

“Becoming the Church Per Jesus”

John 3:1-21

February 9, 2014

VIDEO: *Gospel of John 2:13-25*

Introduction: Once again let me remind you...

Context is critical!

Today we're going to look at a section of Scripture that contains what is arguably the most frequently quoted, best known, and widely cherished part of the Bible... John 3:16. And with that, it may surprise you to learn that many (if not most) people who are familiar with this iconic verse do not understand its immediate or applicable context.

With that said, let me remind you of where we have been with God thru John's Gospel up to this point... Once we revisit the first 2 chapters, then, and only then, (if we really want to KNOW what God is saying to us) will we be ready to engage chapter 3's famous encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus...

REVIEW:

John 1:1-18	Theological
John 1:19-34	Christological
John 1:35-51	Evangelical
John 2:1-12	Supernatural
John 2:13-25	Confrontational

T/S: From this contextual vantage point, let us look now into the first 21 verses of chapter 3. As we do, remember this: There are no God given “chapter breaks” in the original text. Consequently, unless the Word says something like: “then a few days later...” – we are to continue reading in the same “context” as the previous verse or chapter. With that understood, the forthcoming exchange with Nicodemus is better understood in the light and context of 2:22-25 than as a stand alone encounter (as 3:1-21 is often considered).

What’s the difference? What’s the big deal?

Answer: It’s like trying to understand two dots... Lets assume the first dot is isolated, alone, and has no surrounding or supportive markings. If I asked you what that dot was doing or how it may prove to be significant, the best you could do is tell me of its “potential” and then speculate if and what it might someday prove to become...

Now, by contrast, let’s take that same dot... but this time, let’s put it in its proper & fuller context. Let’s say this time, the dot in question is in a perfect line with 5 previous dots... So perfect is this line that one cannot ignore nor deny the fact that our “dot” in question is actually a part of a well defined and clearly established “line.” What then can be said of our individual “dot?”

Answer (phase 2): The surrounding context will not only help us to better understand the immediate role and purpose of the “dot;” but moreover, the context (i.e. “line”) also sheds light on where this “dot” is pointing.

So it is when we read & study God’s Word in full and proper context. To ignore this principle truth is to see the Bible as little more than decorative (albeit divine) “dots.” Instead, God would have His children come to the Scriptures in search of defining & refining truth. The Lord wants us to see the proper portrait of His heart and holiness, the full context of His instruction, information, & inspiration.

In short, when Jesus said: “Follow Me” – He knew that you and I would have the Scriptures to lead us... That’s exactly why we need to understand the biblical “lines” (made up of biblical dots) that are here to guide us.

T/S: So today the line of truth in love continues from...

Theological

Christological

Evangelical

Supernatural

Confrontational

“UNIVERSAL” truth in love!

Big Idea: The Gospel is **one size fits ALL!**

Preview:

I. ***Context***

II. ***Conversation***

III. ***Commentary***

VIDEO: ***Gospel of John 3:1-21***

T/S: Let's jump in...

I. Context: "Connect the Dots"

2:23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing. **24** But Jesus on His part did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people **25** and needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; **2** this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

T/S: John's been juxtaposing Jesus vs. Judaism's events & environments...

Jesus was at the wedding CELEBRATION...

Jesus did a Temple CLEANSING of His own...

Jesus went to the CEREMONIAL Passover Feast...

Jesus gets followed by CASUAL, superficial believers

WATCH as John now shifts from the programs to the people

KEY POINT: Nic begins another aspect of John's intentionality... He has shown us that he was contrasting Judaism's "Events & Environments." NOW... he begins to show us how the gospel's message is applied to EVERYONE (watch how the culture's diversity of delinquents is addressed from here on out).

***** Nic is an important dot in a divine line! - JDP**

T/S: To understand Nic's coming... we need to look back a ways and take a little sneak peek ahead:

Connect the dots behind us: Genesis 3:15... Abraham...
Moses... Prophets... John 2:12-25... vv.23-25

Peek ahead at the dots coming: Nic... John the Baptist...
Woman at the well... Samaritan men... Royal
official... Crippled man... Revelation!!!

***** Use the easel to lay out the "dots" into the Gospel "line"**

Bottom line on Context...

Jesus is in the process of CONTRASTING...

Empty religion vs. Eternal relationship

Judaism's perversion vs. Jesus' preservation

“Man-made” vs. Messianic-Miracle!

Jesus is about to make an important “People-Point!”

T/S: Let’s listen in on the conversation so that we can better understand conversion!

Again... remember: ***“One size fits ALL!”***

II. Conversation *(Carnal)*

Confrontation

3 *Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

Confusion

4 *Nicodemus *said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”*

Illustrate Nic with "pin the tail on the donkey" exercise... You can "know" all the pieces of reality AND be more than comfortable in the physical, spiritual, and conversational environment... and still be absolutely clueless and confused when it comes to putting everything together "effectively," as evidenced by its lasting, eternal affects (see 1 Corinthians 2:14).

Certitude

5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Consistency

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

Clarity

7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Comparison

8 The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from

and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Confounded

9 Nicodemus said to Him, **“How can these things be?”**

Challenged

10 Jesus answered and said to him, *“Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?”*

*** Read Ezekiel 36...

Called-Out

11 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.**

Content

12 *If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*

Christ / Christology

13 *No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.*

III. **Commentary** (3:14-21)

"Illustration of Explanation"

14 *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; **15** so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.*

Exegete & Correlate Numbers 21...

Contrast:

Mercy vs. grumbling...

