

Basic Training Bible Ministries
presents
“The Simplicity of the Gospel”



“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”
Matthew 18:3

Cross and Spurs Cowboy Church Conference
May 14–16, 2021
Buchanan Dam, Texas

The Simplicity of the Gospel

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:3

Introduction

All little children begin the learning process in life the same way. They learn by faith. Because they know that they don't know, they are humble. They have never seen an elephant, or a whale, but if you show them a picture book, they learn to identify whatever they are shown. If they are told, “This is an elephant,” they don't argue and say, “No, I think that is a chicken.” They believe what they are told because it is in their child-like nature to trust.

Only as we grow do we begin to assume a level of knowledge, based on what we have learned by faith. As adults we turn more and more to reason (rationalism) and science (empiricism), where we learn by trial and error. Gradually, we begin to turn away from the faith we had as little children.

Here, Jesus is telling His disciples that they need to “turn around, go back” to being like little children. They need to come to Him in simple, child-like faith if they would enter into His heavenly kingdom. The same point was made on another occasion (Mark 10:13–16). When we return to the simplicity of child-like faith, we come to Jesus through His Word in humility. And Peter, the leader of the disciple band, assures us “*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*” (1 Pet. 5:5b). It is time for us to turn back to the simplicity and humility of little children and hear the voice of our heavenly Father!

CLASS ONE:

Jesus Christ, The Only Way (John 3)

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

John 3:16

This is without doubt the most well-known promise in the entire Bible. But too often we overlook the context of this verse. It is connected to a story, and the story has a point to make that adds scope and depth to these words.

The Baffled Theologian

This chapter begins with the night visit of Nicodemus to Jesus. Nicodemus was not only a Pharisee (a very rigid and religious sect), but he was also a “*ruler of the Jews*” (v. 1), meaning he was a member of the ruling council of the Jews—the Sanhedrin. According to Jesus in v. 10, he was considered the premier scholar and teacher in Israel. Humanly speaking, he could be proud of all his religious achievements.

Yet when Jesus told him, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (vv. 3, 7), Nicodemus was baffled. Though he was a celebrated religious leader, he did not know the greatest of all spiritual truths—the answer to the question: How could anyone enter eternal life?

Jesus has told Nicodemus some great truths about the new birth. He declared that it was a birth “*from [above]*” (v. 7) includes the idea of “*again*.” He has declared that two births are involved: one from water (natural birth) and one by the Spirit (vv. 5–6, spiritual re-birth). He then declares that the second birth, by the Holy Spirit, is observable only by its effects in the lives of those who receive it (v. 8; 2 Cor. 5:17).

The response of Nicodemus is, “*How can these things be?*” Though his entire life was dedicated to the doctrines and duties of Jewish religion, Nicodemus did not know how to enter into eternal life. When Jesus responds, “*We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness*” (v. 11), He is speaking of Himself and the Holy Spirit (vv. 6–8). He then explains to Nicodemus how one can enter into eternal life.

Jesus had spoken of earthly things, like natural birth, water, and the wind, as examples. If Nicodemus did not believe Him in these matters, how could he believe when the Lord spoke of eternal life, the kingdom of God, and the Holy Spirit? Jesus is revealing to Nicodemus that the problem is not that he is lacking intelligence, but that he is lacking faith in Jesus as “*He who came down from heaven*.”

Jesus Explains the Gospel

First, He uses an Old Testament example (vv. 14–15). It is from the story recorded in Numbers 21:4–9, where the children of Israel sinned, and God sent fiery serpents among them. When they cried out to the Lord and confessed their sin, God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. If anyone simply looked to the pole, they would be healed. This was a prophetic picture of Christ on the cross. Just as the bronze serpent pictured what was killing the people, so Jesus on the cross demonstrated that “*The wages of sin is death, but the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. 6:23). All we have to do is look to Him in faith to be saved from sin and death.

Next (v. 16), He explained that God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, into the world out of His **love** for all mankind. His promise is that whoever believes in Him would not perish in judgment but would have everlasting **life**.

Then (vv. 17–19), He declares that He (Jesus) did not come into the world to judge us, but rather to save us. All who believe will be saved (delivered from judgment), but those who reject Him will be judged. Their judgment is not for their sins, which Jesus Christ paid for, but for their rejection of Christ, who is the only way to eternal life.

This was because to reject the **light** that Christ brought into the world, and love darkness instead, brought self-condemnation. In Jesus Christ are found the light that leads to God, the love that comes from God, and the life that is God’s life—eternal life.

