

“You Must Be Born Again!”

Nic at Night

John 3:1-10

Reading: Colossians 2:6-15

March 15, 2020

Bethany Baptist Church

...pray...

Last Lord's Day we witnessed Jesus' *second* sign in John's Gospel (John 2):

Jesus *plaited* the whip and *purged* the temple. "*Zeal for Your house will consume me!*" (2:17)

Jesus *pushed back* on the Sanhedrin and *prophesied* His greatest sign: "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.*" (2:19)

Jesus performed *more* signs during Passover and the crowds believed: *many believed in His name, observing the signs He was doing* (2:23).

But Jesus wasn't having any of it: "*But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men.*" (2:24)

Let's pick up the account as we read 3:1-21

One man had been *taking it all in*: *multiple* miracles, *temple* purging, maybe even *John the Baptist's* testimony.

He was *pious* man and he had a *big spiritual* question: "*How can I know I have eternal life?*"

Jesus answered that man enters God's Kingdom by the will and work of the Holy Spirit.

We'll spend the next few weeks examining this *life changing conversation*, as...

One of the most powerful teachers in Israel poses three questions to the most powerful teacher in the world:

(This morning)

Ques.1 – How can I see the Kingdom of God? (vv.1-3)

Ques.2 – How can a man be born when he is old? (vv.4-8)

(Next Lord's Day)

Ques.3 – How can these things be? (vv.9-15)

The Final Answer – Believe in God's One & Only Son. (vv.16-21)

Here's Nicodemus *first* question: "How can I see the Kingdom of God?" (vv1-3)

1. But *who* was Nicodemus (and *who* were the Pharisees)?
 - a. "*Nicodemus*" was a *Greek* name, but nonetheless it was *popular* among 1st century Jews: "*Conqueror of the People.*"
 - b. We can assume from these first few verses that Nicodemus was an *older* man (4) and an *influential* man.
 - c. *Influential*, because after all, he was a *Pharisee*.... The *Pharisees* came on the *Jewish scene* sometime between the writing of the **OT** & **NT** ("*Intertestamental Period*" ~ **400** years).
 - i. They tended to be *middle-class* Jews, but more importantly, they tended to be *very strict* in their observance of the **OT** Law. In fact, they were usually *stricter* than the Law!
 - ii. And even though, in their pride, they often *looked down* on the *average Joe*, the *average Joe* tended to *look up* to the *pious Pharisees*.
 - d. But Nicodemus **wasn't** *just* a Pharisee – do you see that phrase "*a ruler of the Jews*" (1b)?" That means Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish *Sanhedrin*.
 - i. The *Sanhedrin* (= "**70**") was the *ruling council* in 1st century Israel, answering only to the occupying *Romans*.
 - ii. The council was comprised of *Pharisees* (theologically strict) and *Sadducees* (**not** so theologically strict). The Pharisees and the Sadducees *ruled* together, but they **didn't** always see eye-to-eye.
 - e. To *cap it all off* (10), Jesus labeled Nicodemus "*the teacher in Israel.*" As in a *noteworthy teacher*. So, *Pharisee & Ruler & Premier Teacher*...Nicodemus was *quite* the man!

2. And one of Israel's *most prominent teachers* came to Jesus for *personal interview*.
 - a. He came at *night*. Maybe because the *aging ruler* from *Jerusalem* didn't want to be seen coming to the *young rabbi* from *Galilee*.
 - i. Or maybe it was just the *best time* to get together...
 - b. Whatever motivated the *time*, Nicodemus clearly came with *respect* (read v.2 – *quote*: “*Rabbi, we know...*”).
 - i. Our man Nicodemus was one of those *many men & women* who had witnessed Jesus' *Passover miracles* (beginning w/ the sign of the *Temple Purging*). **Remember v.23 (read)?** Nicodemus made it *clear*, those signs *impressed* him!
 - ii. And as member of the *Sanhedrin*, Nicodemus would have heard the report about John the Baptist's *testimony* (ch.1); especially what John has said about Jesus: “*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!...this is the Son of God!*”
 - iii. So as he came to Jesus, his *conclusion* was *unavoidable*: “*we know you have come from God.*” (**OBTW**, did you catch that “*we*”...**not just** Nicodemus *gets it*, apparently there are others among the *Pharisees* and even in the *Sanhedrin* who get it!)
 1. “*...no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him.*”
 - c. But despite witnessing the *signs* & the starting with this *respectful greeting*, Nicodemus *beats around the bush!*