Mercy vs. darkness

Mercy vs. lies

Grace vs. knowledge

Grace vs. position

Grace vs. works

"Declaration of Explanation"

16 *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."*

- A. See the (4) points of the Gospel
 - 1. God
 - 2. Man
 - 3. Sin
 - 4. Response

Note: see Abe sac of Isaac as foreshadow of 3:16... Key for you and me = we are not called to sac our children (that part was pointing at Jesus). Our part, like Abe, is to sac our precious idol(s)... Gal 2:20 addresses that directly & tangentially. We sacrifice "self" out of love for our Savior! As children of God we faithfully follow Christ to the cross, in part, by picking up ours & following Him thru thick and thin - no matter what!

- C. Connect back to "purpose" thru "context"

We receive eternal life by believing. So the greatest explanation follows the greatest illustration.

God	The greatest Lover
so loved	The greatest degree
the world	The greatest company
that he gave	The greatest act
his one and only Son	The greatest gift
that whoever	The greatest opportunity
believes	The greatest simplicity

in him	The greatest attraction
shall not perish	The greatest promise
but	The greatest difference
have	The greatest certainty
eternal life	The greatest possession

In him, we have everlasting life.

John 3:16 is not just a proclamation of holy love, it is also a portrait of the horizontal love that is to permeate and propel every Christ-follower & every Christ-following Church.

Reality check... Most of us don't really like love.... We love like but we don't like love.. Let me explain. Liking is easy as well as defined & applied with common sense boundaries. "Like" lives under the controls of our flesh's auto-pilot. In short, we like what we like and we don't like what we don't like. It's a personal thing... purely subjective. Love, on the other hand, is objective, absolute, and defined biblically in accordance with the heart & character of God. Love is selfless, stretching, and the fruit of one's relationship with our Savior. Paradoxically, love is impossible to experience without the Savior's Spirit in us... and, at the same time, love cannot be systematically silenced or squandered within those whom the Spirit resides.

***** Isaiah 53 *****

"Clarification of Explanation"

17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. **18** 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.

- A. Clarification of PURPOSE
- B. Clarification of PROCESS

"Demonstration of Explanation"

19 *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. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."*

Another Gospel Demonstration

- A. Jesus is the issue! (God)
- B. Humanity has a choice to make... (man)
- C. Humanity loves the darkness... (sin)
- D. Comes or doesn't come to the Light... (response)

Only (2) Options

- A. Light vs. Dark
- B. Good vs. Evil

C.	Love	vs.	Hate
D.	Action	vs.	In-Action
E.	Come	vs.	Complacency
F.	Faith	vs.	Fear
G.	Exposed	vs.	Hidden
H.	“Practices”	vs.	Hypocrisy
I.	Truth	vs.	Lies
J.	Fruit (“of God”)	vs.	“of the Devil”

Reality to Be Realized

- A. Entrance into the kingdom of God has NOTHING to do with who you are (or are not).
- B. Entrance into the kingdom of God has NOTHING to do with what you know (or don't know).
- C. Entrance into the kingdom of God has NOTHING to do with what YOU do... but rather, it has EVERYTHING to do with what CHRIST has DONE on the cross!

Hence...

The Gospel is **one size fits ALL!**

***** read Isaiah 53 *****

Friends... that's GOOD NEWS!

As for the “so what” factor for us... Here's the take-away:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believes in Him will not perish, but will have eternal life.”

- Amen & Amen!

NIV Commentary:

JOHN HAS DESCRIBED the wonder of Jesus through signs worked both in Cana and in Jerusalem (chapter 2). Both deeds—the one miraculous, the other a prophetic sign—unveiled the glory of Christ and demonstrated how the coming of the Messiah not only replaces, but overwhelms the traditional institutions of Judaism. He offers something new and abundant and makes an absolute call on those who would follow him. Jewish ritual vessels and the Jewish temple, both instruments of religious cleansing, now find a replacement in Christ. But in order for this replacement to be complete, we must await "the [hour]" (2:4), the time when "the temple . . . [of] his body" will be torn down and rebuilt (2:19). In other words, Jesus' glorification on the cross will be the turning point in which Judaism discovers its dissolution and renewal.

Setting up text/context:

We should also note that John now employs a literary structure that we will see throughout his Gospel: the *discourse*.

Johannine discourses throughout this Gospel, questions are posed to Jesus in order to transport the story onto a higher plane of discussion. The questioner is often blissfully—and ironically—ignorant of what is being asked of him or her, and this leads to dramatic misunderstandings.

The notion in this and so many other discourses is that unless some deficit is met (generally faith or the Spirit), deeper penetration into the words of Jesus is impossible.

John 3 is also organized with a simple literary pattern. In 3:1-15 a dialogue represents the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. John 3:16-22 has always posed a problem for translators since it is impossible to know where the citation from Jesus ends (since Greek has no quotation marks). It is likely that 3:16 begins another section of commentary provided by the evangelist, which leads us more

deeply into the meaning of the preceding dialogue. Then, in [3:22-36](#) the same pattern follows: An initial dialogue (this time centering on John the Baptist, [3:22-30](#)) is followed by more commentary ([3:31-36](#)), which leads us into insights that compare the respective roles of Jesus and the Baptist. Therefore John has given us two dialogues, each of which concludes with theological remarks that uncover the meaning of what has gone before.

Jesus and Nicodemus ([3:1-21](#))

JOHN GOES ON to give us another glimpse of Jesus and his mission. [John 1:4](#) told us that "in him was life, and that life was the light of [human beings]." Jesus does not merely replace religious institutions, he comes to give life, hope, and renewal to people. Notice how [2:25](#) anticipates the section before us. While he was in Jerusalem, Jesus knew that many people were watching him. But he did not entrust himself to any of them, for he knew the inner character of people. The Greek sets up the present story nicely (lit.): "for he knew what was in a *man* [Gk. *anthropos*]. Now there was a *man* [Gk. *anthropos*] of the Pharisees named Nicodemus ... " ([2:25-3:1](#)).