Everyman's Bible Verse

William Barclay said that while many believers have a favorite verse, John 3:16 was “everyman’s verse,” because it is God’s offer of eternal life to the whole world. Let’s look at this verse broken down in segments to reveal ten great truths about eternal salvation:

1. “*For God*”—**The Author**. The heavenly Father is the author of the plan of salvation. He devised the plan and put it into action.
2. “*So loved*”—**The motive**. John tells us in 1 John 4:8 and 16 that “*God is love*.” This is the essence of God summarized in one word. It was His love for the world that moved Him to act for our redemption.
3. “*The world*”—**The scope**. Though many try to diminish this, the truth is that God sent Christ to die for every member of mankind.
4. “*That He gave*”—**The Gift**. God gave His pure and holy Son as a substitutionary sacrifice in our place, to pay the penalty of our sins.
5. “*His only begotten Son*”—**The Savior**. John calls Jesus Christ “*the Savior of the world*” (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14).
6. “*That whoever*”—**The invitation**. No one is excluded from the offer of eternal life through Jesus Christ.
7. “*Believes in Him*”—**The condition**. It is not just faith, but faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. The power of faith is in the power of the One in whom we believe.
8. “*Should not perish*”—**The deliverance**. Those who believe are rescued from eternal condemnation and separation from God.
9. “*But have*”—**The security**. We receive eternal life at the moment that we believe, and it can never be forfeited or lost.
10. “*Everlasting life*”—**The possession**. This is new birth into sharing in the very life of God Himself.

The Simplicity of Faith

Nicodemus had long ago lost his child-like humility. Like all of us he had immersed himself in his world and labored to find his place in it. For him it was the pursuit of scholarly study and zealous observance of the Law of Moses. He had risen to the top by religious discipline and self-sacrifice. Yet he knew nothing of another world, where God’s greatest gifts could not be gained by work or merit. In order to find it, he had to become as a little child again. He needed to come to the same conclusion that Saul of Tarsus later came to, as the Apostle Paul, that finding Jesus Christ is worth the loss of all things (Phil. 3:7–8). Fortunately, he did humble himself, and find that only through Jesus Christ could new birth and new life be found (John 7:50–51; 19:39–42). Note what John the Baptist says toward the end of the chapter:

“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

John 3:36

On the night of His betrayal and arrest, Jesus summarized all these truths in a simple declaration:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

John 14:6

The gospel message is the most simple, yet the most crucial, that can ever be uttered or heard. All through the ages men have sought various man-made ways to find eternal life. The fact remains that only faith alone in Jesus Christ alone will fulfill that longing for eternal life.

An Anglican Priest and an African Evangelist

For many years we have been blessed to be a part of a Bible Institute in the mountains of Papua New Guinea. This Institute is the result of over 40 years of ministry in that area by veteran missionaries, Jim and Jaki Parlier, who served with Wycliff Bible Translators.

During one session, an Anglican priest attended, who believed that the only way to gain eternal life was through religious devotion, good deeds, and constant service. I do not remember whose message reached him, as there were several pastors and teachers present. But when he learned that eternal life was a free gift, and that it could only be received by faith, he was overjoyed. It was as if a huge burden was lifted from him and he was filled with joy and peace.

He was so excited, he said he could not attend further classes, as there were too many people in remote villages who needed to hear this wonderful message of grace. He began to travel far and wide throughout the whole region, preaching the Gospel to all who would hear.

In a similar case, a man in Nigeria had heard and received the Gospel. He was a poor subsistence farmer, living in a remote area. I was privileged to visit his home, where we found his wife and several children struggling to survive. “Where is your husband?” my translator asked. She looked to the north, where there was a belt of rugged mountains. She said, “After my husband came and told me and the children this wonderful, Good News about Jesus Christ, we rejoiced and sang for many days. Then he began to be very troubled, and I asked him, ‘Why are you troubled?’ He pointed to the mountains and said, ‘Dear wife, there are many villages over those mountains that have never heard this Good News. How will they hear unless I go and tell them?’”

She said they talked and prayed about it and decided that he must go. He had been gone about six months at the time we visited, and she had received no word from him. Before we left, she said to us, “Isn’t it wonderful that God would choose my husband to go and carry the news about Jesus to those people?” Such faith so often puts us to shame!

I Am My Neighbor's Bible

I am my neighbor's Bible; he reads me when we meet
Today he'll read me in my home, tomorrow on the street.
He may be friend or relative, or a slight acquaintance be,
But I am my neighbor's Bible, and he is reading me.

You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do and the things that you say.
And men read what you write, whether faithless or true.
So what is the Gospel, according to you?

– Author unknown

CLASS TWO:

Jesus Offers the Water of Life (John 4)

“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

John 4:13–14

Jesus and His disciples were on a long journey from Jerusalem to Galilee. The normal route for this journey avoided Samaria by crossing the Jordan river and travelling north on its eastern side. But we are told that *“He needed to go through Samaria”* (v.4). Jesus had a divine appointment with a woman at a well.