3. Because *here's* what Nicodemus *wanted* to say! “*How can I see the Kingdom of God?*” **2X**
- a. What *huge topic* – the “*Kingdom of God*”! The *biggest* explanation is the *simplest*: *God's rule over everything!* (After all, God *designed & created & sustains* everything!)
 - b. But Nicodemus has something a little more *specific* in mind, even if he's a little *tongue-tied*: “*Seeing the Kingdom*” = “*citizenship in God's kingdom*” which boils down to: “*eternal life in the kingdom.*”
 - c. Nicodemus wants to know for sure he has *eternal life*....
4. Nicodemus *beat around the bush*, but Jesus *cuts to the chase*: **read v.3.**
- a. “*Verily verily...*” All **three** of Jesus' answers (3, 5, 11) began like that. It was a formula that meant a crucial truth *was on its way*.
 - b. In fact, Jesus has just stated the *most important instruction* you & I will *ever hear*, on *either side of eternity*: “*You **must** be born again!*”
 - c. The Gr. word **ανωθεν** can be translated “*again*” or “*from above.*”
 - d. You can translate Jesus' answer: “*You must be born **again.***”
 - i. As in, “*Nicodemus, all your teacher & ruler & Pharisee accomplishments **aren't** enough to earn you eternal life!*”
 - ii. “*Again....*” As in, Nicodemus; you're going to have to *start all over*, on an *entirely new footing!* *Spirit...and not good works.*
 - e. **Whoa!** ?Being a Pharisees (etc.) *wasn't* enough!?! How do you suppose an *aging leader* who had invested his *long life* in earning *God's favor* by *keeping the Ten Commandments* (etc.) felt about **that...?**
 - i. Bible scholar **R.C.H Lenski** has this insight: *Son of Abraham, Jew, Sadducee, famous teacher...now it all means **nothing!?!** Jesus is telling Nicodemus that the work of a long, strict lifetime has just been reduced to a **pile of ashes!***

5. Beloved, I hope you care about *eternal life* (I can *assure* you, *I do!*)!
 - a. And I hope you see that if an *uber-religious* guy like Nicodemus has to *start over* at the most fundamental spiritual level (you know – *born again*)...
 - b. ...then **you can't** do enough *good/religious* things to **earn** *eternal life!*

Friend, Jesus doesn't command you to *improve* your life, you have to *start all over*: "You must be born again!"

That got Nicodemus' attention, and it provoked his second question: "How can a man be born when he is old? (Read just v.4.)

1. Nicodemus is *stunned*. In fact **v.7**, Jesus *admonishes* him for his *amazement*.
 - a. *Womb & birth...? Coming **out** the **first** time was tough enough, going back **in** and coming back a **second** time sounds inconceivable!*
 - b. Now, perhaps Nicodemus **is completely confused...** and he thinks this *really* is some kind of an **OB/GYN** conversation.
 - c. Or maybe "*the teacher of Israel*" understands that Jesus is moving on *spiritual ground*, and Nicodemus is able to keep the *same illustration*.
 - d. But either way, our friend is *shocked* and *out of his league*. "*I've poured my life into the Law (traditional religion); how can I start over again?*"
2. Jesus' answer pounds home that *eternal life* (v.5 – *entering the kingdom of God*) is an *act of God's Spirit*. **Read vv.5-7.**
 - a. Some people think Jesus is referring to **two** births in v.6: *natural birth* ("of water") followed by *spiritual birth*. Or perhaps of *water baptism* accompanied by *spiritual birth*.
 - i. But **neither** is correct. Both the **OT & NT equate** "*born of water and the Spirit*" with one thing: *spiritual rebirth*.
 - ii. **Ezek 36:25-27** - *Then I will **sprinkle clean** water on you, and you will be clean; I will **cleans**e you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and **put a new spirit within you**; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will **put My Spirit** within you and **cause you to walk in My statutes**, and you will be careful to **observe My ordinances**.*
 1. This New Covenant promise equates our *new spiritual life* with *sprinkling, cleansing, new heart, new spirit, new faithfulness*, and the indwelling of God's *Holy Spirit*.
 2. It all boils down to **one** thing: *receiving spiritual life* – i.e. *receiving eternal life*.

