

## “The Night Visitor – Part II”

January 11, 2026

John 3:14-21

### I. Introduction

I thought about starting out this morning with a quiz or just a question about what we were studying before we took a break for Advent and the beginning of a new year. But not wanting to be depressed at the answers I might hear, I decided that that was a very bad idea. So instead, let me remind you that we had begun a study of the Gospel of John. John began his Gospel by affirming that Jesus is God—actually, God Incarnate. Turn to the opening verses of John’s Gospel, [turn to John 1:1-5](#). In the rest of the first chapter John introduced John the Baptist, John the Baptist’s testimony concerning Jesus as “**The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**” ([John 1:29](#)), and, finally, Jesus’ first disciples (Andrew, John, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathanael). In chapter 2 John described two things Jesus did at the beginning of His public ministry; the miracle at Cana where Jesus turned water into wine and the cleaning of the Temple in Jerusalem during Passover. But Jesus did other miracles as well, turn to [John 2:23-25](#). However, this belief was a shallow, sign-based faith. At most, these so-called “believers” believed that the signs were from God, but they weren’t too sure who Jesus was.

The story of Nicodemus is about one such believer. Nicodemus was an example of one who was attracted to Jesus because of the “**miraculous signs**” Jesus did. You kind of feel sorry for Nicodemus. Here was a very religious man who was trying with all of his strength and his whole heart to know God and to do what God wanted. In his search for righteousness, he had even become a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus must have spent several days during Passover watching a new prophet—a prophet from Nazareth no less—and this prophet was doing miracles—“**miraculous signs**”—that could only be done through the power of God. [Turn to John 3:1-2](#). So, Nicodemus came to have a long talk with Jesus in the night when there would be few interruptions.

When Nicodemus came to talk with Jesus, he was expecting to have an intellectual discussion about God and righteousness, i.e., right living, and the demonstrations of God’s power that were seen in Jesus’ life

and miracles. But Jesus had other plans; He wanted to talk to Nicodemus about his salvation and eternal life.

So, Jesus said in [verse 3](#), “**I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**”

Since they were on totally different wavelengths, Jesus needed to get Nicodemus on the same page with Him. So, Jesus used 4 different illustrations about salvation. Two of these illustrations we considered last time—last year.

The first illustration was birth, i.e., salvation is like birth. Jesus said that if Nicodemus wanted to live a righteous life and be saved from an eternity in hell, he needed to be born again or, as we saw earlier “*born from above*.” There are many similarities between physical birth and spiritual birth. For example, just like the physical birth of a person results from the work of others, spiritual birth is the work of others, too. [Turn to Titus 3:4-7.](#) Salvation means starting all over again, admitting as [Rom. 3:10](#) says that “**there is no one righteous, not even one.**” Also, just as physical birth is a new beginning with great hope for what lies ahead, with sins forgiven and forgotten, spiritual birth is a new beginning and the future is bright with the hope of eternal life. Finally, just like a physical birth leads to a child with the nature of his or her parents, a spiritual birth leads to one having the nature of his heavenly Father. [2 Peter 1:4](#) says, “**He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that though them you may participate in the divine nature.**”

Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> illustration was the wind, i.e., salvation is like the wind. The work of the Holy Spirit in the “*birth from above*” is like the wind; it cannot be controlled or predicted. And like the wind, the effects of the Holy Spirit can be seen in the changed lives of those who are born again.

## **II. Jesus’ Final Illustrations**

**A. Salvation is like the snake on the pole.** [Now turn to today’s Scripture: John 3:14-21.](#) Here we see Jesus’ final 2 illustrations beginning with the snake on the pole. Jesus said that **salvation is like the snake on the pole.** Jesus’ 3<sup>rd</sup> illustration used a story that would have been familiar to Nicodemus. As a type of His sacrificial death on the cross, the Lord referred to a story in Numbers; [turn to Numbers 21:4-9.](#) Towards the end of Israel’s 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, once again the children of Israel rebelled against God. This time God sent venomous snakes that bit the people so that many died. When the people repented,

Moses interceded for them and God in His grace and mercy had Moses make a bronze snake or serpent and raise it above the camp on a pole. Those who were bitten would be healed if they looked at it; the “looking” demonstrated faith in God’s forgiveness and healing power. People had to look at the snake in faith.

The point of Jesus’ illustration was that “**just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man (i.e. Jesus) must be lifted up**,” i.e., crucified. The term “must be” emphasized that Christ’s death was a necessary part of God’s plan of salvation. Jesus had to die as a substitute for sinners, because as Rom. 6:23 says, “**The wages of sin is death**” and as Hebrews 9:22 says “**without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**” I Peter 3:18 adds, “**For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.**”

The solution to the serpent problem was not in killing the serpents, making medicine, pretending they were not there, passing anti-serpent laws, or climbing the pole. The answer wasn’t in any works or righteousness of those affected. People had to look at the snake in faith with hope and dependence on God’s word. In the same way, whoever looks in faith alone to the crucified and resurrected Christ will be cured from sin’s deadly bite and will in Him have eternal life. To be saved, people need to look to Jesus in faith.

Then we come to John 3:16 which is without a doubt the most familiar and loved verse in all of Scripture. Here is God’s motive for giving His one and only Son—His one-of-a-kind Son—God loved the evil, sinful world of fallen mankind. Love—real love—is never passive. The very nature of agape love is to give the best and not hold back. Romans 5:8 says, “**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” There was nothing in man that attracted God’s love. **In spite** of who and what we are, God loves each one of us. God loves us because God is the personification of love, as 1 John 4:16 says, “**God is love.**” 1 John 3:16 says, “**This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.**” This is the motive or reason for Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice—love. God couldn’t help Himself—He loved us too much. In Jeremiah 31:3, the LORD said, “**I have loved you with an everlasting love.**” Just as the supreme proof of Abraham’s love for God was his willingness to sacrifice “**his only son,**

Isaac,” in [Genesis 22:1-18](#), so also, but on a much grander scale, God the Father’s offering of His one and only Son was the supreme demonstration of His saving love for sinners.