The Outcast Woman

“It was about the sixth hour” (v.6), beginning from 6 a.m., tells us that it was around noon, at the hottest time of the day. Normally, the women came to draw water either in the morning or in the evening—the cooler parts of the day. This woman, who was scorned and despised by the other women of the village, came when she would not have to endure their whispers and taunts. She was an outcast, and Jesus was about to take her into His family.

After the disciples went into the village to buy food, Jesus began the conversation with a request: *“Give Me a drink”* (v. 7). This was very strange to the woman, who knew the animosity between Jews and Samaritans, for the Jews considered them a mixed and degenerate race. She also had grown to know the ways of men, and she was reserved, suspicious, and cautious. But her surprised response opened the door for the Lord to begin to meet the needs of her soul. Jesus spoke to her of the gift of God—the water of life, which only He could give to her. He is speaking of the free gift of God's grace, which is eternal life (John 3:16; Rom. 5:15; 6:23; 8:32; 2 Cor. 9:15; Eph. 2:8).

Like Nicodemus, the woman is thinking only in physical terms. Since He has nothing to draw with and the well is deep, where could this *“living water”* (v.10) come from? Was He greater than Jacob, who dug the well? Indeed, she was about to find out about His infinite greatness! It was in response to His promise in v. 13–14 that the woman asks for Him to give her this water.

She is still thinking in physical terms and wants to be freed from the drudgery of walking to the well in the heat of the day (v. 15). But the Lord Jesus never disregards even the feeblest request for help. In keeping with the customs of the day, Jesus tells her to go and call her husband first. He is beginning to probe her soul, not to shame her, but to reveal that He knows her sins, and that His love and grace are greater than all her sin.

In vv. 17–20, as Jesus begins to reveal His knowledge of her, she seeks to evade His penetrating insight. First, she denies having a husband, to which He reveals His knowledge of her series of husbands, and of her current situation—living with a man, but unmarried. He does this not to shame her, but to reveal both His infinite knowledge and her desperate need.

This results in her concluding that He is a prophet, and so she begins talking about her religion, in contrast to that of the Jews. It is as if she is saying, as many do today, “You have your religion, and I have mine. We both worship in our own way.” This gives Jesus the opportunity to reveal to her that the only true worship is to know the true God, and to “worship Him in spirit and in truth,” for the heavenly Father seeks for such people to be His worshippers (vv. 21–24).

I Am He

Now, in vv. 25–26, in response to Jesus’ mention of worshipping God in truth, the woman declares her knowledge that the Messiah is coming, who would reveal to us all truth. She rightly assumes that He is not coming only to save the Jews, but even Samaritans as well. To this Jesus responds, “*I who speak to you am He.*” Literally, what He said to her was, “*I Am, the One speaking to you.*” He declares Himself to be the “*I Am*” of the Old Testament (Exod. 3:14).

At this point the disciples return; the woman leaves her water pot and goes into the city, saying, “*Come, see a Man who told me all things that ever I did. Could this be the Christ?*” (v. 29). The result was a flood of people coming out of the village to see Jesus (vv. 39–42). Many of them believed in Him because of the woman’s testimony, but others only believed in Him when they heard Him speak. However, all came to the same conclusion. “*We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world*” (v. 42b).

Jesus Defines Drinking the Water of Life

On a later occasion, at the feast of Tabernacles, Jesus made this same offer to His own people.

*“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and **drink**. He who **believes** in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”*

John 7:37–38

John explains that Jesus is speaking here of the Holy Spirit who would be given to those who believed, after Jesus was crucified and raised again (John 7:39).

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”

John 6:63

Here, we see that in the Lord Jesus the words of the prophets were fulfilled, “*as the Scripture has said*” (John 7:38), and here are a few examples:

“Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”
Isaiah 12:3

*“For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground;
I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring.”*
Isaiah 44:3

*“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come,
buy and eat. Yes, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.”*
Isaiah 55:1

The Thirst of the Soul

There is a spiritual thirst in the soul of every human being. We try desperately to fill it with all the things of this world, but are never satisfied. Only Jesus Christ the Savior can satisfy that thirst. And that free gift of living water can only be received by simple, child-like faith. No thirsty child would reject a cup of cool water. Yet so many in their pride and hardness of heart turn their backs on the Lord Jesus.

*“We laugh at the child who is afraid of the dark. But how we should weep
over the grown adult who is afraid of the Light.”*

– Anonymous

This woman had gone from the innocence of childhood to the hardened and calculating ways of life in a fallen and broken world. She may have been the product of deception and abuse from an early age, or she may have chosen her path willfully and brazenly.

Jesus warned against those who would take advantage of a child’s trust and innocence:

*“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to [stumble], it would be better
for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”*
Matthew 18:6

Whatever the circumstances of this particular woman, we all tend to go from the trusting innocence of a child to the hardened arrogance of the adult life. We learn to be calculating and conniving as we struggle and fight for our little scrap of life. How blessed are those who, on being confronted by the love, grace, and compassion of the Savior, are willing to turn back to the humble and teachable spirit of a trusting child!

