

Sermon on John 3:16-18

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“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16-18)

We have been preaching a series of sermons from the third chapter of the Gospel of John concerning the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus. In the Gospel of John the Lord spoke for the first time about the need to be born again or regenerated. His teachings began with the words of John 3:3, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

The Lord in these verses speaks of a person's need to be born again from the point of view of what a person needs to do to be born again. This is evident in the Lord's words in John 3:7, *“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘**You must be born again.**’”* The emphasis in these verses is on our part or responsibility in being born again. The Lord is speaking directly to us.

In the verses that follow, the emphasis shifts to the Lord's part in our regeneration. This is seen in the verses that emphasize what the Lord has done for us for our salvation as in John 3:11-14, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen ...”*, and, *“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”*

Beginning with verse 14 and continuing through verse 21, the emphasis is both on the Lord's part and on our part in being born again, that is, in being saved. To illustrate:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up ...” -- this is on the Lord's part, what he has done that we might be saved. *“... that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”* -- speaks of what we must do on our part in order to be saved.

Likewise in John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ...*" -- this is on the Lord's part, what He has done that we might be saved; while "*... that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,*" talks of what we must do on our part in order to be saved.

Verse 17, "*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved,*." is on the Lord's part, what he has done that we might be saved, while verse 18 (as well as the verses that follow) treat of what we must do on our part in order to be saved, and also the consequences if we choose not to do so. Thus, "*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*" (John 3:18)

This alternating in the verses between the Lord's part in our salvation and our part indicates the reciprocal nature of our relationship with the Lord. The Lord has done and continues to do His part in our salvation, and we need to do our part. However, the Lord leaves us in complete freedom. He does not force us to reciprocate or respond to His actions and commandments. He stands at the door and knocks; we choose whether we wish to open to Him or not. Likewise, believing in Him is our choice, no one forces us to believe in the Lord.

In the verses of our text from John Chapter 3:16-18, you may have noticed the emphasis placed upon believing in the only begotten Son of God who was sent into the world in order to save the world. We may ask two questions:

1. Who is the only begotten Son of God?
2. What is meant by believing in Him?

By the only begotten Son of God is meant the Lord as to the Human which He assumed in the world. This is called the Divine Human. The Lord often said that He was sent by the Father into the world, and that He came forth from the Father. "Being sent into the world" means to descend into the world and come among mankind. This was done by means of a human which He took on through the virgin Mary. Moreover, that Human actually is the Son of God because it was conceived from Jehovah God as His Father.

The Lord is called "the Son of God," "the Son of man," and "the son of Mary;" "the Son of God" meaning Jehovah God in His Human; "the Son of man" the Lord in respect to the Word; while "the son of Mary" means strictly the human He took on in the world. In regard to the Lord, the Divine that He had was from Jehovah the Father,

and the human from the mother. These two united are the Son of God. This is evident from the account of the Lord's birth as given in Luke:

The angel Gabriel said to Mary, The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you, therefore the Holy thing that shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

God descended into the world, taking on a human body from Mary. The soul of this human body was Divine. It was God Himself. While in the world, the Lord put off that human which he had received from Mary and replaced it with a Human that was completely Divine. The process by which this putting off of the maternal human and taking on of a Divine Human was called His glorification. The Lord while in the world referred to this process in such passages as John 17:4, 5; *“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”*

Many times the Lord spoke with the Father as if he were speaking with another individual. This has created the impression that Jesus and the Father are two separate persons. In reality, Jesus at these times was speaking with the Divine which was present within himself. There are not two Divine persons nor are there two Gods. That there is only one God is plainly taught in numerous places in the Word, such as in Deuteronomy 6:4, *“the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”* And further from John 14:9-11, Jesus speaking to Philip said, *“Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me....”*

The Lord instructed us to believe in Him and to believe in His Name. By the name of the Lord is not meant his many names such as, Jesus, Lord, Christ, Messiah, Jehovah, God, Alpha and Omega. Rather, by the name names of the Lord are meant his qualities or attributes from which we think about him and worship him.

Let us compare this to people we know. When someone mentions a person we know, we usually don't spend much time thinking about that person's name. What we think about is the personality, character and mental image we have of that person. We think about others from the qualities and attributes that

we know of that person. Many of us have had the sometimes embarrassing experience of forgetting a person's name but being able to remember almost everything else about the person. The name simply brings to mind the qualities and attributes of another.