- b. Then Jesus answers Nicodemus' **second** question by repeating the *most important instruction of all time!* “*You must be born again!*”
 - i. Here is a spiritual *fact of life* you **must not miss** (6): *everyone* has human birth but **not** *everyone* has spiritual birth.
 - ii. The *spiritual birth* is necessary or you remain just *flesh*. And that's *not good*...
 - iii. You need a *spiritual birth* and that's a work of the *Holy Spirit*.
 - c. Friend, may I say it **one** more time? “*Don't be shocked! You must be born again.*”
3. From the *breeze* on your face, to the *prairie wind* that turns those giant wind turbines, to the *hurricane storms* that batter coastlines, you **can't** *see it* – but you **can't** *deny it!*
- a. Jesus says the *wind* is a real-life picture of how **God's spirit** regenerates **man's spirit**. (Don't forget, man's spirit is *dead* until the Holy Spirit *stirs!* **Eph 2:1** – *And you were dead in your ...*)
 - b. Interestingly, in both the Greek & the Hebrew languages, the same words translate *wind* & *spirit*: in Hebrew it's *ruach*, and in Greek it's *pneuma* (pneumatic tool).
 - c. Who can map where the *blowing wind* and *spiritual rebirth* begin and end; both are *invisible* ... but **not** their effects.
 - i. **The wind is real and so is the Spirit.**
 - d. You can be sure the wind does *whatever it wants*, **uninfluenced** by *man*, even by the man it *touches*.
 - i. And God's Spirit is **not** subject to human *will* or *control*.
 - ii. The Holy Spirit works like the *wind* in the lives of the people to whom it gives *spiritual life*.

Do you want eternal life? God's Spirit has to touch you & give you, life everlasting.

I hope that at some time in your life, you've asked Jesus the "Nicodemus question": "How can I have eternal life?"

Jesus' answer is *still the same*:

1. *You must be born again!* That's because you're *dead*... Your *sin* is the symptom of your *spiritual death*. You *do* sin (deed, word, thought, motive), you *are* a sinner (*by nature*), and so you are **dead** *in your trespasses and sins*.
2. The NT tersely diagnoses you this way: "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*" because "*you were dead in your transgressions.*"

God *judges* sinners. That's *bad news!*

1. God is mankind's *Creator* and *King*, and your sin marks you as a *rebel*.
2. When the rebel stands before the King, he'll be *judged* and *condemned*.
3. *It is appointed for men to die once, and after death comes judgement.*
4. Holy God's condemnation of *sinners* is *real* and *just*: it is *eternal* and *excruciatingly awful*.
5. And God will allow only **one** of **two** people to *pay* for your sin.
6. You or Jesus. You **don't** want it to be you...

So God's sent His *one & only* Son to *pay for* you sins *in* your place.

1. As we've already seen in the *Gospel of John*, Jesus *existed* from all *eternity* as God's Son. Then at *just the right* time in history Jesus was born as the *miraculously conceived child* of Mary. Which means Jesus is *truly God* and *truly Man*. That combination of *deity* and *humanity* makes Jesus *uniquely qualified* to *pay* for our sins.
2. That is what happened on the *cross*: *all* of the sins of *all* of Christ's people for *all* time were placed on Jesus, and God *punished* Him there for us!
3. The New Testament says: *But God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

4. To *prove to the world* that God *accepts* Jesus' payment, He *raised* Christ from the grave on the **third** day (*Resurrection*).
5. The Resurrection *also* proves that *eternal life* is God's gift to children; He *raised* Christ, He'll *raise* you! (***That's*** what Nicodemus was looking for!)

But **how** – *how* can you know that Jesus' *payment*, pays for *your sins*? Here's *how*:

1. *Look* to Christ, and Christ *alone*. The Bible teaches that the only *condition* for receiving God's forgiveness is *faith* and *repentance*.
2. **Repent** (turn) by *turning away* from your *sins* and *selfishness* and *turn to* Jesus.
3. **Trust** that Jesus *is* who He claims (The Son of God) and has *done* what He claims (*died* to pay for all your sins, *resurrected* on the **3rd** day).
4. If you *look to Jesus*, God will *forgive* you and give you *spiritual life*!

Are you *born again*...?

I'll say it once more: "You **must** be born again!"

...pray...