

The Secret of Salvation

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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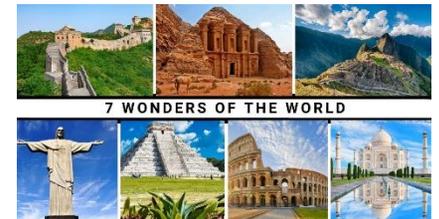
October 24, 2021

Text: John 3:1-21 (emphasis on John 3:16)

Purpose: Jesus revealed the secret to Nicodemus one night under the cover of darkness. Jesus said, *"You must be born again!"* Through prayer you can admit to God that you are a sinner. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins. Invite Jesus into your life as Savior and Lord. Thank Him for entering your life. Commit yourself to live for Him.

THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD¹

A group of students was asked to list what they thought were the present Seven Wonders of the World. Though there was some disagreement, the following got the most votes:



1. Egypt's Great Pyramids
3. Grand Canyon
5. Empire State Building
7. China's Great Wall

2. Taj Mahal
4. Panama Canal
6. St. Peter's Basili

While gathering the votes, the teacher noted that one quiet student hadn't turned in her paper yet, so she asked the girl if she was having trouble with her list. The girl replied, "Yes, a little. I couldn't quite make up my mind because there were so many." The teacher said, "Well, tell us what

you have, and maybe we can help." The girl hesitated, then read, "I think the Seven Wonders of the World are:

1. TO SEE
2. TO TASTE
3. TO TOUCH
4. TO HEAR."

She hesitated a little, and then added,
5. TO FEEL 6. TO LAUGH
7. AND TO LOVE.

The room was so full of silence you could have heard a pin drop.

Those things we overlook as simple and ordinary are truly wondrous. This is a gentle reminder that the most precious things in life cannot be bought...but are gifts from above. (James 1:17)

Under the Cover of Darkness

A man came to Jesus by cover of darkness to learn the truth of who Jesus REALLY was. This man was known as Nicodemus. This man was a fine upstanding citizen of Jerusalem. But he had a reputation to protect. He had a family he did not want to discredit. He just wanted a little more information about this new movement in his town. He was a seeker in search of the secret of this man called Jesus.



Many of us through life wear different masks as we interact with others. We wear the professional mask. We put our best clothes on. We have our suit sharp.

We wear the best dress. We are careful about what we say so we do not ruin our reputation. We may wear a slightly different mask when we are with our friends. We are not as careful about what we say, or what we do. We can put our feet up on the coffee table with these people. But when we get home at night, we usually don't have any masks. We put our masks away until another day. When we are home, we wear the sloppy clothes. Your wife or husband and children know the real you.

With Nicodemus, we see the various masks being shown and slowly being removed as Jesus begins to talk with him.

What is the Secret of Salvation?

Nicodemus begins with a little flattery. It was true what he said, but it does sound as if he is trying to butter him up.

"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." (v. 2)



He did not ask a question, but we all know when someone begins a conversation like that, there is a hidden question behind the statement. Jesus sees right through what he is seeking. The question he did not ask was, **"What is the Secret of Salvation?"**



It is true, He did not ask that, but since I have watched Jeopardy for some time, I can sometimes determine the question simply by looking at the answer.

Jesus said in response to this unasked question, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” (v. 3)

We learned in chapter one that one of the repeated themes found in the Book of John is that “darkness does not comprehend” the things that are spiritual. CS Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity* notes that those that are not Christian cannot discern the things of God because they do not have what it takes to do that.

Nicodemus asks innocently, “*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb?*” (v. 4) He doesn’t comprehend the spiritual nature of the conversation with Jesus. He is only thinking in the physical realm. Nicodemus was seeking the answer to the question, but Jesus continues to baffle his mind with riddles.



Again, Jesus continues with the riddle of salvation. “*Unless one is born of water and of spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*” (v. 5)

Over the years, many have interpreted this to mean that water baptism and spirit baptism is essential for salvation. I do believe once you accept Jesus as your Savior, you should follow that up with water baptism. But baptism alone will not save you. Believing in Jesus Christ is what brings about salvation to occur in your life. Mark 16:16 says, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*” Believing is the key to salvation.

