

“Salvation in the Son” (Jn. 3:12-21)

1. Heaven to Earth (12-13)
 - a. Ascending & Descending (1:51). Angels upon Jesus.
 - b. Ascending & Descending (v. 13) – Jesus Himself! It’s not that Jesus was saying “I’ve been here and back” but that “no one has ascended but one has descended.” See Jn. 1:1-5, 18
2. The Serpent & The Son of Man (14-15)
 - a. Serpent (Nu. 21:1-9)
 - b. Son of Man (v. 14)
 - c. Both lifted up. Both the object of faith for healing.
 - d. Double Meaning: ‘raised’ up honorary ‘exalted,’ but also as a sacrificial curse. See vv. 8:28; 12:32, 34 and Isa. 52:13. See **Further Consideration** below.
 - e. Looking to the serpent healed them physically. It’s as Jesus was telling Nic that we too are fatally struck by the disease of sin and unless we look to the Cross of Jesus where He hung as a curse for our sins, we too will perish as those in the wilderness who refused to simply look to the serpent. The stakes are higher: It’s sobering to think that unless we believe on Jesus that we would die as those in the wilderness. But it is all the more critical that we avoid spiritual death and eternal separation!
 - f. The implication in Nu. 21 is that some (or many), even in their death agonies of terror and pain, would not trust God and look to the serpent lifted up on the pole. John’s account underscores this several times already in the first three chapters and we will conclude w/ a confirmation of such in this message.
 - g. Looking to Jesus heals us spiritually. Salvation wasn’t (isn’t) easy, but it is simply attained by faith. Conversely, salvation may be attained easily, but what it cost and entailed of the Trinity, is oh so incomprehensible to man.
 - h. A way or The way to be saved?
 - i. Firstly, what other religion simply says believe (trust) and be saved? None, hence Jesus said (Jn. 14:6).
 - ii. Secondly, how insolent can one be to demand that all God did to acquire our redemption was not enough, unnecessary, or too narrow-minded?
 - iii. Thirdly, Jesus didn’t die to merely show us how ugly sin is or how cruel man can be. Jesus didn’t endure temptation in His humanity and take on Satan, scorn, humiliation, defamation, betrayal, scourging, crucifixion, and drink the entire cup of God’s wrath – when such could be avoided (Mat. 26:39).
3. Executed yet Exalted (14)
 - a. Literally hung up like the venomous serpent yet perfectly victorious as the sinners’ Warrior (Rev. 5:5-6 & 9-10).
 - b. Note: in this exchange w/ Nic., Jesus has alluded to events and types found in Genesis (i.e. Jacob), Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Numbers just to name the more pertinent references.
 - c. He hung on the cruelest instrument of execution as His body endured the fatal venom of sin – yet He would rise victorious after leading captivity captive to set us captives free. In Jn. 2:19, Jesus cryptically referred to this salvific act – the salvation act (Heb. 2:3).
4. Life & Death (16-18)
 - a. Escaping death. “Parish” is default position and eternal life is escaping death via being born from above to experience everlasting life!
 - b. V. 17 continues the presupposition of default condemnation. Christ has no need to condemn the dead for they are dead (Eph. 2:1). The serpents were not sent to condemn but to punish.

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And though Jesus didn't come to condemn but to save – all who will be saved or condemned will be declared as such by Jesus. “God has committed all judgment to Christ (5:22, 27). He goes on to speak of Christ as judging (5:30; 8:16, 26) or not judging (8:15 [but cf. 16]; 12:47), and of His word as judging people (12:48). His judgment is just (5:30) and true (8:16).”¹

- c. D. A. Carson put it well, “He did not come into a neutral world in order to save some and condemn others; he came into a lost world (for that is the nature of the ‘world’, 1:9) in order to save some.”²
- d. V. 18 reaffirms this. Ro. 3:9-12, 23 cf. Pss. 14:1-3; 53:1-3.
- e. V. 16 and thus is the reason why God sent His only begotten Son! We love darkness and thus stand condemned, but He loves us so much that He died for us (Gal. 2:20).
- f. Wright: We are seeing, in particular, what God's own love looks like. John refers us back to 1:18, and behind that to 1:1–2, in order to say: when Jesus died on the cross, that was the full and dramatic display of God's own love. It wasn't a messy accident; it wasn't God letting the worst happen to someone else. The cross is at the heart of John's amazing new picture of who God is. He is now to be known as the God who is both father and son, and the son is revealed, ‘lifted up’, when he dies under the weight of the world's evil. The cross is the ultimate ladder set up between **heaven** and earth.³
- g. Morris: “John is not saying that God has decreed that people who do such and such things are condemned. It is not God's sentence with which he is concerned here. He is telling us rather how the process works. People choose the darkness and their condemnation lies in that very fact. They shut themselves up to darkness; they choose to live in darkness; they cut themselves off from the light. Why? “Because their deeds were evil.” Immersed in wrongdoing, they have no wish to be disturbed. They refuse to be shaken out of their comfortable sinfulness. So they reject the light that comes to them and set their love (aorist tense) on darkness. Thereby they condemn themselves.”⁴

