

HAVE YOU PLACED YOUR FAITH IN CHRIST?

3 ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, in the same way must the Son of man be lifted up; ¹⁵so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life—¹⁶for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world; but [rather], that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned; whoever does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is [the reason for] the condemnation: the Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the light; because their works were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his works will not be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes to the light, so that it may be seen that his works have been produced by God. (Jn. 3:14-21)

Introduction

Dotty met her future husband, Alex, while both of them were attending Washington High School in Los Angeles. She was especially attracted to Alex's large family and their relationship with God. But it was not until some eight years later that the LORD "became real" to Dotty. It was then that she personally placed her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; it was then that she experienced for herself His forgiveness and love (*POWER*, 6/12/88, pp. 2-ff.)

Tracey was a young man who grew up in a hard working farm family in South Dakota; the family attended church faithfully. Throughout his childhood and teenage years Tracey had been taught the stories about Jesus. But it was not until he went to college and joined a Christian group on campus that he learned of the necessity of personally placing his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible declares that if we would be saved, each one of us must personally put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—receiving Him as our Savior and entrusting our lives to Him.

I. You Must Place Your Faith in Jesus Christ, Even Though It May Seem to Be Foolish (Jn. 3:14-15)

In verses 14-15 Jesus calls Nicodemus' attention to an event that occurred during the time of Israel's wilderness journey, recorded in Numbers 21:4-9,

Then they traveled from Mount Hor along the route towards the Red Sea, in order to go around the land of Edom. The people became very discouraged in spirit because of the route [they were obligated to take]. ⁵The people spoke against God and against Moses, saying, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt in order to die in this wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" ⁶Then Jehovah sent venomous snakes

among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against Jehovah and against you. Pray that Jehovah would take the snakes away from us." ⁸Jehovah said to Moses, "Make [a replica of] a venomous snake and put it on a pole; when anyone who has been bitten looks at it, he shall live." ⁹So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. And it happened that, if anyone was bitten by a snake, when he looked at the bronze snake, he lived. (Num. 21:4-9)

Having encountered adversity (Num. 21:4,) the people complained against God, questioning and even denying His goodness and covenantal faithfulness (Num. 21:5.) Consequently, the LORD sent venomous snakes (perhaps vipers) among the people—they bit the people, many people died, and the rest were subject to the same peril (Num. 21:6.) The people confessed their sin and asked for deliverance from these deadly poisonous snakes (Num. 21:7.)

Numbers 21:8-9 now describes the salvation the LORD provided: He instructed Moses to make a bronze replica of the venomous snake. Moses was then to set up this replica on a pole—it was to be prominently displayed for all to see; it was made available to all as the means of salvation. But it was only effective as a cure to those perishing Israelites who looked at it, trusting that the LORD would use it as the means by which to save them.

Jesus tells Nicodemus—and us—that the salvation the LORD provided for Israel in the wilderness was a model of the great and eternal salvation from sin and from hell that He now offers to us in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, and His death on the cross as the only acceptable payment for our sins.

Notice the apparent foolishness of God's way of salvation: The people of Israel pleaded to be delivered from the deadly poisonous snakes. What did the LORD do in response to their pleas? He did not immediately kill the snakes or drive them away. He did not point out to Moses a medicinal herb that could counteract the poison. He commanded that a replica of these snakes be made, and that this bronze replica be placed atop a pole and thus be offered as the means of salvation! Consider the words of the Apostle Paul concerning the way of salvation God offers us in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ: *"we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews [this is] a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles [this is] foolishness"* (1 Cor. 1:23.) Christ, the Messiah, the Savior, is presented as dying in weakness, dying the death of a notorious criminal upon the cross; we are instructed to place our faith in Him for our salvation, for He is the only means of salvation for us. In the eyes of the world, such a way of salvation is scandalous and foolish, both to ancient man and to modern man. Consider T.V. mogul Ted Turner's comments on Christianity and the way of salvation by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ: It starts out that we're all horrible. We're all born in sin. We're rotten; we're no good. And it makes people feel bad when you tell little kids that they're basically bad. He [Christ] had to come down here and suffer and die on the

cross, so with his blood our sins would be washed away. Weird, man. (*WORLD*, 6/16/90, p. 19.)

