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Nicodemus (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this recording, Steve Gregg discusses the second part of Nicodemus from John 3, referencing Romans 7:5-6 and Ezekiel 36 in relation to Jesus' teachings on being born again. He delves into the different interpretations of Ezekiel 36, suggesting that being born again is crucial to forming a spiritual relationship with God. Gregg also emphasizes the importance of developing spiritual senses and being honest with oneself before God, as those who commit to the truth will receive eternal life.

Transcript

The contrast in Romans 7 verses 5 and 6 is between then and now. Now, in verse 6, is when we've been delivered from the law. It's clearly since we've been saved.

Before that, we were in the flesh. That's another way of saying in Adam. In the spirit is another way of saying in Christ.

We can see that from Romans 8, where he says, in verse 9, Now, if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he is not his. If the spirit dwells in you, that's if you're a Christian, you're in the spirit. Being in the spirit and being in Christ are essentially the same thing.

Being in Adam and in the flesh are the same thing to Paul. Now, bring that back to John chapter 3. We may find, actually, in John chapter 3, the words of Jesus that gave Paul this vocabulary. Because Jesus said in verse 6, That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

It remains flesh. It remains in the realm of flesh. It's never anywhere but in the flesh.

And that which is born of the spirit, it takes that to be in the spirit, to become a spiritual person. And, of course, being born again is the transition point. Now, as I said, this is the second possible meaning of born of water and born of the spirit.

Is that born of water is physical birth. That which is of the flesh. And results, no matter how many times you do it, you'll still remain flesh.

Going back into your mother's womb and being born again isn't going to help. Because if

you could do that, you'd still come out flesh. If you could do it ten times, you'd still come out flesh.

But one time, being born of the spirit is enough to make you a spiritual person. To be able to worship God in spirit and to relate to him as a spiritual person. Now, there is a third possible interpretation of that expression, born of water and born of the spirit.

I have no problems with the second. But the third is also reasonable. A number of commentators believe these days that Jesus was referring back to a promise concerning the new covenant.

Found in Ezekiel chapter 36. If you turn there, you'll see what we mean. In Ezekiel chapter 36, beginning with verse 25 and down through verse 27.

This promise is made, and it has to do with the new covenant. It says, then I will sprinkle clean water on you. This verse, by the way, is also the verse that's used as a rationale for sprinkling as a mode of baptism.

As opposed to immersion. I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

I will give you a new heart and a new spirit within you. I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. That's a soft heart, instead of a hard heart.

And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and you will keep my judgments and do them. Now, here he speaks of a changed heart. Just like Jeremiah does when he talks about writing his laws on our hearts.

This is talking about the same thing in just different words. Changing your heart. It's almost like, instead of writing my laws on it, I'll just give you a new one.

With the laws already factory installed. Now, the point here is this is described in terms of God sprinkling them with water and giving them a new spirit. Or, in the second instance, verse 27, giving them his spirit.

Some have felt that when Jesus talked about being born of the water and the spirit, he was not talking about two things, but one thing. One second birth. In other words, Jesus is not even talking about the first birth in that statement.

He's just talking about being born again. That being born again is itself a birth of water and of the spirit. Getting those expressions from this passage in Ezekiel.

Now, it's true, Ezekiel doesn't use the word born or birth or reborn or anything like that. But it does talk about a new heart. And a new life.

And a new spirit. It's sort of like a baby has a brand new heart, a new life, and so forth.

And it's possible that Jesus intended for Nicodemus to relate back to this idea.

At least many commentators feel that is so. And that being born of the water and of the spirit are simply two ways of designating the same experience. When you're born again, you are born of this experience where you're sprinkled with clean water and receive new spirit, new heart, and so forth.

That is a possible meaning. It perhaps is not as easy to read into the passage as the second. But those three views have prevailed among different commentators and interpreters of John 3.5. Some understand it to be water baptism and spirit baptism.

Some refer to it to be a contrast between natural birth and spiritual birth. And a third category believe that it's just an expanded way of talking about spiritual birth. Just being born again is being born of the water and of the spirit as per the language of Ezekiel.