Others have called this verse John 3:5, a polemic (strong bold statement) against what John the Baptist is preaching in the wilderness. John was calling all of Israel to repent and be baptized in water. I do not think Jesus is speaking against John the Baptist’s preaching. I think this is referring to a physical birth and a spiritual birth. When you were born, you were enveloped in water. When the water broke, then you were physically born. Jesus is saying that, “Yes, you need physical birth, but you also need a spiritual birth.”



We all have a physical birth; we all need a spiritual birth.

If you are born once (physically) you will die twice (physically and spiritually)

If you are born twice (physically and spiritually) you will only die once (physically).

Jesus is acknowledging that what is born of flesh is flesh. What is born of spirit is spirit. Some people teach that in this life, we can live a life so good, and holy, that we can overcome the physical flesh. I would beg to differ with those individuals. A pastor friend of mine once said that “We could live so close to God that we would never sin again.” His heart must be better than my heart. For I know I am only a moment’s thought away from sin.

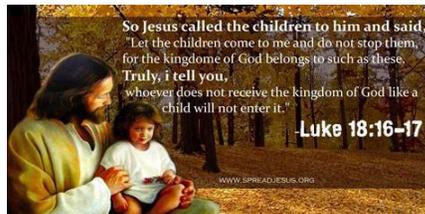
We can and need to strive to crucify the flesh, but the only destination for our flesh is the grave. When we die, our bodies will be placed in the grave. What God is offering us through Jesus Christ is a new creation. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, He comes and dwells inside us. He comes in and gives us some of His nature – the Holy Spirit.

When we acknowledge our dependence upon Him for our life, our salvation, our forgiveness, -- He enters into our lives and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

Do not marvel at this teaching Jesus told Nicodemus. *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”* When God calls us to Him, we need to respond to His invitation.

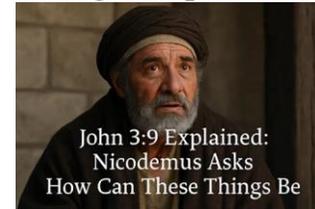
Come to Jesus as Children

Jesus once told his listeners that we need to come to him as little children. That does not mean that we need to be childlike in the exercise of our faith. But we need to trust God to do the saving. As children, we trusted our parents to put food on the table, to pay the mortgage, to pay the light bill, to provide a place that is warm and safe to grow up in. We placed our trust in them to do that. In the back of our minds, we may have been tempted to worry about some of that, but we simply trusted them.



Some adults have a hard time understanding it all. We want all the answers before we trust God. We concern ourselves with the details about heaven, the rapture, the tribulation, or like Nicodemus, we want to understand the mystery of salvation. All God wants us to do is to trust Him. Yes, we should explore the truth of what we are taught. Yes, we need to test to see if what is stated is accurate and reliable. But at some point, you have to step out in faith. It is like jumping off the diving board for the first time. It is like

getting on an airplane. It is taking what you know, and taking a step of faith.



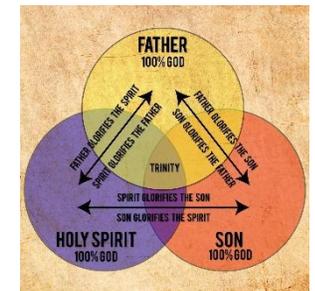
Nicodemus asked another one of those questions. *“How can these things be?”*

Jesus pokes back at Nicodemus with a little sarcasm: *“Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”*

Of course, Nicodemus could not know these things, because he did not understand. Jesus in this nighttime encounter, makes one of the most amazing claims so far in the book of John.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

“We speak what We know and testify to what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.” Notice how all of these statements are in the first-person plural. This refers back to the fact that Jesus and God are one. The “We” and “Our” he is speaking about is none other than God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.



Nicodemus wants to know spiritual teachings but he still doesn't believe. Jesus says how can I tell you more when you don't even believe the earthly things.



