

Gospel Reflections:
JOHN 3

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JOHN 3:1-13

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

² The same came to JESUS by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from GOD: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except GOD be with him.

³ JESUS answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see The Kingdom of GOD.

⁴ Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

⁵ JESUS answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of The Spirit, he cannot enter into The Kingdom of GOD.

⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of The Spirit is spirit.

⁷ Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

⁸ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of The Spirit.

⁹ Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be?

¹⁰ JESUS answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

¹¹ Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not Our witness.

¹² If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

¹³ And no man hath ascended up to Heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even The Son of Man which is in Heaven.

CHRIST challenges the erroneous understanding of The Kingdom of GOD, in that it is not simply the nation of Israel of The Old Testament on earth, but that it is before that a spiritual Kingdom of being placed in right communion with GOD. In the same way, The Church on earth is not merely the universal collection of denominations, buildings and congregations throughout the world on any given Sunday morning, but is first The spiritual Kingdom of being remade into right communion with GOD.

This brings to mind the cry of David in PSALM 51, when he cries out for The LORD to wash the sin-stains of murder, adultery, false witness and deceit from his heart and out of his very soul by The HOLY SPIRIT. So he cries out, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." [verse 2] The sin over a man's soul is the actual violation of GOD's Law that separates us from The LORD, whether it be in thought, word or deed. But iniquity is the inner defilement of a man's soul that is unclean before The LORD, which leads to sin.

This is why CHRIST tells the Pharisees that the keeping or non-keeping of outward religious ordinances, such as the ceremonial washing of the hands before meals which they practiced so fanatically, does not defile or make clean a man's soul. So JESUS chastises them in LUKE 11:39, "...Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness." By GOD's Grace, the repentant sinner is forgiven his sins according to The Lord's Word, but

it is The HOLY SPIRIT that enters and remakes the humble penitent clean within, giving new life which leads to the avoidance of sin.

Here also JESUS gives us a picture of The Sacrament of Baptism, which is held as a sign, channel and means of wiping away Original Sin and bringing us into The Kingdom of GOD – first into The Church militant now on earth, and then into The Church triumphant forever in Heaven. The outside of the cup of our lives is washed with baptismal waters. But it is The HOLY SPIRIT which washes and renews the inside of the cup of our lives to wash away iniquity.

So David prays in PSALM 51:10-14, “Create in me a clean heart, O GOD; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy Presence; and take not Thy HOLY SPIRIT from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy... Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors Thy Ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O GOD, Thou GOD of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness!”

JOHN 3:14-18

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must The Son of Man be lifted up:

¹⁵ That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

¹⁶ For GOD so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

¹⁷ For GOD sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.

¹⁸ He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but He that believeth not is condemned already, because He hath not believed in The Name of The only begotten Son of GOD.

Why was it necessary that CHRIST be lifted up on The Cross in suffering and death before His resurrection to redeem our souls? Only by doing so, most Christians understand, could He save our souls from eternal separation from His Father in Heaven. What is this reference to Moses lifting up the serpent on the pole in The Torah? The clue is this, where Saint Paul declares in II CORINTHIANS 5:21, of why The Cross was necessary in The Plan of Divine Redemption: “For He [that is, GOD The Father] hath made Him [that is, GOD The Son] to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of GOD in Him.”

In the desert, when the Israelites grumbled in unbelief and rebellion against The LORD and against Moses for the hardships of their trek through the wilderness of Sinai, they were smitten. The Divine Record records in NUMBERS 21:6-9, “And The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against The LORD, and against thee; pray unto The LORD, that He take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And The LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one

that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.”

The serpent is a symbol of evil in Scripture, and evil incarnate in The Garden of Eden, through which the devil himself tempted Adam and Eve into grumbling, unbelief and rebellion against The LORD. Here the intent is that the people be made to face their sins, and we can almost hear Moses chastising the people of GOD as they gaze upon the symbol of their wickedness, crying on their knees in sorrow! “Look upon your sins, which bring you only sorrow and death! Is your heart not convicted in terror before The Almighty? Is your mind not brought low in sorrow for your sin against Your Divine Deliverer? Is your soul not crushed with the sackcloth and ashes of your iniquity before The Eternal One? Then repent before His awful Presence and live!”

So here in JOHN 3 CHRIST reveals that, on The Cross, He will take on the sins of the world upon Himself, and if we become His people, His righteousness will be over our souls. So when GOD The Father looks upon us, He will no longer see the sin and iniquity that had once separated us from His holy and righteous Presence, but will instead see only the sinless righteousness of His Son!

