

INTRODUCTION

Today we come to the end of John 3, one of the most strategic chapters in all of the Bible. The original manuscripts of the Bible weren't divided by chapters and divisions. The division we currently have was devised by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the early 1200s. Having chapter and verse divisions is for the ease of being able to locate a specific passage of scripture.

Genesis 1 can be called the Prime Chapter, because it is chapter #1. In the same sense, John 3 could be called the Millennial chapter of the Bible because it is chapter #1,000. When we started our study of John 3 in August, I mentioned that if all the rest of the Bible were lost, there is enough Gospel truth in John 3 for everyone in the world to know Jesus.

In this message, I want to touch on the truth found in the final six verses of John 3, then I want to back up and give a message that focuses on three majors MUSTS in John 3. These are three "musts" you can trust. In today's passage, John the Baptist has just been speaking, and many scholars believe he continues with these truths as he contrasts his role with that of Jesus.

John 3:31-36. "The one who comes from above is above all [Jesus]. The one who is from the earth [John] is earthly and speaks in earthly terms. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, and yet no one accepts his testimony. The one who has accepted his testimony has affirmed that God is true. For the one whom God sent speaks God's words, since he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands. The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him."

Before we backtrack into John 3, let me share with you three truths that are communicated in these final verses. We won't spend much time here, because these are themes we will see again in this study.

Jesus came down from heaven.

If someone asks me where I'm from, I usually say, "I'm from L.A." Or you might say, "I'm from Oklahoma." But Jesus insisted many times that He came down from heaven. When we get to John 6, we'll see where Jesus says He came down from heaven seven times in a few short verses.

The Father has given Jesus all authority.

Did you notice the interaction of the Trinity in this passage? We read that in verse 35 that the Father loves the Son and has given Him all authority, and it is the Son who gives the Holy Spirit. We see the authority of the Father in the miracles that Jesus performs.

Jesus gives the Spirit generously.

We read where Jesus gives the Spirit without measure. When we get to John 14-16 we will learn more about how Jesus promised to send the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. Jesus said He had been with the disciples, but that the Holy Spirit would be in them.

Now with that brief introduction, I want us to consider three major MUSTS in John 3. As I read through the Bible, I am always looking for spiritual links. In John 3 there are three times the word "Must" appears. And each one of these statements in an absolute imperative. There are many things in life that are may be's, but there are only a few things that are must-be's. These are three must be's. These are three musts you can trust. Let's take a moment and dig into each of these musts. The first is the MUST for the Savior.

1. JESUS MUST BE CRUCIFIED TO PAY MY SIN PENALTY.

In John 3:14-15 Jesus said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

When we studied this a few weeks ago we talked about the story recorded in Numbers 21. The children of Israel were wandering in the desert, and God had miraculously provided food for them in the form of manna. Every morning they went out and manna was covering the ground. But the people ate so much manna they got sick and tired of it and started complaining to Moses and God. They said, "The same old manna every day, and we're getting tired of it. We've prepared it every way you can imagine. We've made ba manna splits. Ba manna bread. Mannacotti—man, oh, man we're fed up with manna!"

So the Bible says God sent thousands of poisonous snakes into the camp, and many people were bitten and died. So the people repented and admitted they had sinned and Moses prayed for them. God told Moses to put a bronze snake and put it on a pole and hold it up. He promised that whoever looked at that snake on a pole, they would be cured. All they had to do was to look and live.

Jesus used that graphic story to illustrate *why* He had to go to the cross. The snake is a symbol of the poisonous consequences of our sin. Each of us has been bitten by the toxic venom of sin. We are ALL sinners and we deserve death.

But when Jesus was lifted up, He became that snake for us. Even though there was no sinful venom in His body, He took the poison of our sin into His perfect character, and absorbed our punishment.

Many people want to accept Jesus as a good man or as a prophet, but not as someone who would be nailed to a Roman cross. Our Muslim friends love Issa as a great prophet, second only to Mohammed. The Qur'an says Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, and performed miracles. But Muslims stop short of the cross and insist that Jesus wasn't crucified, it was just someone who looked like Jesus. They can't accept the idea of the cross. The Bible says that "the

word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. But it is the power of God to us who are being saved." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

There are even some who claim to be Christians that don't believe in the saving work of the cross. Dr. Albert Schweitzer was a famous physician and humanitarian. He was also a virtuoso organist. He served most of his life as a missionary doctor in Africa. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1952. He accomplished a world of good in his medical work in Africa, but he had a faulty view of the cross. He wrote a book entitled *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, in which he claimed that all the miracle stories about Jesus were myths, and that Jesus was merely a great man who died as a martyr.

He believed Jesus came to force the end of history, but in failing to do that, he was killed. To quote his own words: "Jesus lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all history to a close. It refuses to turn, and he throws himself on it. Then it does turn and it crushes him." (*The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, p. 370-371) To Albert Schweitzer the death of Jesus was meaningless. He believed Jesus was unwillingly crushed under the wheel of the world. And he didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus. As wonderful a humanitarian as Dr. Schweitzer was, he had it wrong.