In other words, Nicodemus steps forward not as a random observer of Jesus, but as a representative of those in Jerusalem who had witnessed the work of Jesus in chapter 2. Moreover, he represents an institution within Judaism: the rabbis or teachers of the law. These were men who specialized in knowing the law, who led in synagogue worship and instruction, and who served as spiritual guides.

The story of Nicodemus, therefore, is another story in which Jesus continues to reverse the prominence of institutions in Judaism—to replace them, to show their incompleteness in light of his arrival, to supplant their function with his own life and work.

John's historical reporting of these episodes is not simplistic. He writes to convert, so that his reader will grow in faith ([20:31](#)). Inasmuch as every episode is designed to speak to John's audience using the uniqueness of a historical figure (the educated, the out-cast, the poor, the wealthy), this is true of [John 3](#). Nicodemus's

encounter with Jesus is a drama describing one night in Jerusalem as well as any possible night anywhere.

We also know he was a rabbi ([3:1](#), [10](#)), a teacher no doubt of some fame.

But "**night**" is also likely a theological symbol (used frequently by John) that expresses Nicodemus's spiritual relation to the truth. John often refers to darkness as the realm of evil, untruth, and unbelief (e.g., [9:4](#); [11:10](#)). **John's subsequent commentary ([3:19ff.](#)) says this plainly: Jesus is light that has come into the world, but men and women prefer darkness. In this case, however, Nicodemus has made a serious choice: He has stepped into the light to make inquiries.**

Nicodemus's first question ([3:2](#)) shows admirable respect. He acknowledges Jesus as a teacher (despite Jesus' lack of credentials, [7:15](#)) and is willing to give him the benefit of the doubt: His activities must come from God and his efforts must have some divine endorsement.

Nicodemus wants to engage Jesus theologically, to launch a discussion. His use of plurals ("*we* know") even suggests he represents a group. Is he an emissary from somewhere? An inquirer assigned to return with a report?

Jesus' response is unexpected ([3:3](#)). Instead of joining Nicodemus by engaging his question, he forces the rabbi to move to another level of inquiry. Jesus is not interested in the divine authentication of signs but in the reality of someone's relationship with God.

Jesus, however, says that there is a new prerequisite to see or enter this kingdom. "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born *again* [Gk. *anōthen*]." *Anōthen* can either mean "again" or "from above," and it is clear from the other Johannine uses that the local sense ("from above") is John's usual meaning ([3:31](#); [19:11](#), [23](#)). But since Nicodemus sees it one way and Jesus means it another, John has provided us here

with one of the first misunderstandings in his Gospel. In order to enter the kingdom, in order to understand divine revelations such as this, one must have an experience that transports beyond the mere observation of "signs." Divine signs are ambiguous without divine aid.

Jesus is driving at something comprehensive, a complete renewal of the whole person. As Calvin commented, "by the word 'born again' he means not the amendment of a part but the renewal of the whole nature. Hence it follows that there is nothing in us that is not defective." [

Nicodemus's second question ([3:4](#))... Above all it shows that Nicodemus is outside the kingdom and that he cannot penetrate its deeper truths. Thus Jesus must explain more fully ([3:5-8](#)). Divine birth is now explained as birth "of water and the Spirit."

...likely view is to see this as a reference to John the Baptist's baptism, which the Gospel has already introduced in the narrative. Nicodemus (by this reading) must submit to the baptism of repentance offered by the Baptist at the Jordan. Following this he can experience the Spirit and transformation.

(4) Another option suggests that "water and Spirit" form a unified concept to express the eschatological renewal promised in the Old Testament. The prophets in particular described a coming era when the transforming Spirit of God would be poured out generously on all people ([Isa. 32:15-20](#); [Joel 2:28](#)). Sometimes this renewal is described metaphorically as water. Note [Isaiah 44:3](#): "For I will pour *water* on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my *Spirit* on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants." Note how *water* and *Spirit* are easily joined as the life-giving gifts of God. This figurative pair appears again and again in the Old Testament, and no doubt [Ezekiel 36:25-27](#) is the most important eschatological image of all. Here Israel's heart will be transformed:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

In other words, Jesus is here pointing to the dawning of a new eschatological era. John the Baptist has inaugurated this era, and submission to his message—his water baptism, which is the precursor for Christian baptism—is expected. Jesus now is the baptizer "in Spirit" ([1:33](#)), who will complete the dawning of this time. But above all, Nicodemus must understand that this era will be an era when the Spirit of God moves among humanity. Jesus compares this with the "wind," another Greek wordplay, since *pneuma* can mean either "spirit" or "wind" ([3:8](#)). Its origin and movements are mysterious, and they cannot be contained by the human religious systems Jesus has already challenged.

Nicodemus's third and final question is rhetorical in the narrative... He is baffled. He is disturbed. His commitment to the Torah and obedience, to prayer and sacrifice, and his understanding of election, responsibility, and privilege have all been challenged. He should have no problem understanding that the Spirit of God can transform; but he is a man standing on the frontier, looking at a new country and wondering how such momentous events will unfold.

For the third (and final) time Jesus begins his answer with (lit.) "Truly, truly I say to you," as if to underscore the importance of what he is about to say ([3:3](#), [5](#), [11](#)) The irony of his response is that he refers to Nicodemus as a rabbi ([3:10](#)), just as Nicodemus had referred to Jesus ([3:2](#)), but now we see that this teacher does not know the answers. Jesus is the only "true rabbi" who can explain the deeper mysteries of God.

The problem rests on a refusal by many (pl. "you" in [3:11b, 12](#)) to receive this testimony and believe. It is not really a problem of knowledge ([3:10](#)). The signs and Scriptures are accessible here on earth, and if these cannot be understood and believed, it is not possible for profound heavenly things to be believed. People who stumble on the elemental teachings of Jesus cannot hope to grasp the deeper realities.