So also with the Lord, whose names represent his qualities. In Apocalypse Explained 102 we read this concerning names:

That "Jehovah's name" or the "Lord's name" does not mean the name itself, but all things of love and faith, is from the spiritual world. There the names used on the earth are not uttered; but the names of the persons who are spoken of are formed from the idea of all things known about them combined into a single word. In this way names in the spiritual world are expressed; consequently names there, like all the other things, are spiritual. The names "Lord" and "Jesus Christ," are not even uttered there as on the earth, but in place of those names a name is formed from the idea of all things known and believed respecting Him; and this idea is made up of all things of love to Him and faith in Him. This is because these in the complex are the Lord in them; for the Lord is in everyone in the goods of love and of faith that are from Him. As this is so, the quality of everyone there, in respect to love to the Lord and faith in the Lord, is immediately known if he only utters "Lord" or "Jesus Christ" by a spiritual expression or spiritual name; and for the same reason also, those who are not in any love to Him or faith in Him are unable to speak His name, that is, to form any spiritual name of Him. From this it is now clear why by the "name" of Jehovah, of the Lord, or of Jesus Christ, name is not meant in the Word, but everything of love and of faith whereby He is worshiped." (AE 102)

In regard to the Lord, the Divine Human is called the Son of God and also the Only Begotten Son, for the Lord is Jehovah Himself in the Divine Human.

Now for the second question: what is meant by believing in Him?

Apocalypse Revealed 553 gives a clear concise answer, *"To believe in the Lord is to approach Him directly and to have confidence that He will save, and because no one can have confidence unless he lives well, therefore this also is understood by 'to believe in Him'."*

Believing in the Lord has more to do with our state of life, than with our state of faith apart from life. This is made clear in this passage from Arcana Coelestia 2343:

Within the Church it is indeed well known that all regeneration or new life, and therefore salvation, comes from the Lord alone, but few believe it. The reason they do not believe it is that the good of charity does not exist in them. It is as impossible for those in whom that good does not exist to believe it as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle; for the good of charity is the very seed-bed of faith. Truth and good agree together, but truth and evil never do. They have contrary natures and turn away from each other. Insofar therefore as someone is moved by good, he can be governed by truth, that is, insofar as charity exists with him faith is able to, especially the most fundamental matter of faith that all salvation comes from the Lord. (Arcana Coelestia 2343)

As we mentioned at the beginning, in the work of being born again or being regenerated, there are two parts: On the Lord's part there is His unceasing effort to can conjoin us with Himself, to save us. That is why He came into the world and made His Human Divine. On our part there must be a belief in Him, and this we can only have when we live according to His commandments. As a Lord teaches us:

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken to a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

(John 14:21 & Matthew 7:24)

Amen

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 25:1, 4, 6-9

¹ O LORD, You *are* my God.

I will exalt You,

I will praise Your name,

For You have done wonderful *things*;

Your counsels of old *are* faithfulness *and* truth.

⁴ For You have been a strength to the poor,

A strength to the needy in his distress,

A refuge from the storm,

A shade from the heat;

For the blast of the terrible ones *is* as a storm *against* the wall.

⁶ And in this mountain

The LORD of hosts will make for all people

A feast of choice pieces,
A feast of wines on the lees,
Of fat things full of marrow,
Of well-refined wines on the lees.

- ⁷ And He will destroy on this mountain
The surface of the covering cast over all people,
And the veil that is spread over all nations.
- ⁸ He will swallow up death forever,
And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces;
The rebuke of His people
He will take away from all the earth;
For the LORD has spoken.
- ⁹ And it will be said in that day:
“Behold, this *is* our God;
We have waited for Him, and He will save us.
This *is* the LORD;
We have waited for Him;
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

Isaiah 40:10, 11

- ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong *hand*,
And His arm shall rule for Him;
Behold, His reward *is* with Him,
And His work before Him.
- ¹¹ He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry *them* in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young.

John 3:16-21

¹⁶For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

¹⁸“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does

not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

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... The Lord has glorified His Human, that is, united it to the Divine of the Father, that is, to the Divine that was in Him from conception, for the sake of making it possible for the human race to be united to God the Father in Him and through Him. That this was the purpose of the Lord's coming into the world and of the glorification of His Human He teaches fully in John (chaps. xiv, xv, xvii), ... and elsewhere. It is plain from these passages that the coming of the Lord into the world, and the glorification of His Human, had for an end the conjunction of mankind with God the Father in Him and through Him, thus that He is to be approached. The Lord also confirms this by having so often said that there must be belief in Him in order that they may have eternal life, as may be seen above.

Who cannot see that all these things have been said by the Lord concerning Himself in His Human, and that He would never say, nor could say, that He was in men and men were in Him and that there must be belief in Him in order that they may have eternal life, unless His Human was Divine? By 'to ask the Father in His Name' is not understood to approach God the Father directly nor to ask for His sake, but to approach the Lord, and the Father through Him, because the Father is in the Son, and they are one, as He Himself teaches. 'In His Name' has this signification, as can be established also from these passages:

He who does not believe in the Son has been judged already, for he has not believed in the Name of the Only-begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)

AMEN