The Thirst of a Turkish Woman

I was returning from Kazakhstan to America and had to go through Frankfurt, Germany. As I was checking in with my luggage, I notice a lady struggling with a huge bag, so I stepped over and lifted it onto the scale at the checkout stand. I thought nothing of it and went back to getting my ticket.

As I boarded the plane and found my seat, I noticed that the plane was nearly empty. Only a few passengers were scattered around. The plane took off, and suddenly, the lady I had helped came back from a few seats forward. She asked if I would mind if she sat with me, as there were so few passengers, and she would like someone to talk to. I said I would be glad to have her company and learned that her name was Aiselle.

I asked where she was going, and she said, "I am leaving Turkey for America. I have married an American soldier who was stationed in my country, and it has taken a year for me to get permission to immigrate." I had often wanted to visit Turkey, so began to ask her questions about her country. I told her I had read about some amazing historical events in her country (thinking of the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul).

Her response was interesting. She said that while she loved her country, and all her family were there, she did not like a religion that was so full of hate. She said, "Why couldn't someone come up with a religion that was based on love?"

What an open door to speak to her about the Lord Jesus Christ! For the next seven hours, I presented the gospel message, opening my small New Testament so she could read it for herself. Before long, it was obvious to me that she believed the message, and when I asked her, she said, "This is the truth I have been seeking for so long."

When we parted upon arriving in America, I gave her the little New Testament, and she was so thrilled. I have never seen her again, but I have never ceased to pray for her and the American soldier she married.

I Heard the Voice of Jesus

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water, thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live."

I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him."

– Horatius Bonar

CLASS THREE:

The Righteous Judge and Perfect Advocate (John 5 and 6)

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

John 5:24

In this story (John 5), the Jewish leaders are persecuting Jesus for healing a crippled man (vv. 16–23). They hated Him first of all because he had healed the man on the Sabbath (vv. 1–15).

These religious hypocrites cared nothing for the man who had suffered thirty-eight years of infirmity. All they cared for was the subjection of the people to their arbitrary rules and regulations. Sounds like some of our churches today, doesn't it?

But secondly, they hated Him because He claimed equality with God (vv. 17–18). He spent some time speaking to them of His sympathy and union with the Father's desire to save men from death and judgment and bring them into life. He concluded by saying that to receive the Son was to receive the Father, and to reject the Son was also to reject the Father (v. 23).

All of this leads to the conclusion in our key verse (v. 24), declaring that people's response to Jesus is a matter of life and death, not just here and now, but eternally. Sin demands judgment from a holy God, and the only way to escape that judgment is by Jesus Christ bearing our judgment for us. That He has already done for the whole world.

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their sins to them ... for He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus Christ] to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”
2 Corinthians 5:19, 21

But God will not impose deliverance on any man; each must choose to receive Christ in faith or to reject Him and face the final judgment (vv. 25–27). It will be Jesus Christ, the One who died for our sins, who will be the advocate and justifier of all who believe in Him, and He will be the judge of all who reject Him in unbelief.

In vv. 28–29, Jesus speaks of the resurrection unto life and the resurrection unto judgment. The determining factor, He says, is between *“those who have done good ... and those who have done evil.”* A misreading of His meaning leads many to conclude that good deeds are what save us. Let us look into what Jesus considered a good work:

“Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’”
John 6:28–29

The work here is not the act of believing, which is apart from works (Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:9), but rather is done by *“Him whom He sent.”* Jesus Christ came into the world to die on the cross for the sins of mankind. In order to emphasize that this was the only work required, and that it was God—not man—who accomplished it, He then followed up with two amazing promises:

*“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger,
and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”*
John 6:35

*“All that the Father give Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me
I will by no means cast out.”*
John 6:37

These promises bring to our understanding, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, three vital truths about the Person and the work of Jesus Christ as our Savior:

His Identity

First, in John 6:35, Jesus began with the words, “*I Am.*” To the Jews, familiar with Exodus 3:14, this was a clear declaration of the deity of Jesus (see vv. 48, 51). He uses this formula repeatedly in the Gospel of John. Consider these statements:

1. “*I Am He*” (John 4:26).
2. “*I Am the bread of life*” (John 6:35, 48, 51).
3. “*I Am the light of the world*” (John 8:12).
4. “*I Am the door*” (John 10:7).
5. “*I Am the good shepherd*” (John 10:11, 14).
6. “*I Am the resurrection and the life*” (John 11:25).
7. “*I Am the way, the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6).
8. “*I Am the true vine*” (John 15:1).
9. “*I Am a king*” (John 18:37).

