

Theme: God's Grace

Object: Gift-wrapped Package

Scripture: "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 3:16 NASB)

Look at this beautiful package! As you can probably guess by the way it is wrapped, there is a gift inside. Do any of you like to receive gifts? I do too. I cannot imagine anyone saying that they don't like receiving gifts. If I gave this package to you and asked you for \$5.00, would it be gift? No. If you have to pay for it or do something to receive it – well then it is not a gift. When someone gives you a gift, to be a gift, it does not cost anything. To be gift it does not come with any conditions. You just have to accept it. That is what makes it a gift. Who would like this gift?

What is the first best gift you ever received? Was it your first bicycle? For me it was a Cowboy Hat and Six Shooter. For some it might be their first doll. But, this morning I want to talk with you about the great gift of all time – ever!

You might be thinking what could the greatest gift ever - be? Well, it is the gift of eternal life, to live forever. It is the gift from God for those He calls to Himself – all one has to do is freely accept it. That is what our verse today says, "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." If you grow to understand that Jesus

is God and believe in heart and praise Jesus with your mouth then you will have received this the most precious gift - ever.

If I give you this beautifully wrapped gift it would not be polite to ask me, "How much did it cost?" But the most wonderful gift, the gift of Jesus, we do not have to ask because God tells us in the Bible how much it cost. The cost was great, the cost was the most precious thing God had – it was God's Son Jesus. Can you close your eyes and imagine how much God loved each of us that He would send His one and only Son to the earth to die on the cross to pay for each of our sins so that we would have eternal life – or so that we would be with God forever and ever. Keep you eyes closed – can you imagine how much Jesus loved each of us to be willing to die on that cross so that those who believe in their heart that Jesus is God will live in heaven with Him forever.

If you want to live forever – you may – it is a gift from God – it is Jesus – and all we have to do is accept God's gift.

Thank you, Father, for the greatest gift ever. Thank you for Jesus who loved each of us so much that He paid the price for our sins, so that He would give us the gift of eternal life with Him – to live with God forever. Amen.

READING – John 3:1-17

John 3:11-17

Slide New Birth - Continued

Sermon #16

Open in Prayer **Blank**

We continue with the meeting of Jesus and Nicodemus. This passage began in chapter 2, verse 23 and ends in chapter 3, verse 21. We have seen so far that Jesus clearly taught and demanded that one must abandon oneself and one's perceived rights and submit to Him as their Savior. This was Jesus' message both in His public ministry and His private conversations. John 3 verses 1 to 21 recounts a private conversation in the night with Nicodemus, a Pharisee of prominence, a member of the Sanhedrin.

Jesus goes straight to the real issue – the transformation of Nicodemus' heart by the need to be **born again**. Jesus says in verse 3, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** Jesus now calls Nicodemus to forsake all he has worked so hard to become and start over. Jesus calls Nicodemus to live with hope in Jesus as the Messiah and to realize that human effort, no matter how noble, is powerless to save. Before being **born again** every, every person is a child of wrath before God the Creator. It is amazing that God the Holy Spirit takes the words of scripture and plants them within the womb of our hearts and there conceives and births a new life – a spiritual life for all eternity.

Although we have seen that Jesus' words to Nicodemus were based on Old Testament revelation they ran contrary to everything Nicodemus had been taught and was able to see in the scriptures with his human eye and mind. Aware of this ingrained thought Jesus continued by saying, **“Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ”** The verb translated here as **“must”** is a strong word

indicating the absolute necessity. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he “**must**” get over his astonishment at being wrong in his concept of righteousness and how one enters into the kingdom of God and he “**must**” seek to be “**born again**” spiritually if he wants to enter the kingdom of God. For one to enter into the kingdom cannot be accomplished by righteous works.

Now in verse 11 Jesus begins to wrap up his conversation with Nicodemus. As we saw in verse 3 when Jesus begins with “**Truly, truly**” He is saying what I am about to tell you is important and I want you to listen – truly listen. So too, we need to listen, “**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.**” Jesus is saying even at this early stage in His earthly ministry there are witnesses to the truth of one having to be spiritually re-born and the change this brings into ones life. From the Old Testament there is the testimony of the Prophet’s lives and from the time Jesus began His earthly ministry there is John the Baptist, His disciples and others in Cana and in Jerusalem during the Passover who accepted Jesus’ testimony and they collectively are a testimony of being **born again** and the changed lives and this showed God’s power to transform lives through Jesus. However, at this point Nicodemus has not accepted the witness of Jesus and all these others. He sees Jesus as a prophet, not as God incarnate. For Nicodemus to see these spiritual truths as evidence of the need to be **born again** would mean he would have to humble himself to the fact that he, even as a Pharisee, was living in spiritual darkness, living life based on the Law which was given to men to show them their sin and their need for salvation and that Jesus is his only hope to be spiritually **born again**. This is why Jesus says, “**If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?**” Nicodemus did not understand Jesus’ earthly example in verse 8, for if he had, he would then know he needed to confess his sin and he would be confronted

with his lack of righteousness and his desperate need of a Savior and this takes heavenly wisdom, not earthly knowledge. Like we saw in verses 23 to 25 there were many who heard the gospel of Jesus and saw His miracles but refused to believe, so too it is with Nicodemus at this time. Now Jesus pushes Nicodemus further and convicts him in his unbelief.