5. Light & Darkness (19-21)

- a. Light has invaded and darkness cannot overcome it (1:5; 8-13).
- b. The dead love the dark and hate the light (19-20). Jn. 7:7.
- c. The light exposes evil (Eph. 5:11-13).
- d. Snakes and the pole. God provided both. Jesus is the Judge and Savior and thus will execute final judgment for the unrepentant as He paid for justice on the Cross for those who do repent.
- e. However, it is very unsettling to come out of the comfort and familiarity of the darkness that hides, not only our actions; but our attitudes, thoughts, fears, anxiousness, insecurities, and perverted priorities.
- f. You can either come out of the dark to cling to the light or hate the truth and hide from it unto your destruction/ruin i.e. perishing (Rev. 6:9-17).

¹ Morris, L. (1995). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 205). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

² Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 207). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

³ Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (pp. 33–34). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

⁴ Morris, L. (1995). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 207). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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- g. Here there opens up the great divide, which John describes in terms of darkness and light (see 1:4–5). Believing in Jesus means coming to the light, the light of God’s new creation. Not believing means remaining in the darkness. The darkness (and those who embrace it) must be condemned, not because it offends against some arbitrary laws which God made up for the fun of it, and certainly not because it has to do with the material, created world rather than with a supposed ‘spiritual’ world. It must be condemned because evil is destroying and defacing the present world, and preventing people coming forward into God’s new world (‘eternal life’; that is, the life of the age to come).⁵
6. Doing Evil or Doing Truth (20-21)
- a. Marvin Vincent Explains: **Doeth the truth** (ποιῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν). The phrase occurs only here and in 1 John 1:6. Note the contrasted phrase, *doeth evil* (ver. 20). There the plural is used: *doeth evil things*; evil being represented by a number of bad works. Here the singular, *the truth*, or *truth*; truth being regarded as one, and “including in a supreme unity all right deeds.” There is also to be noted the different words for *doing* in these two verses: *doeth evil* (πράσσω); *doeth truth* (ποιῶν). The latter verb contemplates the *object and end* of action; the former the *means*, with the idea of continuity and repetition. Πράσσω is the *practice*, while ποιῶν may be the *doing once for all*.⁶
 - b. So how again does one “do truth”? Jn. 6:27-29 comes to mind. “Believing” on Jesus is the ‘work of God.’
 - c. Believing i.e. faith i.e. living what you believe entails clinging to Christ when others demean or defame you for it (Mat. 5:10-12). See also Ro. 10:9-11 cf. Isa. 28:16 ‘haste’ connotes peace i.e. in all circumstances, when trust is put in the LORD. Paul’s reference emphasizes no shame or disgrace, assuming many will attempt to oppose and shame us.

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Jesus told Nicodemus what was necessary to enter the “Kingdom of God” (being born from above – Jn. 3:5) and went on to explain how to attain “everlasting life” (vv. 13-16). After mentioning the mystery of the Spirit, who gives us new life and thus entrance into the Kingdom, Jesus explained that attaining such is realized through belief i.e. trust in the Son of Man being “lifted up.” We see then that eternal life is life in the kingdom of God which is life lived willingly under the righteous reign of the “Father” (v. 16). Eternal life, then; is something that is provided by the Spirit, the Son, and the Father. And though it is available to whoever believes (trusts), it is not automatic for those who hate the light and truth! And those who hate light and truth hate Jesus (Jn. 7:7; 18:37).