I think all things considered, I still lean toward the second view, which I've held most of my life. And Jesus is saying that being born once is not enough. Even if you've been born of impeccable Jewish parentage, you still have to be born of the spirit.

You're a Jew, but you're a flesh Jew. That true Israel and true circumcision is not of the flesh, but of the spirit. So, this man was probably surprised by this, because Jesus is essentially saying you have to go back to square one.

You've got to start over. You've spent years of your life rising through the ranks, climbing the rungs of success in the Jewish order. You started out with a good pedigree and moved up from there.

Ascending, getting your education, running for office, or however they got into the Sanhedrin. I'm not sure exactly how they got that office, but he jumped through the hoops. Somehow, he got there.

And no doubt felt like he was well advanced above most of his countrymen, in terms of having the likelihood of privilege in the kingdom of God. But Jesus says, no, not even close. You've got to start all over again on a different basis.

Everything you've done is in the flesh. You've got to start all over, get born all over again of the spirit. And then you can see the kingdom.

In verse 3, he put it, you can't see the kingdom without this rebirth. In verse 5, he says you can't enter the kingdom without it. Possibly both expressions are synonymous.

Now in verse 7, Jesus said, apparently noticing the shock on the man's face, the astonishment, he said, don't marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it. But you cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes.

So is everyone who is born of the spirit. Now, Jesus compares what he's talking to with the wind. But what is the comparison he's making? Does it mean those who are born of the spirit, you don't know where they're coming from or where they're going? No, that's something different.

What I think he's saying is this. There is a mystery about what he's talking about. The things of the spirit are mysterious.

A natural man, for one thing, can't receive them. They're spiritually discerned. That's what Paul said anyway in 1 Corinthians 2, 14 and 15.

Their foolishness to the natural man, the things of the spirit, they're mysterious to him. They have to be revealed. The wind is like that, sort of in the natural.

Wind is something that we take for granted, we all believe in it, but no one's ever seen it. You've never seen the wind, it's an invisible thing. Now, Jesus doesn't make this point, though I suppose he could have.

You do see, of course, the effect of the wind. You see branches and leaves blowing and papers blowing and so forth. You see the effect the wind has, but you don't see the wind itself.

Jesus, if he wanted to make a slightly different point, could have pointed out that that's how it is with those who are born in the spirit. You don't really see the spirit, you don't see God, but you see the effect he has on the lives of those that he blows upon. But Jesus was making, apparently, a much more generic point even than that.

Simply that, listen, there are mysteries in life that we take in stride that doesn't prevent us from accepting them. Something as common and as everyday and mundane as the wind, which is probably blowing at that very moment while he's speaking. We can hear it whistling, we hear it, we know it's there, there's no question about it, but there's many mysteries about it.

We can't tell you where it came from, who can say where the wind started or where it'll end? Well, our modern meteorologists can sort of help out along that now, but they certainly didn't have any way of doing that then. What he was saying is, even in familiar things, there is mystery. So why are you having a problem with me introducing a mystery in the spiritual realm? Should it be astonishing that the spiritual realm has some things that are mysterious and that defy analysis, just like the natural world has? And I think that's what Jesus meant a little later when he said, if I've spoken to you of earthly things and you haven't believed me, how will you do when I just speak of spiritual things or heavenly things? What earthly things is he talking about? I'm not sure, but he may mean the things he's been talking about so far, he's been using earthly analogies.

Birth, wind, things like that. I mean, what if I dispense with the analogies and only speak

in spiritual words and so forth? Then you'll really have problems. The idea, however, is that he's trying to make his information accessible to Nicodemus.

He's not trying to be mysterious. He's not trying to be elusive. He's not trying to avoid issues.

He's trying to help the man through the fact that the man is totally unspiritually minded. The man didn't have a concept of being born of the Spirit. The Jews, it was hard for them to have that concept because everything about their religion, they've been conditioned from youth to think in terms of ritual and outward observance and outward cleanliness and washings and stuff like that.

To even be aware of the whole spiritual side of a relationship with God, it was hard for them. It just wasn't in their thinking. And I think Jesus is trying to say, listen, get used to it.