In verse 13 Jesus says, “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.” Jesus points to the historical fact that no human has ascended to heaven while they are alive. Mankind cannot visit heaven to check it out before committing to believe in Jesus as God and as their Lord and as their Savior. Mankind is bound by time, space and history – Jesus, as God, is not. Jesus is telling Nicodemus what he should already know as a student of the scriptures.

Proverbs 30 verse 4 says, **Slide** “Who has ascended into heaven and descended? **Slide** Who has gathered the wind in His fists? **Slide** Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? **Slide** Who has established all the ends of the earth? **Slide** What is His name or His son’s name? **Slide** Surely you know!” Jesus is saying, Nicodemus “Surely you know!” Nicodemus, as a Pharisee “Surely you know!” These are the things God does and they are impossible for men. This is why the Apostle John opened his gospel by saying, **Slide** “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.” (John 1:18 NASB) Jesus has seen and knows God the Father for they are One. **Blank** There are some exceptions to John 3:13 but these exceptions prove the rule set forth in John 3:13 that no living human can visit heaven; Lazarus returned from the dead and died again and, graves were opened after the crucifixion and some dead saints returned for a period of time. So the only One that has a true knowledge of heaven is God. Jesus the human has this true knowledge of heaven, therefore He is God – God

incarnate – fully sinless man and fully divine God. The divinely inspired writer of Hebrews wrote, **Slide** “In these last days (God) has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.” (Hebrews 1:2 NASB) Jesus also made this clear, by saying, **Slide** “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.” (John 6:46 NASB)

Blank At this point Nicodemus should have had the ability to look back through several thousand years of history and the scriptures written over this same long period and seen the evidence of the truth Jesus was sharing with him. We, you and I, have a couple more thousand years to add to this history. We know from both the scriptures and history the following is true – the Law was given to convict men of their sins and show them their desperate need for salvation. The Law does NOT save! Paul says, **Slide** “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.” (Romans 7:6 NASB) Clearly then - as Christians, we are freed from external control by the Law to internal control by the Holy Spirit. **Blank**

Jesus used an illustration from nature by speaking of the coming and the going of the wind to make His point with Nicodemus in verse 8 of chapter 3. Jesus now uses an Old Testament illustration to help Nicodemus see who He is – the Son of the Living God – the long awaited Messiah. Let me read to you verses 14 and 15, “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.” Jesus uses the Old Testament, which Nicodemus knew well, to make His point. In Numbers chapter 21 verses 5 to 9 we read of sin, of repentance and of God’s judgment of sin and of His grace by offering a way to be saved. **Slide**⁵ “The people spoke against God and Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For

there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.’⁶ The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.⁷ So the people came to Moses and said, ‘We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.’ And Moses interceded for the people.⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.’⁹ And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.” (Numbers 21:5-9_{NASB})

Just as God judged the Hebrews for their incessant complaining against Him and Moses, so too God will judge all who reject Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. In desperation the Hebrews begged Moses to intercede on their behalf. God answered Moses’ prayer with divine grace and showed mercy to a rebellious people. God instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent and raise it above the camp on a pole. The people who were bitten and looked upon it would be healed. By looking to the bronze serpent as God and Moses instructed they were healed for by following God’s instruction they were admitting their guilt and expressing faith in God’s forgiveness and His power to heal. **Blank**

From our point in history 2000 years after the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus and having the breathe of the scriptures that make up the entire Bible we see that Jesus was making an analogy to the necessity of His being nailed to the Cross of Calvary as part of God’s plan for our salvation. **Whoever believes** by faith alone and looks to the crucified Christ for salvation from sin’s deadly bite will be saved and **“will in Him have eternal life.”** Verse 15 here in chapter 3 is the first of fifteen references by John in his gospel to the important term **“eternal life.”** Jesus defined what eternal life is in His High Priestly Prayer to the Father in John 17, **Slide** **“Father,**

the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. **Slide** **This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.**” (John 17:1-3 NASB) In Ephesians we see God **Slide** “Raised us up with Him (God the Father), and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that in the **ages to come** He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:6-7 NASB) For those who believe in Jesus as God then **Slide** “Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.” (1 Corinthians 15:49 NASB) We are new creations through Jesus that **bear the image of the heavenly** and will live by God’s grace forever in His presence in heaven. **Blank**

