

The scripture reading was John 3: 1-21

Verse #16 is so famous. Today we're going to contemplate the depth of what Yeshua was saying in these verses. Nicodemus had a feeling. He was drawn to the Messiah but was torn. He came by night to conceal his actions from his peers. We view this as shameful, but at least he came. He had to know more. He knew the scriptures and understood what he was seeing with his own eyes was a man from Yahweh. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews and a Pharisee but called the teacher with no pedigree Rabbi. This shows lots of respect. Yeshua, knowing He had a captive audience, begins to tell Nicodemus things that will make sense later, but not so much right then.

Slide 2 Yeshua answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (Joh 3:3)

We take this for granted today but it was new information, even to Nicodemus and those who had witnessed or taken part in John's baptism. John baptizing for the forgiveness of sins was new but this phrase of being born again was even more new. And puzzling. Now we know that being born again is our conversion from our worldly selves into a new creation, one born into the family of God. We get to choose to join Yahweh's family. We enter the water as repentant sinners and come out as children of God. This begins a new life of humility, study, and service from whatever age one decides to give their life to Yeshua. Nicodemus would not understand these things for some time yet, even though he desperately desired to know right then.

Slide 3 Yeshua answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life." (Joh 3:10-15)

I didn't realize that being baptized was considered an earthly thing before, but there it is. Nicodemus was just told one specific thing – that we must be born again through baptism. This was so important that Yeshua did it Himself at the beginning of His ministry, even though He's the only being who actually did not need to be born again! Yeshua told them that He had descended from heaven. Nicodemus must have been perplexed to say the least. You have to be born again and now a Rabbi is telling Him He had come down from heaven. We don't get Nicodemus' reaction to this. BTW, the name Nicodemus means "victorious among his people". I wonder how victorious he felt when he watched Yeshua die because this is the same Nicodemus who, despite hearing these

strange things, was there at the cross with Joseph of Arimathea to bring down His lifeless body and anoint it for burial in chapter 19 of John. Here, Nicodemus is at the beginning of Yeshua's ministry and it is very important to see he made it through to the end. Being faithful to the end while not understanding is a tangential lesson for today. Because Yeshua introduces the goal of our faith in this passage: eternal life. He tells Nicodemus, a leader of the Pharisees, that the key to eternal life is to believe in the Son of Man being lifted up like Moses lifted up the serpent – when that made exactly no sense at all. Imagine hearing this for the first time, before the events happened. It would sound like madness. Yet Nicodemus believed to the point of being at the cross to anoint Yeshua's body. And guess what? As far as I can tell this is the first person Yeshua tells about this. Nicodemus was indeed victorious among his people.

Slide 4 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (Joh 3:16-18)

Gave is past tense. Yeshua was declaring victory before it happened. This victory was actually won at the foundation of the world, and I'll get to that in a minute. Because this verse is often cited out of context, we forget that eternal life was mentioned just a couple lines above. It's not just believing Yeshua is the Son of God that is the key to eternal life, oh no, we have to believe that He was crucified as well, just as Moses lifted up the serpent. And, by extension, that He was resurrected from the dead. Believing in that is what saves us from the judgment. The judgment is the resurrection where eternity is decided. Those who belong to Yeshua get resurrected 1000 years earlier at the resurrection of life. By accepting Yeshua as the Messiah, the Son of God, who died innocently and was resurrected by the Father, makes us born again and we do not come into judgment. That doesn't mean we don't sin, oh no, just that our sins are covered by the blood of the Messiah. God sent the Son into the world to give the world a chance at skipping the judgment. Unfortunately, not that many will take the invitation, but we who have heard the good news need to take the invite. Believe, repent, be baptized, and turn to God. Learn His ways and separate from this sinful world.

Believing in the Name. This is why many of us have adopted Yeshua's actual name instead of His traditional Name Jesus. Keep in mind, almost everyone on earth learned the Name of the Son of God as Jesus, so it's not bad to call him that, but once we study to show ourselves approved and learn His actual name is the Hebrew word for Salvation, these verses make a whole lot more sense.

Nicodemus, a leader of the Pharisees, was almost assuredly speaking to the Son of God in the Holy tongue. And when He heard that the world is saved through the Name of the Son of God, he would have gotten it instantly. Being saved by believing in Salvation, it's a triple entendre.

Slide 5 "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." (Joh 3:19-21)

The light of the world. More double and triple entendres. When we speak to each other today, we use our American culture. When we tell each other that it was close to Thanksgiving, we get images in our heads of fall, leaves, a chill in the air, football on TV for a 4 day weekend, turkey, the settling of a continent. This is a close example of how Jews communicated in the first century. They had a culture and their language is part of that culture. Everybody knew it was time for the Messiah based on the Daniel prophesy. So what does that have to do with the light of the world, Chris? The word Messiah means anointed one. The anointing is done with olive oil. Olive oil was crucial to that region not because of food, but because it was how they had light at night or in dark places. The menorah was an olive oil lamp. The ten virgins were to have olive oil in the lamps, not petroleum. When someone is anointed by God for a purpose, oil that produces light is poured on them thus the title of Messiah is tied to light. When it is turned into the Greek word Christos, that word literally means to put oil on something. Nicodemus came to the light in the darkness.

This gets deeper. Remember in Genesis that there was light before there was a sun or moon? Right. The first thing spoken into existence was light. While it can't be proven, I believe Yeshua was that light and He was telling Nicodemus He was that light right here. The light had come into the world. And guess what? Men loved the darkness because their deeds were evil. Today, we see evil in broad daylight. People protesting wanting the extermination of the Jews. People unashamedly protesting in favor of all manner of debauchery. What happens when the Messiah returns? They will flee to the caves to hide themselves from the light. They do not want to operate in the sight of the One who judges the living and the dead. Yeshua's first coming declared judgment on this planet. The light has come into the world. Those who love truth and righteousness embrace the light, even when it shines on our own imperfections. Because we know the light is warm, the light is love, the light gives life. Those who practice evil desire darkness where they believe they are in control. That they can do whatever they feel like doing without fear of judgment. But that judgment is coming, brothers and sisters, and it draws nearer each day.

Slide 6 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Messiah. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1Pe 1:17-21)

From before the foundation of the world, brothers and sisters. The Light came into the world because He was part of a plan that existed from before there was light.

God knew when He made the world all that would transpire. He knew Eve would fall to temptation and Adam would fall. He knew the flood would happen. He knew the Hebrews would be disobedient even after seeing all those miracles in the wilderness. He knew the sordid history of Israel from the crossing of the Jordan until the Maccabean revolt. He knew that the Romans would be occupying Judea at the time His Son would enter the world. He knew Judas would betray Yeshua and Peter would deny His Son three times. He knew it would be the women who would discover the Messiah had been resurrected. He knew the joy His followers would experience at His Son's resurrection and the boldness with which they would preach the Gospel. He knew the Paul of Tarsus would persecute His people, be humbled, and become the greatest evangelist of all time. He knew Christianity would enter dark times, then times of reformation, then times of liberation. He knew America would be established to be a beacon of freedom for the world and become the base of operations for those who acknowledge His Son. He knew that our present troubles would be upon us and upon the Jews. That the nations would continue to wish death on any who follow Him at all. And He knew about the things we have yet to see, culminating in a great and terrible day of judgment for an enormous amount of people who refuse to repent which will then bring forth the kingdom for eternity. And for this, He gave His only begotten Son. He is letting all this play out to show the world that every little thing we did along the way mattered. That we each matter to Him and His Son so much that He gave Yeshua so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.