Jesus is unique among all others to disclose these heavenly truths because he is the only one among humankind who has truly entered heaven's realms ([3:13](#)). Human teachers do not have access to this sort of revelation. He alone brings a capacity for disclosure that exceeds both human imagination and wisdom. But just as Jesus descended with this knowledge, making him the unparalleled rabbi, so too Jesus must return ([3:14](#)).

Jesus then refers to a story from [Numbers 21](#), in which Moses built a serpent of bronze and elevated it among the Israelites so that whoever gazed on it would be healed from the snakes that bit them in the desert. In the same manner, Jesus says, he must be "lifted up" in order to become the source of eternal life for all who believe. The Greek *hypsōō* (lift up) is an important Johannine verb to describe Jesus' "ascent" or "lifting up" to the cross ([3:14](#); [8:28](#); [12:32, 34](#)). Luke uses this same verb in Acts for Jesus' ascension/exaltation ([Acts 2:33](#); [5:31](#)). John has in mind that the cross will not simply be a place of sacrifice and suffering, but a place of departure, of return, when Jesus resumes his life with the Father ([17:1-19](#)). Jesus *ascends* to the cross. As we will see later in this Gospel, the cross will actually be a place of glorification.

Many scholars agree that [3:16-21](#) provides reflections or meditations written by John.

The statement that God loves *the world* is surprising on two counts ([3:16](#)). (1) Judaism rarely (or never) spoke of God's loving the world

outside of Israel. God desires to reach this world through Israel, his child. It is a uniquely Christian idea to say that God's love extends beyond the limits of race and nation. (2) John tells his readers elsewhere that they are not to love the world ([1 John 2:15-17](#)) because it is a place of disbelief and hostility (cf. [John 15:18-19](#); [16:8](#)). Carson comments effectively, "There is no contradiction between this prohibition and the fact that God does love it [the world]. Christians are not to love the world with the selfish love of participation; God loves the world with the selfless, costly love of redemption."

This helpful insight gives a clue to what John means by "the world." In John's writings "world" (Gk. *kosmos*) is not a reference to the natural world of trees, animals, and plants—a world defended by the Sierra Club and Green-peace For John *kosmos* (used seventy-eight times in this Gospel, twenty-four times in his letters) is the realm of *humanity* arrayed in opposition to God ([1:9](#); [7:7](#)). Thus Jesus enters this world in his incarnation, knowing that hostility will result and that sacrifice will be needed in order to redeem the world ([1:29](#); [3:17](#); [6:51](#)). This dimension of the Son's work must be underscored: The Son did not come to the world to save a select few (those chosen, those privileged); rather, he came to save *the world*, namely, the all-encompassing circle of men and women who inhabit this planet, people who embrace darkness habitually ([3:19-21](#)).

In this respect, the entry of the Son into the darkness of this world is an act of judgment ([3:19](#); cf. [9:39](#)) inasmuch as divine light has penetrated and unveiled the darkness for what it is. Jesus has not come to condemn the world ([3:17](#)) but to reveal and save, to provide a way of escape for those shuttered in the darkness. His coming does not bring a "verdict" (NIV), but a process by which judgment is active on those who witness his coming. Those who see this light and recognize the tragedy of their own situation have one responsibility: to believe ([3:16](#), [18](#)).

Yet it is not so simple. The affections of people in the world are corrupt; their desires are fallen; they are not eager to be redeemed. They "love darkness instead of light"; in fact, they "hate" the light. This is strong language, which uncovers something of the seriousness of the moral struggle between God and the world. Evil and darkness do not ignore the

light; they wage war against it, trying to bring it down. But despite these efforts, the darkness cannot vanquish the light ([1:9](#)). The darkness launches a battle that brings about its own defeat.

By contrast, those who love the coming of the light, who look on and trust the "upraised," crucified Son, who believe in Jesus and "live by the truth" ([3:21](#)), these people not only enjoy eternal life ([3:16](#), [18](#)) but they come to the light and yearn for its truth.

John is describing what happens when those in the world make a choice to believe; they are transformed into children of God ([1:12](#); [11:52](#); [1 John 3:10](#)), experiencing the power of the Spirit ([3:5-6](#)) and living the truth ([3:21](#)). Such people live righteously because God is at work in them ([3:21b](#)), not because they have a native desire to be godly.

NIV "Bridging Context"

...the conversation with Nicodemus is a model conversation, a paradigm if you will, of Jesus bringing the light of God to one who is captive in darkness.

(1) Note the profile of Nicodemus: He is one of the people Jesus would not trust ([2:24](#)) because he knew them so well. Morris infers from the passage that Nicodemus was a man who loved the truth, was timid about its expression, but in the end stood in Jesus' defense when his disciples fled.

This may be true, but we can also say that Nicodemus portrays a character whose life has not been completely penetrated by Christ, who asks questions but does not become a disciple, who listens but does not believe. Glimmers of courage surface in chapter 7 — and certainly the choice to assist in Jesus' burial was courageous—but in the end, Nicodemus does not become a model disciple. Disciples confess Jesus' identity, remain with him, and tell others (cf. the disciples of chs. 1 and 4). Nicodemus' story exhibits none of these features.

Above all, Nicodemus comes from "Jerusalem" instead of Galilee. He is a theological insider. He is adept at spiritual things and is famous for his skill at teaching. On the historical plane, I have argued that John is signaling to us something about messianic replacement and abundance: Jesus is the rabbi or teacher who brings heavenly wisdom ([3:13](#)) while the average rabbi cannot understand the deeper things of God ([3:10](#)). Jesus is *the* Rabbi who makes all other teachers schooled in Judaism redundant. In fact, one wonders if his theological skill becomes an impediment to Nicodemus's ability to become a disciple. Is there a comment here about *our capacity* to genuinely accept Jesus? Should Nicodemus serve as a mirror for some of us to see ourselves? John's emphasis on Christology hardly makes him anti-intellectual. But in some fashion, I cannot avoid wondering if John would have us reflect on the relation between religious ambition and sophistication and our ability to see and hear a personal Jesus today.