Jesus WAS crushed on the cross, but He did it willingly, and it was all part of God's plan. Seven hundred and fifty years before the cross, the prophet Isaiah predicted, "But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him...Yet the Lord was pleased to CRUSH him severely... After his anguish, he will see light and be satisfied." (Isaiah 53:5,10,11)

You can live a life of good works and win fifty Nobel Prizes, but there's no other way to get to heaven except through the blood of the cross. The cross wasn't an afterthought or plan B. It was God's plan from the beginning. The Bible says Jesus is the Lamb of God slain from the Foundation of the World. And when we stand around the throne of heaven we will see Jesus as a Lamb that was slain. The cross isn't an option, it is a MUST for the salvation of any person. It was on the cross that Jesus paid the penalty for my sin.

Phillip Keller writes about a woman in California who stood before a judge. When the charge was read, she pleaded guilty. The judge accepted her verdict and she was ordered to either pay \$500 or spend 30 days in jail. The young woman responded that she didn't have the money for the fine, so she would accept the jail time. Slowly, the judge rose and removed his robe. He walked down and stood beside the young woman. She was his daughter. Then, with a heavy heart, he took his check book and paid the \$500 fine to the clerk. Her judge was also a loving father. He paid the debt she couldn't pay. As we stand before the Judge of the Universe, we have to plead guilty. We cannot pay the fine. But the judge is also our Savior: He has already borne the punishment for us! Our sins crushed Him on the cross.

That's the "must" of the Savior. Now let's look at the MUST of a sinner.

2. I MUST BE BORN AGAIN TO ENTER HEAVEN.

Jesus said, "Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again." (John 3:7)

A Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and said, "God must be with you because of the miracles you are doing." Jesus didn't accept the flattery and say, "Why, Thank you sir." Without missing a beat Jesus said, "Nicodemus unless you are born again, you will not see the Kingdom of heaven." Then Jesus said, "Unless you are born again, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." And then Jesus said a third time, "Do not be amazed that I told you, you MUST be born again."

When Jesus told Nicodemus he had to be born again, Nick didn't say, "Why?" He said, "How?" It's like he was thinking, "Oh man, I like the sound of that. But HOW can that happen? Can I enter back in to my mother's womb?" Jesus must have smiled at his reply and said, "No, Nick. There's physical birth, and there's spiritual birth."

He said, "Spiritual birth is like the wind." You can't see the wind, you can only see the effects of the wind." Jesus was using a play on words there because the word "spirit" and the word "wind" are the same.

Let me simplify what it means to be born again.

The new birth begins with a change of mind that produces a change of behavior. It starts with a new way of thinking that leads to a new way of living. The Bible says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

So, what needs to change in our minds? We must change the idea that we can be good enough to earn God's acceptance. Let's use Nicodemus as an example. He was a Pharisee. He was obsessed with keeping the Jewish Law. The Pharisees believed that if they could live perfectly according to God's Law, they would be seen as righteous in God's eyes. But they themselves knew that it was impossible.

Because they didn't only keep the Law of the Torah, they also had to obey all the laws written to explain the laws of the Torah. For instance, the Law says to keep the Sabbath Day holy and no work should be done. But what constituted work? To define work, the rabbis and the scribes wrote volumes of additional laws. The Mishnah contained 24 chapters about the Sabbath, and the Talmud contained 56 pages about how the Sabbath could be violated.

For instance, it was determined that tying a knot on the Sabbath constituted work. But there was an exception. A woman could tie a sash around her waist to remain modest. So this exception led to a loophole. If a man needed to get water from the well on a Sabbath and the bucket wasn't tied to the rope, he couldn't tie the rope; that was work. But he could tie one end of a woman's sash to the rope and the other end to the bucket. That's a loophole.

The law said you couldn't spit on the dirt on the Sabbath, that was considered making mortar; but you could spit on a rock, so you had to watch your aim. Another loophole.

Or the Talmud said that a man could only walk 2000 cubits, which is about 3,000 feet from his home on the Sabbath – any farther, and it would be considered work. But they came up with a loophole. If a man knew he needed to walk more than 3,000 feet on the Sabbath, during the week before he would place a small item from his home, like a cup, plate, or oil lamp at 3,000 foot intervals. On the Sabbath, when he reached those items he would say, "This is my home." And he would walk another 3,000 feet. Another loophole. So Nicodemus' life revolved around keeping these laws and knowing the loopholes. He knew in his heart that his kind of rule keeping had nothing to do with real righteousness. He had to change his thinking.

That night, Nicodemus heard the good news that God loves the world so much that he gave his one and only son, and whoever believes in him would have eternal life.

After his encounter with Jesus, Nicodemus had a change of behavior. We only see Nick two more times in the gospel story. Once in John 7:51 when the Sanhedrin is discussing how to get rid of Jesus, Nicodemus steps up and asks, "Our law doesn't condemn a man without giving him a chance to defend himself." And again in John 19:39-42 when Nicodemus risked his reputation by joining Joseph of Arimathea in removing the body of Jesus from the cross. Then they covered his corpse with sweet-smelling spices and lovingly lay the body in the tomb.