It may appear to be foolishness in the eyes of the world, but it truly is the way of salvation, because it is the way provided by God: *“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”* (Num. 21:9.) As the Apostle Paul goes on to write in 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 25, *“the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing; but for us who being saved it is the power of God ... ²⁵because the foolishness of God is wiser than [the wisdom of] men; and the weakness of God is stronger than [the strength of] men.”* Again, Paul testifies to the Romans, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes; to the Jew first, but also to the Greek”* (Rom. 1:16.)

In order to be saved, you must place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, even though it may seem foolish to the natural man.

II. You Must Place Your Faith in Jesus Christ, As Your Personal Response to God’s Act of Love (Jn. 3:16-17)

John 3:16 speaks of the love of God. The God of the Bible, the true and living God, is a Person; He is not a blind force or some great cosmic energy; He is a Person. The God of the Bible is a Person who loves. According to 1 John 4:8, *“God is love;”* that is to say, God is the source and the embodiment of love. We are told that the God of the Bible loved *“the world.”* By nature, we love those people who are agreeable to us; but we do not naturally extend our love to those people whom we find to be disagreeable or who have offended and wronged us. But such “love” that is typically displayed by human beings is not even worthy to be called true love when it is compared to the love of God. The Bible tells us that God loved *“the world.”* That is to say, the human race, mankind in our sinful condition as we resist and reject God’s rightful lordship over our lives, as we break His holy commandments, this is the Bible’s definition of *“the world.”* Yet, Scripture declares, God *“loved the world.”* The Apostle Paul brings out more explicitly the awesome dimension of this statement when he writes: *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this way: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom. 5:8.)

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. God’s love is an active love; God’s love is an emotion that moves Him to action. God’s love is a giving love; God expressed His love by giving Himself in the Person of His one and only Son. Out of love for the world, God willingly gave His own Son, going so far as to send Him to the cross, going so far as to lay upon Him the awful sentence of condemnation, going so far as to make Him the atoning sacrifice for sin. Isaiah 53:5-6 provides an Old Testament prophecy describing the atoning work of Christ Jesus:

... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment was laid upon him for our peace, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Jehovah has laid upon him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:5-6)

John 3:17 goes on to say that God did not send His Son into the world in order to condemn the world. God certainly has every right to condemn the world: *“God is a righteous judge; indeed, a God who has indignation every day”* (Psl. 7:11.) God certainly has the power to carry out His righteous judgment against the entire world of sinful humanity:

... the nations are like a drop [of water] from a bucket, they are regarded as the small dust on the scales. He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust ... ¹⁷All the nations are as nothing before him; they are regarded by him as worthless, and less than nothing. (Isa. 40:15,17)

On a previous occasion God in fact did execute His judgment against the world of sinful mankind. Referring to the Great Flood in the days of Noah, the Apostle Peter declares,

... long ago there were heavens, and an earth formed out of water and in the midst of water by the word of God. ⁶By means [of that same word] the world that existed at that time perished, being flooded with water. (2 Pet. 3:5-6)

Peter goes on to warn, a future date God shall execute one final and eternal judgment upon sinful mankind: *“by that same word the present heavens and earth are being preserved for fire, reserved for the day of the judgment and destruction of ungodly mankind”* (2 Pet. 3:7.)

But according to John 3:17, on this particular occasion—the sending of His Son into the world for the purpose of going to the cross of Calvary—God sent His Son *“in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

Having considered the greatness of God’s love, we must now consider the necessity of responding to that divine love: the necessity for each of us to personally place our faith in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, receiving Him as our Savior. Notice how frequently the necessity for personal faith is stressed in these verses:

... whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (Jn. 3:15)

...whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn. 3:16)

Whoever believes in him is not condemned; whoever does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. (Jn. 3:18)

In each of these verses the Greek form of the verb “to believe” is in the participial form (ὁ πιστεύων), indicating “the believer.” It is referring to the one who becomes a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, a disciple of Christ, one who receives Christ as their Savior and entrusts their life to Christ to belong to Him. Yet, how frequently people fail to appreciate the necessity of personal faith in Christ, the necessity of responding to Christ with personal faith; instead, they tragically take Christ and His sacrifice for granted to their own eternal loss.

There are those who acknowledge that Christ died for the world, and assume that, therefore, they need not trouble themselves about their salvation, they assume that it is “automatic.” Their reasoning goes like this: Christ died for the world, for mankind; I am a part of mankind; so, naturally, He must have died for me. But does John 3:16 say, *“for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that all of mankind shall not perish, but have eternal life”*? There are others who maintain that they believe in Jesus, but all they really believe are simply the facts about Jesus. Their argument is as follows: I believe Jesus was a man who died on the cross, was buried, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven; acknowledging these facts must make me a Christian. But does John 3:16 say, *“for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes the facts about Jesus shall not perish, but have eternal life”*?

