

Gospel of John Chapter 3 - John Karmelich

Keeping my big theological question theme going, this lesson deals with the issue of what is salvation. I will say it's a bit more complicated than you what you might think. Before I define it, I'll give you my quick overview of this chapter. It's essentially two stories about two people testifying that Jesus is God. The first is one is about one of the religious leaders in Jerusalem. A logical assumption is that He spent his adult life trying his best to be a strictly observant Jew and still realized something was "amuck," or else the man wouldn't be asking Jesus salvation questions! The second story is John the Baptist (JTB) saying in effect, "Jesus is far more important than me! Since He's now here, my role is essentially over, so focus on Him." This chapter also has the famous line, "God so loved the world that He sent His only Son that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life." I recited that off the top of my head, so that is how important that statement is to me.

As most of you know, I write these lessons for believers. Most of us know these stories well and even if we don't, I'm sure you'll share details with us we may forget later, so go ahead, hit us! So with that thought in mind, tell us why should we be thinking about our salvation for these two stories?

To explain, I want you to consider what I consider the three aspects of salvation: The first is when we first we first accepted Jesus as Lord of our lives. I assume most of us have done that. The next one is when we die and have faith we'll be in Jesus' presence. Both of those depend on our faith that Jesus is God and died for every sin we ever have committed and ever will commit. The second one's the hard one! That's about using our lives as witnesses for Jesus. It's when we "put our money/time where our mouth is." Of course, I believe we're saved by faith alone. If we're saved that way, what are we doing about it? That's why salvation is a threefold process: 1) when we first believe 2) believing it for the rest of our lives and 3) using our lives as living witnesses for Him. Many of the passages in this chapter do focus on #1 and #3. Still, using our lives for Jesus is not only the focus of this ministry, but a reminder of why we're created in the first place. With that said, time to go through the chapter, and see how they affect what should be our lives as we use them for His glory.

The chapter opens up by telling us that one of the Jewish religious leaders (meaning he was part of the council of men that decided religious cases) went to see Jesus by night. It also means this guy lived as a very strict religious Jew (a Pharisee) to observe God's laws and their interpretation of them. History tells us he was a "top dog," as he was one of the wealthiest men in Jerusalem. He speaks to Jesus with the pronouns "we". He goes to Jesus at night, probably to avoid being seen by other the religious men. Apparently, Jesus did a bunch of miracles when he came to the Temple area (see Chapter 2) that aren't recorded. Therefore Nicodemus, says to Jesus in effect, "No one can do what you've been doing unless you came from God"! It also means "Nico" (shortened his name to make it easier to type) realized his efforts to please God meant something was missing. That is why he came to Jesus in the first place. At that moment made His famous born again statement.

Give Nicodemus some credit to his response. He realizes Jesus is not referring to a literal second birth out of the womb. What he did not grasp is how can a person accept that God accepts us "faults and all" as Jesus taught. It's not blunt yet, but that's the direction we're heading. Jesus makes a statement about the fact we must be born of the "water and the spirit." (Most likely a reference to Ezekiel 36:24-28 that tells us God sprinkles water on us and changes us.) Remember Jesus is talking to someone who knows his Bible well, so Jesus quotes it. Jesus then talks about how the Spirit of God is kind of like the wind, as we don't know where and how the wind blows. (In Hebrew "wind" and "spirit" are the same word so

it's a play on words). Jesus' essential point is that we have no idea who gets saved, but some people will be! In other words obviously, some people are saved, and some are not.

That leads back to my opening point about salvation. I assume everyone here believes Jesus is God, as we are betting our eternity on it! The issue is, what are we doing in the meantime about it? Let me put it this way: Nicodemus was risking his life's work realizing we must trust in Jesus payment for our sin as well as for our daily lives, in effect, pointing people to Him over us! By the way, Nicodemus will be mentioned a few more times in John's gospel, showing that he did believe in Him, and used the rest of his life to focus on that truth.

This leads us to the famous line that "God so loved the world that He gave His only son." That leads to the question, "If God loves the world, why does He permit people to be in hell? Because some people reject His free gift of salvation. Of course, there are issues about the naïve and children. His love for the world is conditional upon acceptance of His free gift. In effect, that is a summary of Verses 16-19. It includes the idea that people choose to be wicked (reject Him), or just want to trust in their ability to prove their worth to God, versus accepting that free gift. That leads me again to "Salvation Issue #2." All I'm saying is, if we believe it then we need to put "our money and our time where our mouth is," so to speak.

All of this leads to story #2 in in this chapter. In effect, it's John the Baptist's "wrap up song." After his big moment of baptizing Jesus, JTB continues baptizing, not in the sense of accepting what Jesus did as it hasn't happened yet but to get people to realize they're sinful and turn from it! An interesting footnote, JTB was baptizing in effect "up-river" in Samaria. It's a subtle way of getting one's focus on Jesus, as if to say, "He's in Israel and I'm outside of the country, so focus on Him, not me"!

In fact, John's disciples were complaining how Jesus was getting more followers than John. John then said in effect, "Hey, remember who He is and remember who I am." John compares himself to being a best man at a wedding. A best man's role is important, but he's not the star of the show! The text says there was even an argument between John's disciples and Jesus' disciples about baptism. John ends the discussion by saying, in effect, "Jesus is more important than me, so get your focus on Him"!

So why are these two stories here? Why does the Gospel writer transition from one to the other? John the Gospel writer was probably in the room when Nicodemus showed up. I suspect John wanted to put this story after the "Nic" one to remind us of the importance of putting themselves "second to Jesus" as each man did it in their own way. Of course, we're not all of us are called to be pulpit preachers. Each of us put Jesus first in different ways. We show our salvation throughout our life by constantly making the effort to put God before anything else. But what if we need to deal with a problem at this moment? I know that's a big part of life. We pray for guidance and make the best decision we can with what we do know at the moment. That too is putting God first as we trust in Him to guide our lives.

Hope this gives each of us food for thought as we read both Nicodemus and "JTB" seeing Jesus as the center of our lives. As always, thanks for reading.

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! To read the other one, click on one of the two links on this page. Thanks again for reading this. John