Here we hear the fulfillment of the picture painted in prophesy for us by the prophet in ISAIAH 53:3-5, “He is despised and rejected of men; A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of GOD, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”

Only by coming Himself to pay the penalty for the infinite sins of men on The Cross could The infinite GOD atone for the souls of His saints. How so? By offering Himself up for us as The Lamb of GOD, The Sin Offering Incarnate, as the prophet says in ISAIAH 53:10, “Yet it pleased The LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin...!” The Messiah’s soul becomes, as it is freely offered up in our place, אָשָׁם - ‘ASHAM – our “sin;” our “trespass” of The Law of GOD; our “guilt” before The Throne of JEHOVAH; our very “trespass offering.” [Whittaker’s Revised BDB Lexicon, p 79]

JOHN 3:19-21

¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than Light, because their deeds were evil.

²⁰ For every one that doeth evil hateth The Light, neither cometh to The Light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.

²¹ But he that doeth truth cometh to The Light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in GOD.

He that is redeemed in CHRIST brings forth the good works that a true and living faith produce. But those that have no faith, or have a dead faith, show forth lives manifested in evil works, because their souls are not born again by The HOLY SPIRIT, their hearts not being convicted by JESUS CHRIST, The Light of GOD Incarnate. Those who love things of this world and themselves, rather than The Almighty and their neighbour as and above themselves, live their lives in the darkness of sin, sorrow, suffering and death, both earthly and – GOD forbid - eternal.

The evil one, the devil, is forever at work to keep men in the darkness, that they may be his pawns and property now and forever and not enter into The Kingdom of Heaven! Saint Paul observes this in II CORINTHIANS 4:3-4, “But if our Gospel [of JESUS CHRIST] be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest The Light of The glorious Gospel of CHRIST, Who is The Image of GOD, should shine unto them.”

How sad that this should be for so many souls and so many lives! For GOD does not desire that any should perish, but that all men should live in His Presence now and forever. But this is not possible if our souls are drenched in the darkness of debauchery and damnation! The prophet declares The Word of GOD for us in EZEKIEL 18:31-32, “Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith The Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye!”

Now JESUS CHRIST is The Light of the world, The Truth Incarnate of The Living GOD, come to rescue we His people from the darkness of death in our lives and our souls. He is The Word of GOD, The Eternal pre-existing Logos, Who offers to guide our lives and souls into His marvelous Light both now and forever! PSALM 119:105 declares, O LORD, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path!” How foolish we are when we refuse His great Mercy at The Cross!

JOHN 3:22-30

²² After these things came JESUS and His disciples into the land of Judaea; and there He tarried with them, and baptized.

²³ And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

²⁴ For John was not yet cast into prison.

²⁵ Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.

²⁶ And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to Whom thou barest witness, behold, The Same baptizeth, and all men come to Him.

²⁷ John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from Heaven.

²⁸ Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not The CHRIST, but that I am sent before Him.

²⁹ He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.

Saint John The Baptist realized and openly confessed that he, though having come mightily in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way for The Coming of The Messiah, must decrease as CHRIST increases. If we are to be true servants of our Lord, we must seek to do His will and serve Him by serving others with a humble heart. The blessed Gospel of salvation offered to all men is not about us, but about JESUS.

We are all called to preach it, sometimes by words, but always by our actions. JESUS commands us in JOHN 13:34-35, "A new Commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." As it is attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, "Preach The Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words." As John The Baptist says, and so must we if we are CHRIST's, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

JOHN 3:31-36

³¹ He that cometh from Above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from Heaven is above all.

³² And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony.

³³ He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that GOD is true.

³⁴ For he whom GOD hath sent speaketh The Words of GOD: for GOD giveth not The Spirit by measure unto him.

³⁵ The Father loveth The Son, and hath given all things into His hand.

³⁶ He that believeth on The Son hath everlasting life: and He that believeth not The Son shall not see life; but the wrath of GOD abideth on him.

What a frightful thing Saint John declares here at the end of this chapter, that if a man turns from The Son of GOD – JESUS CHRIST – the wrath of The Almighty shall come to abide, to live, to hover over, to judge and crush him! Saint John testifies that The Words he records from John The Baptist are truth because They are from the very mouth of GOD. Moses declares in DEUTERONOMY 32:4 of The LORD that "He is The Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a GOD of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." GOD The Father having given all things into the hands of GOD The Son, so also is The Son our Rock, The Perfect One, full of truth and righteousness, judging us in His mercy and truth.

[Hebrew Old Testament from <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0.htm>]

[English Bible quotes from King James Version]