

John 3:17-21

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/john/john-3/john-317-21/>

Jesus has not come into the world to judge or rule it just yet; He has come to die the death of a suffering servant for the world's sins. Whoever believes in Him will be saved from judgment, and will be reconciled to God, but whoever does not believe already stands condemned to separation from God. Jesus declares He is the Light, but men choose darkness so that they may sin continually. There is one fundamental choice in life: to either hate and fear the Light so that you can persist in sin, or to go to the Light and practice the truth and deeds ordained by God.

Nicodemus started with “I know you have to have God with you in order to do all these miracles” and now, in a few words, has been told:

- You can't see or enter the kingdom of God without being born again, of the Spirit.
- Eternal life (the life the Pharisees sought) begins with having the same quantity and application of faith the ancient Israelites were required to have to look at the bronze serpent lifted up on the pole, except you need to look at Jesus, the Son of Man, lifted up on a cross.
- Jesus will resolve the dilemma of two prophesied Messiahs, a suffering servant and a conquering king. As the “Son of Man” He will fulfill both applications of the term, as a human, who suffers and dies for our sins, being “lifted up” on a cross, as well as the conquering Messiah “Son of Man” of Daniel chapter 7.
- Further, he has been told, “You should know all this, being learned in the Bible.”

We can speculate that Nicodemus might have had trouble sleeping that night, with his head spinning. Jesus didn't exactly break Nicodemus in slowly. But Nicodemus seemed to have a genuine interest, so Jesus gave him a full dose.

Jesus continues, now explaining why He will come in two advents:

- First as the human Son of Man who will die on a cross, and be “lifted up” as the serpent was lifted up, so that all who have enough faith to look, hoping to be healed of sin, will have a new birth.
- Second as a Son of Man coming in the clouds, as predicted in Daniel 7, who will rule the earth.

As a scholar of the Bible, Nicodemus should have expected two advents for the Messiah. That is the pattern for deliverers of Israel that provided a type or shadow of the Messiah. For example:

1) Joseph was revealed by dreams to be a ruler his family, but they rejected him, slaying him figuratively. Then Joseph is later revealed as their savior from the famine, he whom his brethren had rejected and exiled (which is a form of death).

2. Moses was revealed to the Hebrews as their brother and deliverer. They rejected him. Moses was then exiled (a form of death) and returned as their deliverer in a second advent.

3. King David was revealed as the deliverer of Israel by killing Goliath. He was anointed as king, but was exiled by Saul (a form of death) until his second advent, when he ascended to the throne of the kingdom.

Jesus explains *For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him*. We are not told that Nicodemus asked why Jesus would save the world, which would have included saving the hated Romans. We are not told that Nicodemus asked why the Son of Man, who is predicted in Daniel 7 to come in the clouds and rule the earth, would come first to save the world from sin. But it appears Jesus knew he had those questions, so He answers them.

Jesus will, in fact, come to judge the world. But that will be at His second coming. In His first advent, *God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world*. That comes later (Revelation 20:11-15). The reason God sent the *Son of Man into the world* the first time was so *the world might be saved through Him*.

Jesus discloses to Nicodemus, who is a ruler of the Jews, that He came to save the Romans as well as the Jews. It will not matter what someone's heritage is, whether they are born Jew or Gentile. It will not matter their skin color, or nationality. What will matter is faith. Enough faith to look at Jesus on a cross, hoping for deliverance from sin.

Jesus asserts *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*. Nicodemus' privilege as a Jewish ruler won't matter. His biblical knowledge won't matter. Nothing will matter apart from faith in Jesus, the Person speaking to him. The starting place for avoiding judgment is to believe in Jesus. To have sufficient faith to "look at Jesus on the cross, hoping to be delivered from your sin" (John 3:14-15). The one who has this belief, enough faith to look, hoping for deliverance, *is not judged*. This is because Jesus bears the sins of the one who believes.