His Promise

Second, when Jesus says, “*shall never hunger ... never thirst*” (v. 35), and “*I will by no means cast out*” (v. 37), He is using a formula in the original Greek language—a double negative—that means “Never ever!” It is the strongest possible way to state an absolute negative. Consider these examples of things Jesus says can absolutely never happen to those who believe in Him:

1. Those who believe in Him “*will never thirst*” (John 4:14; 6:35b). This means to thirst for everlasting life, for they cannot lose it.
2. Those who believe in Him “*shall never hunger*” (John 6:35a).
3. All who come to Him in faith He will “*by no means cast out*” (John 6:37).
4. Those who keep His word “*shall never see death ... shall never taste death*” (John 8:51–52).
5. Those who believe in Him are His sheep, and “*they shall never perish*” (John 10:28).
6. Whoever believes in Him “*shall never die*” (John 11:26).

These seven statements (two under point four) are absolute assurances that simple child-like faith in Jesus Christ, at any point in time, results in eternal life, which can never be lost.

The One and Only Condition

Third and finally, the condition for claiming the promises of Jesus and entering into everlasting life is always the same, by believing in Him. This is driven home by being stated 98 times in this Gospel and is declared by John himself to be the thrust of the whole book.

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

John 20:30–31

A Thief Acquitted

“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

1 John 2:1–2

On the day Jesus was crucified, there were two thieves crucified with him. In fact, Jesus Himself was crucified on the cross of Barabbas, dying in his place. At first, the two thieves mocked Him, along with the religious leaders and the crowd. But one of them was rebuked by his own conscience, as he observed the nobility and heard Jesus pray for forgiveness on those who condemned Him.

After rebuking the other thief for his callousness and hypocrisy, he turned to the Lord and said, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” What was Jesus’ answer to him? “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:42–43). Like a little child, in unbearable pain, he simply cried out in faith. His hands and feet were nailed to the cross—there was absolutely nothing he could do. But he could believe, and that is all it took. I urge each and every one who reads these words, become as little children, and entrust your souls to a loving Savior! He will either be your judge, or your advocate on that day.

Prayer Before Execution

O merciful Father, my hope is in Thee!
O gracious Redeemer, deliver Thou me!
My bondage bemoaning, with sorrowful groaning,
I long to be free.
Lamenting, relenting, and humbly repenting,
O Jesus, my Savior, I languish for Thee!

– Mary Queen of Scots

The Indian Murderer Who Found Christ

On my first mission trip to India, nearly thirty years ago, we hosted a conference for Pastors and leaders in Vishakapatnam, in Andhra Pradesh state. On the first day, about 125 people showed up. We were in the middle of the day when, during one of the breaks, a man walked in the door at the back, who immediately drew my attention. He looked like a lion in the midst of a flock of sheep. He was very tall, with a head of long, wild black hair, and a full beard. He looked like he had just stepped out of a Bible story, in his white peasant clothing. He looked like I would expect the prophet Elijah to look.

I asked my translator to be introduced to him, and he said, “This man was a murderer, who then became a Christian Sadhu (holy man).” He had a kind but penetrating gaze, and an aura about him that was wild and intriguing. As the conference continued, I was able to learn a bit about him, and finally asked if we could visit his village when the conference ended.

We travelled for some hours, into rugged mountains and remote villages, until we came to the home of our friend, whose name was Satyanandum. He led us up a hill to a small, thatched roof,

open air church, where he and his people met for worship. I asked him if he would tell me his story, and we went out, with my translator, to sit on a log under a big shade tree. Here is what he told me:

“I was, many years ago, a vicious and violent man. I would watch for rich merchants travelling through my village and go and lay in wait for them in the jungle. When they came along, I would kill them with a big knife I carried, then hide the body, and take their valuables and money. I did this many, many times.

“Then, one evening when I was going to hide out on the trail to do my usual business, I saw a man in the village with a large crowd gathered. As I walked by, I heard him speak of thieves and murderers. I was sure he was gathering a crowd to arrest me. So, I quietly moved into the crowd, thinking to myself, ‘When the crowd leaves I will kill this man.’ But instead, I began to realize the man was not talking about me, but about someone named Jesus, who loved all sinners and died a horrible death so that we could have eternal life.

“After the evangelist finished and the crowd dispersed, I went up to this man, and asked him to tell me more. We sat in front of the hut where he was staying until nearly dawn, as he spoke to me of the Savior of the world. He then gave me a New Testament in my own language. The next morning, when he awoke, I was standing before his door. I had the clothes on my back, a staff, and my Bible.”

“‘Where are you going?’ he asked. I said, ‘I am going to tell all of India the good news that you have shared with me.’ He asked, ‘How will you live?’ I said, ‘The Lord Jesus is able to care for me.’”