(2) In these verses John has given careful attention to the work of Christ. Of course, John mentions the saving work of Christ on the cross ([3:14](#)), but he has far more to say. Initially John has an interest in how Christ's work extends to those in darkness even though he is "the light." He speaks to Nicodemus *at night*. That is, Jesus must step into darkness itself in order to redeem those captive to it. This notion reminds me of Jesus' saying in [Mark 2:17](#): "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners." God is not demanding some moral or religious preparation from us that makes us interesting and acceptable to him. On the contrary, his mission is to enter the darkness and find us.

This strikes me as a terribly important theme. In the Synoptics, Jesus tells stories about shepherds looking for lost sheep. In John, Jesus uses the abstract dualistic metaphor of light and darkness, and in chapter 3 he is the light looking in darkness for men and women who will become children of God.

Another feature of Jesus' work has to do with revelation. Jesus is not simply another human teacher who outdoes one of Jerusalem's leading rabbis. Jesus is not simply a superior human expositor of Scripture who

in debate can outrun any rival. Jesus is a *divine* teacher and revealer of God. We saw this already in [1:18](#):

The importance of Jesus is not found simply in what he says but in where he comes from. Therefore there is an *ontological* dimension to Christology in John that is essential. Jesus has descended from heaven ([3:13](#)). This notion offers a remarkable appeal to my century:

Christology makes an absolute claim, an outrageous claim, to religious truth. No other source can rival what is being claimed here for Jesus. He provides access to God that is unlike any other religious founder.

(3) John's most obvious contribution has to do with human transformation and its possibilities. Of course when Jesus challenges Nicodemus that he must be "born again/from above," he is making a fundamental statement about theological anthropology. That is, humanity is broken beyond all repair. God's work in the world is not a question of fixing the part, but rebuilding the whole. It is described comprehensively as nothing short of another birth. The significance of this new birth gains weight theologically as soon as we develop our doctrine of the comprehensiveness of human fallenness and sin.

The transformation offered to Nicodemus also opens the question of the nature of true religion. That is, religion is not necessarily a matter of personal knowledge or ethical behavior. Nor is it fidelity to religious traditions, no matter how virtuously they evoke higher ethical, religious behavior among us. Jesus is claiming that true spirituality is *not* discovering some latent capacity within the human soul and fanning it to flame. It is *not* uncovering a moral consciousness that is hidden by sedimentary layers of civilization's corruptions. Nor is it inspiring aesthetic qualities that promote society in its finest form. It is *not* a "horizontal" experience that takes up the materials available around us in the world.

Rather, Jesus claims, true religion is "vertical." It has to do not with the human spirit, but with God's Spirit. It is a foreign invasion, sabotage of

the first order. True religion unites humanity with God's powerful Spirit, who overwhelms, transforms, and *converts* (in the full meaning of the word) its subject. Our role in this transformation is belief ([3:16](#), [18](#)), and yet it is a belief that is aided by God's work within us since we live in the darkness and have our spiritual capacities handicapped by sin.

NIV Contemporary Application:

These stories also remind me of the power of God (about which I can become increasingly blasé). Of course there are moments when I have a glimpse of the darkness. And there are other moments when I see the radiance of the Light, and suddenly I inherit the dualistic up/down, right/wrong, dark/light worldview that John would have me possess. Conversion stories help me understand the drama of sentences like [3:20-21](#): "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

One of my favorite books is *Conversions*, which describes the stories of famous conversions (Augustine, Muggeridge, Tolstoy, Spurgeon, Wesley, etc.) Some pastors let people tell their own stories regularly in worship in order to reinforce the idea that Christianity is not something that you follow as much as it is a power that transforms.

There is also a provocative secondary message here, which has to do with cultural and intellectual bondage. Nicodemus was entrenched in his career, locked into the status quo of Jerusalem's mainstream; he was so invested in it that he had to have a clandestine meeting with Jesus.

There is an important lesson in this, namely, that there is a link between spiritual receptivity and the degree to which we are "settled" into a system of life and belief. The greater our comfort, the less our chances to receive a new word, a transforming word from God. This is probably the reason why as people age, the possibility of their conversion tends to decrease.

Religious knowledge can become a shield, a defense with which we protect ourselves from the very God we claim to know.

Moshe's problem was not a question of knowledge. He (along with hundreds of licensed Jewish tour guides in Israel) possesses more knowledge about Jesus than the average pastor. Such guides are like Nicodemus inasmuch as they are professional observers who can talk about Jesus but have not experienced him, who can give accurate lectures but who have not had a transforming spiritual experience, who know all about wine but have not tasted it. [

I firmly believe that there are men and women in the church today who have not really heard the Nicodemus story. They have grown up in their tradition, they have taught it and defended it, but it has become a tame and predictable thing. One of the problems that comes with discussions of transformation and the power of the Spirit is how some people with longstanding spiritual interest, personal experience, or theological degrees will respond to stories like [John 3](#). They can be skeptical. Or they may have determined a way to theologize their way around the mystical gift offered to Nicodemus. Jesus is talking about mystical experiences and spiritual power. One can harness this Spirit no more than one can harness the wind.