God’s love, Jesus’ love is a perfect, everlasting agape love—sacrificial love. Since Jesus is God, this means, as Paul wrote in [Colossians 1:19-20](#), that God Himself—not some created being—came to the cross and suffered in order to bring His beloved creation back to Himself. As one commentator put it, “*The cross is God’s work. Jesus Christ didn’t come to earth to change God’s mind, but to express God’s mind.*” God’s love leads to God’s grace—[Ephesians 2:8-9](#) says, “**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.**”

Like the healing from the snake’s bite, God’s loving gift, His gracious gift of salvation is free and only available to whoever believes in Christ. God’s offer of mercy (i.e. *not getting what we deserve, eternity in hell*) and grace (i.e. *getting what we don’t deserve, eternity in heaven*) is for whoever, regardless of their sins; Paul wrote in [1 Timothy 1:15](#), “**Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus cam into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.**” But as [John 3:18](#) adds, “**But whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.**”

The difference between perishing and living, between condemnation and salvation, between an eternity in hell and an eternity in heaven, is faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus could well have come to this world as a Judge and destroyed every rebellious sinner; but in love, He came to this world as our Savior, and He died for us on the cross! He became the “**uplifted snake**”—both in His death and in His resurrection. The serpent in Moses’ day brought physical life to the dying Jews; Jesus Christ gives eternal life to anyone—Jew or Gentile—who trusts in Him. He has become salvation for the whole world!

**B. Salvation is like Light and Darkness.** Jesus’ fourth and last illustration is one of the major images used in the Gospel of John that of “**light and darkness.**” Salvation is like Light and Darkness. Jesus said in [John 8:12](#), “**I am the Light of the world.**” Sadly, many sinners don’t come the “**light of life.**” Jesus told Nicodemus that it is because “**men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.**” Unbelievers are not ignorant but willfully reject the truth. They want to persist in their evil deeds, and this

keeps them from coming to the light. The closer the sinner gets to the light, the more his sins are exposed. It isn't "*intellectual problems*" that keep people from trusting Christ. It is the moral and spiritual blindness that keeps them loving the darkness and hating the light. Turn to Romans 1:18-23.

As many of you know, in 1988 Linda, I and our 2 kids lived for the whole year in Australia. While there, we made many good friends; two of them were a husband and wife. The wife was an active Christian, she was a leader in her church, she taught women's Bible studies and went calling during the week. Her husband was not a Christian; as he told me one time, "*I don't want to change. I like to drink and smoke and gamble and if I become a Christian, I would have to stop all that.*" He, like many other people, willingly chose the darkness and wanted nothing to do with the Light. His shortsightedness regarding eternity was so very sad! But there is a happy ending to this story. About 15 years later on one of our return trips to Australia, Gordon said that he had an announcement to make, the week before our coming he had come to the Lord. He had seen the Light and he had made Jesus his Lord and Savior. This was an answer to much prayer and led to tears of joy.

### **III. Conclusion**

So, here's the problem for Nicodemus and for every individual: "*What to do with Jesus.*" Jesus came in love to save, to heal, and to offer spiritual birth. He did not come to condemn or judge. But His coming brings things to a head. Now a decision must be made. The position of every person is something like a man who is in prison being asked whether or not he will accept a pardon. That is the gospel. It is not telling a man that he is on trial. He is already condemned—he is a sinner. He is already in prison waiting for his execution. But the gospel tells him a pardon is offered to him. The point is: will he accept the pardon?

Just like Nicodemus and Gordon, every person must choose. If he chooses to lay aside all his preconceived ideas and learning and accept Jesus as the One who has come down from heaven to pay the penalty for his sin, he will be born again, saved from an eternity in hell. In [Revelation 3:20](#) Jesus said, "[Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat](#)

with him, and he with me.” But if a person chooses to turn aside, to leave and work out his own salvation by his own stubborn efforts, however noble they may be, he stands under condemnation and will perish.

Although Nicodemus came to Jesus in the darkness and most likely left the same way hours later, his later actions seem to imply that eventually he came to the Light. In [John 7:50-51](#) he defended Jesus before his fellow Pharisees and in [John 19:39](#) he helped Joseph of Arimathea take Jesus’ body down from the cross and place it in Joseph’s tomb. This choice about what to do with Jesus is for every person. There isn’t any wiggle room, as Peter said in [Acts 4:12](#), “[Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.](#)” Or as John puts in [John 3:36](#), “[Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.](#)” If an Israelite who had been bitten by a snake had refused to look at the bronze snake, he died. If someone decides to reject God’s gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection and decides to go a different way, he will die and spend eternity in hell. A person’s choice determines where he or she will spend eternity. What is your choice?

The answer to the question “*What to do with Jesus*” doesn’t stop at making Him your Lord and Savior. Now, as Jesus commanded in the Great Commission in [Matthew 28:19-20](#), every Christian needs to “[go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.](#)” [Romans 10:13](#) says, “[Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.](#)” But [verse 14](#) adds, “[How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone teaching to them?](#)” [2 Corinthians 5:20](#) says, “[We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.](#)” As one of His children, What are you doing with Jesus Christ and for Jesus?