⁵ Wright, T. (2004). [*John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10*](#) (p. 34). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

⁶ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [*Word studies in the New Testament*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 103). New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

Further Consideration

What is more, not only is John’s use of the verb *hypsōō* in a dual sense not original with the evangelist, but also it draws on Isaianic terminology; it is not only in John, but already in Isaiah, that the theme of “lifting up” is linked with the theme of “being glorified,” and, a further element of crucial significance, this in the context of the figure of the Suffering Servant of the Lord (cf. Isa. 52:13–53:12; esp. 52:13 LX^x; see Carson 1991: 201). What John discerns in this source text, and draws out by appropriating Isaianic theology, is that in truth Jesus’ crucifixion and exaltation are not distinct steps that are realized successively (as one might surmise from reading the Synoptics); rather, it is precisely Jesus’ crucifixion itself that constitutes, at the same time, his exaltation in that it marks the culmination of his messianic mission as the heaven-sent Word and the obedient Son of the Father. Hence, according to the Fourth Evangelist, Jesus’ death is not a moment of ignominy and shame, but rather a glorious event that not only brings glory to God, Jesus’ sender (12:28; 17:1, 4), and accrues glory to the Son owing to his obedience to the Father’s will (12:23; 17:1), but also becomes the way by which Jesus returns to the glory that he had with the Father before the world began (17:5; cf. 17:24; see also 13:1; 16:28).⁷

Just as the sin, failure, and murmuring of the Israelites in the wilderness and their standing in judgment of God and his revelation were deserving of divine judgment and death and requiring salvation by way of looking at God’s means of deliverance, so also Nicodemus was in danger of duplicating the same stance toward God’s revelation in Jesus and of repeating the pattern of sin, failure, and murmuring in his own day and situation. Hence it is not only the looking in faith at the God-appointed means of salvation that constitutes a parallel but also the predicament leading to the divine remedy in the first place. Thus Nicodemus and his fellow Sanhedrin members, as well as the other Jews and all readers of John’s Gospel, are not in the position of objective, neutral judges of the merits or shortcomings of Jesus’ claims as they might deem themselves; rather, they themselves are called to render a verdict that will either allow them to pass from death to life (5:24) and from God’s wrath to God’s favor (3:36) or confirm the verdict of death upon their lives (3:19–21).⁸

Significantly, the affirmation in 3:15 that “everyone who believes may in him [Jesus] have eternal life” (*contra* the NIV’s “everyone who believes in him”) constitutes the first reference to “eternal life” in this Gospel (see later 3:16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2–3; and the reference to “life in his name” in 20:31, which, in turn, by way of *inclusio*, corresponds to 1:12). The probable meaning of the expression “eternal life” is “the life of the age to come”—that is, resurrection life, which, according to John, can to some extent already be experienced in the here and now (e.g., 5:24; 10:10). That life, however, is found only “in him” (3:15, explicating and harking back to the prologue, 1:4). Hence the eternal life entered into by the new, spiritual birth is none other than the eternal life of the preexistent Word-become-flesh in Jesus, who has life in himself (5:26) and is himself

[·] esp. especially

^X LXX Septuagint

⁷ Köstenberger, A. J. (2007). [John](#). In *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (p. 436). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

⁸ Köstenberger, A. J. (2007). [John](#). In *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (pp. 435–436). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

^V NIV New International Version

the resurrection and the life (11:25) (see Carson 1991: 202–3). In the flow of the discourse Jesus moves from a reference to being born from above by water and spirit in terms of Ezekiel (John 3:5) to an O^T narrative passage, the account of the bronze snake in the wilderness (Num. 21:4–9), which served as the divinely appointed means of new physical life to the people of Israel. Correspondingly, Jesus presents himself as the means of new spiritual life—eternal life—for those who become children of God by looking at the lifted-up Savior in faith (3:14–15; cf. 1:12).⁹

Finally, Jesus’ adduction of the account of Num. 21 and John’s inclusion of this instance of Jesus’ use of Scripture in his Gospel are part of a very broad exodus typology or Moses/exodus typology that pervades much of the Gospel. This typology includes Jesus’ “signs” (see commentary above), which to a significant extent hark back to Moses’ performance of “signs and wonders” at the exodus. It also includes the references to the Prophet envisaged in Deut. 18 in 1:45; 6:14; 7:40; the references to Moses writing about Jesus and testifying about him in 5:45–47; and the entire Johannine Farewell Discourse (chaps. 13–17), which is patterned after Moses’ final words to the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy. Jesus is also set in relation to Moses, and the giving of the law, in the opening prologue (1:17; cf. 9:28). Yet another important part of the Moses/exodus typology in John’s Gospel is the feeding of the multitude (chap. 6), which includes Jesus’ correction that it is not Moses, but God, who has given the Israelites the bread from heaven (6:32), and which presents Jesus as the “bread from heaven” as the typological fulfillment of the manna provided by God for Israel in the wilderness (6:30–58).¹⁰

^T OT Old Testament

⁹ Köstenberger, A. J. (2007). [John](#). In *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (p. 436). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

· chaps. chapters

· chap. chapter

¹⁰ Köstenberger, A. J. (2007). [John](#). In *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (p. 437). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.