...read an old book written by Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*... a book full of wisdom and warnings. Above all it describes a "diabolical theology" that can infect the most well-intentioned, passionate, Christian leader. **It is possible, Thielicke argues, to get one's theology right but to get one's relationship with God all wrong. There is a pathology to theological education—a spiritual disease, he calls it—that can distance us from God. Nicodemus was a theologian. I am a theologian. Mature Christians are theologians. We must always be on the alert to see if we are linked to the spiritually unpredictable Holy Spirit of God.**

Today's intellectual climate is offended by the absolute claim of religious truth, but a faithful rendering of New Testament Christology

demands this. This theme will continue to come up throughout the Gospel of John

John says in [3:16](#). "God so loved the world..." The work of Christ is *God* at work, *God* saving the world, *God* extending himself into the condition of our humanity and bringing about reconciliation.

Why is this important? Because it means that God himself is on our side. God himself is at work on our behalf. He did not send a messenger (Jesus) to do the dirty work. God himself came to the cross and suffered in order to bring his beloved creation back to himself.

This understanding is expressed repeatedly by Paul. In [2 Corinthians 5:18-19](#) he describes the goodness of God in rescuing us and remarks: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

Or again, in the words of [Colossians 1:19-20](#): "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." **The cross is thus God's work. Jesus Christ came to earth not in order to change God's mind, but to express God's mind.**

Kent Hughes Commentary:

-----vv.1-8

[John 3:1-8](#) relates our Lord's classic conversation with Nicodemus, in which he explained what he meant by being born again. There we find the essentials, the non-negotiables, of the born-again experience.

As Nicodemus approached Jesus, he came respectfully, using the honored title "Rabbi." He was prepared for an exchange of philosophical ideas, but he was not prepared for what followed. Jesus cut him off and went straight to the heart of the matter. In a glorious instant the vocabulary of our faith was given one of its greatest concepts — "born again." Nicodemus pondered one of the greatest subjects possible to man, and his wheels began to turn. Many commentaries paint Nicodemus as a theological dummy. But Jesus would not have confronted a dummy with this high thought. Nicodemus knew exactly what was going on when Jesus said he needed to be "born again." The rabbis had a saying: "A proselyte who embraces Judaism is like a newborn child." All things were thought to be completely new, and old connections destroyed.

Tennyson caught the idea when he wrote:

**Oh, for a man to rise in me,
that the man that I am
might cease to be.**

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." ([John 3:5](#))

Again Nicodemus knew what Jesus meant. He realized that at that very time John the Baptist was baptizing people in water as a symbol of their inward repentance. We read about this in [John 3:23](#). What flashed across Nicodemus' mind was: "except you are born of all that water baptism signifies, which is *repentance*, and that which Spirit baptism accomplishes, which is *regeneration*, you cannot enter the kingdom of God." In other words, Nicodemus saw very clearly that no one is born again if there is no repentance; and along with repentance comes a work of the Spirit in the heart. *These are the non-negotiables of being born again.*

there are many people who claim to be born again who know nothing of repentance. That means, according to our Lord's definition, that there are multiple thousands of people who claim to be born again but who really are not! Jesus says that unless one is "born of water" —that is, repentance—it is impossible to enter the kingdom of God.

The Scriptures teach that there is no new birth without repentance.... Repentance also involves a change of mind. The Biblical word comes from two words—one that means "after" and another that means "thought" or "mind."

When there is repentance, there is a change of action coupled with a change of mind. It is not simply a new direction or an about-face. It is not education. It is not a religious experience. Did you know that being born again is not merely "asking Jesus into your heart"? If that happens *without* repentance, it will *not* bring regeneration and new life. Being born again is a radical change that takes place in a person's life whereby through repentance and a work of the Spirit he is given a new nature. [Second Corinthians 5:17](#) says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" And [2 Peter 1:4](#) adds, "so that... you may participate in the divine nature."

Our Lord further explained this radical change in [verses 6-7](#).

"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'" The radical change is not something that can be accomplished by human energy.

That which is vegetable is vegetable, that which is animal is animal, and that which is flesh remains flesh. There is no evolution from flesh to spirit! Jesus says, "You must be born again" ([John 3:7](#)). You must realize you are a sinner and repent. You must receive the work of the Spirit in your life. "You must be born again." When Jesus says

"must," we had better listen. Have you been born again according to the definition given in [John 3](#)? The question is not, have you had a religious experience, or have you had a transformation, but have you been born again?

"Nicodemus, being born of the Spirit is like your experience with the wind. You can see the wind's effect, but not the wind itself." With those who are born again, the effects of the Spirit are visible in their lives, even though the Spirit cannot be seen. One of the reasons we have not seen our country swept for Christ is that there has not been sufficient evidence of the Spirit in Christians' lives. In many cases "salvation" is a bogus experience.

Is the wind of the Spirit at work in your life? Perhaps it is gently blowing, soothing your soul. From what you have heard, you feel affirmed. You are born again. You have turned from your sin, and the Spirit of God has washed you clean so that you have a new nature. Or possibly the wind of the Spirit is raging in your life right now. You clearly see the nonnegotiables. You see your sin, and you are repenting. You desire the Spirit to rush into your life and make you a new person. You believe Christ is the answer. If so, why not yield your life to him right now?

---- vv.9-21

Our Lord brought Nicodemus, the teacher of the Pharisees, face to face with the necessity of being born again, then confronted him with the nonnegotiables of the faith.

This encounter with Nicodemus is relevant for us today. The term *born again* has been pirated, emptied of its meaning, dragged through the gutter, and given back to us minus its power. Today when a person says he is born again we cannot be sure what he or she means. The mere use of the word tells us almost nothing. The truth, however, is that when one is really born again, there is a radical repentance, a radical work of the Spirit in the life, and a radical change so that the whole being is brought into new life. The results are discernible—they can be seen.

We see Nicodemus' final question in [verse 9](#): "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. "Lord, I see your analogies, but how does this new birth happen? What is the force that lies behind being born again?"