These are the actions of a changed man. I think Nicodemus could look back to that night and say, that's when it all changed for me. That's when I was born again. Can you look back to a time in your life when it changed for you? When you stopped thinking you could earn heaven and trusted Jesus to save you?

I can look back at March 11, 1961 and remember the night when I changed my mind about what a good little boy I was. I realized I was a sinner and I trusted Jesus. I didn't become perfect, and I have sinned and failed God many times since then, but I have had a holy desire to live in obedience to God. That's what it means to be born again. That's the Must for the sinner. Jesus said, "Don't be surprised. You MUST be born again." The third must is the must for the servant.

3. I MUST SURRENDER TO JESUS AS MY LORD.

John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30) We were here just a couple of weeks ago. Some of John the Baptist's disciples were getting uptight because they saw their disciples leaving and starting to follow Jesus. Rather than getting upset, John said, "That's the way it's supposed to happen. I'm not the bridegroom, I'm just the best man. I want to put the spotlight on Him."

And then, in John 3:30 I shared what is part of my life motto: "He must increase; and I must decrease." That means that we must totally surrender our lives to the Lordship of Jesus.

I have unintentionally misled people through the years when I asked them if they would make Jesus the Lord of their lives. That was the wrong way to say it. You can't MAKE Jesus Lord because He already IS Lord of everything and every person in this universe. You can't make Him Lord because He already is—but you can surrender to His rule and reign over every area of your life.

Watchman Nee was a Chinese pastor who preached and trained thousands of Chinese Christians in the early years of the twentieth century. After the Communist takeover in 1952, Nee was arrested; he spent the next twenty years in prison, and died there in 1972 at 69. His book, *The Normal Christian Life* is a powerful summary of what it means for Jesus to live in us. One of his most powerful quotes relates to surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus. He wrote: “A day must come in our lives, as definite as the day of our conversion, when we give up all right to ourselves and submit to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ.” (*The Normal Christian Life*)

A person cannot intentionally receive Jesus as their Savior and reject Him as their Lord. But many people, including myself, came to Christ at an early age, and we knew we were saved. Jesus was my savior. I knew I wasn't going to hell, but it wasn't until I was older than I came to understand that Jesus wanted to be my Lord as well. So, it was in the summer of 1970, between my junior and senior year of high school that I totally surrendered every part of my life to Jesus.

When someone who is older comes to Christ, they may realize the necessity to accept Jesus as BOTH Savior and Lord, as it should be. But it didn't happen like that for me.

How about you? Many of you know that you are saved—Jesus is your Savior, but have you ever surrendered to Him as Lord? Have you said, “Here, Lord, you can control every area of my life—my public life, my private life, my family life, my work life—everything I have is yours.” When you make that commitment, you will see that Jesus will increase and your will and ego will decrease.

When that happens, Jesus becomes the Master and we become the servant. When Paul started his letters, he identified himself as a slave for Jesus Christ. Are you willing to live as a slave of Jesus?

One of the first novels I ever read as a boy was *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. I read an abridged version, because the original English version from 1719 was massive and difficult to read. In fact, the actual title of the book was *The Life and most Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner: who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an uninhabited Island on the coast of America, lying near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates. Written by Himself.*

I just want to focus on one point of the story. Crusoe rescued a native from being killed and eaten by cannibals. He named him Friday, and Friday dedicated his life to serving Robison Crusoe. The first thing Robison did was teach Friday to speak English, and then he taught Him

about Jesus. Robison Crusoe is full of Christian themes that never appeared in any of the movies. Crusoe read the Bible to Friday every day. And here are his exact words about teaching Friday how to become a Christian: "I had not only been moved to look up to heaven myself, and to seek the Hand that had brought me here, but was now to be made an instrument, under Providence, to save the life, and soul of a poor savage, and bring him to the true knowledge of Christian faith. That he might know Christ Jesus, in whom is life eternal; I say, when I reflected upon all these things, a secret joy ran through every part of My soul, and I frequently rejoiced that ever I was brought to this place for this single purpose."

Later Crusoe would write that Friday became a believer, and was a better Christian than himself. And Friday pledged his life to follow and serve his Master Crusoe. When they were rescued, Crusoe gave Friday the opportunity to go back to his people, but Friday chose to follow Crusoe and serve his Master until he died. And that's the way each of us should surrender to the Lordship of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

There are a lot of optional things in life. There are plenty of May-be's but there are a few absolute imperatives—these are MUST-be's. There's the MUST of the Savior: He must be lifted up on the cross. There's the MUST for the sinner: I must be born again. And there is the MUST for the servant: He must increase, and I must decrease.

And now I MUST conclude this message and you MUST decide if you are going to surrender to Jesus to be your Savior and your LORD.

OUTLINE

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- The Father has given Jesus all authority.
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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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