You accept other mysteries like the wind. You don't know where it comes from, where it's going. It's that way with being born of the Spirit.

There can be some things you won't understand. How can a person be born of the Spirit? Well, that's for God to know. It's not anything so easy as just going back into the womb and being born again.

It's something much more mysterious than that, even like the wind is. It defies analysis from a human point of view in some ways. And Nicodemus answers in verse 9 and says, how can these things be? Nicodemus doesn't have a very large speaking part in this story.

It's sort of like the agnostic in my dialogue on agnosticism. He's just there to feed opportunities for the Christian to speak. Sort of like the straight man in the old-fashioned comedy teams.

The guy sets up the other guy to make the joke or something. Nicodemus is just there to give Jesus a chance to say his lines, as it were. And I don't mean to say that that's a literary device.

I think it really happened this way. Nicodemus comes in and makes some introductory remarks. And after that, he has nothing to say except questions.

And the questions give Jesus the opportunity to clarify what he said in the first place. The first thing Nicodemus said after his initial opening remark was in verse 4, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Then he doesn't speak again until verse 9 where he says, how can these things be? And that's the last he says on record here in this story. He speaks again in chapter 7 in another context.

In other words, we don't get much out of Nicodemus here. We get him presenting an opportunity for Jesus to explain or to present these ideas. But we don't really get a feel for how Nicodemus left the conversation.

How it affected him. Last we hear, he's still asking for more clarity. However, in the other places where Nicodemus is mentioned, which we looked at already in John 7, he actually seems to feebly speak up in Jesus' defense.

His compatriots are already condemning Jesus without a trial. He says, does our law condemn a man before it hears him? And that's all he says. But obviously he's speaking up to bring a little moderation and a little more fairness into the way that they were going to treat Jesus.

And then of course finally, along with Joseph of Arimathea, ends up taking the body of Jesus and burying it. Which raises questions about whether it's right for us to think that his coming by night is an evidence of his being ashamed to be seen with Jesus. Some people think so.

It's possible that he came by night in the first place, not because of any shame. After all, if he was representing a group that sent him, he could hardly have any interest in concealing the fact that he was going. His countrymen may have sent him.

He may have been officially going. The fact that he went at night may not be as significant as preachers sometimes make it. It may just be that he'd had a long day and was busy and couldn't come until night.

Or maybe the crowds were around Jesus so much in the day, he had to wait until Jesus was alone. So we shouldn't read too much into the fact that it was night time, trying to get something out of Nicodemus' attitude. He was a teachable guy.

Confused, and he didn't know quite how to respond. But it seems like in his later actions, what few are recorded of him, he became a believer. And while we don't read of it in this particular account, it would appear that he did take what Jesus said to heart.

The last thing he says is, how can these things be? And Jesus answered and said to him in verse 10, Are you the teacher of Israel and you don't know these things? That's kind of an acrostic remark. Can you call yourself a teacher? I'm just talking to you, the ABCs here. How come you don't know this? You are the teacher of Israel? Now, it does seem as if the teacher of Israel should have known these things.

Jesus was quite right in showing astonishment. The guy should have been able to read the Old Testament and tell that God was looking for a spiritual relationship with people. God wanted people to love him.

God was looking for truth in the inner parts. Anyone who read the Psalms would certainly

know that God was looking for a pure heart and clean hands and a spiritual relationship with God. Having read Ezekiel or Jeremiah, he should have known that God had mentioned the new covenant would be characterized by changes of heart and change in the spirit.

It should not be surprising to him that the Messiah would introduce a new spiritual order or that he would emphasize that those are important things. Even David emphasized those. So the teacher of Israel should have been a little more on the ball about this kind of stuff.

However, of course, he was a product of his generation and these kinds of things were not the emphasis of Judaism at that time. So Jesus, no doubt this remark stung him a little bit, stung Nicodemus. Are you the teacher of Israel and you don't know these things? What a thing to say to a guy who has some reputation, some ego in his position as a teacher.