As our Lord began to answer Nicodemus, he skillfully led up to the main thrust. Notice [verse 10](#), where Jesus gently chides Nicodemus: "'You are Israel's teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things?'" In other words, "You have all of this learning and yet you do not understand?"

With that our Lord elected to give what is possibly the greatest illustration from the Old Testament of what the new birth means—the dynamics behind spiritual life.

The Great Illustration of the Cross

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." ([John 3:14-15](#))

With those words Nicodemus' mind spun back thousands of years to what is recorded in [Numbers 21](#). With this reference "Israel's teacher" was on familiar ground.

They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then

when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. ([Numbers 21:4-9](#))

Our Lord left no doubt about the application: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up." This is a picture of the dying, sinful world with the atoning cross raised high.

The details of the analogy are remarkable. The snakes are symbolic of sin—in fact, the perfect symbol of sin because it was a serpent that tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, thereby bringing sin into the world. Our very natures have been polluted. Paul says, "There is no one righteous, not even one" ([Romans 3:10](#)). Then we see the likeness of a serpent lifted up on a pole. It is significant that Moses elected not to use an actual serpent. The symbolism would not have been so exact and perfect if he had. Our Lord became sin (or a serpent) for us. [Romans 8:3](#) says, "God... sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." [Second Corinthians 5:21](#) adds, "God made him who had no sin *to be sin* for us, that we might become the righteousness of God." And [Galatians 3:13](#) states, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by *becoming a curse* for us" (italics added).

We dare not miss the importance of the gaze of faith. [Numbers 21:9](#) says, "When anyone... looked at the bronze snake, he lived." The command to look to that uplifted serpent was a gracious foreshadowing of looking to Christ for our salvation. No wonder our Lord said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up." Moses raised that serpent up high in the camp, and all the dying Israelites had to do was look to that pole and be saved. No matter how horribly they were bitten, no matter how many times they had been bitten or how sick they were, the opportunity for salvation was there. Even the most degraded and miserable sinner who looks to Christ will be saved.

So Jesus has set down for all subsequent generations that the radical change, the new birth, is possible only when he takes our infected natures upon himself, bears the venom, and imparts a new nature to us. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)).

[John 3:16](#) shows us the greatness of God's love, that it is a vast, unbounded, bottomless sea! That is the heart of the gospel! It is not simply "God is love," but "God so loved the world that he *gave*." That is what lies at the root of the new birth. "Nicodemus, do you want to understand how this can be? It is through the overflowing, unbounded love of God." Many churches sing F. M. Lehman's great hymn about the love of God. Interestingly, the last verse was not penned by him. He found it inscribed on the wall of an insane asylum next to the bed of a man who had evidently found the love of God before he passed away.

The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell,
It goes beyond the highest star
And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave his Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.
Could we with ink the ocean fill
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky.

"Nicodemus, the new birth is possible because of the great, boundless love of God." That is the thrust of the words "God so loved the world."

This great love brings about a great result... of those who know Christ! When we die we will be more alive than we have ever been! [John 3:16](#) says that when we believe, we have eternal life as our *present* possession.

Eternal life is *now*, because "God so loved." Furthermore, he offers it to "the world," the *cosmos*, a word used 186 times in the Greek New Testament and always with a sinful connotation. Amazing—God loves the sinful world!

Next we see the condition for eternal life: "that whoever *believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Compare the first part of [verse 18](#), "Whoever *believes* in him is not condemned." We receive eternal life by believing. So the greatest explanation follows the greatest illustration.

God	The greatest Lover
so loved	The greatest degree
the world	The greatest company
that he gave	The greatest act
his one and only Son	The greatest gift
that whoever	The greatest opportunity
believes	The greatest simplicity
in him	The greatest attraction
shall not perish	The greatest promise
but	The greatest difference
have	The greatest certainty
eternal life	The greatest possession

In him, we have everlasting life.

The Great Necessity of the Cross

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

([John 3:17-18](#))

Christ did not come into the world to judge the world, but judgment does come through him, and because of this there is a dynamic process going on that he described in [verses 19-21](#):

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

How men respond to the light indicates how they relate to the new birth.

How do *you* respond to the light?

Conclusion

Moses' illustration is great not only because it tells us what the great necessity is, but because it suggests what the necessity is *not*. It would have been quite natural for the Israelites to attempt to concoct an antidote to counteract the poison. They could have occupied themselves trying to find a cure for the venom, and some of them would have been pacified right into death with the hope that a cure was imminent.

Nicodemus says, "How can this be? How can I be born again?" Through belief in Christ alone—looking to the cross. We must give up our dependence on ourselves—our cleverness, our self-improvement, our plans of becoming religious—and just look to him! -

Preaching the Word (Kent Hughes)

Ironside Commentary:

vv.16-21

MARTIN LUTHER called this [sixteenth verse](#) the "Miniature Gospel," because there is a sense in which the whole story of the Bible is told out in it. "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." The verse negatives the idea that a great many persons seem to have; that God is represented in Scriptures as a stern, angry Judge waiting to destroy men because of their sins, but that Jesus Christ, in some way or other, has made it possible for God to come out in love to sinners; in other words, that Christ loved us enough to die for us and, having atoned for our sins, God can now love us and be merciful to us. But that is an utter perversion of the gospel. Jesus Christ did not die to enable God to love sinners, but "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." This same precious truth is set forth in similar words in the fourth chapter of the first Epistle of John, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." So the coming to this world of our Lord Jesus Christ and His going to the cross, there to settle the sin question and thus meet every claim of the divine righteousness against the sinner, is the proof of the infinite love of God toward a world of guilty men.