I learned that Satyanandam then spent eight years walking the dusty roads and trails of India preaching the Gospel and living from the meager offerings he was given. Finally, he said, “India has had its chance to hear. I will now go into China.” Over the mountains he went, and preached to tribal people in China—until he was arrested—and with other prisoners, stood against a wall and was shot. All but him died. He was found to be alive, and some of those who believed took him in and cared for him until he recovered.

He then left China and went into Tibet, preaching the Gospel until he was again arrested and imprisoned. In this prison, he won some of the other prisoners and guards to faith in Christ. He then escaped from the prison and went alone over the Himalayas toward India. On the way, he was set upon by a band of thieves who thought to rob him, and finding he had nothing, stabbed him and left him for dead. A Yak caravan on its way to India found him and carried him back to India.

He told me he now had three churches in different villages he would travel to on foot, through the jungles, where both tigers and terrorists often threatened him. I never saw this man again, though I often tried to make contact with him. How exciting it will be to meet him again in Heaven and see what great things God was able to do with a murderer-turned-evangelist and teacher!

CLASS FOUR: **The Good Shepherd**

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”
John 10:11

The figure of the shepherd was always close to Jesus in His ministry. As He looked on the multitudes, we are told, *“But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd”* (Matt. 9:36).

The prophet Isaiah, who lived seven centuries before Christ came, spoke of Him in prophecy, saying, *“He will feed His flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young”* (Isa. 40:11).

In fulfillment of this prophecy, Jesus goes on to explain the security of His sheep, and how they come to enter into His flock.

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.”
John 10:27–30

Those who are His sheep hear His voice and enter the flock by faith in Him (John 10:9; Rom. 10:17), while those who reject Him cannot be His sheep. Twice in John 10:25 and 26, Jesus told them the one thing that kept them from entering into His sheepfold: *“I told you, and you do not believe ... But you do not believe.”* Unbelief in Jesus Christ is the great barrier to eternal life.

The Lost Sheep

Jesus often spoke of the importance of finding the lost sheep. In Luke 15, the religious hypocrites scorned Him, saying, *“This Man receives sinners and eats with them”* (Luke 15:2). Jesus responded with a parable of the lost sheep, and how the shepherd would leave the ninety-nine who were safe to go search for that lost sheep.

He then illustrated this parable by another—possibly the best loved parable He ever told. This is the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). The story is a familiar one, of the younger son, who demanded his inheritance and went into a far country. There he squandered all his wealth and found himself in need. Just at that time, a severe famine came in the land. To survive, he ended up feeding a farmer’s pigs, and would have fought them for the slop they were eating.

In time, the boy came to his senses, and ashamed of what he had done, decided to return to his father, and beg to be allowed to be his slave. But upon his return, he found the father watching for him, who ran to him and embraced him. After the boy’s confession of his sin, the father cut him off, not even allowing him to beg to be a slave, he clothed him in the best robe (probably after a good bath), placed his signet ring (representing all his wealth) on his hand, and put sandals on his bruised and weary feet. Then he ordered that the fatted calf be prepared for a

great feast, saying, *“For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found”* (Luke 15:24).

What is the point in Jesus’ story? He knows that sooner or later we all identify with the prodigal son. We fail in matters small and great, and life knocks us down, and then others delight in stomping on us. This is what the religious leaders of His day were like. But, like the father in the story (a picture of the heavenly Father), Jesus is always looking and longing for us to come back to Him.

When the good shepherd finds the lost sheep, he doesn’t beat it for wandering away. As Isaiah pictured it, he lifts it in His arms and carries it to safety, to nourish and care for it.

You may be one of His sheep that has wandered. He is watching and waiting for you to come to your senses, to humble yourself like a little child and to confess—like the prodigal—that you have sinned. He is always willing to receive us, restore us, and enrich us again.

It may be that you are not of His flock, because you have never believed in Him. If so, the door is open, and He is calling you to enter in. The one and only price of admission is to believe in Him—to trust in His power to save, which is based on His sacrifice on the cross for you, when He paid the penalty for all your sins. Just think of this: If He loved you enough to go to the cross for you when you were a sinner and His enemy (Rom. 5:8, 10), how great will be His love for you as one of His sheep?

The Lost Sheep

It was a sheep, not a lamb, that wandered away
In the parable Jesus told
A full-grown sheep that wandered away
From the ninety and nine in the fold.

Out on the hillside, out in the cold
‘Twas a sheep the good shepherd sought.
And back to the flock, safe into the fold
‘Twas a sheep the good shepherd brought.

And why for the sheep do we earnestly plead
And as earnestly hope and pray?
If the sheep go wrong, it won’t be long
Till the lambs are as wrong as they.

For the lambs will follow the sheep, you know
Wherever the sheep may stray.
And if the sheep are lost, what a terrible cost
Those lambs will have to pay.