What about those who do not believe? *He who does not believe has been judged already*. It is like those in the wilderness who were bitten by the vipers. They were told, "Hey, Moses said if we will go look at the bronze snake on the pole being lifted up, we won't die." Anyone who said "That's hogwash, I am not going to waste my time on that" would die of the snake poison. They already had the poison, and it killed them. In similar fashion, those who *do not believe* are already separated from God by their sin, and it brings death. They are already separated from God, being born into sin (Romans 5:12). They are *judged already*.

Jesus now makes clear that the "Son of Man" is also the *only begotten Son of God*. Now add to the list of things Nicodemus is hearing that were likely mind-blowing to him is that Jesus has come from heaven as God-in-flesh. This would make clear that there is one God, in multiple persons, with Jesus as the Son to the Father. Since Jesus has already spoken of the Spirit, Jesus has testified to the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit being one God.

Perhaps anticipating what Nicodemus might be thinking “How do I reconcile that this man does amazing miracles, but is saying all these crazy things?” Jesus states, *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.* This interview appears to have occurred at the first part of Jesus’ ministry, since it was placed in Chapter 3. But Jesus speaks in the past tense, as though His rejection by Israel has already occurred. This is a common prophetic device, to describe a future event in the past tense. The point is, “This is so certain to occur that I will speak of it as though it has already happened.”

Jesus, the Son of Man, *has come into the world*, having “descended from heaven.” He is the *only begotten Son of God*. He who made the world has come into the world as the *Light*. But the *men* of the world *loved the darkness rather than the Light*. Why did they prefer *darkness*? Simple: *because their deeds were evil*. The word translated *evil* is “poneros.” This verse from 1 John illustrates the nature of this word, and is penned by the same author:

“For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one (poneros) and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil (poneros), and his brother’s were righteous.”

(1 John 3:11-12)

Evil is the opposite of love. Rather than seeking to benefit others, it seeks to extract from and exploit others. Jesus came into the world to serve, and to shine light on darkness. But the exploiters did not want to change. So they hated the Light. They wanted to continue to do *deeds* that were *evil*.

Jesus goes on to say, *For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.* The word translated *evil* in verse 20 is different than “poneros” that is translated “evil” in verse 19, but is used in John 5:29 as a contrast to “good” so it seems to carry the same basic idea. The reason those who do *evil* hate the *Light* is because they do not want their *deeds* to be *exposed*. This means they know deep down what they are doing is wrong, but they want to keep doing it, apparently while maintaining the illusion that they are upright.

Jesus is giving Nicodemus a pretty clear and stark choice: “Nicodemus, do you want darkness or Light?” “Do you want to do good or evil?” This passage opened by noting that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night; Nicodemus might have been squirming by this point. Jesus states the final challenge, contrasting the evil-doer, saying *But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.* It would most certainly seem that Nicodemus would consider himself as someone *who practices the truth*. But Jesus is challenging him. If Nicodemus is actually someone *who practices the truth*, then he will also be someone who *comes to the Light*.

What will it be, Nicodemus? Do you want to *come to the Light*? Are you someone who wants to practice what is true, or do you want to be a doer of evil? Your righteous façade means nothing in the presence of God, who knows the heart. The root of evil is in the heart, and is self-seeking

and leads to exploitation and abuse of others. But the root of good is *truth* and *Light*. If Nicodemus wants to be one *who practices the truth*, then he will have to choose the *Light*. At some point it seems Nicodemus chose the *Light*, since he participated in Jesus' burial, and might have testified of this interview.

Those who come to the *Light* will have their *deeds manifested as having been wrought in God*. This passage began with Nicodemus commenting that Jesus was a "Good Teacher" and that He would not be able to do the miracles He had accomplished unless God was with Him. Now Jesus comes full circle, noting that if there are *deeds wrought in God*, that means those deeds come from those who follow the *Light*. Yes, Nicodemus, Jesus' deeds are from God. But the question is, will yours be? If you want the answer to be "yes" then you must choose the *Light*, and that begins by believing what is true about the *Light*, and have the faith to look upon Him, hoping to be delivered from your sin.

Biblical Text

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. 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."