Jesus is testifying that He has come from God and is Immanuel, God in the flesh. The Mormon Church believes that God was

once a man just as we are. In the prologue in the Book of John, it clearly states that God always was and the Word (Jesus) was always with Him.

In the Garden of Eden, the serpent promised Eve that she too would be as a god if she would only eat of this fruit. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day saints has fallen for the old lie of Satan. They believe that they too will be gods – if they are good enough, if they will just live right, do right, and marry right.

I am here to say, that there is only one God. There is only one Savior. Jesus came to redeem us. Not give us a model to become a god ourselves.

The Bronze Serpent and the Son of Man

John 3:14 introduces one of the most obscure incidences recorded in the Old Testament while the children of Israel were wandering in the desert. (Numbers 21:4-9)



The children of Israel were becoming tired of the journey in the desert. They grumbled about the lack of food and water. They grumbled about God and Moses.

God then sent snakes out among the people and caused many of them to be bitten and they died. These were described as fiery serpents. They came to Moses and pleaded that he would pray to God and remove these snakes. God instructed Moses to make a brass fiery serpent and place it upon a pole. When the people looked upon the

snake on the pole, they would be healed. Failure to look upon it caused them to die.



The lesson that is brought to my attention in this situation is that our world is full of sin. Romans 3:23 says, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* The serpent is like sin which has gone out into our world. It is biting everyone and they are dying in their sin. There is sin on every side by the apparent evil they encounter daily. God gave them a way of escape. Look unto the brass serpent and be saved.

When Jesus met Nicodemus that night, he reminded him of this situation in Israel’s history. Jesus knew his mission. His mission was to be raised upon a cross to be that sin offering for us. Looking to Jesus can heal our sin sick soul.

Don’t you see that when you see a cross? He was high and lifted up for our sake. If we don’t become emotionally touched about the cost for our restored fellowship with God, then maybe we need to go back and reevaluate the price God paid.

The Power of John 3:16

The most quoted verse, the most memorized verse in the entire bible is John 3:16.



A little boy was wandering the streets of Korea one cold night. He had no home and nowhere to go. A policeman met him and asked if he had a place to stay. The boy

replied that he slept in a cardboard box under a nearby bridge.

The man told him to go a certain house. He was instructed to tell the woman when she asked what he wanted, to tell her “John 3:16 sent me.”

JOHN 3:16

The little boy did just that. She invited the boy in and gave him a seat beside the fireplace. “John 3:16 sure gives a cold Korean boy a warm place to sit.”

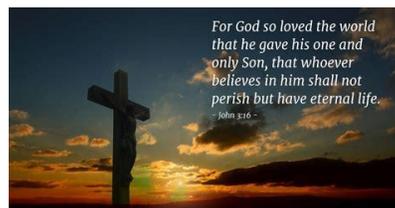
A few minutes later she came with a plate holding a sandwich and other food. As he ate, he thought to himself, “John 3:16 sure gives a hungry Korean boy food to eat.”

After he ate, she asked if he had had a bath in a while, he replied no. She led him upstairs, showed him the bath and took his clothes to wash. She left a pair of pajamas for him to change into. He said to himself again, “John 3:16 surely gives a dirty Korean boy a clean bath and clean clothes.”

As the evening came to a close, she gave him a warm bed to sleep in.

As he lay in bed, he wondered what was so special about John 3:16. This John 3:16 sure is great. It has provided a warm place to sit, food to eat, a warm bath and a clean warm bed to sleep in.”

In the morning, the boy arose early to talk with the woman. She was busy in the kitchen



making breakfast. For the first time, he asked, “What is so special about John 3:16?”

She shared with this boy for the first time about God’s love for him. Because of God’s love for her, she was able to give love to this little boy.

You see, God did not save the world through love, He saved it through His Son. He loved us, you and me, so much that He sent His Son to die on that cross. That if you believe in that Son, accept Him as your Savior, ask Him to forgive you of your sins, then He is faithful and just to do that.

