

No.

42.

"IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS  
WHICH ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH ON THE  
RIGHT HAND OF GOD." COL. 3. 1.

J O H N 3.  
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*An Address (revised) at*

Forest Gate, E. 7.

6th April, 1912.

by

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J O H N 3.

An Address by Mr. P. W. Howard,

At Forest Gate, E.7

6th April, 1912.

We have seen how Nicodemus representing others in his somewhat proud way, came to the Lord Jesus by night, but that the Lord would have nothing of Nicodemus's flattery, but would bring Nicodemus down as a poor, helpless, lost sinner, to see his need of a quickening from above, a birth out of the water of wrath, and a birth out of the quickening work of the Spirit of God without Whom none can see God's glory. You recollect how <sup>to</sup> Nicodemus's words, which were almost quibbles, the Lord answered firmly, sternly, yet graciously. We read these verses 10, 11 and 12 last time. "Jesus answered and said, Thou art the teacher of Israel and these things thou dost not recognize; verily, verily, I say unto thee, that which WE have seen, we speak". So the Lord brings before us His link with John, and John's link with Him. Nicodemus had come in the name of others, the Lord says, "You refuse Me, and One linked with Me". The Lord's "we" is the answer to Nicodemus's "we". Nicodemus and the Pharisees had particularly refused John's testimony, and that was to refuse Christ, "Ye receive not OUR witness". Earthly things had been said to the teacher of Israel and he did not believe. The Lord does not compromise, He does not explain away the words of Israel's Rabbi. Nicodemus had said

"How?" The Lord says, "You do not believe, and the others in whose name you come do not believe" - for the "you" is plural. "If I have told YOU earthly things, how heavenly things will you believe?" "YOU"-plural again. While Nicodemus identified himself with the Sanhedrin of Israel, or with any section of it, he could not be brought to a right position before the Lord. Salvation is not a matter of a little company changing its opinion or recognizing a new teacher; it is an individual matter for the poor, lost sinner, and Nicodemus had to be brought to a humbling "THOU" before he could enter into the blessedness of grace. "How will ye believe?" The Lord answers Nicodemus's "how?" with another "how?"; there is nothing to please the flesh, nothing that man would choose. Verse 13 refers to the Deity of Christ and also an indication that Nicodemus could receive the instruction from no-one else. "And no-one hath ascended up into the heaven except He Who descended out of the heaven, even the Son of man Who is in heaven". Christ emphasized Himself. Israel's teachers to this day bring that against Him. If He were not God, He could not thus emphasize Himself. The way in which the humble and meek Saviour spoke of Himself demonstrated His Deity more clearly than almost anything else. His very humility, it is evident, would make the words of glory concerning Himself out of place, were He not God manifest in the flesh. That He was the Son of man is true, but that He was the One in the heaven, essentially in the heaven, as the term implies, - that was also

true. The realization of the Deity of Christ is ever linked with a true realization of the atonement of Christ, the two are associated. Israel at the present time have a stumbling block at the two; they reject His Deity, and they reject His death; when He returns in glory they will understand both. "They will look upon Me Whom they pierced" says Zech. 12, where God is speaking. "Me" - Deity; "Whom they pierced" - death. They will say, "Lo, this is our God" - Deity; "We will be glad and rejoice in His Salvation" - atonement. And the Lord Jesus links the two here, for He adds in verse 14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up". The Deity of Christ explained in verse 13 is linked with the expression "in heaven", the atonement is linked with His being on earth, and with the title "Son of man". There is language here which none can understand, except they are in Christ Jesus, for "Who hath known the mind of the Lord?" Who hath found the nature of the Lord? Mere logic, mere science, mere mental ability must fall short, No-one knoweth the Son, but the Father, and he to whomsoever the Father reveals. "As Moses lifted up (or exalted) the serpent (the one serpent) in the wilderness (a place outside the city) so must the Son of man be lifted up (exalted)". The word SO implies a fulfilment of type and a parallel event; in the same way He must be lifted up, that is to say must be lifted up outside the city, must be lifted up on a pole, for the cross was simply a stake, as the word implies. The cross beam is rather linked with heathenism, Christ was lifted up on a pole, fulfilling the words of Moses

concerning a curse on those who hang on a tree. But the SO has a fuller teaching. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, the one hope of salvation, SO did the Lord Jesus die. There were not two serpents, and there are not two Saviours. Bitten ones looked to the serpent, and heart-broken <sup>Sinners</sup> ~~ones~~ look to the Saviour. Only those who felt their need looked, they were not told that they could look because they were a chosen people, though it WAS because they were a chosen people they could look. So is it now. We do not preach to the unsaved concerning God's secret hidden counsels, but when they look they realize that their feeling of doom is their argument for looking. The reason for the looking is the grace of God which has brought them into the position to look. God's grace is always the background, God's grace is always the basis as well as the top-stone. But the SO is more emphatic. The serpent was a serpent of brass, and brass or copper suggests power. But, was not our beloved Lord crucified through weakness? Ah, but that which appeared the weakness of God was stronger than death, and He when He died there, suffering in intense physical and soul agony, was the Mighty One,- Altogether powerful, in wondrous power to bear the sin of great numbers whom no man can number. He bare the sin of many, when He, the Lamb of God took away that sin, a weight that no man could have taken together with Him. Another might share the weight of the cross on the journey to Calvary, an angel might be with him in Gethsemane, but on Calvary He was there alone, alone