Most assuredly, I say to you, we speak what we know and testify what we have seen and you do not receive our witness. There have been many conjectures as to who we and our refer to. Since Jesus is the speaker and he's speaking in the first person plural, obviously he's one of the pluralities he's referring to, but who are the others? There must be at least one other he has in mind besides himself.

Now, perhaps one of the first things that comes to Christian's minds is he's referring to the Father and probably to the whole Godhead, the Father and the Holy Spirit and himself, so that all three of them are testifying. I suspect, though, that that is not what he meant and not how Nicodemus would have been intended to understand it. There had been another witness like Jesus that had gotten the attention of the Pharisees and of the Sanhedrin.

That was John the Baptist. And he said the same kinds of things that Jesus did. In fact, he even said that he that comes after me would be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

And he mentioned there would be a spiritual aspect to this new order. And John the Baptist is probably the one that Jesus is referring to. Our testimony, we speak what we've seen and heard.

Probably it's himself and John. In favor of that theory, we can look back at what John actually has recorded as having said in John chapter 1, where he was bearing witness to Jesus. Look at John 1, verse 29 and following.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me. I did not know him, but that he should be revealed to Israel.

Therefore I came baptizing with water. And John bore witness, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and he remained upon him. I did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, Upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God. Now notice what John says. I have seen and I have testified.

Look at Jesus' words in John 3. In verse 11, Assuredly we say to you and we speak what we know and testify what we have seen. Specifically it says we testify what we have seen. Those are John's exact words about himself.

I have seen and I testify. And now Jesus is adding himself as a second witness. I have seen what I'm talking about too and I know what I'm talking about.

And he explains that somewhat more in verse 13 or else John does by way of explanation. Anyway, he's saying you have had two witnesses, John the Baptist and me. And we're talking, you know, we're not talking through our hats, we're not just guessing.

We have seen and know what we're talking about. John the Baptist saw something happen and he knew what he was talking about. And his testimony is therefore credible.

My testimony is likewise, he says, and therefore you have two witnesses. And yet you do not receive our witness. Now under the Jewish law, it would take two witnesses to establish any point.

That's actually in Deuteronomy that says that. I think it's in chapter 19. And that being so, Jesus is pointing out that the Jews, even under their own law, should believe what Jesus is saying because he's a second witness, John being the first.

And yet he points out you have witnesses, two witnesses on this point, but you don't receive it. You don't receive the witness of these two. He says in verse 12, if I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? Now he may be addressing something here that Nicodemus needs to notice about himself.

And that is that he's not disposed to believe as much as he needs to be. He's being more skeptical than necessary. Jesus said, I've made it easy for you.

I've spoken to you in earthly terms. That should be a lot easier for you. Paul said to the Corinthians, when I came to you, I couldn't speak to you as unto wise men or as spiritual.

I had to speak unto you as carnal and babes. I gave you milk and not solid food because you weren't able to receive it. Even now you're not able, he says.

This is 1 Corinthians 3, the opening verses. Jesus did that with this guy. He had to give

him milk.

I have to use things that have clear, natural, earthly analogies. It makes it a lot easier for you. Paul does that too sometimes.

He says, I speak to you, you know, because of the weakness of your flesh, I speak to you as a man or whatever. He basically says, I'm giving you human analogies and things that will help you because you're not really very spiritual. And you can't understand these things very well.

But Jesus is saying, even so, even though I've reduced this down to an earthly comparison to make it easy, you're still having trouble with it. You're still not accepting it. And if you're not accepting it at this level, what makes you think you could accept it if I get into the meat, if I get into the solid stuff, the heavenly things, the things for which no earthly analogy will serve? I mean, for example, what earthly analogy could ever clarify the issue of the Trinity? I can think of none.

A lot of people have tried very hard to think of analogies. And I've heard many of them, but none of them are perfect, and most of them are probably misleading. The Bible doesn't give us any analogies for it.

It's probably something for which we have no frame of reference on earth. And we only have to accept the words and take them at face value and not try to picture it by any analogy. There are spiritual things for which no earthly counterpart exists.

But thus far, Jesus has been talking to Nicodemus about things that he could compare with birth. That's something well known in the earth. With wind, things easy to hopefully relate with.

