes, Jesus will have a different mission'
 - The mission of mercy has already been accomplished in His first coming
 - So His second coming will be one of judgment, as depicted in Revelation 19 and 20
- Notice in v.18 Jesus says that those who believe are not judged
 - Jesus is confirming that there is a judgment coming one day
 - The fact that Jesus didn't come to judge in His first coming doesn't mean that there isn't a judgment
 - And yet when you place your trust in Jesus Christ, you change your future
 - You will not be subject to the coming judgment for sin, because your judgment fell upon Christ
 - Even though that judgement day lies in the future, for the believer it's been cancelled
 - And then Jesus says that for the one who has not believed, his judgment has already happened because he rejected the only solution
 - There is no second solution
 - Once you reject the Son of God, you assure yourself a seat at the coming judgment moment
 - And when that judgment comes, it will be certain and final

- So in that sense the unbeliever has been judged already
- But then Jesus goes further in explaining how that judgment came to men “already”
 - In v.19 Jesus says that when the Light came into the world, it revealed who was judged and who was not
 - Those who loved the darkness rather than loving Christ, the Light are those who have been judged already
 - They rejected the Light because they loved evil and didn’t want their evil deeds exposed by the Light of the truth
 - This is the common experience of unbelievers
 - Before faith, we all live in immorality and sin, for that’s all we know
 - And the prospect of approaching God holds no appeal, because we know instinctively it will require an exposing of sin
 - As Jesus says at the beginning of v.20, everyone who does evil hates the Light, that is Christ
 - Because the Light of the truth will expose the sin of our lives
 - Every unbeliever is set against Christ by nature
 - This is why Paul says in Romans 3 that none seek God by nature

Rom. 3:10 as it is written,
 “ THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

Rom. 3:11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
 THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

Rom. 3:12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
 THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
 THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

- So what causes any man or woman to make that trip into the Light?
 - We all have evil in our hearts
 - We all have lived in sin
 - So why do some choose the Light instead of preferring darkness?

- Remember I said that both parts of plan of salvation are steps done by God?
 - Well, Jesus now explains how God is responsible for both the work on the cross but also for the work of belief in the heart
 - In v.21 Jesus says it's the one who practices the truth comes to the Light
 - Someone who practices the truth refers to someone whose heart has already been brought into agreement with the truth
 - John commonly speaks of practicing righteousness and practicing unrighteousness as ways of describing believers and unbelievers

[1John 1:6](#) If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not **practice** the truth;

[1John 2:29](#) If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who **practices** righteousness is born of Him.

[1John 3:7](#) Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who **practices** righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;

[1John 3:10](#) By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not **practice** righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

- So the one who practices the truth would be someone who is righteous by faith
 - That person will come to the Light
 - Which makes sense, because if a person has come to be righteous by faith in Messiah, then they have nothing to fear in coming to the Light
 - Their sins have been forgiven by faith, so the Light is no longer a threat to them
- But the odd thing about Jesus' statement is the order in which Jesus places these conditions

- He says that those who practicing the truth are those who come to the Light
 - We might have expected Him to say that those who come to the Light will become those who practice the truth
 - The order seems backward
 - Isn't it our coming to faith in Christ that brings us into a walk of truth?
- Jesus has established a conundrum in these verses
 - He said that those who are in the darkness will always avoid the Light
 - The Light of Christ will expose the evil deeds of the unbeliever
 - So the unbeliever will always avoid the Light
 - But then Jesus said that the salvation God offers through spiritual rebirth requires that a person believe in the Messiah
 - So how can a person come to know Jesus as Messiah so as to believe and receive eternal life if every unbeliever hates the Light
 - And how can someone become the person who practices the truth before they come to the Light?
 - Jesus resolves the conundrum in the second half of v.21
 - People are brought into the Light by the power of God
 - Notice that Jesus says the deeds of this person are wrought by God
 - The deeds Jesus is talking about are the deeds of walking in truth
 - Moving from a life of unbelief and evil deeds is transformed into a life of faith according to the truth by the work of God
 - The word for wrought simply means accomplished by God
 - The work to bring a person into the Light so that they might believe and be saved is a work done by God
 - So not only does God descend to die in our place
 - But He is also the one Who transforms us spiritually, by His Spirit

- And by that transformation, we are then able to come to the Light
- And that entire process is wrought or accomplished by God on our behalf
- This is the true definition of grace
- This ends the discussion with Nicodemus
 - Summarizing this discussion, we learned about the manner of our salvation
 - It's a process of spiritual rebirth, not one of human works
 - It's accomplished in the heart by the invisible work of the Spirit
 - It brings men into a walk of truth, so that they may come to the Light
 - And in the Light they come to belief in the Messiah's death on their behalf
 - Just as Moses prophesied
 - That a provision from God would be lifted up on a cross
 - So that all who believe in that sacrifice would be saved
 - And this Pharisee believed in this provision, having heard it explained by Christ Himself
 - He's a man who was teaching men the wrong way to enter the Kingdom
 - And on this day, he came to understand it truly for the first time