John 3:16 is exhorting us to have personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to personally receive Him as our Savior and entrust our lives to Him—by faith, to receive Him into our life and to enter into His life. Bear in mind that the Greek form of the verb “to believe” is in the participial form (ὁ πιστεύων), indicating “the believer.” It is referring to the one who becomes a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, a disciple of Christ, one who receives Christ as their Savior and entrusts their life to Christ. By way of illustration: Assume you are standing at the edge of Niagara Falls, watching an expert tightrope walker perform his skillful feat of crossing the falls. He successfully pushes a wheelbarrow across the falls on his tightrope. He then pushes the same wheelbarrow across the falls containing a 200-pound weight. You are convinced of his ability to safely cross the falls on his tightrope. Just at that moment a brush fire ignites behind you, blocking your way of escape, threatening your life, and pushing you to the very edge of the falls. The tightrope walker instructs you to get into his wheelbarrow, assuring you that he will carry you to safety. If you truly believe in him and his ability, you will accept his offer and climb into his wheelbarrow. In the same way, Christ calls upon us to truly believe in Him and “climb into” His life, entrusting ourselves to Him and receiving Him as our Savior.

In order to be saved, you must place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as your personal response to God’s act of love.

III. You Must Place Your Faith in Jesus Christ, In Order to Escape the Judgment of God (Jn. 3:18-21)

John 3:18 declares that the one who believes in Christ is not condemned, but the one who does not believe is condemned already. In other words, there is no mystery or suspense as to the verdict that will be pronounced against the unbeliever on the Day of Judgment: his just fate is declared; he merely awaits the execution of the sentence. On that Day the Lord Jesus, in His capacity as the Righteous Judge, will say to all such persons, *“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matt. 25:41.)

Why will this be the case? Such will be the case because he has rejected the only means of salvation, the Savior sent by God in His love: *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12.) If you have rejected the holiness of God, you can come to Christ to receive forgiveness and new spiritual life. But if you reject the mercy and love of God as it is offered to you in Christ, then you have no hope but to face the final and inevitable judgment.

Note: Scripture declares that those who have not heard of the Savior are under the just sentence of condemnation, not because they have rejected the Savior, but because they are sinners who reject the righteousness of God in favor of ungodliness:

... the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness ... ²⁵They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 1:18,25)

John 3:19 declares, *“And this is [the reason for] the condemnation.”* Verse 19 is now going to present the cause for the condemnation. What follows is the explanation of why a man rejects Christ and therefore suffers the consequence. *“The Light has come into the world”* (vs. 19b); Jesus Christ, the holy Son of God, is the Light of the world, He reveals to us the divine life of God and the life God requires that we live if we would be acceptable to our God and Creator. But *“men loved the darkness rather than (or more than) the light”* (vs. 19c.) By nature, we love the spiritual darkness of ungodliness as a way of life. By nature, we love the darkness as a means of concealing our sin-filled and guilty lives. Jesus Christ, as the Light of the world, brings unbearable conviction upon us for the ungodliness of our lives. Therefore, by nature we seek to retreat into the darkness so as to avoid the revealing, convicting light of God as it shines in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Conversely, as 3:21 indicates, the man who practices the truth is naturally drawn to the light. The man who lives a thoroughly godly life is drawn to the light because he loves the light and he has nothing to hide; consider the testimony of Psalm 26:1-3,

Vindicate me, O Jehovah, for I have led a blameless life. I have also trusted in Jehovah without wavering. ²Test me, O Jehovah, and try me; examine my heart

and my mind; ³for your lovingkindness is before my eyes; and I have walked in your truth. (Psl. 26:1-3)

The only One who fits the description given in Psalm 26 is the Light Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ; the rest of the world fits the description given in John 3:19-20.

But even though we are sinners, we need not be afraid to come to that holy Light, which is Jesus, He will do us no harm if we come. Why may we come to Him with confidence? We may do so, and are urged by Him to do so, because God in His love sent His Son into the world for us (vs. 16); because God did not send His Son into the world to condemn us, but to save us (Jn. 3:17.) But you can only be saved from the inevitable judgment to come if you come to Christ and entrust yourself to Him, receiving Him as your Savior.

In order to be saved, you must place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; for that is the only way you can escape the righteous judgment of God.