But the guy's even having trouble with that. And Jesus may be pointing out, you know, you're a little bit too unteachable here. I've made it as easy as possible, and you're having trouble accepting it.

I've got deeper things than this, heavenly things to tell. But if you can't accept it at this level, you're going to have serious problems. You're just not going to get it, you know, when I get on to the advanced stuff.

Really, I think it's what he's saying. He said to his disciples in the upper room, even after three and a half years of being with him, he said, I still have many things to say to you, but you're not yet able to receive them, not able to endure them, he said. But when the Holy Spirit comes, he'll take care of that.

He'll lead you into all truth. That is John 16 verses 11 and 12. No, 12 and 13.

John 16, 12. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

However, when he, the Spirit of Truth, will come, he will guide you into all truth.

More things to say, but I can't give them to you now because you're not ready for them. He's saying the same thing to Nicodemus here. I've given you the ABCs.

I've given you the simple math facts. But what's going to happen when we have to go into trigonometry? You haven't even gotten this yet. So let's try to learn the lessons as they come to us.

And when we're faithful with that which is least, we can go on to other things. The writer of Hebrews complained that his readers had never grown up, although they'd had ample opportunity to. In Hebrews chapter 5, he said in verse 12, actually just before this in Hebrews 5, that the writer tried to introduce the idea of the priesthood of Melchizedek, which is a spiritual concept, and he realized that his readers may not be able to get it.

And he says in Hebrews 5, 11, Of whom, meaning Melchizedek, we have much to say and hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. Then in verse 12 he says, For though by this time you ought to be teachers. Are you the teacher of Israel? You don't understand these things? You people by now should be teachers.

Implying that they'd been Christians for some time. But you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. And you have become, you've come to need milk and not solid food.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he's a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age. That is, those who by reason of use have their senses, and I take this must be the spiritual senses, exercised to discern good and evil.

You don't discern moral issues with your physical senses. That's a spiritual thing. You've got to develop your spiritual senses.

Those who by reason of use, that is, they put to use what little they've got, they develop spiritual discernment. They exercise their senses to discern between good and evil. And that qualifies them for the solid food.

He says, you people aren't there yet. You're only ready for milk. Nicodemus wasn't there yet.

He couldn't even grasp the milk. He was having a hard time with that. And he says, what are you going to do when I have to introduce more solid concepts, heavenly things? The question is rhetorical.

The answer, of course, is implied. You won't do well at all. Now, as I said earlier, John 3.13 is questionable.

John may be interjecting his explanatory comments here on what Jesus has just said. Or Jesus himself may be going on about it. My views on it have shifted various ways over the years.

I just don't know. But I could see it either way. It says, no one has ascended to heaven, but he who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man, who is in heaven.

And as I pointed out to you earlier in this session, the expression, who is in heaven, is omitted from the Alexandrian text, which might just remove a difficulty. Now, one thing about textual criticism, deciding which manuscript is more likely to be authentic, one of the rules, there are certain rules that guide textual critics in deciding between variant readings that are possible. Generally speaking, the more difficult reading is to be preferred.

Because there is more of a tendency of a copyist to smooth out a difficulty that's already in the original, than to create new ones. Without doubt, this statement, that the Son of Man is in heaven, in a passage that appears to be coming from the mouth of Jesus himself, when he was not in heaven but on earth, is a difficulty. And therefore, that in itself may mean it's authentic.

Because a copyist is not likely to have added it to those manuscripts that contain it. It's more likely they would have omitted it from the ones that don't contain it. Because I'd like to omit it, if I could.

I mean, it would make it a lot easier. Now, some people who believe that phrase is authentic, and they do consider it to be a statement of Jesus, they would say, well, Jesus, even when he was on earth, was still in heaven and elsewhere. They're essentially saying Jesus was omnipresent, even when he was on earth.

However, I don't think the scripture would support that notion, that Jesus was omnipresent, even while on earth. Because, for example, in John chapter 11, when Lazarus died, and Jesus announced to his disciples, our friend Lazarus has died, his next comment was, and I'm glad that I was not there. Apparently there was some place he was not.