He is love. We are taught that in [1 John 4:8, 16](#). "God is love." That is His very nature. We can say that God is gracious, but we cannot say that God is grace. We can say that God is compassionate, but we cannot say that God is compassion. God is kind, but God is not kindness. But we can say, God is love. That is His nature, and love had to manifest itself, and although men had forfeited every claim that they might have upon God, still He loved us and sent His only Son to become the propitiation for our sins—"God so loved the

world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"whosoever"? "God so loved... that He gave... that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He could not find another more all-embracing word than that. It takes you in. It takes me in.

Yes, the sacrifice of Christ is an infinite sacrifice. Do not let the enemy of your soul tell you there is no hope for you. Do not let him tell you you have sinned away your day of grace; that you have gone so far that God is no longer merciful. There is life abundant for you if you will but look up into the face of the One who died on Calvary's cross and trust Him for yourself. Let me repeat it again, "Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"Whosoever believeth." What is it to believe? It is to trust in Him; to confide in Him; to commit yourself and your affairs to Him. He is saying to you, poor needy sinner, "You cannot save yourself. All your efforts to redeem yourself can only end in failure, but I have given My Son to die for you. Trust in Him. Confide in Him!"

"Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish."

"Have," that suggests present possession. He does not say, "hope to have everlasting life." You will have everlasting life right here and now when you believe in Jesus, when you trust Him.

Quality > Quantity!!! (JDP).... Everlasting life, remember, is far more than life throughout eternity. It is far more than endless existence. It is the very life of God communicated to the soul in order that we may enjoy fellowship with Him.

In [verse 17](#), as though to encourage the guiltiest to come to Him, He says, "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be

saved."

GREAT ILLUSTRATION of APPLICATION (v.17 with a Catholic man): I remember, years ago, a dear old man behind the counter in a big department store in Los Angeles, where I worked as a lad. The old man was very kind to me. He saw that I was very green and knew not what was expected of me. He took me under his wing and cared for me. I soon got interested in finding out whether he was saved or not. My dear mother was never with anybody very long before she asked them the question, "Are you saved? Are you born again?" I became so used to hearing her ask that question that I thought I ought to ask it of people too. I went to him one day and said, "Mr. Walsh, are you saved?" He looked at me and said, "My dear boy, no one will ever know that until the day of judgment." "Oh," I replied, "there must be some mistake; my mother knows she is saved." "Well, she has made a mistake," he said; "for no one can know that." "But the Bible says, 'He that believeth on Him... hath everlasting life.'" "Oh, well," he said, "we can't be sure down here unless we become great saints; but we must just do the best we can and pray to the Lord and the blessed Virgin and the saints to help, and hope that in the day of judgment it may turn out well and we will be saved." "But," I said, "why do you pray to the blessed Virgin? Why not go direct to Jesus?" "My dear boy, the Lord is so great and mighty and holy that it is not befitting that a poor sinner such as I should go to Him, and there is no other who has such influence as His mother." I did not know how to answer him then. But as I studied my Bible through the years, I could see what the answer was. Jesus unapproachable! Jesus hard to be contacted! Why, it was said of Him, "This Man receiveth sinners," and though high in heavenly glory, He still says to sinners, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden." Yes. you can go directly to Him and when you trust Him He gives you eternal life. He did not come to condemn the world. He came with a heart of love to win poor sinners to Himself.

And then the [eighteenth verse](#) is so plain and simple. Oh, if you are an anxious soul and seeking light, remember that these are the very words of the living God, "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." Now, do you see this? There are just two classes of people in that verse. All men in the world who have heard the message are divided into these two classes.

You are either among those who believe in Jesus or among those who do not believe. It is not a question of believing *about* Him; it is a question of believing *in* Him. It is not holding mental conceptions about Him, mere facts of history; but it is trusting Him, committing yourself to Him. Those who trust Him and those who do not trust Him—in which of the two groups do you find yourself?

So, if you are condemned, it is not simply because of the many sins you have committed through your lifetime. It is because of spurning the revelation of the Saviour that God has provided. If you turn away from God and continue rejecting Jesus, you are committing the worst sin there is. He came, a light, into the world to lighten the darkness. If you turn away from Him, you are responsible for the darkness in which you will live and die. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Is it not strange that men would rather continue in darkness than turn to Him, who is the light of life, and find deliverance. "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth (*i.e.*, he that is absolutely honest with God) cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Are you going to turn away from the light today or are you coming into the light?

- H.A. Ironside Expository Commentary

Misc:

* See truth, then explanation pattern

1. See vv.7&9

2. See vv.15&16

3. See vv.18&(19-21)

- Romans 8:1 affirms the positive

see also [Psalm 32:1-2](#)

- Luke 9:23-25 warning...

- Link the "light / darkness" word
back to 1 John 1&2

- "Jesus loves the lights on!" JDP

[explain implications...](#)

[Matthew 3:8 = "bear fruit in](#)

keeping with repentance"

Are you seeking a "port" (in the storm) or a "foundation" to build on? Note the distinction even further by contrasting a port with a cave... & a foundation with a "platform"

Scriptural cross references:

EZ 36... Context for Nic

Numbers 21... Explain for Nic

Eph. 2:4ff... Expand 3:16

2 Cor 9:15... Expand on 3:16

Titus 3:4... Expand on 3:16

Romans 5:8... Expand on 3:16

*** Now go back to Gen. 3:15!!!!!!!

*** God's loving, sov plan all along

See 1 John 3:1... (1 John 4:10&19 bring it full circle)

Get a portrait of God's 3:16 "love" in/thru:

Romans 8:3

Galatians 4:4-5

Isaiah. 53!

See how inclusive God's merciful love is in 3:16... At the same time, see how exclusive God's messianic love is in 3:18.

SEE AMOS 5:18-20... This applies to those who had/have a false sense of security (ie. saved due to heritage, resume, works, etc)

Note the hope... Nic leaves lost but shows up later bearing fruit (juxtapose against those depicted in the parable of the soils).