– Author Unknown

A Lost Sheep From Siberia

What a comfort it is, in these turbulent times, to be able to say:

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want ... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Psalm 23:1, 6

Even a little child can understand this!

I was teaching at a seminary in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and was asked to preach at a local church in the area. I spoke on the love of God and how He seeks the lost soul to come to Him through Jesus Christ.

At the end of the message, the Pastor asked if anyone who had a need, to come forward for prayer or help. A lady seated in the back came forward and dropped to her knees and began weeping. She was from a village in Siberia, a thousand miles to the north, and she had come to visit her mother.

She said that always when she would visit, her mother would try to get her to come to church, but she did not want to come. She said that this morning, just to get her mother to stop asking, she came with her. And then she said, “I have been running from God for many years, but today He found me!” Her name was Tanya, and we spoke with her, explained the Gospel clearly, and she went her way rejoicing with her mother.

Two years later we returned to Kazakhstan, I was again asked to speak at that church. Nan and I had brought a hand-crank cassette player, with many cassettes of the New Testament in Russian. We hoped to give them to Tanya’s mother, so she could pass them on to Tanya the next time she visited. But who should we find at the church? Tanya herself, who had come again to visit her mother for a short time!

The last we heard, in her village in Siberia, Tanya would open her home one evening each week, and nearly the whole village would come to hear the word of God. How we pray that many other souls have come into the kingdom of God because of Tanya’s life and witness.

CLASS FIVE:

The Resurrection and the Life (John 11)

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though He may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

John 11:25–26

A Funeral Message

Before we consider the claims of Jesus here, and the amazing promise they contain, we should review the story and the setting (vv. 1–20). Jesus had a very special love for and relationship with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary (see v. 5). He usually stayed in their home when visiting

Jerusalem (Luke 10:38–42). We are never told how these three young people came to be in the unusual situation in which we find them. No parents are mentioned, none of them had married—a very strange circumstance in that time. Apparently, the parents had died, but how long ago? The three children had learned to rely on one another to survive. The indication was that Martha was the eldest. How she might have struggled to care for the others after the death of their parents, we cannot know.

Lazarus had become deathly ill, and the sisters sent for Jesus to come. Since they knew where He was, they would have known how long it would take for Him to arrive, but for some unknown reason, Jesus delayed His coming (v. 6). His stated reason for this was, *“That the Son of God may be glorified through it”* (v. 4).

Since the religious leaders in Jerusalem were plotting to kill Jesus, the disciples considered it an act of suicide to return there, but Jesus reassured them (vv. 8–11). Jesus told the disciples Lazarus was sleeping (he had died during Jesus’ two-day delay) but then plainly told them that he was dead (vv. 12–15). Often, the Bible speaks of the death of the believer as *“sleep”* because the body will *“awaken”* at the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

It was after Jesus arrived that Martha, and then Mary, confronted Jesus on His late arrival, declaring their faith that—had He come sooner—Lazarus would not have died (vv. 21, 32). Martha even added this hope-filled statement, *“But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You”* (v. 22). It is in this context that we find the promise of Jesus in vv. 25–26 (see above). But we must not isolate what Jesus said, from Martha’s response.

Martha Interprets Jesus’ Question

After His amazing statement in vv. 25–26, He asks her, *“Do you believe this?”* Her response is a simple, child-like response to the question. She says, *“Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world”* (v. 27). Take note how she interprets His claims, so that the *“this”* of v. 26 becomes the *“that”* of v. 27. In other words, Jesus could only be *“the resurrection and the life”* if, in fact, He is *“the Christ, the Son of God.”* Why is this important?

Take a look at John’s theme statement for why he wrote this Gospel:

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

John 20:30–31

And what kind of life is John concerned with? Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10b). He is speaking here of both eternal life, yet future, and of spiritually blessed and abundant life here and now.

Martha’s interpretation was not the result of great intellectual reasoning; rather, it was the simple conclusion that even a child could come to. Who can give us life but God? And who could give us eternal life but God Himself? Observing Jesus’ teaching and miracles, Martha had concluded that Jesus was the Son of God—the promised Savior and Redeemer!

The Simplicity of the Gospel

The Bible declares that the gospel message—the Good News of what Christ has done—and how we can enter into eternal life, is so simple that a little child can understand it. So just how simple is it to gain eternal life?

1. It is as simple as coming when you are called.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”
Matthew 11:28

2. It is as simple as drinking water when you are thirsty.

“But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”
John 4:14 (see John 7:37–38)

3. It is as simple as eating bread when you are hungry.

“I am the living bread that comes down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”
John 6:51

4. It is as simple as entering an open door.

“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”
John 10:9

5. It is as simple as receiving a free gift.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
Romans 6:23

6. It is as simple as calling out for help.

“For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
Romans 10:13

7. It is as simple as believing in Jesus Christ.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”
John 6:47

8. It is as simple as the trust of a small child.

“Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.’”