In fact, he wasn't there, he was in this one place where his body was. Jesus was confined to a physical body during his lifetime, and in my understanding, was not omnipresent. Therefore, for him to be on earth and say, I am in heaven also, wouldn't be an affirmation of his omnipresence.

One could say, well, aren't we sort of on earth and in heaven too? I mean, doesn't it say in Ephesians 2.6 that we are seated in Christ in heavenly places, and yet here we are right on earth. Couldn't Jesus mean that about himself? I don't think so. I don't think it would fit as well as Ephesians 6 does of us.

The reason we are seated in Christ in heavenly places is because he is there. He is physically ascended. He's gone.

He's not here, he's there, and we are found in him by virtue of God's decree. We are credited as being in him, and that's the only sense in which we're there. We're not really there.

We are counted as being there in him. He is there as our representative. We are not literally there.

We're here. We're not leading a double life in two different worlds. We do relate simultaneously to the spiritual and to the physical, but we do so from one point in space, right here where we are.

In Christ, we are counted as having died. We are counted as having raised from the dead. We are counted as having ascended.

We are counted as being seated at the right hand of God. All these things have to do with, I believe, the legal standing of the Christian in Christ. But to speak of actually being two places at once would seem to speak of astral projection.

My body is here, but my spirit is somewhere else. That's not what the Bible teaches. And therefore, I don't think that Paul's comment that we are seated in Christ and heavenly places provides an analogy that would work for Jesus being on earth and saying he was in heaven at the same time.

It doesn't strike me as being comparable. I think that if the expression that the Son of Man is in heaven, in verse 13, is authentic and part of the original, it must suggest that John has now taken up the pen to comment on what Jesus had just said. And, well, he might.

Because Jesus had just made a comment about John the Baptist and himself bearing witness of what they had seen and what they knew. It's possible that John the writer might wish to clarify that and say, well, you know, the reason Jesus said he saw and knew is because, after all, he came right down from heaven. No one else has done that.

He lives in heaven even now. He's gone back there. From the vantage point of the writer, Jesus had ascended by the time this book was written.

And that could be what he means there. And he says, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so, must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Now here, it has the appearance of being Jesus talking because it speaks the Son of Man must be lifted up.

Which sounds like a future thing. John, we would think, might not be saying that. Now,

again, parentheses are not used in the Greek.

It's possible that verse 13 alone belongs in parentheses. Just as in John 7, verse 39 has to be in parentheses. Now, the parentheses are, in fact, supplied by the translators in chapter 7. I guess they're not here, but they are in some translations.

But I mentioned this passage earlier today. John 7, 37 through 39. Verses 37 and 38 have a statement by Jesus.

And then in verse 39, John's comment about it, which could be put in parentheses. But it's possible that in John 3, verse 13 also belongs in parentheses. John is making this expanding comment on what Jesus had just said.

That Jesus knew and saw and so forth because he actually had come down from heaven. And even at the time of writing, was back there. The only other thing that makes sense is that that expression, who is in heaven, isn't part of the original.

And that those manuscripts that leave it out, they leave it out because it wasn't part of the original. If that is true, then there's nothing about verse 13 that couldn't also have been part of what Jesus said. But Jesus said, and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.

That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Now, at this point alone, Jesus, if he is speaking to Nicodemus still at this point, is finally saying what a man must do to be born again. He's been talking somewhat philosophically about the fact that being born of the flesh isn't good enough.

And that to be spiritual, you've got to be born of the spirit and so forth. But that's nice to say, but how do you do it? Of course, the obvious question in Nicodemus' mind is going to be, well, that sounds great. What do you do? Where do I apply? How do you get born of the spirit? It's not enough just to know that that's necessary.

I don't instinctively know how to do that. And so it's possible that Jesus is finishing out his discourse here to Nicodemus by saying, now this is how it's done. Whoever believes in the Son of Man when he is lifted up shall have everlasting life.

Will be born again. Will have a spiritual and enduring life. So we see then that being born again comes about by faith when we believe on him.