This brings us to verse 16, undoubtedly the most familiar and beloved verse in all of scripture. **“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.”** Yet, because it is so familiar it can cause us to overlook the profound truth it contains. God’s motive for giving, as 2 Corinthians says, **“His indescribable gift!”** was that He **loved the** evil, sinful **world** of fallen people, a world completely lost and unable to save itself by any ceremony, ritual, animal sacrifice or by works or efforts of man. Nothing, absolutely nothing in man attracted God’s love. Simply put God loves mankind because He sovereignly chose to. **Slide** “When the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, **Slide** **He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy,** by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4-7 NASB) The miracle of salvation by

grace was explained by Paul to those in Rome, **Slide** “**God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of *God through Him.*” (Romans 5:8-9 NASB) **Blank** This beloved verse of John 3:16 speaks of the **world** and this has confused some. God the Father through God the Son is reconciling the **world** to Himself, not in the sense of universal salvation, but in the sense that the **world** has no other reconciler but Christ. The truth is that **not** all will be reconciled is clear from a number of scriptures passages. Paul wrote in Colossians, **Slide** “For it was the *Father’s* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 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. And although **Slide** **you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him** (God the Father) **holy and blameless and beyond reproach.**” (Colossians 1:19-22 NASB) Christ then is the reconciler between God the Father and mankind for those whom God calls and God has divinely chosen to not call all. This is evident by what Paul was inspired to write, **Slide** “For those whom He (God) foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and **Slide** **these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.**” (Romans 8:29-30 NASB) Many may take the gift of salvation for granted, but there are no human words that can adequately express the magnitude of God’s gift of salvation. God’s gift is unique and comes only through Jesus Christ. God the Son lowered Himself from heaven, which no man has seen; to earth to become a man in order that, **Slide** “He (God) made Him (Jesus) *who knew no sin to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the

righteousness of God in Him (Christ).” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NASB) **Blank** This act, this divine act of love, of grace and mercy is beyond description, but this gift is one we should be forever thankful for, humbled by and the gift of salvation should prompt us to worship God and drive us to live holy lives out of gratitude to the only true God. This salvation that John speaks of here in verse 16 is a salvation once given and received it can never be lost, true believers will be divinely preserved and will faithfully persevere until the end. Jesus said, **Slide** “When they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but *it is* the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.” (Matthew 10:19-22 NASB) **Blank** God has called you, saved you and He will preserve you. “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.” To perish as verse 16 says is to receive God’s final and eternal judgment. Luke said that Jesus came not to call the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance. It is those who reject Jesus as the Christ who God will judge. However, it was not the mission of God the Son to judge the world in His first coming, but the consequence of rejecting the Son will be dealt with in His second coming. Verse 17 also dealt with the popular belief among Jews that when the Messiah came He would bless only Jews and would judge non-Jews or Gentiles – “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” Salvation has now come for ALL who believe in Jesus. God’s gracious offer of salvation extended beyond Israel to all mankind and in truth had always been extended to all people. Nicodemus should have known this. The Abrahamic

covenant, which Israel was so proud of, is clear, for God said in Genesis, **Slide** “Now the LORD said to Abram ... ‘And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you **all the families** of the earth will be blessed.’ ”

(Genesis 12:1 & 3 NASB) Salvation for people, both Jews and Gentiles was God’s plan from the very beginning. The prophet Isaiah spoke the words of God, saying, **Slide** “I am the LORD, I have called You (Jesus) in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, and **Slide** I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison. I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.” (Isaiah 42:6-8 NASB) since Nicodemus failed to have spiritual wisdom of the scriptures how could he hope to discern the spiritual when he was not spiritual. **Blank** However, Christ opened Nicodemus’ eyes to the need of spiritual wisdom that could only come from God the Holy Spirit and his eyes were beginning to open to his desperate need for salvation by the Messiah. Jesus did ALL His Father commanded. The Pharisees did as the Pharisees desired. The question then is, are we, you and me, are we ambassadors of God faithfully living by His grace and faithful to share the saving gospel of our Lord Jesus with the lost? My brothers and sisters, my beloved, may we be faithful and persevere until the end. Do not fear, for the Lord is with us – share the gospel! Live the gospel and teach the gospel by both deed and word.

Let me close by reading out of Romans. Please turn to Romans chapter 8. Let the word of Paul, inspired by God, sink into your mind and soul. This is the word of God, true and right – may we live these words. I will begin reading in verse 31. **Slide** “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God’s

elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written,

“FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;

WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.” (Psalm 44:22)

³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

Slide ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, **Slide** will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:31 to 39 NASB) So I say in closing and because God is call each of us – my beloved live the salvation and gospel given to you by God every day with passion!