Matthew 18:2–3

Do You Believe This?

We were on a mission journey to Nigeria and were asked to hike into a remote village near the border of Cameroon and Nigeria. The trail was a rugged mountain goat trail that led down to a remote area, in which there were seven or eight villages on both sides of the border. Many of the people there had never seen white people, so we caused quite a stir.

Our son, Wil went out with the runners to go to the various villages to invite them to come to a meeting to be held that night. Around sundown, many people began to filter into the gathering place, until there were around three hundred present. But one village had not come. Instead, the village chief had come with several of his elders, to see what the message was about. While the crowd sat around the village square, he and his elders stood at the back of the gathering.

I presented the message of the love of God and the sacrifice of Christ to them all, as a fire blazed in the center of the village, casting flickering shadows over the crowd. This message had to be translated from my English into the Igbo language, and then to the dialect of this tribe. They listened intently, but I noticed the chief and his elders simply stood with folded arms at the back of the crowd.

After I had spoken, Nan spoke to the women and children, then Wil and another young man from Australia named Andrew, also spoke on various Scriptures. When we had all finished, I asked if there were any questions that we could answer for them. The aloof chief from the back of the crowd raised his hand. He said, “From what you have told us, we are sinners, and we know this is true. But you have told us of one God who loves us and wants to deliver us. We do not yet understand what He wants us to do.”

I thought for a moment, then pointed up to the myriad of stars shining brilliantly in the African night. I said that the God of Heaven created each of those stars and named each one of them. He also created each one of us, and knew us by name. I went on to explain that, because of His love for each one of us, He sent His own Son to come to this world, and to die on the cross for each of us—to pay the penalty of our sins. I explained how crucifixion took place, and the much greater agony of Christ paying the penalty of the sins of the whole world.

As I was talking, I saw the chief begin to look at his elders, and they all began to smile and nod their heads. They were understanding the message; so were the others in the crowd. And then, we all saw something that we have never seen, before or since. It was as if a wind blew across the crowd, and the people began to look at one another in wonder, and smile, while some began chanting and singing. They had understood the message, and they believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior. The last we heard, there were several small churches that had been established in that area. They had gone from child-like faith in Jesus Christ to becoming warriors in the spiritual battle.

Come, You Children

“Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord ... The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.”

Psalm 34:11, 18

It often takes broken hearts in the struggle of life to bring us, as adults, to the contrite and humble heart of a little child. Until we have tried all our resources, utilized all our rational power, and exhausted our strength and options, we will not humble ourselves as little children.

How many times do we hear the complaint: “If God is a loving God, why does He allow so much suffering?” The only answer to this question is two-fold: first, because this world has rejected God and turned away to sin and self-gratification. Second, in such a world of hardened hearts and closed minds, only suffering can break the hardness and bring us to our knees.

If you find yourself in a world that is always dark and painful, you have only one hope. Humble yourself as a little child and come to the Savior. He will receive you and begin to bring healing and hope into your life.

If you have trusted in Him, and your life is dark and dreary, have you followed Him? Only in daily fellowship with Him through His Word, by prayer and obedience, can we know the power of His presence.

We are called to Him in faith to become a family. We cannot forsake the family and expect to enjoy His full blessing (Heb. 10:24–25). I encourage you to find a local church that is strong in Bible teaching. Get to know the people and become a brother or sister in the faith who not only is ministered to, but who also ministers to other family members. Whatever you do for other members of His royal family, you do for Him.

“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.”

1 John 3:18–19

Of Such Is the Kingdom of God

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”

Mark 10:14–15

The point Jesus is making is not that we can only be saved when we are children. He is saying that we have to go back to childlike humility and trustfulness if we are to enter into the kingdom of God.

You may be well-educated and advanced in your intellectual achievements. It may be that you are a scientist, an engineer, a doctor, or a physicist. Your intellect will be one of the greatest hurdles to your coming to Jesus Christ.

You will have to lay all of your accomplishments aside, and return to the mind-set of your childhood if you are to find eternal life, for there is no other way to enter the family of God but by faith. It is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, trusting Him to accomplish all you need to be acceptable to a just and holy God. Neither intellect, nor science, nor reason can lead you to the Savior.

My prayer for you if you have never trusted in Jesus Christ is this: that you will recognize that you are a sinner in need of deliverance, and that Christ alone, who died to pay the penalty for your sins, is the only Savior. Then, that you will come to Him in the simplicity of child-like faith to receive the free gift of eternal life. You can receive it no other way!

Where Is Thy Kingdom?

“Where is the Kingdom?” asked the solemn priest,
Weighted with lore and spent with fast and feast.
The happy Christ at his pretensions smiled,
And simply said, “In the heart of a child.”

– Thomas Curtis Clark