Now, the comparison of the serpent that Moses raised up in the wilderness is a little perplexing. There's a certain appropriateness about the illustration because the people he's referring to, who got saved looking at the serpent, actually healed, they had been bit by snakes. The story, of course, is in the book of Numbers, chapter 21.

And because of the rebellion, God had sent fiery serpents to bite and to kill many of the

Israelites. And many were perishing of snake bite. And Moses interceded for them and God said, okay, make a serpent of bronze, put it up on a pole, and anyone who looks at it will be healed of their snake bite.

So they were. Now, this makes a very good analogy in one way of Jesus being lifted up on a pole. Actually, the word pole in Numbers is a banner pole.

A banner pole was an upright pole with a cross beam from which banners were hung when marching to war. So this serpent was actually put on a cross-shaped structure. And Jesus says it's like that.

The people who looked at the serpent on the cross, as it were, on the pole, they were healed of their snake bite. All of humanity has been bitten by the serpent, Satan, and are dying from that malady that has come about from it. And it's as we look to the Messiah, the Son of Man, who is lifted up on the cross, just like the serpent was lifted up on the pole, that we will be healed of this malady.

We'll have a spiritual healing, a salvation experience. We'll have eternal life. Just as the Jews who looked at the snake on the pole, they were doomed to die unless they did so because they were dying of snake bite, and their lives were prolonged as a result of looking at it.

So our lives, believing in Jesus, are prolonged actually forever. And the sickness of sin is undone. Now, what is difficult about this is that a snake would be used as a type of Christ.

This is the difficulty. Especially in view of the fact that God must have intended, when he told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole, that he intended that Jesus would later make this comment about it, and that this bronze snake was intended to be a type of Christ. I don't know what Ron might have said, if anything, about this problem when he taught through numbers.

But I think there's a couple of possibilities. It has been suggested that Jesus on the cross, as the Bible says, became sin for us. A transaction happened in the sight of God where all of our wickedness, all of our devilry was imputed to him, and he was counted as a sinner.

Not only as a sinner, but bearing all the sin of all the world upon him. And dying as a criminal. That's what his substitutionary death was all about.

Our sin was transferred to him. He actually became, somehow in the sight of God, guilty of sin. He became the rankest of sinners, without ever committing a sin.

It says in 2 Corinthians 5.21, He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. And it's possible that Jesus on the cross, what is

being conveyed there by a serpent, is that he became as vile in the sight of God, as the devil himself, who is the one normally represented by serpents in the Bible. Jesus is only here.

And it's possible that it's saying something like, Jesus on the cross actually became a loathsome thing in the sight of God. As a sinner, he took on sin. And was more like the devil than like God at that moment.

Not because Jesus really, in his character, became like the devil. But just in the judgment of God, all of our wickedness was transferred to Jesus. And he had to be treated as if he were that way.

Now, I'm not real happy with that explanation. There's another one that I like better. Another possibility that I think is probably better.

Is that, even though Jesus died on the cross, it wasn't Jesus who really was defeated there. It was the devil that was defeated there. Jesus crushed the serpent's head when the serpent bruised his heel.

It says in Colossians 2.15, it says that Jesus disarmed principalities and powers and made a show of them, triumphing over them in the cross. Colossians 2.15. Also, in Hebrews 2.14. Hebrews 2.14 says that Jesus, through death, destroyed him who had the power of death. That is, when Jesus died on the cross, he destroyed the devil.

And, you know, the world saw Jesus on the cross. The world saw the end of Jesus, as far as they were concerned. The death of Jesus.

The defeat of Jesus. But in fact, what was happening when Jesus died on the cross was the defeat of the devil. It was as good as if the devil himself had been nailed on the cross, because it was really he who was being crushed.

It was he who was being destroyed in that act. Now, it's not at all clear why God told the Jews to make, or Moses, to make a bronze serpent. The serpent was the problem.

We didn't need another serpent, bronze or otherwise. Why make a bronze serpent? Why not make a bronze lamb to represent Jesus? And whoever looks at the lamb will be cured of their snakebite. I'm not sure, but possibly in the eyes of Moses and his contemporaries, the hanging of a serpent on the pole was suggesting the destroying of a serpent.