supporting the judgment that He took for the lost. But there is a further thought - the brass was moulded into the form of a serpent, and the serpents were the executors of God's wrath, and thus the Lord Jesus when exalted upon that pole was exalted there as the One Who met wrath, as the One Who was as it were filled with judgment, as the One Who entirely met the doom of His people. But the brazen serpent did not move as the other serpents, the brazen serpent did not bite; and because Christ as it were took the very shape of judgment there is no biting judgment <sup>against</sup> to those who look to it. Wrath is satisfied, wrath is settled, wrath is silent, wrath is met, and the Lord's redeemed rejoice, that as Moses lifted up <sup>the serpent</sup> in the wilderness, so has the Son of man been lifted up. The MUST has been fulfilled, the MUST'S of John 3 are linked together; we, by grace, have enjoyed the earlier MUST of verse 7 because of the other MUST of verse 14. The IN THE WILDERNESS is an additional thought; the wilderness is a picture of the world, and Christ was not merely a Saviour for Jews, but for Jews and GENTILES who are alike brought near by His precious blood. Only those who understand a wilderness position, who feel the world is a wilderness, and feel themselves in danger, only those look, and all that look, though numerous, are saved by one way of salvation. One bullock on Israel's day of atonement died for many in one race, one goat died for many in one nation, one serpent was the centre for the whole people, God's one's are full of teaching for those who realize the One of Whom they speak.

Christ was exalted, and lifted up when He died. John tells us that He Himself said, "If I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all men unto Me". Yes, He was exalted when men thought that they had brought Him down. It was no mere accident that He was on the cross, He was between earth and heaven; He was as it were the uniting One, and the cross suggested the ladder, or rather the One Who was hanged on that cross suggested a ladder, lifted up that others might see Him. Lifted up as the One Who was more than an earthly one, as the One Who has come down from heaven, He the Great Saviour of sinners was there exalted as finishing the work that was given Him to do, exalted in anticipation of the exaltation when He was raised from the dead and placed at the right hand of the Father, exalted that His people might be exalted, that they might have, not the curse of Divine judgment, but, after the weight of MAN'S reproach and judgment, that they might share the crown of glory and the throne of triumph with Himself.

And verse 15 adds "That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life, for God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life". These added words give a wondrous Divine emphasis. We cannot help noticing that their force is somewhat weaker by the altered translation "eternal" and "everlasting". God by repetition often brings His truth to bear on those who have bad memories. Christ was lifted up with a Divine object.

There was no mere accident - "That whosoever" - of whatever nation or condition or age he be. But the word is singular; it implies that it must be the looking individually. National salvation is not the Divine teaching; it is a matter of individual relationship to a personal Christ. "That whosoever believeth in Him", or more emphatically, "That everyone that is characterized by believing in Him". He receives a new life, a Divine life, that is marked by believing in Him, and that finds a resting place in Him. "Should not perish away". How could he perish away, when he has life in him? PERISHING is the opposite of HAVING, AWAY is the opposite of END. "Should not perish away, but have everlasting life, for God so loved the world". The "for" links to the verse preceding. We must not read any passage out of its context. "For God so loved the world". The "so" is the same word as in verse 14. These SO'S suggest certain parallels. "God SO loved the world". In what way? Ah! with a "so" that has no parallel except with itself. He so loved as to give. The only parallel is part of the same love. Yet there is a further thought - He so loved that He would not save without a righteous death for poor guilty sinners. He did not love indiscriminately and carelessly, He did not love indulgently, He so loved as only to save by a sacrifice, - HE LOVED RIGHTEOUSLY. The fulness of that love never made it unjust against His law. He never broke His truth to save those on whom He set His mercy. His word stood, His righteousness remained unshaken, but yet He loved, and loved

with an everlasting love, that from eternity extends to eternity, and gives an everlasting life because of Him Who took over our death. He so loved as to give, and we, having been brought by such love to know such love, should love enough to give unto Him. Love is not mere impulse, love is not mere language, love is active. Love gives, and if we love the Lord, we should give our all unto Him. If we love our brethren we should lay down our lives for them, or at least be ready to do anything, enduring the strain with holy cheerfulness because of love.

In verse 16 the "in Him" is rather "into Him", for by nature man is outside, but when there is salvation there is a blessed "into Him". Not merely do we believe into a thing, a creed, or a church, but into Him, a Living Person Who became dead that we might live in Him.

"HAVE" everlasting life. The words ring out again "HAVE". The tense implies a continuance, the tense implies that the Lord's people are to possess this by the enjoyment of a living faith in Him as a living possession. "HAVE life everlasting", in the ages to come they shall still have it. Not only are they possessed, but they possess; not only are they in Christ, but Christ is in them. There is a wondrous fulness in what grace has wrought; and we deserve the judgment, we deserve wrath, we had followed the serpent to sin, and we deserve the serpent's doom, but Christ took our place that we might believe in Him. "THANKS BE UNTO GOD FOR HIS UNSPEAKABLE GIFT".