

The Greatest Love, the Greatest Gift

John 3:13-19 ¹³ No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. ¹⁸ "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

This passage before us this morning is in the context of the visit of Nicodemus with our Lord. Now he was a ruler of the Jews and he came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "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." Now our Lord did not respond and say thank you or even acknowledging that his understanding was correct that He indeed was from God, but simply responded with these words, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And Nicodemus answered with the most foolish response, "can a man enter a second time into his mothers womb and be born?" Now the word our Lord used can be translated "from above" but it is quite clear Nicodemus understood it to mean, born again a second time. Our Lord clearly explains it to mean that as our first birth was fleshly, we need to be born again with a spiritual birth, otherwise one cannot understand the things of God. Paul says it thus in his letter to the church at Corinth, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor 2:14) Jesus here rebukes Nicodemus for being a teacher of the Jews and not understanding this truth. Jesus went on to say to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness." In other words you acknowledge that I am come from God but you do not receive my witness, my teaching, you although a Jew in certain authority stand in need of conversion. The error of Nicodemus was this he was convinced that God was with Jesus, but did not understand who Jesus really was, "God come down from heaven in the flesh". It was here that Christ revealed to Nicodemus and to us, first who He was, and secondly the Father's part in our salvation. Let us then consider what our Lord proclaimed at this time. 1) Sinful man cannot obtain an entrance into heaven on His own, 2) The necessity of God condescending and coming down to man, 3) The means of that condescending, and 4) and the result of that condescending on God's part.

A. Sinful man cannot obtain an entrance into heaven on His own - *No one has ascended to heaven*

1. Heaven is holy, sinful man cannot enter therein

Rev 21:27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie

- a. The unrighteous *will not inherit the kingdom of God?* 1 Cor 6:7
- b. To enter heaven requires holiness - *without which no one will see the Lord* Heb 12:14

2. If we should ask, who may ascend into heaven the answer is quite clear

Ps 24:3-4 Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

3. Since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God it follows then that no mortal man by his unaided power can enter heaven nor even understand the things of God.

- a. Calvin here writes *For to ascend to heaven* means here, "to have a pure knowledge of the mysteries of God, and the light of spiritual understanding."
- b. And Paul informs us that the "natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor 2:14

4. This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God

B. Thus the necessity of God condescending and coming down to man

1. Christ quickly proposes the answer for what was impossible for sinful man to do was provided by the Son of God.

*No one has ascended to heaven but **He who came down from heaven**, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven*

2. First this speaks of the deity of our Lord
 - a. Who is in heaven
 - b. When our Lord laid aside His glory this did not change the fact that He was still truly God
3. He came down from heaven
 - a. When Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, this was our Lord upon that throne.
 - b. We know this because when John quoted from that passage in Isaiah John tells us, *“These things Isaiah said of Him when he saw the Lord’s high and lifted up.”* John 12:41
4. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners

1 Tim 1:15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners

5. It is only through Christ that we can know God

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

6. This is why Jesus said, *“I am the way the truth and the life, no man can come unto the Father except through me.”* (cf Jn. 14:6)

C. The means of that condescending

1. Can be summed up in this - God’s love - *For God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son*
2. This speaks of the Father’s part in our salvation - He love us
3. He sent His Son to redeem us - *In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.* (1 John 4:9-10)
4. Our very thoughts and feeling should be filled with amazement of the Father and His love in this action on our behalf
 - a. He loved His Son for how often did he proclaim from heaven - *This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased*
 - b. This alone should increase our faith and give us great confidence in our Father and His love for us.

*Rom 8:31-33 If God is for us, who can be against us? **He who did not spare His own Son**, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*

- c. When we understand that God laid our iniquity upon His beloved Son when we were so undeserving

Isa 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

5. God’s love for us must never be minimized when we understand He stood by and permitted His Son, His beloved Son, to be wounded and bruised upon the cross especially when we hear the cry of our Savior upon the cross - *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.*

CONCLUSION: We must never celebrate the birth of our Savior without an awareness as to why He came down to earth.

As you remember the birth of our Lord, think on your inability to approach the throne of God

As you remember the birth of our Lord, think how greatly the Father loved you

As you remember the birth of our Lord, think on the great condescension of God on your behalf

As you remember the birth of our Lord, think of the great humility that our Lord suffered that we might one day ascend and rejoice before that most glorious heavenly throne

As you remember the birth of our Lord, think of the love with which God our Father has bestowed upon us

He that spared not His own Son