The raising up or the crucifixion of Jesus was something that, you know, was the destruction of a man when he was crucified, generally speaking. So the serpent being raised up might have implied destruction of the serpents, or of their effect. And people who looked at that would be healed of their snakebite.

But it's still an unnatural thing to our minds for Jesus to be represented by a type which was a serpent in numbers. But I think it probably is done that way in order to portray the idea that Jesus, in dying, really won the victory over Satan. It was Satan who was defeated there at the cross, not Jesus.

And, you know, I don't know if that's the correct explanation, but it's hard to know what is, if not that. Now, let's see, we're just about out of time here. How are we doing? About five minutes.

Let me take five minutes and we'll talk about these remaining verses. These verses actually deserve more time, but actually some of them I've talked about several times already this year, because the verses about light and darkness are very important. Verses that have come up under other headings.

But in verse 16, it says, Now notice the last line of that very famous verse is just like the last line of verse 15, Now, as I said, verses 14 and 15 seem to be predicting Jesus' death. The Son of Man must be lifted up in the future. Which makes it sound like Jesus is probably saying those words.

But at verse 16, it's possible that John is now commenting again, springboarding from that last line in verse 15. These people who believe in Jesus will not perish, but have eternal life. Now, either Jesus just repeated himself in verse 16 when he made the same comment, or else maybe John is saying, this is what it's all about.

God sent his Son. Now, Jesus could have made the remark in verse 16, we just don't know. But he makes essentially the same remark in verse 15 and 16.

Essentially, those who believe in Jesus will not perish, but have eternal life. And this is because God loved the world and sent Jesus. And it says in verse 17, We are not here to condemn the world either.

He didn't send us into the world to condemn people. Although sometimes a message of life, or of light, is received like condemnation. And that's not our fault.

Jesus' message was like condemnation some too. But that's not because Jesus condemned everyone. They were already condemned before he got here.

That's why he had to come. No one got more condemned by Jesus than they already were. His coming simply illustrated that they were condemned.

Exposure to him brought out what was in their hearts, what was hidden before. It says in verse 18, Because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 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.

Their deeds were already evil before the light came. Jesus was the light, and when he came, he exposed their deeds as evil. They were condemned already before God, because he already knew their deeds were evil.

But they felt condemned when their deeds were exposed. They felt embarrassed, they felt naked, like Adam and Eve after they sinned, and wanted to cover themselves. People want to cover their wickedness if they are committed to evil.

If people, however, are committed to truth, even though the light brings to light embarrassing things about ourselves, we don't hide them. We want to walk in the light. And John brought this out in his first epistle in chapter 1 also.

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another. And he explains that further by talking about if we confess our sins, rather than if we say we are not sinners. All those verses, 1 John 1, verses 6-10, are about that walking in the light, letting people see our faults, confessing our sins rather than hiding them.

It says in verse 21, He who does the truth, and that would be anyone who is committed to truth in principle, even unflattering truth about himself, comes to the light that his deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done in God. A person who has an honest heart before God is not afraid of exposure. Sometimes there will be embarrassing things, but most of the time if a person's heart is honest before God, he'll have nothing to hide.

His deeds are done in God and the light won't bring anything embarrassing to light. But even if it does, his love for truth makes him prefer the light, even the embarrassment and shame that the light brings upon his evil deeds, rather than wanting to recoil into a more comfortable place in the dark corners where his wickedness doesn't have to be confronted or changed. And this is where really the two categories of men are seen, those who are condemned and those who are not.

Those who are condemned are condemned because they reject such light as has come to them. Not everyone has received the same amount of light. Jesus, of course, is the ultimate light that God has given to the world, but some people have light from other sources, from their conscience, for instance, or from nature that declares the glory of God, and they even read Bell against that light.

So, people can condemn themselves without ever hearing about Jesus, and God doesn't owe it to them to save them somehow. Anytime a person rejects what light they have, they're rejecting integrity, they're rejecting truth, and to not love truth is something that God judges people for, as we know from many passages of Scripture. Well, we've run out of time, so we'll stop there, and I think this is where we're supposed to stop anyway.

Somehow we made it through verse 21.