Martin Luther once said, “God, then, is more earnest for me to be saved than I am to be saved! He so loved the world that He gave His Son (see John 3:16). He loved not saints, not penitents, not the religious, not those who love Him; but “the world,” secular men, profane men, hardened rebels, hopeless wanderers and sinners! He gave not a mere promise, not an angel to teach us, not a world to ransom us, but His Son – His only begotten! So much did God love the world, sinners, me! I believe this. I must believe it; I believe on Him who says it. How can I, then, do otherwise than rejoice?²



“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

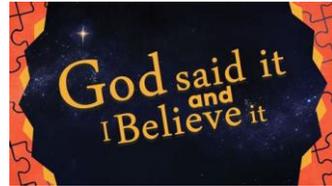
When we read this, we can insert our name where it says, “whosoever.” That word whosoever includes you and me.

Let us personalize it. *“For God so loved (Your Name), that He gave his only begotten Son, that if (Your Name) believe in Him, I will not perish but have everlasting life.”*

I am not saved by who I am, I am saved by faith in Christ.
The one that died upon that cross, died for me.

Jesus did not come to condemn or judge the world. He came to save and redeem us back to God.

Jesus Said It ... I Believed It



An evangelist was holding a special meeting for boys and girls. One day after the children’s meeting, little Helen came home, rushed into her father’s study, threw her arms around him, and said, “Daddy, I am a Christian!”

“Well, Helen, I am glad to hear that,” said her father.
“When did you become a Christian?”

“This afternoon, Daddy,” she replied.

He asked her to tell him what had happened.

“Oh,” she said, “the evangelist told us that Jesus Christ was there in the room and that, if we would receive Him, He would come in and live in our hearts and make us His own; that He would receive us.”

“Well,” he said, “go on; tell me what else happened.”

“Why, I received Him and Jesus took me in.”

The father asked, “But how do you know that when you received Jesus, He took you in?”

She gave him a look which he would never forget. She answered, “Why, Daddy, because He said He would!”

That’s exactly what it means to believe in the name of Christ – to believe who He is and what He said He would do for us when we receive Him. It is so simple that explanations only serve to complicate it.³

A Love Without End

The country singer George Strait sang a song entitled, “Love without End, Amen.” It tells the story of a young boy coming home from school after having a fight and expecting punishment from his dad. Fully expecting the wrath of his father, the son waited, expecting the worst. However, the father said, “Let me tell you a secret about a father’s love ... Daddies don’t just love their children every now and then ... it is a love without end. Amen.”



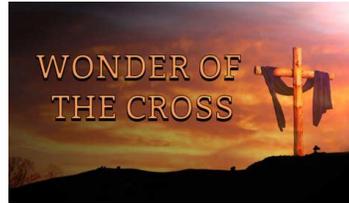
The young boy grew up and passed this secret on to his children. One day he dreamed that he died and went to heaven, He was concerned, as he waited to go in, because he realized there must be some mistake for if they knew half the things he’s done they would never let him in. It was then that he heard his father’s words again, “Let me tell you a secret about a father’s love ... Daddies don’t just love their children every now and then ... it’s a love without end. Amen.”



Isn't it a comfort to know that we have a heavenly Father like this? It is no secret, concerning our Father's love: God doesn't just love His children every now and then; indeed, it is a "love without end, Amen."⁴

God is extending you the offer of entering into His family and becoming a child of God. The choice is up to you. Have you accepted this gift? He has promised to come in, if we by faith, ask Him to.

I think the greatest wonder in the world today is the cross of Jesus Christ. It is through His sacrifice upon that cross that saves sinners like me. Many of us are wearing masks today. Some of us hide our situation from the world very well. Nicodemus did it when he met Jesus, and Jesus saw right through it. Today, you can come to Christ if you will only take that step of faith. Today is the day of salvation.



LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Mickey's Funnies, A Wonders "Funny," Feb. 27, 2026

² Heartwarming Bible Illustrations, Saved by Grace, number 763, page 300.

³ Illustrations of Bible Truths, Simple Faith, number 629, page 204.

⁴ A Treasury of Bible Illustrations, Bill Thrasher, "Love Without End, Amen," number 504, page 198.